

A topographic map of the Indo-Pacific region, showing the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Ocean. The map uses a color gradient from green to brown to represent elevation, with blue for water. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent tan rectangular background.

ALLIES, PARTNERS, AND PROSPECTS

Global Perspectives on the US Indo Pacific Strategy

THE HENRY M. JACKSON SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
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Common Acronyms and Abbreviations

Countries and Organizations

EU	European Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
UK	United Kingdom
AUKUS	Australian - UK - US Partnership
ROK	Republic of Korea
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
PRC	People's Republic of China
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Policies and Initiatives

FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea

Miscellaneous

FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

Executive Summary

The Indo-Pacific is the most important region in contemporary international affairs. It is home to most of the world's population and also the world's economic center of gravity. The People's Republic of China is a major player in the region and a global superpower as is the United States, which has sought to promote an international rules-based order as part of its global security architecture. To address the threat of the PRC, the United States officially pivoted its global strategy from the Euro-Atlantic to Asia in the 2010s, and in February 2022 President Joseph Biden's administration released its Indo-Pacific Strategy, whose vision of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" is meant to directly challenge China's growing diplomatic, economic, and military prowess. While the United States mainly focuses on countering the PRC, its Indo-Pacific Strategy intersects with those of many Indo-Pacific nations and organizations.

This report highlights some key actors in the Indo-Pacific region, their roles differentiated by the relationship they have with the US either as allies, partners, or prospects.

- 1) Allies: Japan, the Republic of Korea, Australia, and relevant European actors.
- 2) Partners: India, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the Pacific Islands states.
- 3) Prospects: Middle Eastern states, Pakistan, East African states, and the People's Republic of China.

Understandably, these actors are guided by their own national interests, which can result in actions that are not always in accord with the US Indo-Pacific Strategy. While allies are mostly in concert with US global strategy and are often bound by security treaties; partners have far less formal ties but generally have good working relations with the US; and prospects are potentially partners or allies in the making. To maintain and enhance its standing in the Indo-Pacific, the US has to continue strengthening its alliances and partnerships in the region and demonstrating the value of its global strategy and rules-based international order.

To maintain and expand US influence in the region, we arrived at these broad strategies:

- For Allies, the United States must continue to bolster the already-strong relationships between its allies in and outside the Indo-Pacific. Cooperation among allies typically

centers around military and maritime collaboration which the United States should encourage through joint military exercises, cyber and military capacity building, and joint freedom of navigation ventures. Furthermore, US allies should clarify a unified stance towards engagement with China to address the threat it poses against the FOIP vision.

- For Partners, the United States must increase its engagement through open dialogue and information sharing while respecting the multilateral strategy of these actors who seek to avoid being trapped between the US-PRC great power rivalry. The United States should primarily continue joint exercises and technological capacity building, as well as enforce the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which is of vital importance to the economic stability of US partners. In non-military domains, the United States should bolster human security by helping improve living standards in partner countries through public and private investment, in addition to strengthening climate resilience in part by aiding the transition to renewable energy resources. Lastly, the United States must develop effective repercussions against overreach by the PRC, which often threatens the political and maritime interests of US partner countries.
- For Prospects, the United States must focus on promoting economic resilience through the protection of trade routes and fostering cooperation, addressing climate concerns by aiding the transition to renewable energy sources, improving public relations through the promotion of humanitarian and joint cultural exchange programs, and strengthening relationships with regional organizations. Most importantly, the United States should seek to cooperate with the PRC where it can while promoting regional organizations in a multilateral strategy to counter the growing dependence of African and Middle Eastern states on China.

Our report offers an overview of the involvement of the roles that different actors in the region can effectively play in the United States Indo-Pacific Strategy that would also benefit them, and what the United States government should do to foster and strengthen its relations across the Indo-Pacific. At the end of each section, there are specific policy recommendations that stem from the broad strategic recommendations outlined above.

Introduction

The emergence of China as a global superpower poses the greatest challenge to US dominance in the twenty-first century. In recent years their relationship has become increasingly tense, particularly in the aftermath of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Their differences have led both sides to close consulates and to impose heavy economic sanctions on one another.¹ In July 2020, then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo even went as far as to declare that America’s “engagement with China has failed.”² It is no secret that the United States views China as an opponent not only across Asia but also on the world stage as China continues to flex its economic prowess through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Biden administration’s major foreign policy statement outlining the “Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States” acknowledges this rivalry as a threat to its goal of advancing “security and prosperity” across the vast Indo-Pacific region.³

This report examines the workings of this US Indo-Pacific strategy by focusing on the allies and partners in the region that have played or are playing key roles in furthering US interests. It also looks at the US efforts to strengthen ties with other actors in the region, nation states and also multilateral organizations such as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The US strategy also enjoys the support of entities farther afield, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

The US and its two key allies in the region, Japan and Australia, together with India form a “core group” in the Indo-Pacific Strategy called the Quad. Although India does not have a formal alliance with the US, it is a vital partner. As this report highlights, the US has also been strengthening its ties to several Pacific Island nations and ASEAN, a body made up of ten member

¹ “Timeline: US.-China Relations.”

² Choi, “Pompeo: US. Engagement with China Has Failed.”

³ “Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States.”

states. These allies and partners are essential to the success of the Indo-Pacific Strategy. The final section of this study highlights the US efforts to forge relationships with other states, to develop prospects including in Africa and the Middle East, that could become allies or partners in the future in the US goal to preserve and enhance an “open and free” Indo-Pacific.

The US considers the Indo-Pacific to be an area of extreme importance, a region that “is an essential driver of America’s future security and prosperity.” It is home to more than half (5.9 billion) of the world’s population, along with 60% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and two thirds of overall economic growth.⁴ Successive administrations have recognized its strategic importance by maintaining a significant US military presence in the region. Among the forces stationed in the region are: the Navy, Space Force, Air Force, Army, and Marine Corps. The US Pacific Command is now known as the US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), a name change that recognizes the importance of India and other westerly located nations in the region. USINDOPACOM, founded on January 1st, 1947, is both the oldest and largest of the United States’ unified commands. This command in recent years has had to respond to China’s aggressive actions in international waters, including its construction of artificial islands confirmed by the PRC to be utilized for military resources. The USINDOPACOM will likely be drawn into the Taiwan Straits crisis, a situation that may or may not worsen with the recent election of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate William Lai, who strongly opposes China’s overreach onto the island.

By foregrounding the roles that allies, partners and prospects play in the US Indo-Pacific strategy, this report reassesses a central focus of US security and foreign policy in a global context. By placing different nations, geographic areas, and international organizations into a single framework, this study also highlights the potential of what US policymakers and policies have to offer to the rest of the world as it engages its formidable rival and competitor, the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

⁴ Office of the Spokesperson, “The United States’ Enduring Commitment to the Indo-Pacific.”

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INTRODUCTION

Aside from the US, whose Indo-Pacific Policy is the key area of focus for this proposal, there are many other national and international powers that are stakeholders in the region who are dedicated to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision. Imperative to the success of the United States' strategy are its close allies Japan, Australia, South Korea, and nations that make up the EU and the NATO. Together, these nations and international organizations are the key support that the US needs to achieve its mission in the Indo-Pacific.

As one of the world's most successful democracies and largest economies, Japan has long been an ally of the United States.⁵ The US State Department has declared the nation, whose population sits at 125.7 million, "...fundamental to regional stability and prosperity." A long-standing alliance, the US - Japan Security Treaty will celebrate its 64th anniversary in 2024, a treaty that is essential to Washington's military presence across the Indo-Pacific. Kadena Air Base, located in Okinawa, is the hub of American airpower in the Pacific and is one of the seven total military installations home to four different American military branches spread across the nation.⁶ Japan is also an important player in the eyes of Washington due to its maritime mission, which focuses on the critical sea-lanes that surround the series of islands that compose the nation. Despite the dedicated and demonstrated support to Washington, the economic growth and success of Japan's economy has seen it grow closer to China, a nation which Japan does not outright denounce through its own Indo-Pacific Strategy. This is something of particular concern to policymakers in the United States as China recently surpassed the US to take the title of most important trading partner to Japan.

US - Australia relations are undeniably some of the strongest in the region. Fighting side by side in every conflict since World War I, the two nations will celebrate 84 years of diplomatic relations in 2024. A strong ally of the United States, Australia's role in the Indo-Pacific region is a critical one. As both parties strongly believe in the preservation of free flight and travel through

⁵ "US Relations With Japan."

⁶ "Kadena Air Base."

the South China Sea, the two nations have in recent years engaged in trilateral security partnerships with Japan. Together, these three nations have deployed military forces to not only train jointly, but to ultimately protect international air and waters from unwanted encroachment by the Chinese. The Australia - UK - US partnership, (AUKUS), is another indicator of this shared interest in military partnership and preservation of free travel. In 2023, the partnership brokered an opportunity for Australia to obtain nuclear-powered submarines for the nation's naval forces. Besides from a strong military bond between the two nations, Australia and the US have also worked in recent years to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic together, working as part of the Quad Vaccine Plan (Australia, India, Japan, US), and the COVID-19 Global Health Action Plan. A strong economic partner for the US, whose contributions make up 7% of the Australian economy, the 2005 Free Trade Agreement with Washington has spurred economic growth in both nations, where more than 1,000 American companies currently have locations in Australia, employing 320,000 Australians nationwide.

The US views South Korea, the Republic of Korea (ROK) as an invaluable ally in the Indo-Pacific. Last year, the two nations celebrated 70 years of military cooperation. Many servicemen and women are stationed throughout South Korea; the US has some 28,000 servicemen and women at the largest overseas military base in the world.⁷ The Republic of Korea, which has seen immense economic development in recent decades, is also a valuable trading partner for the United States, serving as the 6th largest goods-trading partner. As South Korea receives an annual foreign direct investment of \$39.1 billion USD, the US is the second highest nation in the ROK's economy for foreign investment.⁸ South Korea, who once received developmental aid during the Korean ar, now supports other nations in line with US policy. An example of this is the support of nearly \$200 million to Ukraine, while pledging another \$300 million in the upcoming years. Although Korea is an ally to the United States in China matters, it is also very concerned with its neighbor to the north - the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea (DPRK). The US keeps a strong presence at the Demilitarized Zone between the two nations, and has pledged full support to South Korea in the event of an invasion from the North. This military backing has bolstered support for the United

⁷ "United States Forces Korea."

⁸ "Korea."

States and has secured South Korea as a strong ally of the US and others currently in the Indo-Pacific region.

The United States has recently described its commitment to NATO as “ironclad.”⁹ It is the view of the Biden Administration, and previous administrations as well, that NATO is an essential player in the push for a free and secure Indo-Pacific. Many of NATO’s member states are key allies of the United States that also share similar goals to that of the Indo-Pacific policy and all hold some presence in the South China Sea alongside the US. As a founding member of the NATO alliance, the US commitment to the transnational organization and its member nations is set in stone. Although not a member of the E.U, the US still shares valuable allies that do hold membership in the organization. France, the United Kingdom, and Germany, among other European nations, are all fellow stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific, and thus are key allies of the United States and their own Indo-Pacific mission.

Together, these international organizations and countries in the Indo-Pacific make up the cornerstone of the American foreign policy strategy in the region. These nations are the groundwork on which Washington must build its presence and success in the region as key proponents of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy.

⁹ Office of the Spokesperson, “The Ironclad US Commitment to NATO.”

BROAD POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

One of, if not the most important, policy recommendations we give to our allies to secure and safeguard the Indo-Pacific is to strengthen multilateral relationships with each other. In order to be successful, allied nations will need to continue to actively participate in international and regional partnerships as well as strengthen relationships with not only the United States, but also with other allied nations in the Indo-Pacific. Although these relationships have demonstrated themselves to be near ironclad, we still encourage all nations in this chapter to continue to build upon this strong foundation laid over previous decades.

A growing concern of not only the United States, but also of the other nations in this chapter is maritime security. In order to keep up with the growing Chinese navy and other forces that might not be aligned with the FOIP vision, all nations in this chapter need to work with each other to develop military technology that puts these nations and their armed forces at the forefront of military capabilities. We suggest to the nations that do not already employ American defense technology such as the F35 next generation fighter jet, or American naval or submarine vessels, to begin to consider the benefits of creating continuity across allied fighting forces in the form of advanced US defense technology.

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific is not only something that the US yearns for, but it is joined by its allies in the region in its desires to keep the region free and open from foreign interference. We propose that allied nations must adopt the same stance on China, something that currently varies across the board. To strengthen the forces standing up to China's aggression in the South China Sea and across the Indo-Pacific, all allied nations must be able to take the same actions on the PRC. Matters such as COVID-19, the economy, technology, and human security are of extreme importance to all allied nations, however, all nations take varying stances and approaches to the issue. In order to strengthen the allied presence, all nations in the region must adopt a similar stance on a variety of issues posed by China.

JAPAN

BACKGROUND

The alliance between Japan and the US began after World War II and, until recently, was the centerpiece of US security policy in Asia. Their ties are still of geopolitical significance, as evidenced by the Indo-Pacific Strategy they share in common.

Japan has allowed more US military facilities and personnel on its soil than any other country in the world, an arrangement that was initially formalized by the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty of 1951. This security alliance is also central to the Indo-Pacific Strategy that is intended to counter the rise of China and the growing threat of a nuclear North Korea. Geopolitically, Japan is an important ally in terms of military strategy for the US because there are 85 US facilities in Japan, which serve as a deterrent against military action of neighboring countries such as China, North Korea, and Russia.¹⁰

First proposed by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2016, Japan's Indo-Pacific Strategy aims to promote Japan's concept of the FOIP. It proposes to do so by: Promoting and establishing the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and a market economy, pursuing economic prosperity, and ensuring peace and stability.¹¹ In March 2023, Prime Minister Kishida revised the earlier FOIP plan by advancing four pillars of cooperation: principles of peace and rules for prosperity, addressing Indo-Pacific challenges, multi-layered connectivity, and security and safety initiatives expanding from sea to air.¹² Over the past several years as China's economic and military influence in the region has grown, Japan has responded by taking on a greater leadership role on many issues of concern in the region. These include national security, human security, energy, climate change mitigation, and international development assistance. The key to realizing this vision is the US-Japan alliance. The current rule-based international order is an extension of the US liberal democratic system, and makes the US-centered alliance expand the core of the security

¹⁰ "US Forces Japan"

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Free and Open Indo-Pacific."

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "The Future of the Indo-Pacific."

architecture in the Indo-Pacific region. Yet, Japan's FOIP concept respects diversity and inclusiveness and advocates coexistence and co-prosperity based on freedom and the rule of law.¹³ Since Japan's FOIP strategy is comprehensive and aims at cooperation among other countries, it is important to keep in mind that the strategy is not a FOIP policy toward China in particular, but rather a strategy towards prosperity in the broader Indo-Pacific.

MARITIME

Stability in the Indo-Pacific is critical to Japan's security and prosperity as it seeks significant economic growth. At the same time, there are a number of challenges to regional stability, including the rapid modernization and resurgence of Chinese military power. In particular, Japan emphasizes and urges its neighboring countries to adopt the rule of law as a means to ensure regional stability, promote free and fair trade, counter unilateral changes and coercion, and foster cooperation and inclusiveness in the maritime environment. The National Security Strategy clearly states the policy to strengthen cooperation with the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) by concretizing the procedures for the defense minister to command the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) in the event of an emergency, and the government has formulated and released a control guideline that defines the procedures. The JSDF concentrates on the front lines of operations, while the JCG plays the role of protecting the public and saving lives at sea.¹⁴¹⁵ Its Coast Guard deploys to counteract piracy in the areas around Somalia, the Gulf of Aden, and South Asia.¹⁶ For the US military, strengthening cooperation with the JSDF and JCG is necessary to enhance maritime security in the region.

China's persistent intrusion into Japan's territorial waters and its unilateral territorial claims to the Senkaku Islands are a serious problem. In the 1990s, the US confirmed that the islands are

13 Kikuchi, “インド太平洋の米中関係を超えて：自由で開かれた地域秩序構築の『機軸国家日本』のインド太平洋戦略新しいリージョナル・アーキテクチャー—自由で開かれたインド太平洋（FOIP）の実現とQuad（日米豪印協力）。”

14 NHK news, “自衛隊と海上保安庁連携強化へ 有事の際の統制要領を策定 政府 | NHK | 自衛隊.”

15 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “National Security Strategy of Japan.”

16 Japan Coast Guard, “Ensuring security.”

Japanese-administered territory to which the Japan-US Security Treaty applies.¹⁷ In 2014, former President Barack Obama made a verbal commitment to deploy US forces with the JSDF together if the disputed islands fall under attack.¹⁸¹⁹ In 2021, under the Biden administration, when Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin chose Japan as their first official foreign trip, their final statement reaffirmed the US commitment to FOIP and reiterated the commitment to defend the disputed islands.²⁰

MILITARY

The JSDF is deepening cooperation with like-minded countries, especially the other members of the Quad (US-Japan-Australia-India) and enhancing maritime security to realize the FOIP strategy. Building on the US-Japan alliance, the Japanese government promotes bilateral and multilateral defense cooperation and exchanges, including joint training and equipment and technology cooperation.

Washington views the US Japan Security Treaty as an invaluable relationship. Signed in the wake of World War II, the treaty has long been a source of partnership and military cooperation between the two nations. Tensions between Tokyo and Washington temporarily flared and took a negative turn as a result of the Security Treaty, when former President Trump claimed that Japan was not making enough financial contributions to the treaty, claims that have since disappeared and caused tensions overall to dissipate under President Biden²¹. In recent years, the Treaty has been amended by the US and Japan in order to craft a larger role for Japan, and the treaty is viewed bilaterally as an essential piece of the US strategy in the Indo-Pacific region.

Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan spells out that the state formally renounced war as a right of sovereignty and the use of force to settle international disputes, thus committing Japan to

¹⁷ Grieger, “Sino-Japanese controversy over the Senkaku/Diaoyu/Diaoyutai Islands: An imminent flashpoint in the Indo-Pacific?”

¹⁸ McCurry and Branigan. “Obama says US will defend Japan in island dispute with China.”

¹⁹ Obama White House, “Joint Press Conference with President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan.”

²⁰ Johnstone, “The East China Sea: Ten Years After the Senkaku Nationalization Crisis | Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative.”

²¹ Maizland and Chang, “The US-Japan Security Alliance.”

a defense policy based on the principle of "exclusive defense." Subsequently, Japan organized a modest self-defense that has grown in size over the years. Among political leaders as well as the wider public, opinions vary about increasing defense spending and defense capabilities in the face of the growing military power of neighboring countries, such as China, North Korea, and Russia.²² In addition, it is not clear to what extent the JSDF is allowed to conduct operations under Article 9 of the current Constitution. Thus, the extent to which the JSDF can be involved in the event of an engagement with a neighboring country is a focus for future consideration by the Japanese government. As a key ally of Japan in the Indo-Pacific, the US must pay attention to future developments in the Japanese government, its interpretation of the Constitution, and the scope of the JSDF's activities.

In December 2022, the current prime minister, Fumio Kishida followed through on his pledge to double Japan's defense budget from about 1% of its gross domestic product, the ratio it has maintained for the past six decades, to 2% by 2027. The most discussed issue related to increasing the national defense budget is provision for long-range land-attack missiles to enhance Japan's counter-attack capabilities and unmanned defense systems. In addition, the Japanese government intends to allocate a budget for research and development to create a next-generation fighter jet in cooperation with Italy and the United Kingdom.²³

Japan's stated FOIP strategy is to be very open to cooperation with relevant countries in the Indo-Pacific region and to actively engage bilaterally and multilaterally, as well as with members of the Quad.²⁴ In 2019, Japan established a 2+2 ministerial framework with India, which is a diplomatic summit involving their respective foreign and defense ministers. They maintain a "Special Strategic Global Partnership" that Japan and India reaffirmed in March 2023.²⁵ Japan also built relationships with other countries in the Indo-Pacific region, such as partnering with the Philippines and Vietnam in the 2+2 ministerial framework.

²²"Article 9 and the US-Japan Security Treaty."

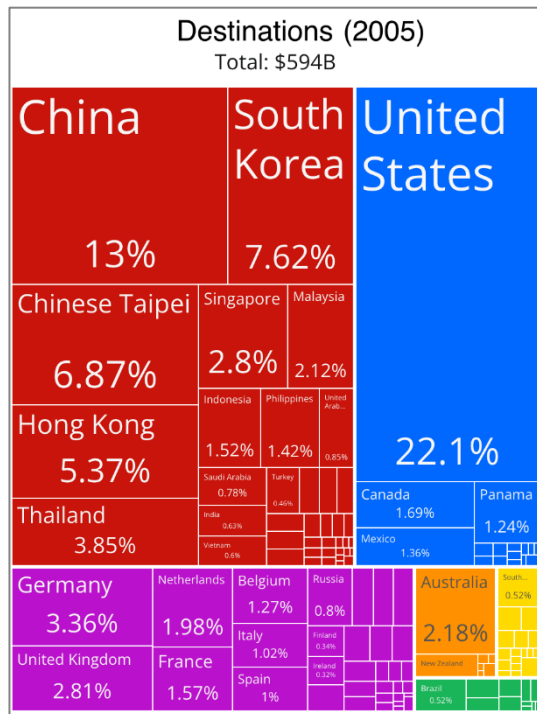
²³ Chang, "Japan's Bigger Defense Budget: Getting to Effective Deterrence."

²⁴ Smith, "The US-Japan Security Alliance."

²⁵ Solanki and Togashi, "India and Japan enhance cooperation despite their differences."

ECONOMY

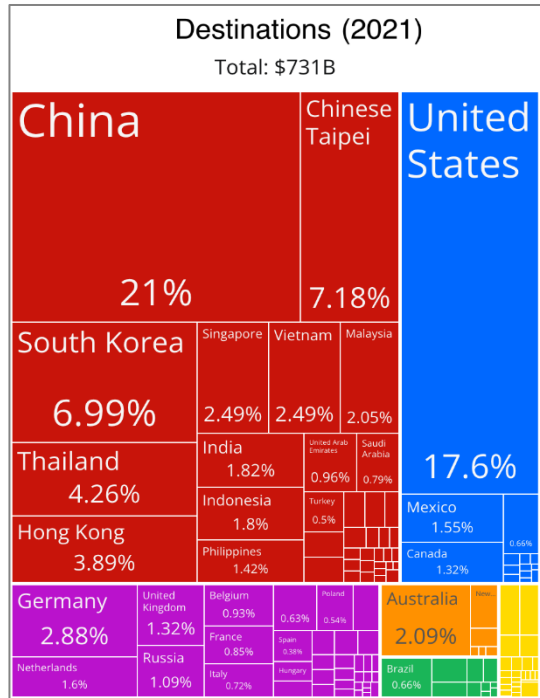
Japan is an extremely valuable trading partner to the United States. Increasing trade to the nation in both imports and exports would likely be approved by both sides of the American political spectrum. Since the two nations have a long history of exchanging goods and services, an uptick in these trades which would spur further development of relations between the two nations in a critical time like this would be a good move for both nations. The recent 2021 announcement of the formal US - Japan Partnership on Trade is an example of the recent relations between the two



nations when it comes to economics. The agreement has proven successful, when in 2022 US trade with Japan totaled \$307.4 billion.²⁶

However, Japan’s FOIP outlook is also shaped by its extensive trade with China, which has become an indispensable trading partner. East Asian economies, including Japan's, are becoming increasingly integrated with China, with China accounting for a rise in share of their exports. In 2021, China consumed more than 21% of Japanese exports, surpassing the US as Japan's top destination for exports.

²⁶ “Japan.”



*The Observatory of Economic Complexity*²⁷

As a result, economic interactions between Japan and China have outweighed political tensions, and the two countries have developed close trade and economic ties. Due to China's economic presence, Japan's FOIP deliberately does not mention China by name, as the US does in its statement.

ENVIRONMENT

Across the Indo-Pacific region, the US and its allies and partners have committed to addressing the climate crisis and seeking climate solutions. Japan has

been at the forefront of these issues since the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol at the Third Conference of the Parties at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Kyoto in 1997. Recognized as a country with high energy efficiency and advanced environmentally friendly technologies, Japan has also contributed to international cooperation on climate change in various ways.

In June 2019, the Japanese government approved the "Long-Term Growth Strategy Based on the Paris Agreement" by cabinet decision. The long-term strategy sets out a vision of achieving a "decarbonized society" as early as possible in the second half of the 21st century.²⁸ Despite its positive intentions the strategy has some challenges. First, while the strategy sets a goal to achieve a "zero-carbon society" as early as possible, it does not outline a concrete path to achieve this. The goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050 remains unchanged, and the 2030 target is only a 26% reduction from 2013 levels. This is the lowest level among major countries, and far short of the level needed to meet the Paris Agreement goals. Second, Japan continues to

²⁷ "Data visualization with Tree Map."

²⁸ McKinsey, "Meeting Japan's Paris agreement targets: More opportunities than costs."

rely on coal. Japan's policy of continuing to build new coal-fired power plants at home and financially supporting them abroad has received criticism from the international community. Japan's current Fifth Energy Strategic Plan states that the energy mix in 2030 will be 26% coal-fired, 22-24% renewable, and 20-22% nuclear, but the target for 2050 is not clear.²⁹

Japan's FOIP strategy also places special emphasis on climate change security. Japan recognizes climate change as an existential crisis that could affect national security through more frequent and severe natural disasters and more severe energy and food problems. Additionally, the strategy also emphasizes Japan's determination to assist island states and developing countries in building economies and societies that are resilient to climate change.³⁰ For example, Japan has provided disaster risk reduction assistance to ASEAN countries.

The US-Japan Climate Partnership, announced on May 23, 2022, aims to bring the two countries together to increase their commitment to mitigating climate change. The partnership seeks to achieve both countries' 2050 net zero targets and the 2030 Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement.³¹ The partnership also focuses on reducing methane emissions from production and consumption, as well as advancing ocean-based climate actions such as green shipping corridors in the region. By collaborating in these areas, the US and Japan aim to advance their environmental targets and contribute to a more sustainable Indo-Pacific region.

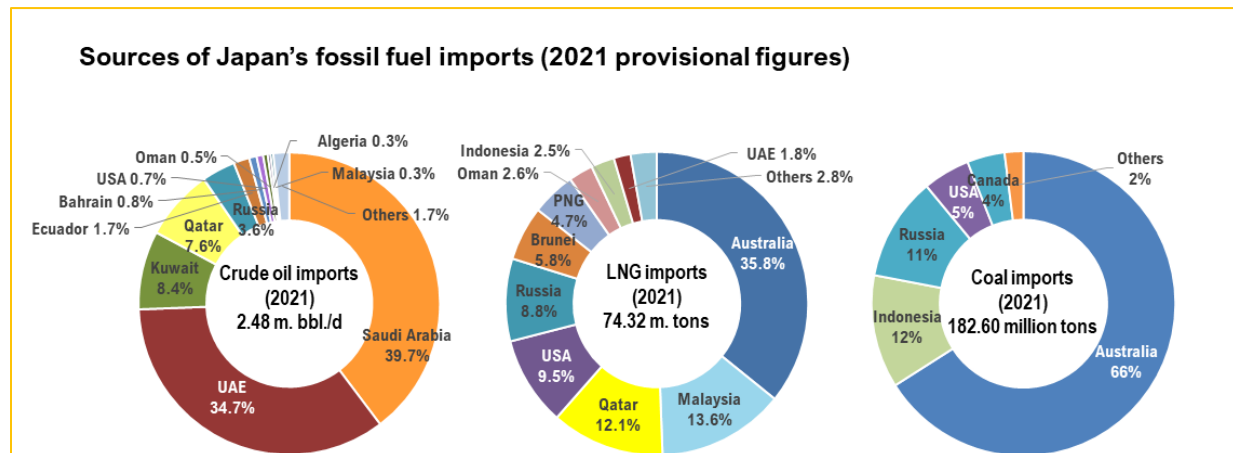
²⁹ Matsushita, "Japan's Response to the Issue of Climate Change: An Innovative Transition Towards a Zero-Carbon and Resilient Society."

³⁰ Matsushita.

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-US Climate Partnership on Ambition, Decarbonization, and Clean Energy."

ENERGY

The Japanese government recognizes that the safe transit of the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) in the Indo-Pacific is as equally important as its national security. The energy self-sufficiency ratio of Japan, with a 12.1% in 2019, marks a considerably low level compared to other Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Since the Great East Japan Earthquake and the nuclear power plant incident in Fukushima in 2011, the reliance on thermal energy generation has increased with fossil fuels. Most fossils imported into Japan transits through the SLOC from the Middle East and Australia. Japan relies on imports for 99.7 %, 97.5 %, and 99.3 % of its crude oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and coal, respectively, and is very well diversified in its LNG imports. It remains 88% dependent on the Middle East for crude oil and Australia for coal.³²³³



CYBER SECURITY

Japan's cybersecurity policy involves multiple ministries and agencies. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry conducts awareness-raising activities for industry, provides support packages, and trains nationally certified Information Security Assistants. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications is also working on cybersecurity strategies by establishing a system that covers everything from information sharing and collection to policy responses. In addition, the Cabinet Cyber Security Center of the Cabinet Secretariat plays a central role in promoting policies and raising awareness. This clearly indicates a desire on the part of both the US and Japan for a strong cybersecurity posture. Japan's 2021 Cyber Security Strategy explicitly names state actors Russia, North Korea, and China as threats.³⁵

The Japanese government formulated its Cyber Security Strategy based on the Cyber Security Basic Law enacted in 2014. One of the measures this strategy takes is the strengthening of the framework for domestic computer security incident response teams (CSIRT) and computer emergency response teams (CERT) through government support. In the event of a serious cyber-attack, the teams take the responsibility for the overall coordination of a series of responses, from information collection and analysis to investigation, evaluation, alerting, attack response, and subsequent policy making on measures to prevent recurrence of cyberattacks. It includes such measures as strengthening the posture of cyber-related units and fundamentally enhancing the cyber defense capabilities of the Ministry of Defense and the JSDF, promoting cooperation with like-minded countries such as the United States, Australia, India, and ASEAN member countries, and leading international cyber exercises.

HUMAN SECURITIES

Japan has been supporting infrastructure development, trade, and investment in South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa by Official Development Assistance (ODA), the government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing

³⁵ The Government of Japan, "Cybersecurity for All."

countries.³⁶ To improve connectivity with South Asian countries, Japan focuses on high-quality infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, airports, power plants, and industrial estates, all of which are vital for economic development. One of the most notable ODA projects is the ongoing construction of the high-speed railway between Mumbai and Ahmedabad in India. Japan also actively supports cohesion and integration with ASEAN and has provided substantial funding for the ASEAN-East Asia Economic Research Institute,³⁷ as well as official development assistance for infrastructure and human resource development through public-private partnerships, bringing in external resources such as private-sector funds, technology, and knowledge to support the development of infrastructure.³⁸ In 2022, Japan's outward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows to ASEAN countries amounted to around 24.2 billion US dollars.³⁹

OTHER NOTES: JAPAN AND NORTH KOREA

The relationship between Japan and North Korea is currently strained by the unresolved abduction of seventeen Japanese citizens and the security threats of North Korea's missile tests. According to Japan's ministry of foreign affairs, the Japanese basic policy toward North Korea strictly states that "Japan seeks to normalize its relations with North Korea, in accordance with the Pyongyang Declaration, through comprehensively resolving outstanding issues of concern such as the abductions, nuclear and missile issues as well as settlement of the unfortunate past."

In 2002, Japan and North Korea announced the Pyongyang Declaration that North Korea acknowledged the abductions and apologized, and five of the abductees were returned to Japan in October of the same year. Since then, however, North Korea has not provided a satisfactory explanation for the remaining twelve abductees. Currently, the Japanese government has recognized the 17 abductees as victims of abduction by North Korea, and the Japanese government

³⁶ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Official development assistance (ODA)."

³⁷ Shiraishi, "Japan's Indo-Pacific Policy."

³⁸ Yuho, "[ASEAN-Japan Special 1] 50 Years of Partnership: Interview with Hayakawa Yuho of the Southeast Asia and Pacific Department."

³⁹ Statista, "Japan: outward FDI flows to ASEAN."

continues to collect information and surveys on 873 abductees for which there is a possibility of abduction by North Korea.⁴⁰

In addition, in 2021, North Korea conducted four launches using ballistic missile technology in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. On February 27 and March 5 in 2022, North Korea launched an intercontinental missile,⁴¹ and fired a projectile believed to be a new ICBM, which is estimated to have fallen 150 kilometers from the Japanese mainland which is within Japan's exclusive economic zone on March 24.

There has been no summit or foreign affairs meeting that has taken place since 2018, leaving potential for the US-led diplomatic progress between Japan and North Korea to make a contribution.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen the trilateral ties among Japan and South Korea in order to improve the collective capacity to respond firmly to North Korea's provocations
- Reaffirm commitment to the US-Japan Security Treaty to strengthen the US-Japan alliance and arrange values and policies to maintain and promote a permanent relationship
- Promote technological exchange and advanced research and development to improve cybersecurity in the Indo-Pacific region by jointly establishing a cybersecurity infrastructure with Japan
- Advance sustainable energy cooperation by opportunities for technological exchange through research exchanges at academic institutions and universities in order to pursue a "zero-carbon society" and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions

⁴⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “政府認定の拉致被害者 | 外務省.”

⁴¹ Japan Ministry of Defense, “Recent Missile and Nuclear Development of North Korea.”

AUSTRALIA

BACKGROUND

With the rise of Asian actors in the region, particularly China as a global superpower, Australia has found itself amidst a volatile Indo-Pacific region, creating new challenges and opportunities for the nation. Australia has had to surmount changing political realities and realign its foreign and domestic policies accordingly. Australian regional engagement emphasizes the importance of multilateral efforts within the region, with a grander ambition of building and maintaining an Indo-Pacific that is open, secure, and stable, closely aligning in perspective with its regional allies Japan, South Korea, and the United States. The shift in regional security dynamics has led Australia to realize the potential and emerging conflicts of interest concerning China and its efforts to establish itself as a regional, potentially global, hegemon.

With the election of Anthony Albanese as the Prime Minister of Australia in May 2022, Australian intentions in regard to its relations with China have shifted to efforts increasingly advocating for stabilization with the PRC and effectively the stabilization of the Indo-Pacific region as a whole, with increased frequency of high level diplomatic meetings, repositioning and reconciling a somewhat compromised relationship. The Australian government reflects these changes and shifts in policy in its Defense and Foreign Policy White Papers. The Australian Government 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper recognizes that in the new “Asian century”, Australia must prioritize making an active effort not only to compliment the emerging Asian global powers but also strengthen its relationships with these nations. Considering that Australia’s bilateral trade with China accounts for 26 percent of Australia’s overall trade within the world, a figure that is rapidly increasing,⁴² it is difficult for the Australian government to act freely upon any conflicts of interest that it may have with China, proving for a complicated dynamic between the two nations. It is important to also recognize that, like the United States, Australia acknowledges the one-China policy, meaning that Australia does not recognize Taiwan as a

⁴² “China Country Brief,” Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/china/china-country-brief..>

sovereign state. Similarly to the United States, Australia maintains informal economic and trade relations with Taiwan.

As an actor in the Indo-Pacific region, Australia has made a conscious effort in the adaptation of its relationships to account for the rise of a China centric “Asian century.” The Australian government lays out this framework in its 2009 White Paper, “Australia in the Asian Century” defining its key regional relationships that include Japan, South Korea, India, Indonesia, and China. This framework is adapted by the Australian government to serve as a foundation of its vision of security and prosperity within the Indo-Pacific, with objectives of facilitating diplomatic, economic, and strategic relations with Indo-Pacific nations. With a focus on the following challenges, Australia would be capable of reinforcing its position in the Indo-Pacific region, contending against Chinese efforts to expand its military, diplomatic, and economic hegemony within the region as well as globally.

MARITIME

Situated at the intersection of the Indian, Pacific, and Southern oceans, Australia is undoubtedly a maritime nation. The maintenance of open and free sea routes connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans plays a crucial role in facilitating trade in goods and energy, which is essential for the growth of the Indo-Pacific. Without the maintenance of a FOIP, many of the critical economies of the region would suffer, including China, Japan, the ROK, as well as Australia. The emergence of the Indo-Pacific region as a strategic concept in Australia is driven by the increasing recognition of the maritime domain's significance in maintaining a rules-based international order.

Australia's maritime security strategy extends beyond national security concerns to include transnational challenges such as marine safety, environmental threats, and scientific research on environmental threats. As it currently stands, Australia's maritime strategy is much less developed compared to that of the United States. This is concerning considering that Australia is heavily dependent on the maritime domain for seaborne supply routes. These seaborne supply routes account for 98% of all trade, imports, and exports flowing through Australia.⁴³ Although there are many possible routes for trade to traverse through, many of these routes pass through the narrow straits of the Southeast Asian archipelago. The strategic significance of the Malacca Strait lies in its role as the most direct route connecting not only the Western Pacific, but also the northern Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Gulf.⁴⁴ Any disruption of the Malacca Strait would reroute

commercial and military vessels through the Sunda Strait. The nature of these straits makes it vulnerable to choke points regardless of Australian involvement in any potential conflicts, creating a possibility for the interruption of vital seaborne trade routes.



Figure: Southeast Asian Maritime Chokepoints⁴⁵

Furthermore, Australia also heavily relies on its maritime domain through the use of underwater data cables along with communication cables for submarines. These data cables

⁴³ Jennifer Parker, "An Australian Maritime Strategy: Resourcing the Royal Australian Navy," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, October 2023.

⁴⁴ "An Australian Maritime Strategy: Resourcing the Royal Australian Navy"

⁴⁵ "An Australian Maritime Strategy: Resourcing the Royal Australian Navy."

contribute to facilitating 99% of all the internet traffic present,⁴⁶ classifying them as a critical sector of infrastructure for Australia.

In 2021, Australia improved its military security capabilities through the establishment of the AUKUS agreement. AUKUS is a trilateral agreement between the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia, with the UK and the US aiding Australia in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines.⁴⁷ As a longstanding global maritime power, the United States has consistently prioritized the Indo-Pacific in its security strategy, particularly evident since the "pivot to Asia" during the Obama administration.⁴⁸

Australia's maritime strategy must be comprehensive, focusing not only on naval power but also on broader maritime security and ocean governance. Due to the geostrategic position of Australia, securing many of the critical supply routes can only be realized by collaboration with regional partners and allies. Many of the critical choke points extend much further than the reach of the current Royal Australian Navy (RAN), making it imperative that Australia pursues security cooperation with Indonesia and Malaysia to ensure uninterrupted lanes of maritime traffic. Concepts of economic reliance on trade, commitment to addressing transnational issues, and adherence to the rules-based international order must be considered by Australia and its allies when enunciating priorities of the Australian maritime strategy.

MILITARY

With its dependence on the security of the maritime domain, Australia has taken an active role in revamping its naval capabilities. The RAN fleet currently does not have a balanced fleet structure, with the lack of a surface-combatant fleet being a primary obstacle. The term "balanced" does not necessarily describe the act of the RAN preparing for a diverse range of scenarios, but rather a RAN that is armed with the capability to effectively conduct operations supporting both national survival followed by fundamental national interests.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Tucker, "Subsea Cables: Keeping Australia Connected to the World."

⁴⁷ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, "AUKUS Factsheet."

⁴⁸ Robertson, "The Obama Administration's Pacific Pivot Strategy."

⁴⁹ Goldrick and Shrikhande, "Sea Denial Is Not Enough: An Australian and Indian Perspective."

Due to the aforementioned Australian geographical realities, it is crucial that the RAN has the necessary infrastructure to traverse extreme range requirements. As of 2023, the RAN fleet consists of 11 surface combatants, many of which classified as Anzac-class frigates, with the initial ships commissioned in 1996.⁵⁰ The Anzac-class frigates are constrained by its limited firepower and aging technologies, and as they were designed during an amiable era, many components of the ship were designed with the intention of being updated if the strategic situation calls for it.⁵¹ Along with the Anzac-class frigates, the RAN is equipped with three Hobart-class destroyers initially commissioned in 2017.⁵² Compared to the likes of the United States, currently equipped with 152 surface combatants, followed by China with 137 surface combatants,⁵³ Australia's fleet is severely underdeveloped. The 2009 Defense White Paper declared ambitions to replace the Anzac class with modernized frigates.⁵⁵ Dubbed the Hunter-class frigate, these modernized frigates were designed with an optimization for anti-submarine warfare.⁵⁶ With an optimization of capabilities, tradeoffs in the overall effectiveness are inevitable. The current design of The Hunter-class frigates project it to be roughly 10,000 metric tons compared to the Anzac-class which is 3,600 metric tons and the Hobart-class at 7,000 metric tons.⁵⁷ Despite this substantial difference in tonnage, there is a notable compromise of firepower per metric ton. When comparing vertical launching system (VLS) capabilities across the platforms, the Anzac-class is equipped with 8 cells, the Hobart-class equipped with 48 VLS cells, and the Hunter-class with only 32 VLS cells.⁵⁸ This limiting of missile capabilities for the Hunter-class serves a similar challenge for the Anzac-class, constraining the decision-making associated using the missiles. Furthermore, due to its already

⁵⁰ Defence Department, "Budget 2023-24 Portfolio."

⁵¹ "An Australian Maritime Strategy: Resourcing the Royal Australian Navy"

⁵² "An Australian Maritime Strategy: Resourcing the Royal Australian Navy"

⁵³ LaGrone, "Navy Raises Battle Force Goal to 381 Ships in Classified Report to Congress."

⁵⁴ O'Rourke, "China Naval Modernization: Implications for US Navy."

⁵⁵ Defence Department, "Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030 (2009 Defence White Paper)."

⁵⁶ "Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030 (2009 Defence White Paper)."

⁵⁷ "An Australian Maritime Strategy: Resourcing the Royal Australian Navy"

⁵⁸ Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), "Department of Defence's Procurement of Hunter Class Frigates: Australian National Audit Office (ANAO)."

hulking design, complications arise in the consideration of capability modification for the Hunter-class, creating a scenario with limited possibility of the balanced fleet design.

The necessity for a strengthening of Australian military capabilities through the assistance of allies is realized by the AUKUS partnership, announced in September 2021.⁵⁹ In the efforts of improving the sovereign capabilities of Australia, the US, and the UK pursued the implementation of advanced capabilities in the form of conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines. AUKUS is not limited to the advancement of the Australian fleet, but also covers cooperation on military information exchange, cyber mechanisms, artificial intelligence, hyper-sonic and counter-hypersonic, and electronic warfare.⁶⁰ The PRC views the AUKUS partnership as a major threat to regional stability and peace because it was primarily enacted in response to China's growing presence as a global superpower.⁶¹

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

Climate change remains at the forefront of Australian environmental concerns. In order to adapt to a growing global theme of reducing emissions the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCEEW) has taken leadership of Australian counter climate change initiatives. To play a role in the reduction of Australian emissions and improved renewable energy infrastructure, the DCEEW has enacted a comprehensive framework guiding its strategy to make this a reality. This framework involves proactive Australian efforts at both a domestic and international level. Domestically, the Australian government has enacted the Climate Change Bill in September 2022.⁶² Within this bill, a goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 43% from 2005 levels by 2030 with a vision to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.⁶³ In support of this policy, the DCEEW has laid out strategies and plans for the Australian government to pursue, namely the Rewiring the Nation (RWN) plan. The RWN highlights the Australian government's commitment

⁵⁹ Jenkins, "Aukus: A Commitment to the Future."

⁶⁰ "AUKUS Factsheet"

⁶¹ Huisken, "What China's Condemnation of AUKUS Says about Beijing."

⁶² Parliament of Australia, "Climate Change Bill 2022."

⁶³ DCCEEW, "Net Zero."

to invest \$20 billion to “rebuild and modernize Australia’s electricity network” by 2030,⁶⁴ aligning with the ambitions presented in the 2022 Climate Change Bill. Internationally, Australia is involved in many cooperative climate change partnerships such as the Paris Agreement, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Cancun Pledge.⁶⁵

Currently, Australia generates 70% of its energy using non-renewable sources, primarily coal and gas.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Australia imports 91% of domestic fuel,⁶⁷ highlighting the dependent nature of Australian trade relationships. This dependence on fuel imports is further exacerbated by the lack of refining capabilities, with only two refineries still in operation.⁶⁸ Further emphasizing the severity of Australia’s energy infrastructure issue, if Australia were to experience a cessation of energy imports, Australia had only a 51 day supply of fuel reserves in May 2023.⁶⁹ In the midst of an increasingly volatile Indo-Pacific region, the potential cessation of these critical imports must be accounted for, and Australia must pursue solutions. This presents an opportunity for the US to aid in the development of Australian sovereign energy capabilities, with an emphasis on clean and renewable energy rather than the current use of traditional sources.

CYBERSECURITY AND TECHNOLOGY

With advancements in technology, ties between critical infrastructure and technology become tighter, and due to the interconnectedness of these infrastructures, they are susceptible to offensive action, targeted for their broad attack surface and crippling power. As Australian networks grow in size and complexity, so does the frequency of cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure. Australia experienced an increase in malicious cyber-attacks against critical infrastructure, with 95 incidents reported in 2021-2022, and 143 incidents in 2022-2023.⁷⁰ The

⁶⁴ DCCEEW, “Rewiring the Nation.”

⁶⁵ Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, “International Cooperation on Climate Change.”

⁶⁶ DCCEEW, “Energy Supply.”

⁶⁷ “Australian Petroleum Statistics 2021.”

⁶⁸ Stevens and Coyne, “Australia’s Fuel Reserves Don’t Have to Keep Running on Empty.”

⁶⁹ IEA, “Oil Stocks of IEA Countries – Data Tools.”

⁷⁰ Australian Signals Directorate, “ASD Cyber Threat Report 2022-23.”

nature of these incidents can be categorized into three types of attacks: the compromise of accounts and/or credentials, compromise of assets, network or infrastructure, and finally denial of service.

With the rise of cyberattacks on critical infrastructure used as a method of hybrid warfare in the Ukraine-Russia conflict, it is paramount that Australia prepares necessary precautions, operating on a counterstrategy that presumes the inevitability of cyber warfare. With the establishment of Australia's Cyber and Critical Tech Cooperation Program (CCTCP) in 2016, Australia actively pursues regional and global cooperative efforts to improve cyber resilience. With the CCTCP, Australia commits to investing \$20.5 million to increase cyber and critical technology resilience in the Southeast Asian region.⁷¹

HUMAN SECURITY

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia was able to maintain a fairly low figure of casualties in comparison to the US, Japan, and South Korea.⁷² Despite this, the COVID-19 pandemic still deeply affected the Australian economy, supply chains, and public health structure. The Australian Government's Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security led the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With a focus on laboratory strengthening, surveillance, disease impact modeling, and health emergency response training, the Centre played a key role in the Australian efforts of containing the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷³ Furthermore, to support regional responses to the pandemic, the Australian Government invested \$623 million to circulate more than 52 million vaccines within the Pacific and Southeast Asian partner countries.⁷⁴

In preparation for future pandemics, Australia delegated the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) to provide a comprehensive framework in limiting the potential risks of future pandemics. Detailed in the 2022 "Strengthening Australia's Pandemic Preparedness" report, the CSIRO emphasized the vital nature of onshore vaccine production and

⁷¹ Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Launch of Australia's International Cyber and Critical Technology Engagement Strategy."

⁷² Mathieu et al., "Australia: Coronavirus Pandemic Country Profile."

⁷³ Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security."

⁷⁴ "Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security."

industry partnership.⁷⁵ In an active effort to enhance these capabilities, Australia began to construct its first major mRNA vaccine manufacturing facility at the end of 2022.⁷⁶ This facility is a product of a decade long partnership between major health industry leader Moderna and the Australian Government.⁷⁷ An increase on domestic vaccine producing capability will reduce Australian dependence on imported vaccines, further improving the nations sovereign capabilities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue support in the development of the Australian maritime capabilities through reevaluating of provisions outlined in AUKUS agreement, redefining terms to aid Australian advancement towards a “balanced” fleet of surface-combatant vessels within the RAN
- Aid in advancement of Australian onshore fuel refinement, providing financial aid to construct localized fuel refinement facilities to reimagine the currently import dependent nature of Australian refined petroleum
- Engage in information exchange regarding clean and renewable energy, further assisting a shift away from non-renewable energy sources, reinforcing Australian efforts to reduce emissions and develop its sovereign energy capabilities

SOUTH KOREA

BACKGROUND

In 1945, after World War II and Japan’s surrender, Korea secured its independence from Japanese rule. Subsequently, the country was divided up at the 38th parallel with the United States controlling the south and the Soviet Union the north. The former was established as the ROK in

⁷⁵ CSIRO, “Strengthening Australia’s Pandemic Preparedness.”

⁷⁶ Department of Industry Science and Resources, “MRNA Vaccine Manufacturing Facility Commences Construction in Melbourne.”

⁷⁷ “MRNA Vaccine Manufacturing Facility Commences Construction in Melbourne”

1948⁷⁸ while the latter became the DPRK. The Korean War continued until 1953 when an armistice was concluded that ended hostilities. However, South and North Korea never formally signed a peace treaty. At the end of the Korean War, in 1953, the US and the ROK signed a Mutual Defense treaty, which committed the US to help the ROK⁷⁹ defend itself “against external armed attack,” especially by DPRK. Thus the US and the ROK’s long alliance began.

One of the top priorities the ROK has is the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and peaceful relations with the DPRK. To counter the DPRK’s nuclear capability, the ROK has sought a trilateral security cooperation between itself, Japan, and the United States.⁸⁰ The DPRK’s nuclear development is a source of global concern since its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1993.⁸¹ Since then it has conducted several nuclear tests: the first in 2006, a second in 2009, and most recently, its sixth in 2017.⁸² President Yoon Suk Yeol and his administration have ranked their top priorities: establishment of peace on the Korean Peninsula and the reunification of Korea. They also emphasize the importance of national sovereignty and territory and laying the foundation for East Asian prosperity and an expanded global role for the ROK.⁸³

In addition to the ROK’s top priorities, the ROK assesses the security environment of various regions, notably in the Indo-Pacific and Korean Peninsula. Showing the ROK’s strong desire to become a global player within the international community, specifically within the Indo-Pacific, as a way to make up for former ROK president Moon Jae-in’s absence from the region.⁸⁴ Prior to the current ROK president Yoon Suk Yeol’s Indo-Pacific Strategy, the New Southern Policy (NSP) from former ROK President Moon Jae-in’s was presented. Under NSP, the ROK’s

⁷⁸ “US Relations With the Republic of Korea.”

⁷⁹ “We Go Together.”

⁸⁰ Korea, “Yoon Suk Yeol Administration’s National Security Strategy View|President | Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea.”

⁸¹ Korea, “Overview | North Korean Nuclear Issue Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea.”

⁸² Korea, “Yoon Suk Yeol Administration’s National Security Strategy View|President | Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea”; Korea, “Overview | North Korean Nuclear Issue Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea.”

⁸³ Korea, “Yoon Suk Yeol Administration’s National Security Strategy View|President | Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea.”

⁸⁴ “The ROK’s Indo-Pacific Strategy under President Yoon.”

role within the Indo-pacific was confined to economic and functional cooperation on a bilateral basis,⁸⁵ restricting the ROK's role within the region. Even when the ROK was working with ASEAN during former president Moon Jae-in's presidency from 2017 to 2022, there was no push in prioritizing development between the two.

Currently, the ROK's role as a global actor can be reflected in its successful and effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic, donation of essential medical supplies to the United States, commitment to sharing information with the International Maritime security construct, and shifting from a country that receives aid to aiding other countries.⁸⁶ It is clear that the ROK has aligned itself with the same ideals as the United States, their strong alliance and commitment being a testament to this.

MARITIME

The ROK aims to establish a world-leading maritime logistics system, wanting to establish a digital marine highway and secure national competitiveness in the shipping and logistics sector.⁸⁷ Leading to a market of future vessels that are zero-emission, eco-friendly, and develop technologies for autonomous ships, a goal that the ROK has projected for 2025. The ROK's Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries has two main visions, a solid and robust marine industry and safe and sound domestic living conditions. The first vision involves the global community, as development of the marine industry means including or at least acknowledging partners that contribute to the industry. The ROK wants to build world-class smart mega ports, as well as secure a competitive edge in marine mobility. The ROK is taking steps towards a leading role⁸⁸ where it can set the international standard for eco-friendly materials, parts, equipment, and technologies.⁸⁹ Outside of the military, the ROK's desire to develop its maritime industry shows a willingness to

⁸⁵ "The ROK's Indo-Pacific Strategy under President Yoon."

⁸⁶ "US Relations With the Republic of Korea."

⁸⁷ Fisheries, "A SOLID AND SOUND LEADING MARITIME NATION."

⁸⁸ Fisheries.

⁸⁹ Fisheries.

serve as both an example and a guide for other countries, reflecting that the ROK is becoming a more prominent global player.

Maritime in terms of the military takes form working with countries within the Indo-Pacific region, such as talks about expanding partnerships of maritime cooperation with the Philippines⁹⁰ or with the commander of the US Coast Guard who visited the Korean Coast Guard⁹¹ in order to discuss areas of cooperation, shared interests, and necessary actions needed in order to prevent transnational crimes. The ROK also works with India to increase maritime promotion in areas that had not been as promoted, such as in the Indian Ocean.⁹² Cooperation with key actors within the Indo-Pacific region is ideal in promoting and expanding maritime cooperation between countries. Since 2005, the ROK coast guard and India have consistently conducted joint exercises since the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation.⁹³ the ROK's pursuit of global presence via maritime cooperation⁹⁴ with key actors in the region reflects the ROK's active action in becoming a key Indo-Pacific player.

Furthering the development of alliances and partnerships via joint exercises allows for the parties involved to strengthen their own maritime security, while bringing resources to the area. The Pacific Ocean receives the majority of the resources, leaving regions, like the Indian Ocean vulnerable.⁹⁵ It is in the ROK's best interests to continue to advance and forge maritime cooperation in the less popular and vulnerable regions of the Indo-Pacific.

MILITARY

The President Yoon administration's layout of the future for the ROK's development, focuses on military defense innovations by developing a powerful and

⁹⁰ "Embassy Hosted a Roundtable Discussion Titled 'Navigating Waves of Partnership: Expanding Philippines-Republic of Korea Maritime Cooperation' 상세보기|Embassy NewsEmbassy of the Republic of Korea in the Republic of the Philippines."

⁹¹ "Korea Coast Guard Strengthens Maritime Security Cooperation with US Coast Guard Pacific Area Command."

⁹² "Strategic Developments and Maritime Cooperation in the Indian Ocean."

⁹³ "Strategic Developments and Maritime Cooperation in the Indian Ocean."

⁹⁴ "Mission & Vision."

⁹⁵ "Strategic Developments and Maritime Cooperation in the Indian Ocean."

technologically advanced military in critical defense areas. One of the main priorities focuses on the enhanced ability to counter DPRK nuclear and missile threats.⁹⁶ In addition to this, developing the military includes developing proactive strategies and operational concepts, such as using AI-based advanced combat capabilities to innovate military structure and training systems.⁹⁷ the ROK is taking into consideration that science and technology is rapidly evolving and plans to use it accordingly.

Additionally, with the ROK's acknowledgement of technology in the development of the military and involvement within various spaces, the ROK aims towards amending relevant regulations and laws to allow authorization for its military to engage with critical cyber operations. They are also working towards pursuing a ROK-US combined exercises and training in order to prepare both nations to combat cyber threats.⁹⁸ For several years, the US and ROK militaries have conducted large-scale drills in order to test their alliance. Any reduction in joint exercises could be damaging to the alliance's cohesion.⁹⁹ During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the joint exercises were postponed and computer simulation exercises occurred in August 2021; North Korea criticized the US and South Korea for their preparation for war.¹⁰⁰ However, prior to these simulated exercises, about 70 ROK lawmakers had called for the former President Moon Jae-in to postpone the exercises due to North Korea's decision to re-open some communication channels with South Korea. Internally, the political climate tends to lean towards postponing international decisions and actions if the opportunity for unification with DPRK presents itself.

When it comes to the Indo-Pacific strategy, the current ROK government looks forward to taking an active and central role compared to the previous administration. Much of the ROK's goals and core values align to those of the United States. The ROK is looking to foster a peaceful, free, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region and wants to do so by sticking to three principles of

⁹⁶ Korea, "Yoon Suk Yeol Administration's National Security Strategy View|President | Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea."

⁹⁷ Korea.

⁹⁸ Korea.

⁹⁹ Manyin et al., "US-South Korea Relations."

¹⁰⁰ Manyin et al.

cooperation. The first being inclusiveness, stating that it will not target or exclude any economy,¹⁰¹ it seeks reliable partnerships that the ROK can trust, and for there to be reciprocity among partnerships. Thus, the ROK's Indo-Pacific Strategy highlights mutually-beneficial cooperation and that the most effective engagement and strategies are those that benefit all parties.¹⁰² The ROK acknowledges that it is a latecomer¹⁰³ compared to other countries that have been discussing the Indo-Pacific Strategy. Thus, President Yoon Suk Yeol is taking the ROK from a previously vague stance on the strategy¹⁰⁴ to a definite stance and announced that the ROK will take a more global role like its allies. This means an expansion of challenges and concerns that the ROK must consider, including, Taiwan strait contingencies, disputes in the South China Sea, and human rights issues in the region. President Yoon's Indo-Pacific Strategy gives a positive outlook on the cooperation between countries within the regions.

During former President Moon Jae-in presidency, the NSP's aim to diversify the diplomatic and economic partnership with ASEAN member states¹⁰⁵ progress was slow. President Yoon Suk Yeol's Indo-Pacific Strategy places ASEAN policy as a subset of the Indo-Pacific Strategy which reflects the ROK's understanding of its active participation in developing partnerships with ASEAN members as essential. The ROK's shift from strategic ambiguity to strategic clarity,¹⁰⁶ specifically from vague statements from the NSP to President Yoon's Indo-Pacific Strategy defined actions and steps it will take, means that the ROK will become a pivotal state in which its willingness and desire to contribute to the region can and will affect its relationship with other actors in the area, most notably, the United States. The ROK's Indo-Pacific Strategy highlights inclusiveness and creates some points of tension between the US and China. The ROK should define with detail or provide a strategy for how to navigate inclusiveness with actors who do not necessarily get along well.

¹⁰¹ Korea, "Introducing the Indo-Pacific Strategy | Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea."

¹⁰² Korea.

¹⁰³ "The ROK's Indo-Pacific Strategy under President Yoon."

¹⁰⁴ "The ROK's Indo-Pacific Strategy under President Yoon."

¹⁰⁵ "The ROK's Indo-Pacific Strategy under President Yoon."

¹⁰⁶ Hwang, "South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy."

South Korea's vibrant and rapid economic growth, make it a formidable rising global power and an economic powerhouse in the making. However, it is dependent on US military support. The military alliance between the US and the ROK has led to the establishment and preparation of the wartime operation control (OPCON), that includes improving the ROK's capabilities and productive security environment on the Korean Peninsula.¹⁰⁷ The US has consolidated their bases in part to return land to the ROK. However, South Korea was responsible for paying for about 94% of new facilities, like Camp Humphreys, the largest overseas US base.¹⁰⁸ Since 1991, South Korea has provided financial support through Special Measures Agreements (SMAs) to offset the cost of stationing US forces in South Korea. With negotiations of the costs occurring every five years, a strain was placed during the Trump administration; the Trump administration had asked South Korea to increase its contribution by about 400%.¹⁰⁹ With the latest negotiation in March 2021, the Biden Administration removed the irritant, created by Trump's administration's ask of the ROK to increase its contribution to SMAs, and the ROK will only pay about \$1 billion annually, an increase

US SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Biden Administration would support an increase in joint exercises between the US and Korea. The Department of Defense has cited its partnership with Korea as one of the "world's premier alliances," (a strong partnership participating in exercises such as Exercise Freedom Shield, which was the largest joint exercise between the two nations in 5 years. A new President may not have the same endorsement of such activities, as former President Trump once claimed that South Korea needed to pay more in order to continue to receive security presence throughout the nation. Trump made this claim in an effort to ease tensions with North Korea in 2019, following large-scale drills with South Korea. The future approval of such exercises is highly dependent on the administration.

¹⁰⁷ Mark E Manyin and Wong, "South Korea: Background and US Relations."

¹⁰⁸ Mark E Manyin and Wong.

¹⁰⁹ Manyin et al., "US-South Korea Relations."

of 13.9% compared to previous SMAs.¹¹⁰The ROK is one of the US's top buyers of US defense systems. Apart from the military alliance, the economic relation between both countries, places South Korea in a unique spot for dependency on the US.

ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY

The ROK has addressed issues about climate change and is an active participant in working towards sustainable goals. The ROK is an active participant in climate change negotiations, acting as the middleman between developed and developing countries, acknowledging both sides in a way that is responsible and accommodating. The ROK is taking steps necessary to do so, such as understanding that developing countries' initial reliance on non-renewable energies before it has developed its industries enough to transition to a clean energy source. The ROK is part of the Paris Agreement, the government adopting the Basic Plan for climate change response and Road Map to achieve national greenhouse gas reduction goals on December 6, 2016.

The ROK acknowledges its commitment to having an active role in greenhouse gas reductions, climate finance, and operation of international carbon markets, while developing an appropriate and comprehensive response strategy.¹¹¹ This global commitment to cooperation and to contribute to address any and all consequences of climate change, focusing especially on three environmental threats – climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution – that could affect a sustainable existence.¹¹² In tandem with the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the ROK is committed to supporting developing countries by responding effectively to extreme weather disasters and events within the region.

The establishment of the Korea Environment Institute (KEI) shows that the ROK takes its environmental role within the Indo-Pacific region seriously. The KEI focuses on environmental policy and technology research¹¹³ along with giving professional and fair reviews of environmental impact assessments. Additionally, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are

¹¹⁰ Manyin et al.

¹¹¹ Korea, "Yoon Suk Yeol Administration's National Security Strategy View|President | Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea."

¹¹² Korea.

¹¹³ Institute, "Mission & Vision | About KEI | About KEI."

adopted by the ROK, with the commitment to the SDGs stressing the ROK's contribution to advance SDGs.¹¹⁴ Overall, the ROK has well developed and involved environmental and energy policies, showing its commitment to the global community.

ECONOMY

The Miracle of the Han River refers to the years after the Korean War in which the ROK saw unprecedented rapid economic growth. As a result of the US's assistance in providing Koreans with technical training and education, the ROK had individuals that were talented in areas of education, finance, and economics.¹¹⁵ In the 1950s, entrepreneurs known as Chaebols that would make up and be responsible for the majority of the ROK's economic growth emerged.¹¹⁶ Giants like Hyundai, LG, Samsung, would soon work closely with the government in planning and pushing the country towards industrialization, in part due to limited natural resources that affected many industries. Other financial policies, like the consecutive Five-Year Plans (FYPs), also aided in the ROK's economic growth, especially within the manufacturing sector.¹¹⁷

Internal factors were not the only thing that pushed the ROK's economy along. Some external factors came in the form of FDI¹¹⁸ and official development assistance from the international community. Nowadays, with the increased worldwide popularity of Korean entertainment and culture, Hallyu, also known as the Korean Wave, has aided the ROK's economy. The ROK saw Hallyu in play as its increase in tourism occurred as worldwide K-pop group BTS grew in popularity.¹¹⁹ Hallyu can be a soft power, used as a way to communicate, persuade, and attract individuals to visit the ROK. This is only further backed by the fact that the ROK government provides funding and publicity and puts in effort to make more foreigners familiar

¹¹⁴ "The 2023 SDG Summit."

¹¹⁵ Seth, "An Unpromising Recovery: South Korea's Post-Korean War Economic Development: 1953-1961."

¹¹⁶ Seth.

¹¹⁷ Bencuya, "The Miracle of Han River."

¹¹⁸ Howe, "South Korea."

¹¹⁹ Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Nepal, "[Korea Supporter's Article] BTS and South Korean Economy 상세보기."

with Hallyu.¹²⁰ This too can be a means of connecting the ROK to the global stage, the bigger the impact Korean culture has, the more positive effect it has on its economy. It can be reflected on exports or tourism in the ROK. The ROK is doing fine in its economic policies and efforts to become a global presence in the entertainment sector, letting the Hallyu do all the work for them.

CYBERSECURITY & TECHNOLOGY

The ROK is implementing and developing technology within various industries at a rapid pace. Its inclusion and use of AI technology within the military shows how quick and adaptive the ROK is to change. The ROK's implementation of technology is reflected in its strengthening of its national cybersecurity capabilities as part of its national security strategy.¹²¹ the ROK is quick to adapt to cybersecurity issues created by the DPRK, such as its deployment of IT workforce overseas to generate foreign currency or use of ransomware to acquire virtual assets. These cybersecurity issues would mean a disruption within the digital landscape that would leave the public unprotected and vulnerable to scams and digital theft. In the digital age, it is crucial to understand how to regulate a space that has no borders; the ROK is working towards this goal in an effective manner. Being able to have solid and precise plans is what allows for easy public adoption and usage, which is crucial in informing the public and allowing them to actively participate in the change.

Korea Internet & Security Agency (KISA) established in 2009, shows the ROK's cross-border cooperation. An example of cross-border cooperation is the ROK's initiation of the project Cybersecurity Alliance for Mutual Progress¹²² (CAMP), a global cooperation network that connects many actors, such as states, public organizations, and non-profit organizations in sharing trends of cybersecurity and development experience to increase growth and develop global cybersecurity.¹²³ the ROK's creations and membership of these organizations reveal that the ROK is ready to be a global partner and aid others.

¹²⁰ Samosir and Wee, *Sociolinguistics of the Korean Wave*.

¹²¹ Korea, "Yoon Suk Yeol Administration's National Security Strategy View|President | Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea."

¹²² "KISA."

¹²³ "CAMP - ABOUT CAMP."

HUMAN SECURITY

The ROK's quick response to the COVID-19 pandemic and aid to other countries shows just how well developed, adaptable, and robust its human security is. This is an indication that its always adapting technology sector can keep up with their need to respond quickly in global events, such as pandemics.

With the birth rate in the ROK declining and the population aging, the ROK is presented with a problem that many East Asian nations have encountered. The demographic transition threatens to decline the sustainability of the economy, education, and defense. With no young population to fill or take over the roles of the elderly, the ROK would be left with an inadequate workforce and working populations seeking other opportunities. However, the ROK is taking action by promoting happy families through people-centered policies. Such policies encourage parental leave, up to one year for both parents and up to 80% of the average monthly wage paid.¹²⁴ However, President Yoon Suk Yeol stated that even if this problem is not solved, it is still “the country's basic duty to ensure that children born in Korea can grow up bright and healthy.”¹²⁵

The ROK wants to enhance their response capabilities and public-private cooperation to address health security crises.¹²⁶ Due to the rapidly aging population in the ROK, the ROK is committed to providing customized services targeting nutrition, physical activity, alcohol consumption, and so on, in order to promote preventive health measures.¹²⁷ Within the healthcare system, active support for the development of new medical devices and drugs that will enhance the standard's competence and standard in healthcare is another way in which ROK commits to improving the standard of living. The ROK is prepared to deal with infectious diseases and how to appropriately respond to them. It would be advisable to share some aspects of the ROK's adaptability to major human security risks to be better prepared for the range of risks the US and its allies may face.

¹²⁴ Stangarone, “Korean Policies to Reverse the Decline in the Fertility Rate Part 1.”

¹²⁵ Stangarone.

¹²⁶ Korea, “Yoon Suk Yeol Administration's National Security Strategy View|President | Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea.”

¹²⁷ “Challenges & Tasks Ahead < Policies.”

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promotion of maritime activities and development of maritime cooperation with nations that are starting maritime activities or help encourage such activities, focusing on more vulnerable and less popular regions
- Support and work towards creating a strategy that allows the ROK to handle inclusiveness with pre-existing tensions between actors and defining the ROK's role in mitigating minimum hostility between actors
- Creation of an effective communication framework that allows for secure and quick communication during events in which human security in the Indo-Pacific may be at risk and outlining US-ROK's role

EUROPEAN ALLIES

BACKGROUND

The emergence of the PRC as a global superpower is a major threat to the rules-based international order established after World War II by the United States and its allies in Western Europe. This section analyzes the ways in which the European allies of the US advance the latter's highly prioritized Indo-Pacific strategy through the activities and policies of their multilateral organizations such as NATO and the EU, as well as diplomatic and strategic efforts undertaken by individual European countries.

Since the 1990s, the EU has identified the “Asia-Pacific” as a region of strategic interest. In the past decade the EU has pivoted even more towards the region as the center of economic gravity in the world has decisively shifted to the Indo-Pacific, releasing its own Indo-Pacific strategy in 2021. As the EU pointedly stated in 2016, there is a “direct connection between European prosperity and Asian security.”¹²⁸ NATO emphasizes much the same point, illustrated by its 2023 Vilnius Summit reiteration of the 2022 Security Concept about developments in the Indo-Pacific region having a direct effect on Euro-Atlantic security.

The US's European allies participate in Indo-Pacific affairs primarily through their strategic partnerships and multilateral diplomacy in the region. NATO, the EU, and several European states have close ties with nations in the region, including Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and New Zealand, the so-called “Asia-Pacific Four” or AP4, as per the designation used by NATO. Several European allies also seek to strengthen their relations with actors seen as important strategic partners, like ASEAN and India, whose Quad membership makes it an important focus of European interest. While each US European ally in the Indo-Pacific supports the rules-based international order, their specific strategic frameworks differ. For example, while NATO involvement mostly focuses on security cooperation with the AP4 countries, the EU's Indo-

¹²⁸ European External Action Service, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*.

US SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The United States itself personally places a heavy emphasis on the importance of building up the strength of non-traditional regional partners, such as those in the Pacific Islands or member states of ASEAN. Changes in the US and EU foreign strategy in order to accommodate each other's approach to the same end goal is an extremely realistic and relatively simple solution. Given that the US and EU already share the same end goal in the region, and only hold small differences in actual approach, adjusting the policy of both to mesh together better could easily be accomplished, especially under the Blinken State Department.

Pacific Strategy does not envision it having a prominent defense role in the region and instead focuses on promoting effective multilateral diplomacy, that is, to engage with many different countries and to elevate multinational fora such as ASEAN as primary strategic actors. Individual European nations, the EU, and NATO have much more multifaceted relations with the PRC; their views range from perceiving China as a threat to seeking dialogue and cooperation with the Chinese government. NATO considers the PRC's policies and ambitions a major challenge to its "interests, security, and values,"¹²⁹ whereas the EU seeks a more pragmatic approach to China. In its official communications, the EU simultaneously recognizes the PRC as a "partner for cooperation, an economic competitor and a systemic rival."¹³⁰ Yet as European threat perception towards China has increased, rivalry has become the main characteristic of this relationship.

Individual European states at times also vary in their commitment to the Indo-Pacific Strategy because their national interests guide their policies.

Two European nations with noticeable regional involvement who view themselves as global security providers are the UK and France, the latter being the only European country with a permanent naval presence in the Indo-Pacific. The UK, while no longer a member of the EU, is still a member of NATO, and has a presence in the region as a participant in US-led initiatives and as a member of organizations such as the trilateral AUKUS group and, later in 2024, the

¹²⁹ NATO, "Vilnius Summit Communiqué."

¹³⁰ "A Strategic Compass for Security and Defense."

Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) trade bloc.¹³¹ In addition to being both a member of the EU and NATO, France is an Indo-Pacific power in its own right. France has over 1.6 million citizens in its overseas territories, with an exclusive economic zone of nine million square kilometers, and is engaged in numerous regional frameworks such as ASEAN, the Pacific Islands Forum, and is the only European member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association.¹³² While the UK and France profess to protect the rules-based international order and seek to increase European involvement in the Indo-Pacific, their strategic approaches differ. For example, while the UK directly integrates itself into the US-led security architecture in the Indo-Pacific, France more strongly backs the EU strategy that generally seeks to give regional partners a third set of options to reduce the risk of confrontation with the PRC and to respect the delicate allegiances caught between the great power rivalry.¹³³ While the growing threat perception towards the PRC has diluted these differences in strategic approach, these different dynamics can influence European involvement in the Indo-Pacific and have led to multiple inter-alliance controversies. Furthermore, the increasing importance of the Indo-Pacific region to Europe is of note as the official policies of France, Germany, and the Netherlands preceded the 2021 EU Indo-Pacific Strategy, and individual European states continue to release their own strategies to this day.

Finally, in order to examine European policy towards the Indo-Pacific, it is imperative to assess the impact of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine on the world's security architecture. While NATO, the EU, and individual US allies in Europe had announced a pivot to Asia in the 2010s, they understandably re-diverted their attention to the war at their doorstep. Based on the policy evolution of documents from 2010 to 2022, European organizations believe that a European war is much more likely. For example, whereas NATO's 2010 Security Concept focused on a diverse range of global threats that included out-of-area and asymmetrical threats such as terrorism, its 2022 Security Concept reaffirms both the immediate threat posed by Russia and the core tenet of the alliance to provide collective defense in the case of an attack. In 2023 and 2024 European defense leaders increasingly stated that a war against Russia could occur in the near future and

¹³¹ Webb, "The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)."

¹³² Perestrello, "NATO and the Indo-Pacific Region."

¹³³ Billon-Galland and Kundnani, "How Ukraine Will Change Europe's Indo-Pacific Ambitions."

therefore preparation for a prolonged confrontation is necessary. Not surprisingly, NATO launched its “Steadfast Defender 2024” military exercise, its largest exercise since the end of the Cold War with a total of 90,000 soldiers participating.¹³⁴ However, Europe cannot ignore the vital importance of the Indo-Pacific region with the understanding that Indo-Pacific affairs directly affect Europe. Russia, the main concern for Europe, has itself sought to pivot to Asia as a way to rebalance its strained ties with the West and to reorient its economy to lessen the effects of sanctions, effectively becoming a junior partner to the PRC.¹³⁵ The European allies of the United States frame the war in Ukraine broadly as a war for democracy against autocracy. This framework implicates China, alongside Russia, as an actor that threatens Western values and the rules-based international order that the US and its European allies seek to uphold. Therefore, addressing the following challenges in the Indo-Pacific region is an important focus for European countries.

MARITIME

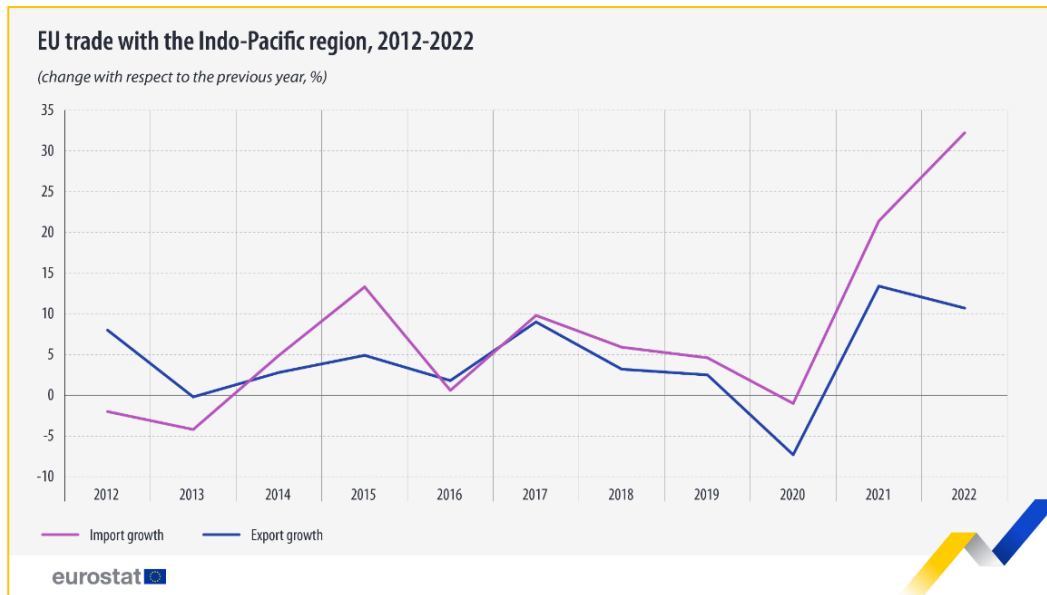
The centrality of Indo-Pacific trade and commerce to the European economy makes maritime affairs a key focus for the US’s European allies. The Indo-Pacific region is the second-largest destination of EU exports and is home to four of the ten largest EU trading partners. In addition, the major waterways of the Indo-Pacific, such as the Straits of Malacca, the South China Sea, and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait are vital to the maintenance of European trade.¹³⁶ Thus, it is clear why the EU and NATO directly tie Indo-Pacific stability to European security and prosperity. The PRC’s revisionist policies and claims to the South and the East China Seas are of direct concern to European states as they have the potential to disrupt the European economy. In response, NATO, in its 2022 Security Concept, states that it will safeguard the interests of its allies and the

¹³⁴ Sabbagh, “Why Are European Defence Leaders Talking about War?”

¹³⁵ Melvin, “Russia and the Indo-Pacific Security Concept.”

¹³⁶ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.”

rules-based international order, emphasizing the value of “freedom of navigation” and the importance of maritime security being the “key to [Euro-Atlantic] peace and prosperity.”¹³⁷



Aside from the COVID-19 pandemic, EU trade with the Indo-Pacific has continuously been increasing.¹³⁸

NATO members prominently participate in maritime security. The main goals of the alliance are to provide deterrence and maintain free and open maritime routes in the face of the PRC’s growing assertiveness. Members seek to satisfy these goals through allied ship presence in the region, conducting port calls, naval exercises, and participating in operations such as the US-led Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS). Since 2018, both France and the UK have participated in FONOPS. Famously in 2021, the UK-led British Carrier Strike Group 21, featuring US and Dutch ships, participated in naval exercises with regional partners and sailed through the South China Sea. In the same year, Germany, despite being a lesser power in the region, participated in maritime operations in the region with its *Bayern* frigate making port calls with many different Indo-Pacific nations and participating in naval exercises with other US allies, all to

¹³⁷ “NATO 2022 Strategic Concept.”

¹³⁸ “EU Trade with the Indo-Pacific Region Increased in 2022.”

the dismay of the PRC.¹³⁹ Despite differing attitudes as to what degree Europe should be involved in the Indo-Pacific, the NATO and EU maritime presence shows how the US's European allies are unified in maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The European Union pursues multilateral diplomacy to address maritime issues in the Indo-Pacific region. For example, piracy and other crime in the western Indian Ocean is a principal maritime security threat that disrupts trade. To address this, the EU began Operation Atalanta (formerly EU Naval Force Somalia) in 2008 to protect vulnerable trade routes and deter criminal activities.¹⁴⁰ Operation Atalanta was not the only method through which the EU became a global maritime security provider. In 2020, the EU launched operation CRIMARIO II, whose purpose is to provide “information sharing, capacity building and training” like its predecessor, CRIMARIO I, and to expand the geographical scope of the project all the way to the Pacific Ocean in order to connect the Indo-Pacific region through common maritime interests.¹⁴¹ The EU's maritime presence is a foot in the door for its Indo-Pacific presence and is a principle method to promote multilateral diplomacy among partners in the Indo-Pacific who are focusing on maritime issues.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Hawkins, “NATO Navies Send Strategic Signals in the Indo-Pacific.”

¹⁴⁰ “Mission.”

¹⁴¹ “CRIMARIO - Critical Maritime Routes Indo-Pacific.”

¹⁴² Larsson and Widen, “The European Union as a Maritime Security Provider -The Naval Diplomacy Perspective.”

MILITARY

When it comes to European involvement in the Indo-Pacific, maritime concerns are directly linked with military issues as maritime security needs force to back it in order to deter malicious actors. While the EU is a principal European voice for maritime security, its competencies primarily lie along economic and political lines as it does not have a strong form of hard power projection in terms of a large standing military force. In practice, NATO is primarily responsible for the defense of most EU countries, and in terms of its Indo-Pacific strategy, the EU acts in accordance with NATO.¹⁴³

NATO member involvement in the Indo-Pacific primarily focuses on its military relations with its partners in the region: Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand (the AP4), each of which agreed to Individually Tailored Partnership Programs in July 2023 that provide country-specific security cooperation.¹⁴⁴ NATO and the AP4 countries share similar concerns over the rise of the PRC and the deterioration of the rules-based international order, which includes the erosion of arms control agreements, cyber-attacks, Chinese military procurement of weapons of mass destruction, and so on.¹⁴⁵ Recognizing the threat emanating from China and the Indo-Pacific link to Euro-Atlantic security, NATO's military presence with its regional partners focuses on joint exercises, building up capacity and interoperability, supporting NATO-led operations, and security coordination.

While the policies of its European allies typically align with the US Indo-Pacific strategy, European countries are not always in agreement as to how to address pressing security needs. A recent example is the controversy over an increased NATO presence in Japan. Japan is one of NATO's most valuable partners in the region and in early 2023, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg began to discuss opening a liaison office in Tokyo, which would be a direct NATO to Japan information conduit and increase Japanese participation in NATO security programs. In response, French President Emmanuel Macron stated

¹⁴³ Kratiuk et al., *Handbook of Indo-Pacific Studies*.

¹⁴⁴ "Relations with Partners across the Globe."

¹⁴⁵ Särkkä, "NATO and the Indo-Pacific Region."

that this would be a “big mistake” in part because it could worsen relations between NATO countries and the PRC.¹⁴⁶ This is not the first controversy to have arisen, with diplomatic strain having occurred in 2021 with France and the newly established trilateral AUKUS group (Australia, United Kingdom, and the US). France was displeased over the fact that the US became Australia’s provider for submarines, invalidating the French-Australian submarine deal that was a pillar for France’s Indo-Pacific policy.¹⁴⁷

There is another complication with European military interests in the Indo-Pacific: European countries have low military credibility in the region, and on their own lack the deterrence capability necessary to support their stated maritime goals. Since the end of the Cold War, European navies drastically shrunk, became overstretched, and, after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, are kept closer to home. There is also the issue that European military involvement under the NATO banner can cause diplomatic strain on potential partners such as India, which seeks to counterbalance the PRC’s growing influence while maintaining good relations with Russia.¹⁴⁸ As a result, aside from military cooperation and capacity building, Europe has delegated much of its maritime and military roles in the Indo-Pacific to partners and allies in the region, including the United States and the AP4 countries. Ultimately Indo-Pacific actors still see European parties as largely being external players that have a minimal impact on the region’s security dynamics.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Shankar, “Significance of a NATO Liaison Office in Japan.”

¹⁴⁷ Perestrello, “NATO and the Indo-Pacific Region.”

¹⁴⁸ van Hooft, “China and the Indo-Pacific in the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept.”

¹⁴⁹ Crabtree, “Looking beyond China.”

US SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Building the strength of its European allies is no doubt of high importance for the United States. Arguably, the role that EU and NATO nations currently play in the Indo-Pacific is too large to delegate completely to the United States. While the Indo-Pacific Command is the largest unified command, it is not large enough to secure the Indo-Pacific region by itself. Increases in defense budget brought on by the US needing to make up for the potential lost presence of its European allies would be scrutinized by Congress when approving defense spending budgets. Depending on the size of the decrease in European force in the region, the US *could* delegate other components of unified commands to the region, such as warships, air wings, and other strategic elements. However, any change in the US defense strategy or defense budget is a change that is likely to raise questions in the legislature and could eventually lead to a decrease of ability to secure the Indo-Pacific region.

Despite the constraints, military relations between the US's European and Indo-Pacific allies have improved, and the collaboration is not unidirectional. Since the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, US allies have become more resolved in combating threats by revisionist global powers, and Indo-Pacific partners have significantly contributed to NATO efforts to defend Europe against Russia. Australia has provided artillery and military vehicles to Ukraine, while the Republic of Korea provided armor and has sold significant amounts of armaments to restock the Polish military in its largest-ever arms export.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, all of the AP4 countries sanctioned Russia. Military relations between the US allies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific show the growing interconnectedness of the world security architecture.

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

In environmental affairs, the EU is the most competent European authority. The EU mainly focuses on addressing climate change, assisting in the transition to green energy, protecting biodiversity, advocating for responsible ocean management, and implementing the United Nations' 2030 Plan and sustainable development goals through its Green Deal. One of the main methods of the EU in

supporting its environmental goals is the Green Alliance and Partnership programs, which build

¹⁵⁰ Pietrewicz, "NATO Intensifies Cooperation with Indo-Pacific Partners."

upon its Green Deal by providing a structure of cooperation with which the EU can engage with its partners in supporting sustainability. For example, the EU-Japan Green Alliance promises, among other goals, that both sides will achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and will support the transition to low-carbon energy sources. In addition, the alliance reiterates both actors' support of the rules-based international order and multilateral treaties such as the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity.¹⁵¹ The EU concluded a similar partnership with the Republic of Korea.¹⁵²

The EU's position as a global leader in addressing climate change is hindered by the contrasting policies of developing Indo-Pacific countries who believe that the EU's environmental restrictions impede their manufacturing industries and economic growth. ASEAN, for example, seeks to further cooperate with the EU on environmental matters, believing that the EU can be a valuable asset in disaster mitigation and investment in the low-carbon energy transition.¹⁵³ However, the EU's strategy to reduce carbon emissions has led to policies such as the European Union Deforestation-Free Regulation that bans the import of products linked to deforestation. These products include palm oil, a principal export of ASEAN countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia which criticize the EU's unilateral environmental policies as protectionist and impeding economic growth.¹⁵⁴ The PRC airs similar grievances as the world's-largest carbon dioxide emitter, and the EU seeks closer cooperation with China on climate matters despite the complex geopolitical situation.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ "EU-Japan Green Alliance."

¹⁵² "EU and Republic of Korea Launch a Green Partnership."

¹⁵³ Bomassi, "Reimagining EU-ASEAN Relations."

¹⁵⁴ Bomassi.

¹⁵⁵ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "EU-China - A Strategic Outlook."

CYBER AND TECH

Cybersecurity is a sphere of principal interest for NATO, as emphasized in its 2022 Security Concept which identifies the PRC's "malicious hybrid and cyber operations" as endangering the alliance's security. While NATO believes Russia to be the primary short-term cyber threat, it identifies China as a persistent long-term threat whose heavy investment and experimentation in cyberspace will continue to affect global affairs.¹⁵⁶ Accordingly, NATO seeks to build upon its existing AP4 partnerships in the Indo-Pacific to create global partnerships concerning cybersecurity. Australia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea are contributing participants of NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre for Excellence which focuses on developing cyber defense research and training among participants.¹⁵⁷ As a part of its partnership with the AP4 countries, NATO contributes to cyber capacity building against hybrid threats in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly through its Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme. The SPS Programme focuses on international scientific cooperation to promote cyber defense and security-related advanced technology, among other areas, to NATO partners, with each bilateral partnership focusing on specific areas of interest particular to the actor.¹⁵⁸

The EU also has converging cyber security interests with its Indo-Pacific partners, especially after the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. In addition to the AP4 countries, much of the EU's cooperative efforts focus on ASEAN, and in 2019 the EU and ASEAN launched a joint statement on cybersecurity cooperation that emphasized the importance of collaborative cyber capacity-building and the importance of multilateral cyber agreements based on rules-based cyber norms.¹⁵⁹ Many ASEAN countries see the EU as a model for cyber and technology policies. The EU General Data Protection Regulation law, for example, is the model preferred by Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and, to a certain extent, Singapore.¹⁶⁰ In

¹⁵⁶ Stevens and Burton, "NATO and Strategic Competition in Cyberspace."

¹⁵⁷ Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre for Excellence, "About Us."

¹⁵⁸ "SPS - Key Priorities."

¹⁵⁹ "ASEAN-EU Statement on Cybersecurity Cooperation."

¹⁶⁰ Bomassi, "Reimagining EU-ASEAN Relations."

addition, the EU seeks to expand access to its Horizon Europe initiative to the Indo-Pacific, enabling partners to participate in EU-funded research and innovation initiatives.¹⁶¹

PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SECURITY

The EU is the most competent European authority on public health matters, devoting significant attention to it in its published strategies. After the 2020-2023 COVID-19 pandemic, the EU identified public health as a multinational sphere of cooperation with Indo-Pacific actors. The EU highlights its main areas of interest in the 2021 Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, which advocates for robust multilateral cooperation in response to current and future health crises. This includes assisting low and middle-income countries in accessing COVID-19 vaccines through initiatives like the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) program, specifically focusing on health cooperation with India. Additionally, the EU aims to strengthen multilateral cooperation to secure diverse pharmaceutical supply chains and to facilitate access to quality medicines. The EU also promotes collaborative research efforts aimed at combating communicable diseases and enhancing healthcare access through the aforementioned Horizon Europe program.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.”

¹⁶² High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a concrete agreed-upon framework between the United States and its European allies for a common strategy of mutual involvement in the Indo-Pacific to prevent inter-alliance controversies that have occurred such as the founding of AUKUS or the establishment of a NATO liaison office in Tokyo
- Support and not impede on European efforts of multilateral diplomacy and cooperation among Indo-Pacific states and encourage European actors to pursue more bilateral and multilateral ties among Indo-Pacific actors as to strengthen third-party actors in the region that counteract the PRC's dominance
- Continue to support military capacity building among European allies themselves in order for Europe to be able to better provide for its own domestic security and not be overstretched, so that the United States could better divert its attention to the Indo-Pacific region
- Continue to foster collaboration and mutual strength building between the United States' European and Indo-Pacific partners and allies, particularly the AP4 countries, through joint military exercises, cyber and technological capacity building, and joint freedom of navigation operations to encourage the FOIP vision

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INTRODUCTION

In addition to the US's alliances in the region, there are several states and multinational organizations that the US has contemporary and historic partnerships within the Indo-Pacific. This section of our report focuses on India, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Pacific Islands. These actors are categorized as strategic partners because they prioritize multilateralism with major world powers over a military alliance with the United States, but still have shared interests, various partnerships agreements, and joint initiatives across many policy spheres.

India has close ties with the US due its economic and political ties along with its membership in the Quad. However, India also maintains close relationships with China and Russia, and many of its own aspirations have the potential to conflict with the US's strategic goals. India aspires to become the main regional security provider in the Indian Ocean. They plan to become the primary global manufacturing hub, especially in the technology sector. The Indian government wants free and open trade in order to reap the economic benefits and further promote Indian national interests. Furthermore, India is willing to accept China as the primary hegemon in the region as long as India also gets an opportunity to establish itself as a regional leader. Currently, India's vision for the Indo-Pacific aims to not exclude any regional power. Yet India has some policies which it will not accept, such as nuclear proliferation and militarization of the Indian Ocean promoted by China.

ASEAN is a supranational organization of ten states bordering the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The organization includes the Philippines and Thailand, two treaty allies of the United States, and eight partner states: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, and Vietnam. ASEAN itself is also a partner to the US, governed by the US-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. ASEAN is concerned about current maritime affairs, especially China's actions in the South China Sea. ASEAN accepts collaboration and support through investments and cooperation initiatives, as they benefit from public investments made from partner actors, as well as military and intelligence cooperation if it benefits regional security. ASEAN will not be forced into military operations, have outside actors overstepping in regional

matters or making unilateral decisions, and pushing ASEAN members to choose between China and US cooperation and allegiance.

The Pacific Islands have historic ties to the US although this strategic relationship has been declining in the past few decades. The Pacific Islands hope to work towards regional development through strengthening relationships with other regional actors, especially in dealing with the ramifications of climate change. Although there is an understanding within the Pacific Island nations of the geopolitical significance of the Indo-Pacific, their own focus is on regional development within the Pacific Islands. This regional focus leads many Pacific Island nations to accept aid and investment from both the US and the People's Republic of China. Many Pacific Island nations are open to working with larger actors but dislike when the imposition of power by actors outside of the region supersedes discussion and partnership with the island nations.

BROAD STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Open dialogue and bilateral information sharing is paramount for the United States' relationship with its partners. Increasing the depth and breadth of partner programs and the US's presence within partner countries will further the US's many strategic goals while simultaneously bolstering perceptions of the US in Indo-Pacific nations. India, the ASEAN nations, and the Pacific Island nations all hold diplomatic communication in high regard; a focus on diplomatic relations and fostering mutual benefit is to the advantage of the US in furthering these partnerships. The United States should aid in increasing the standard of living for people living in partner countries by focusing on infrastructure, healthcare, food security, and per capita income.

Addressing climate change grants the US an opportunity to further the relationship with partner nations through the demonstration of non-military interest in the region such as the promotion of private and public investment in collaborative, affordable alternative energy resource development and resilient infrastructure that meets local needs. Information sharing related to climate change would also demonstrate a more collaborative effort.

Enforcing United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) internationally and developing effective repercussions towards China for antagonistic actions abroad continue to be a main concern for the United States and its partner countries. The continuation of joint exercises with specific focus on Quad capabilities remain crucial for stability in the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, an increased level of information and knowledge sharing about cybersecurity and technology between US and partner countries to address Chinese cyber threats in the region.

INDIA

BACKGROUND

As the United States pushes for a more dominant Indian role in the Indo-Pacific to counter China's increasing economic and military influence, India has continued to augment their presence. In June 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that India's vision for the Indo-Pacific was not directed against any country, but rather was open to multilateralism in the region.¹⁶³ This is what India calls an inclusive vision for all powers in the region through the concept of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR). The SAGAR vision and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) seek to guide India to strengthen its economic and security cooperation with like-minded nations to promote a peaceful and open Indo-Pacific.¹⁶⁴ The SAGAR and IPOI concepts support Prime Minister Modi's declaration that India's engagement in the region is inclusive and flexible, as India's main concern is achieving its national interests.¹⁶⁵

In addition to the increasing Chinese investment in neighboring South Asian countries, Chinese products are infiltrating supply chains in India, especially in the technology sector. India hopes to collaborate closely with its partners to ease over-dependence on China and diversify India's economy by producing more items domestically. In terms of technological advancement, India requires diversification and increased investment to tackle the issue of a Chinese led technology sector in the country. India's collaboration with China in the technological sector can be both beneficial and detrimental to the country. The effects of climate change have been a source of the push to alternative energy sources, which is an issue that India continues to grapple with domestically and internationally.

India's primary maritime motive stems from a need for collaboration and connectivity which can help deter Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific. India is a historic security provider

¹⁶³ Kumar, Sakar and Chaudhury, *Security, Economy, and Ecology: Setting Priorities for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, page 5.

¹⁶⁴ Banerjee, "India and the Emerging Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific."

¹⁶⁵ Haruko, *The "Indo-Pacific" Concept: Geographical Adjustments and Their Implications*, page 11.

in the region, but it faces two primary issues: the vastness of the Indian Ocean which stretches navies thin, and China’s methods of influencing countries which have led to diplomatic strain. India is solving these dilemmas by developing and deepening partnerships with other nations with the goal of patrolling the ocean.

The PRC has been able to augment their national power by undertaking many infrastructure projects around the world through the BRI. An example of China’s imposition on India’s ability to provide security is the Chinese built, owned, and operated Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka. Through devastating debt trapping, China now owns the port and 15,000 acres around it for the next 99 years.¹⁶⁶ As the New York Times points out, “‘a way to subjugate a country is by sword or debt.’ China has chosen the latter.”¹⁶⁷ As seen in the image below, the PRC has either directly built, or aided the building of infrastructure that is encircling the Indian Ocean located at major choke points for maritime trade.

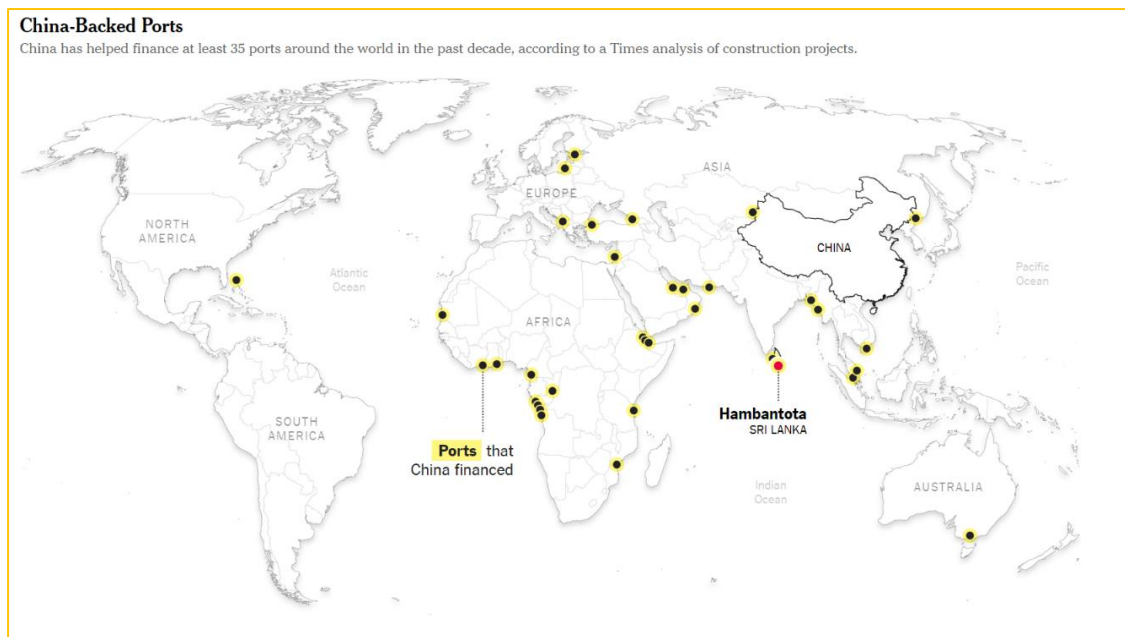


Figure: China-Backed Ports around the world.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Abi-Habib, “How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port.”

¹⁶⁷ Abi-Habib, “How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port.”

¹⁶⁸ Abi-Habib, “How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port.”

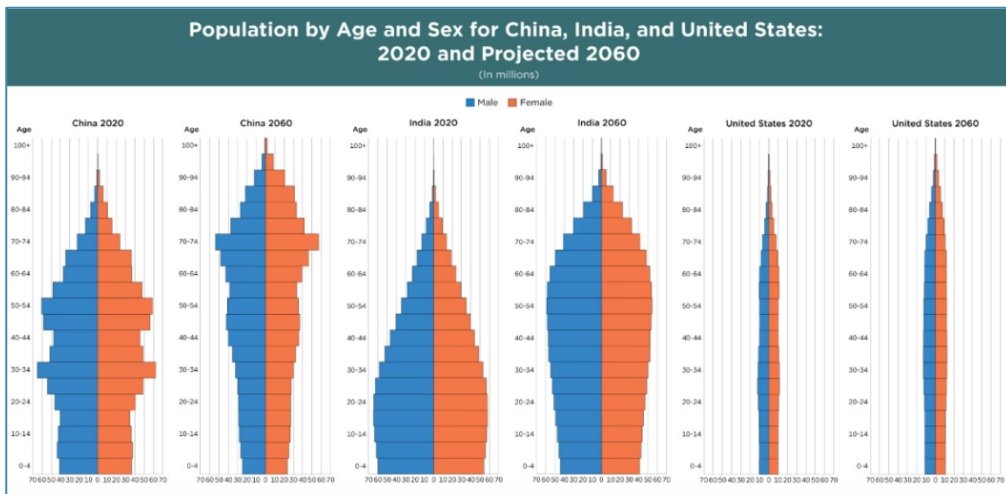
Many of the issues addressed in the US Indo-Pacific Strategy were a priority for India during their G-20 presidential term in 2022-2023. During India’s G-20 Presidency, the country was eager to address what it saw as the world’s most-pressing issues, such as climate change, food security, technology, and healthcare. New Delhi has historically raised concerns on behalf of the rest of the Global South to multilateral organizations, showing how India has positioned itself to be a leader in the Indo-Pacific.¹⁶⁹ India has bolstered its reputation in the region by addressing some of its domestic issues and presenting them to the members of the Global North.

ECONOMY

The Indian government has been paving the path to meet its objective of becoming a global manufacturing powerhouse since 2014. India’s main hurdle to success is a lack of investments, from both within and outside of the country. Despite being the third largest economy in the world, India continues to be a low-income county with a per capita income that is less than half of the world average. With half of India’s population under the age of 25, India’s economy has the potential to grow very rapidly. But now, its economic potential has staggered due to this.¹⁷⁰ The US and China have an age-structure (as shown below) that presents a looming crisis for the working age population. India on the other hand has a more fortified youth base capable of

supporting themselves and older generations, which is ideal for economic growth and sustainability.

Figure: Population Pyramid of China, India, and the US by age and sex.¹⁷¹



¹⁶⁹ Pant and Patil, “India Will Use G-20 Presidency to Push for Reformed Multilateralism.”

¹⁷⁰ Zeniewski and Singh, India Energy Outlook 2021.

¹⁷¹ International Database, "Asia Aging: Demographic, Economic, and Health Transitions."

The Make in India initiative, started in 2014 and targeted at foreign investors, was the government's plan to increase domestic manufacturing. This initiative has failed to increase manufacturing in the country, failed to increase jobs in the manufacturing sector (there was a fall in employment even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic), and failed to increase foreign direct investment.¹⁷² According to the International Energy outlook, "this programme had a stated goal of raising the share of manufacturing in GDP to 25% by 2022 and creating 100 million jobs."¹⁷³ India has been able to attract some investment through this program, but ultimately was not able to increase the number of jobs significantly since 2014. The share of GDP from manufacturing remained at 17% since 2014.¹⁷⁴ The Make in India initiative also led to the implementation of high tariffs of 60% to 100% on imported goods such as alcohol, animals and their products, fruits, vegetables, plants, coffee, tea, and certain motor vehicles.¹⁷⁵ This is intended to promote local goods and agricultural products by augmenting domestic production demands, and to protect and sustain India's natural resources. According to the Carnegie Institute of India, "the problem with the Make in India initiative[...] has been the lack of transparency about the intellectualism that went into designing them."¹⁷⁶ The Make in India initiative has not yet run its full course, but more financial and economic advising and exchange of information between India and the US or World Trade Organization (WTO) will further India's manufacturing capabilities.

Another major focus of Indian economic policies is to protect the agricultural sector and natural resources. India does this by controlling, "retail prices of other products, such as Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) cylinders, natural gas, fertilizer, and drugs, are also controlled. Price controls are in place mainly to support the agricultural sector, ensure food security, and reduce poverty."¹⁷⁷ Protection of natural resources is conducted through economic inclusion policies that "ensure less rural distress, including through an increase in minimum support prices for agricultural products

¹⁷² Baruah, *India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's Theater of Opportunity*.

¹⁷³ Zeniewski and Singh, *India Energy Outlook 2021*.

¹⁷⁴ Zeniewski and Singh, *India Energy Outlook 2021*. 31.

¹⁷⁵ WTO Secretariat, *Trade Policy Review : India, Executive Summary*. 9.

¹⁷⁶ Baruah, *India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's Theater of Opportunity*.

¹⁷⁷ WTO Secretariat, *Trade Policy Review : India, Executive Summary*. 11.

and the direct transfer of subsidies to farmers.”¹⁷⁸ Considering that 660 million people are still living without modern technology and electricity in India, resource protection and propagation of agriculture will remain critical to India’s future.

India would greatly benefit from further direct guidance on implementing economic policies to garner investments. India’s long standing protectionist policies aim to amplify production of smartphones, automobiles, and other manufactured goods. However, not all protectionist methods have been successful in amplifying their domestic market and competitiveness. After three decades of such policies on the automobile industry, India has yet to become a sizable competitor on the global scale.¹⁷⁹ The manufacturing trade sectors such as textiles and clothing employ around 45 million people while the automobiles sector accounts for around 7% of GDP.¹⁸⁰ The WTO notes that India's import value has exceeded its export value, and China is its largest source of import.

India is vulnerable to tariffs due to an established need for coal and oil imports. India is the second largest net importer of oil globally, only behind China. Domestic production initiatives have not generated substantial changes to India’s oil production, and oil prices are determined by market conditions, not government regulations.¹⁸¹ The Indian government has set up numerous policies to increase both the domestic use of natural gas in energy generation, and in domestic production. Acts such as the 2020 Indian Gas Exchange and the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP), which allows for the freedom to set natural gas prices and market to potential investors, is helping achieve the national goal of natural gas fulfilling 15% of the share of energy production in 2030.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ WTO Secretariat, Trade Policy Review : India, Executive Summary. 8.

¹⁷⁹ Darshana, India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi’s Theater of Opportunity.

¹⁸⁰ WTO Secretariat, Trade Policy Review : India, Executive Summary. 12.

¹⁸¹ Zeniewski and Singh, India Energy Outlook 2021. 36.

¹⁸² Zeniewski and Singh, *India Energy Outlook 2021*. 37.

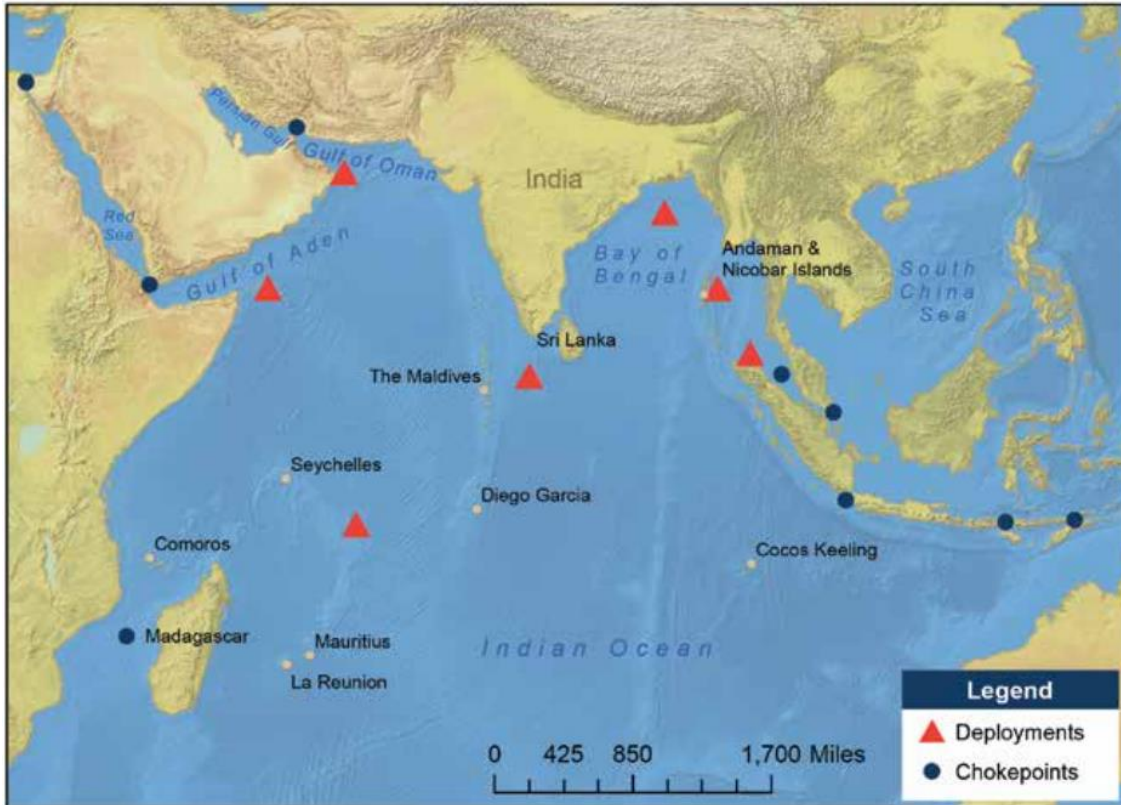
MARITIME & MILITARY

According to the Carnegie Endowment, India has three focus areas concerning the Indo-Pacific Region. First is the expansion of its economic and military footprint in the region. China's economic and connective aid has jeopardized India's dominance in the Indian Ocean by providing infrastructure projects and protection which India has previously been incapable of providing. Secondly, New Delhi now looks for ways to reaffirm its historical position as a security provider as well as cultivate new partnerships. The third objective is to secure maritime dominance through military means and partnerships. China's influence has threatened India's relationships with the islands Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius by reducing India's influence. In some cases, there is even a transition of infrastructure contracts to the less expensive Chinese companies. These islands are now at the forefront of New Delhi's partnership plans. Although threatened by China, New Delhi initially only wanted to neutrally expand diplomatic and economic ties within Southeast Asia, and without being seen as "containing" China¹⁸³ which stopped the Quad's multilateral exercises for a time. In light of the BRI and other hostile actions, India has now taken a stronger stance of strategic autonomy.¹⁸⁴ By balancing its security interests with diplomatic ones, India hopes to remain a leader in the region and contest China's influence in the Indian Ocean.

The vastness of the Indian Ocean constitutes the primary challenge for the Indian Navy in both regional awareness and response capabilities. Looking at the figure below, there are nine choke points for ships passing through the Indian Ocean that are vulnerable to political blockage or maritime attack.

¹⁸³ Darshana, *India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's Theater of Opportunity*.

¹⁸⁴ Shashank, *Malabar Joint Naval Exercise-A Viable Deterrent of Quad in the Indo Pacific?*



*Figure: Major Maritime Chokepoints in the Indian Ocean*¹⁸⁵

India employs the policy of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in which key intelligence gathering through multiple sources enables India to respond to threats quickly. Created out of a necessity to combat terrorist attacks in 2014, the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) has the capability to generate coastal MDA by compiling radar-gathered information and automatic identification sensors.¹⁸⁶ Further surveillance sensors have been installed by India on the island nations of Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles, and the coasts of Bangladesh and Myanmar.¹⁸⁷ The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement

¹⁸⁵ Darshana, *India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's Theater of Opportunity*.

¹⁸⁶ Darshana, *India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's Theater of Opportunity*.

¹⁸⁷ Darshana, *India in the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's Theater of Opportunity*.

with the US and France allows partial access to base facilities for greater deployment capabilities and access to choke points in the ocean.¹⁸⁸

The Malabar Exercises, an annual multilateral war gaming exercise, has clearly been an effective way of improving the existing relations between all Quad nations by enhancing the way their naval forces operate. As the proud first responder to humanitarian crises, the Indian Navy's area of responsibility is the Indian Ocean. Thanks to partnerships that enabled India's Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement with Australia and the Philippines, as well as the Reciprocal Access Agreement with Quad powers, India's Navy has been able to develop rapidly and work in

US SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Chinese analysts have considered the Malabar Exercises to be a "hollow bluff" to contain China, and were able to greatly reduce the scope of the exercise from 2007 to 2014 through international pressure. Recent terrorist attacks in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea have nonetheless proven the Malabar Exercises to be a necessity. The US would benefit greatly from continued joint exercises with India, Japan, and Australia, despite extra-national calls to disband them.

a global setting.

The Indian Navy reported that two aircraft carriers will operate off the west coast of India for the biennial Exercise Milan (19 Feb- 27 Feb) which will include "50 nations and around 20 international vessels and aircraft from across the Indo-Pacific and beyond."¹⁸⁹ The exercise will include all Quad powers and other Indo-Pacific

countries in the largest naval exercise ever held by India. The exercise will include onshore activities going over leadership engagement and cultural exchange as well as practical on the water training on anti-sub, anti-surface, and anti-air warfare.¹⁹⁰ This is a unique opportunity for the US to establish cultural and military connections, and aid regional navies through sharing knowledge on best-practices.

¹⁸⁸ Center for Preventive Action, Conflict Between India and Pakistan.

¹⁸⁹ Defence Media, Australia to participate in Exercise Milan 24.

¹⁹⁰ Defence Media, Australia to participate in Exercise Milan 24.

The Indian Ocean's free and safe passage has been threatened by the Houthi Rebels since mid-November, who are continuously attacking commercial vessels around the Red Sea and recently within India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and affecting 12% of global trade.¹⁹¹ Houthi Rebel action poses a national security threat for many countries and is being addressed by a partnership of countries under Operation Prosperity Guardian, and India's own individual actions to defend commercial vessels. While actions have been taken to counter new styles of maritime terrorism, the Houthis bring to light that the Indian ocean is far too vast to operate in without coalition forces. The Houthis actions have highlighted the need for continuous multilateral partnerships and exercises to keep the waters free and safe.

On another front, India's ongoing military operations on both its Pakistani border and increasingly its Chinese border have been an economic burden, and the fighting forces that defend them are sincerely threatened by the lack of resources. India is facing the People's Liberation Army of China, Kashmiri Separatists, and the Pakistani. India budgeted \$72.6 billion in 2023 for defensive spending;¹⁹² according to the *Defensive Times India*, while small compared to small threats, India is planning on further increasing their spending in the coming years. India recently dedicated an additional \$19.4 billion to buy domestically sourced weapons from 2023 to 2034 and increased their budget for operating along the border with China by 43% or \$602 million dollars.¹⁹³ While this may boost domestic manufacturing and military strength, Indian defense spending has only increased by \$4 billion since 2020,¹⁹⁴ compared to China's whose defense spending increased nearly \$36 billion in the same time frame,¹⁹⁵ with news reports suggesting that number may be higher. Prime Minister Modi has tried to smooth relations with Pakistan since 2014,¹⁹⁶ but recently there has been more turmoil and renewed aggression from the Pakistani military and Kashmir separatists. The ongoing conflict along both borders has resulted in significant spending (over 2%

¹⁹¹ Observer Research Foundation, Houthi Rebels Drag India Into Red Sea Crisis-Analysis.

¹⁹² Kumar, India raises defense budget to \$72.6 bln amid tensions with China.

¹⁹³ Kumar, India raises defense budget to \$72.6 bln amid tensions with China.

¹⁹⁴ World Bank. India Military Spending/Defense Budget 2010-2024.

¹⁹⁵ World Bank. China Military Spending/Defense Budget 2010-2024.

¹⁹⁶ Center for Preventive Action. Conflict Between India and Pakistan.

of the GDP since 2010)¹⁹⁷ in a still underfunded military. Now India needs to strengthen its response capabilities in regard to asymmetric warfare and untraditional attacks if it wants to maintain its status as a security provider.

US SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

If the US takes action in the conflict between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir region, US personnel should not be deployed, as that may be interpreted as imperialistic behavior, and further aggravate the conflict. The probability of future US action is highly dependent on the presidential administration, considering the stark contrast between the Biden and Trump administration’s handlings of middle eastern affairs.

CYBERSECURITY/TECHNOLOGY

Cyber-attacks have been increasing in recent years; in the Indo-Pacific region only Taiwan faces more incidents than India. In 2022, Indians possessed over 1.15 billion phones and had more than 700 million internet users, numbers that are steadily growing that highlight the country’s increasing reliance on information technology.¹⁹⁸ In 2022, the Government of India proposed a National Cybersecurity Strategy; it is also collaborating with other nations such as Japan and

Table 1: India’s cyber engagements

Bilateral cyber dialogues	Australia, Egypt, Japan, New Zealand, United States, ASEAN
Bilateral cyber agreements and MoUs	Bangladesh, Japan, Jordan, Malaysia, Qatar, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Vietnam, Tanzania
CERT-India’s foreign collaborations	South Korea, Japan, Mauritius, United States, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Seychelles
Participation in technical forums	ITU’s International Multilateral Partnership Against Cyber Threats, INTERPOL Global Complex for Innovation, Forum of Incident Response and Security Teams (Group of CERTs), Asia Pacific CERT, Global Forum on Cyber Expertise
Global forums	United Nations’ Group of Governmental Experts

Source: Adapted from Patil (2022)

Figure: India’s cyber engagement¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ World Bank. India Military Spending/Defense Budget 2010-2024.

¹⁹⁸ Singh, “India’s Cybersecurity and Its Impact on the Economy.”

¹⁹⁹ Gateway House, India in the Indo-Pacific: Pursuing, Prosperity & Security, page 59.

Singapore on Memorandums of Understanding regarding cybersecurity.²⁰⁰ As seen in the table below, India has prioritized cybersecurity engagements with other countries to further address the issue of cyber-attacks in the country.

One of the growing barriers to a safe cyber environment in India is that they lack necessary investment to promote the innovation of cybersecurity and technological tools to protect assets. Indian companies typically use tools and technology developed abroad, making their costs higher than feasible for Indian companies. Therefore, India must promote innovation and conduct domestic research in the fields of cybersecurity and technology to tackle its vulnerabilities in the sector.²⁰¹ Since India has a large talent pool with high-quality IT and computer science professionals, monetary resources continue to be the main barrier. India has bolstered its cyber forensic capabilities by setting up cyber forensic labs in academic institutions to fight the rising cybercrime in the country.²⁰² India shares a common understanding with other Indo-Pacific nations on what constitutes responsible state behavior in dealing with cybersecurity threats.²⁰³ New Delhi should engage with smaller Indo-Pacific countries in the conversation of cyber norms to give these countries a sense of involvement in cyberspace management.²⁰⁴

Within the technology supply chain, India relies primarily on Chinese manufacturing. This can be seen with the overreliance on the Chinese telecommunications company Huawei as well as on Chinese-produced handsets.²⁰⁵ India's reliance on China for semiconductors increased from 2020 by 160% or \$4.25 billion.²⁰⁶ A barrier for further development of domestic Indian technology is the low risk tolerance ideology possessed by many Indian companies.²⁰⁷ This means that Indian companies do not take the risk in investing as they do not want to lose out on profit. As

²⁰⁰ United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, "India - Cyber Policy Portal."

²⁰¹ Singh, "India's Cybersecurity and Its Impact on the Economy."

²⁰² Gateway House, *India in the Indo-Pacific: Pursuing, Prosperity & Security*, page 59.

²⁰³ Gateway House, *India in the Indo-Pacific: Pursuing, Prosperity & Security*, page 60.

²⁰⁴ Gateway House, *India in the Indo-Pacific: Pursuing, Prosperity & Security*, page 60.

²⁰⁵ Kotasthane, "India's Technology Competition with China," page 4.

²⁰⁶ Kotasthane, "India's Technology Competition with China," page 4.

²⁰⁷ Kotasthane, "India's Technology Competition with China," page 13.

India continues to provide the world with a large labor supply and low costs, India has become an attractive location for multinational companies to outsource their technological services.²⁰⁸

In terms of technological and cybersecurity advancements, India has continued to collaborate with Chinese individuals who have specific areas of expertise with a focus on technology and knowledge transfer.²⁰⁹ However this collaboration slowed down after the 2020 Galwan conflict in which there was a brief dispute between Chinese and Indian troops along the Sino-Indian border. After this border clash, Chinese state-sponsored cyber criminals attacked India's transportation sector and the electricity grid of the Indian state of Maharashtra.²¹⁰ The Indian government responded to the Galwan border conflict by banning Chinese apps, such as TikTok, and limiting Huawei and ZTE Corporation technology in the country.²¹¹ As Chinese aggression continues to disturb India's domestic cybersecurity sphere, the Indian government turned to its Western partners to alleviate the reliance on Chinese technology in the country as well as address Chinese-sponsored cyberattacks.

Currently, India is not a signatory to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, largely on the basis that India was not consulted when the convention was signed. Thus, India deems the convention unequal and Western-centric.²¹² Indian interests do not always align with the views of the United States; this can be seen in the 5G space where India proposed its own set of 5Gi standards, which offers higher range at a lower frequency aimed to reach rural areas.²¹³ India's main interest is the advancement of technology using knowledge transfer, and deems China as crucial for this progression. India continues to seek out the partners it deems important to carry out their interests. Bilateral trade between China and India remains high regardless of the Modi government's measures and restrictions on Chinese activities in economic, technological, and

²⁰⁸ Taneja and Zakaria, "The US-India Relationship Is Key to the Future of Tech."

²⁰⁹ Kotasthane, *India's Technology Competition with China*, page 14.

²¹⁰ The Hoover Institution and Observer Research Foundation, *Strategic Cooperation In The Indo-Pacific: US And Indian Perspectives*, page 51.

²¹¹ The Hoover Institution and Observer Research Foundation. *Strategic Cooperation In The Indo-Pacific: US And Indian Perspectives*, page 51.

²¹² Singh, "India's Cybersecurity and Its Impact on the Economy."

²¹³ Kotasthane, *India's Technology Competition with China*, page 10.

telecommunications domains.²¹⁴ India acknowledges that the push for diversification away from China cannot be done without its partners and allies.

In 2023, Prime Minister Modi and President Joe Biden reaffirmed in the US-India Critical and Emerging Technologies Initiative (iCET) that technology is central to their deepening bilateral relationship,²¹⁵ by launching cooperation between the National Security Council Secretariat in India and the US National Security Council.²¹⁶ Leaders of both countries reinforced their mutual support for the building of a resilient global semiconductor supply chain. Many US semiconductor industries have begun to invest in India, requiring India to improve domestic infrastructure to help in the production and transportation of products.²¹⁷ President Biden reiterated his commitment to work with the US Congress to reduce legislative barriers imposed on India of the exportation of high-performance computing technology and source code.²¹⁸ India has also shown its commitment by relaxing regulations on the importation of laptops from the US and has been providing subsidies to foreign firms that produce goods in India.²¹⁹

ENVIRONMENT/ENERGY

The United States has made it a priority to assist nations affected by climate change by giving climate resilience a central role in its Indo-Pacific Strategy. India's adaptability to climate issues gives them the potential to be a regional leader in climate change resilience and environmental protection. Just as China has delegated the province of Guangdong for outreach to Oceania countries, Indian states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu would be valuable to Oceania nations as a source of outreach and policy modeling due to their similar climate conditions.²²⁰ South India and Indian islands have developed low-cost construction, cyclone-proofing, rain

²¹⁴ Malik and Madan, "India's Economic Ties with China: Opportunity or Vulnerability?" page 2.

²¹⁵ The White House, "Joint Statement from India and the United States."

²¹⁶ The Hoover Institution and Observer Research Foundation. Strategic Cooperation In The Indo-Pacific: US And Indian Perspectives, page 6.

²¹⁷ Chatterjee Miller, "Sort Out Granular Issues to Bolster US-India Ties."

²¹⁸ Tomoshige, "The Strategic Convergence of the US-India Innovation Partnership."

²¹⁹ Tomoshige, "The Strategic Convergence of the US-India Innovation Partnership."

²²⁰ Gateway House, India in the Indo-Pacific: Pursuing, Prosperity & Security, page 43.

harvesting, and other technologies which could function well for other partners in the Indo-Pacific that are facing similar problems.²²¹

According to a report released by UNICEF, in 2019 India was the seventh most affected country in the world by climate change.²²² In 2022, around 2,267 people in 15 Indian states²²³ died as a result of heat waves which led to an economic loss of US \$66.18 million.²²⁴ As a result of the burning of fossil fuels and high concentration of factories, major cities in India experienced high levels of pollution which were responsible for at least 1.67 million deaths in 2019.²²⁵ India seeks to transition to clean energy by partnering with countries in the Indo-Pacific to achieve this goal. Several barriers stand in the way of this goal, such as the high costs of switching to cleaner energy sources and India's inadequate electric grid infrastructure.²²⁶

In the goal of combating climate change and environmental changes, the Indian government announced its aim to reach net zero emissions by 2070 and decouple its economic growth from carbon emissions.²²⁷ The overarching guide for climate policy in India comes from the National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAPCC). The Indian government has implemented several policy measures to encourage renewable energy, such as implementing capacity targets, improvements to administrative processes, and incentives for domestic production of solar technologies.²²⁸ Despite the new 2023 policies, India has yet to commit to the phasing out of fossil fuels. At COP26, India initially resisted a coal phase-out for the nation, yet ultimately agreed while providing no specific time frame for this coal phase-out.²²⁹ During the UN climate negotiation at the recent COP28 in 2023, Indian environment minister Bhupender Yadav demanded that affluent countries should lead global climate action underlining India's long-term position that developing

²²¹ Gateway House, *India in the Indo-Pacific: Pursuing Prosperity & Security*, page 43.

²²² UNICEF, "Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability | UNICEF India."

²²³ Government of India, Press Release -- Ministry of Earth Sciences, pages 1 to 4.

²²⁴ UNICEF, "Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability | UNICEF India."

²²⁵ Brophy Marcus, "India's Pollution Problem | Think Global Health."

²²⁶ Gyane, "Renewable Energy To Reduce Air Pollution in India."

²²⁷ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change*.

²²⁸ Climate Action Tracker, "India."

²²⁹ Climate Action Tracker, "India."

countries should not be forced to cut back on energy-related emissions as wealthier countries have polluted more.²³⁰ This is highly relevant considering that India is the world's third-largest emitting country after China and the United States. India expects affluent countries to do more for climate change while it has yet to commit to a push away from fossil fuels.

India is facing a great opportunity for revolution in energy production and the government has shown dedication to renewables through several reforms and policies. From 2015 to 2021, India's GDP grew on average 6.7% annually. In that time, electricity was introduced to 50 million new users. A global decline in solar energy costs allowed for India to increase its solar power by a factor of five.²³¹ As mentioned previously, the youthful Indian population is booming and will lead to a more robust population. At the same time as the Indian government is developing its manufacturing sector, the population of India is increasing leading to the increase of electricity demands. Items such as kitchen goods and air conditioning are more popular now and are mostly dependent on electricity rather than biomass. A staggering 900 million Indians gained access to electricity as of 2019, meaning almost every household has basic access to energy now.²³² Despite the government's ambitions, coal, oil, and solid biomass make up 80% of India's current energy fuel supply; India being one of the largest importers of coal globally, while maintaining the fifth largest coal deposit in the world. Despite this development, 660 million Indians still rely on biomass for at home energy production rather than modern fuels or recent technology.²³³ Additionally, "oil consumption has increased in lockstep with urbanization and GDP growth. There has also been some growth in urban light rail, although cities in general lack modern mass transit options."²³⁴ As seen in the figure to the left, a rise in population entails an increase in energy demand, but for India, that demand is still being met with a majority consumption of coal, gas, and oil.

²³⁰ Dickie, "India at COP28 Insists on 'equity' in Climate Talks."

²³¹ Zeniewski and Singh, *India Energy Outlook 2021*. 22.

²³² Zeniewski and Singh, *India Energy Outlook 2021*. 17.

²³³ Zeniewski and Singh, *India Energy Outlook 2021*. 18.

²³⁴ Zeniewski and Singh, *India Energy Outlook 2021*. 23.

Figure: India's Population, GDP and Energy demand information for 2000, 2010 and 2019.²³⁵

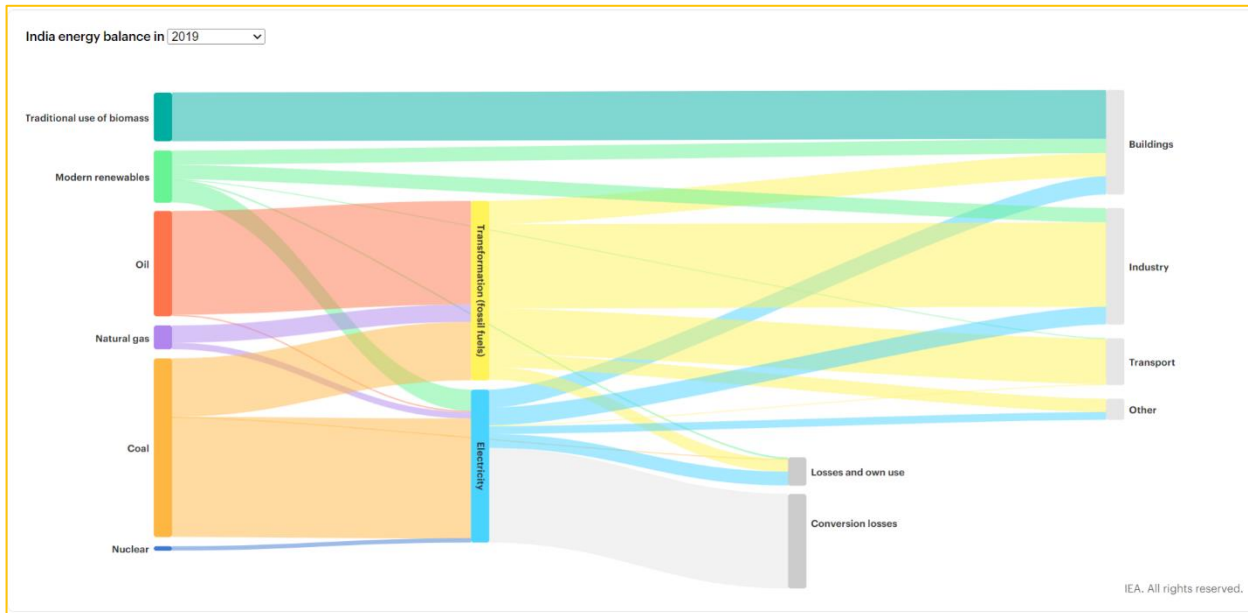
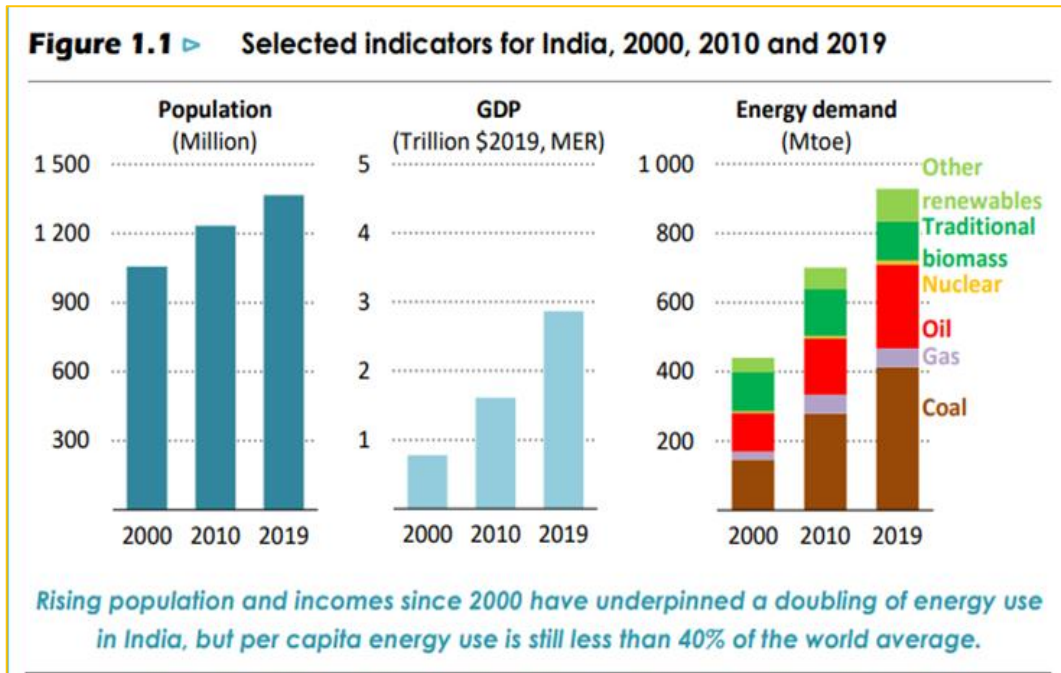


Figure: India's energy use and where it goes (2019).²³⁶

²³⁵ Zeniewski and Singh, India Energy Outlook 2021. 17.

²³⁶ Zeniewski and Singh, India Energy Outlook 2021.

Natural gas and renewable energy have proven to be resilient forms of energy for India, as they were the least affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The diagram above is useful in displaying where each energy source is going to be, how it is used, and what proportions are lost in the process.

Solar-powered revolution

India has a classic supply and demand relationship with the affordability of electricity, with external factors, such as climate change, motivating the government to switch to less polluting forms of energy generation. India's families are also averaging higher incomes with better quality of life, meaning their demand for electricity is growing as well. The ability for citizens to afford renewable energy is a key objective in India's renewable energy development, as Prime Minister Modi is actively working alongside other nations to find creative solutions to the high prices of renewable energy.²³⁷ At the COP28 event, Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Kristersson of Sweden launched the second phase of the Industry Transition Platform, with the end objective being to make renewables more affordable.²³⁸ Prime Minister Modi also asked for climate finance to become more available, accessible, and affordable to developing countries in the global south.²³⁹

Internally, the Indian government estimates that “solar and wind are likely to meet two-thirds of future demand growth by the Financial Year 2032, 66% of India's power generation growth in this 10-year period.”²⁴⁰ New governmental guidelines and initiatives are pushing to achieve their climate change goals and incentivizing the procurement of solar plants. The Bureau of Energy Efficiency is also leading programs to influence consumer decisions for more efficient appliances,²⁴¹ Electric Vehicle (EV) use via charging infrastructure,²⁴² and increasing local investments through the use of accrediting Energy Service Companies to name a few.²⁴³ On top of that, LEDs are now used in over 80% of households due the government's flagship Unnat Jyoti by

²³⁷ Zeniewski and Singh, *India Energy Outlook 2021*. 21.

²³⁸ Press Information Bureau. India at COP-28: Highlights of 28th Conference of Parties.

²³⁹ Press Information Bureau, India at COP-28: Highlights of 28th Conference of Parties.

²⁴⁰ Rodrigues and Lolla, Solar adoption in India entering “accelerating growth” phase.

²⁴¹ Zeniewski and Singh, *India Energy Outlook 2021*. 20.

²⁴² Zeniewski and Singh, *India Energy Outlook 2021*. 91.

²⁴³ Zeniewski and Singh, *India Energy Outlook 2021*. 203.

Affordable LEDs for All (UJALA) scheme, launched in 2015.²⁴⁴ All these actions, if proven fruitful, will provide for a growing population and help to minimize damage from climate change.

HUMAN SECURITY

India hopes to benefit in its role in the Indo-Pacific strategy and how that might affect its human security concerns. India helped distribute 290 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines, which it received from the Quad, to Indo-Pacific nations.²⁴⁵ In addition, the Quad agreed to provide a loan to an Indian pharmaceutical company Biological-E (Bio-E) to increase its manufacture of vaccine doses which would be distributed throughout the Indo-Pacific.²⁴⁶ India's affordable and adaptable goods, especially its low-cost pharmaceuticals, can offer the rest of the Indo-Pacific an alternative to Chinese pharmaceuticals.²⁴⁷ One barrier to this possibility is Western nations viewing Indian pharmaceuticals as a threat, despite how necessary Indian pharmaceuticals are to diversify the supply chains in the region.

As an effect of its increased focus on technology, India has been rapidly expanding its biotechnology sector with a focus on combating healthcare challenges as well as agricultural and climate-related challenges.²⁴⁸ According to Indian experts, concerns regarding the opening of the agricultural sector in India still persist, as the sector employs about half of India's working population, and opening the sector would leave it vulnerable to foreign competition.²⁴⁹ Food security continues to be a significant concern for Indian politicians. Concerns over food security could force the government to take emergency measures by curbing exports and injecting subsidized supplies into the market to ease food prices for their large population.²⁵⁰ While India has been able to elevate millions out of poverty, erratic climate conditions continue to threaten its

²⁴⁴ Zeniewski and Singh, *India Energy Outlook 2021*. 27.

²⁴⁵ Chatterjee Miller, "The Quad's Longevity Might Hinge on Its Health Plan."

²⁴⁶ Chatterjee Miller, "The Quad's Longevity Might Hinge on Its Health Plan."

²⁴⁷ Paskal, "Economic and Human Security in the Indo-Pacific."

²⁴⁸ Ajaykumar, "The Quad's Contribution to Revolutionising Biotechnology Strategies," page 1.

²⁴⁹ Ray, "India's Vision for Indo-Pacific Trade."

²⁵⁰ Kumar and Mashal, "India Reels From Shortage of Tomatoes, a Culinary Staple."

progress as its agricultural sector continues to suffer. Without proper adaptation to climate conditions, the Indian population will continue to experience shortages that put its citizens at further risk of poverty and starvation.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

ECONOMIC

- Advise India in best practices for garnering foreign investment and national budgeting, either through the WTO or US foreign officials to enable and sustain accelerated economic growth

MARITIME & MILITARY

- Continue conducting in-depth joint exercises with specific focus on Quad capabilities to counter terrorist and asymmetric warfare threats for future conflicts
- Increase information sharing with Indian military forces for increased military capacity.

CYBERSECURITY/TECHNOLOGY

- Increase knowledge transfer on technological developments coupled with the exchange of students between India and the United States to help both nations achieve their domestic goals while reducing dependency on Chinese-made technology products
- Develop more open communication between the government of India and the United States to reduce export controls and barriers
- Promote the investment from American private companies to India to expand technological capabilities while simultaneously using India's domestic talent pool

ENVIRONMENT/ENERGY

- Increase coordination between India and the United States to ease the expensive costs of switching to cleaner energy
- Further invest in both the public and private sectors for clean energy with a focus on domestic production to curb the costs for India

HUMAN SECURITY

- Strengthen knowledge cooperation with India as well as further economic investment in crucial sectors of agriculture and healthcare
- Bolster Indian pharmaceutical companies that provide Indo-Pacific countries with alternative lower cost goods, encouraging a shift-away from the current Chinese dominated pharmaceutical sphere

ASEAN

BACKGROUND

ASEAN is dedicated to promoting economic, social, and cultural development across Southeast Asia. Its main values and goals are 1) to promote economic growth, social progress and cultural development in Southeast Asia, 2) to advance regional peace and stability, 3) to pursue active collaboration and mutual assistance on common interests, and 4) to maintain and enhance close and beneficial relationships with existing international and regional organizations.²⁵¹ The “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” document details ASEAN’s commitment to “strengthening ASEAN Centrality, openness, transparency, inclusivity, a rules-based framework, good governance, respect for sovereignty, [and] non-intervention” through the values of “equality, mutual respect, trust, and benefit, and respect for international laws.”²⁵²

ASEAN’s emphasis on safeguarding the interests of the peoples and states of Southeast Asia and utilizing its “inclusive regional architecture” to enhance Indo-Pacific cooperation has the potential to align with US ambitions and policies in the Indo-Pacific region. Although the US and ASEAN currently enjoy a comprehensive strategic partnership,²⁵³ the highest tier relationship granted by ASEAN, ASEAN members differ in their views about the nature and extent of this cooperation. ASEAN unity is essential to keeping the Indo-Pacific region stable—a target goal for both the organization as well as the United States’ Indo-Pacific Strategy. ASEAN has undertaken “collective leadership” to continue building cooperative architecture and assert their leadership and centrality in the region, and to address contemporary challenges and build upon the mechanisms aimed at improving the region.²⁵⁴

Competition between the US and China for influence in ASEAN is a growing source of tension in the region and exacerbates differences within the bloc. This competition also diminishes

²⁵¹ ASEAN, “What We Do.”

²⁵² ASEAN, “Final ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.”

²⁵³ US. Department of State, “Marking One Year since the Release of the Administration’s Indo-Pacific Strategy.”

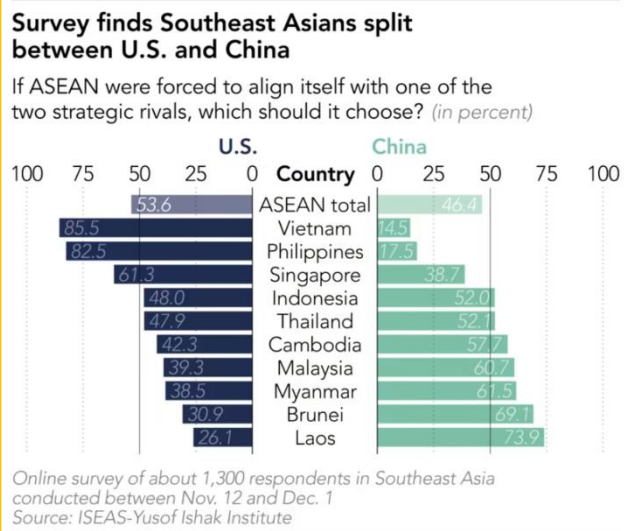
²⁵⁴ ASEAN, “Final ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.”

ASEAN Centrality and is a strain on US-ASEAN relations as most ASEAN member states strongly resist choosing sides between the US and China. Both nations have some military ties with different ASEAN members, but forcing military cooperation on the organization would not be acceptable to ASEAN. ASEAN goals align with the Quad’s intent to ensure a “free and open Indo-Pacific,” which is in opposition to China’s view of a Chinese hegemonic region. The Quad is a valuable tool in the region for providing global public goods such as “humanitarian disaster relief, development of infrastructure, digital connectivity, and public health,” appealing to ASEAN to create a stronger partnership and engaging the other major countries in the Indo-Pacific.²⁵⁵

The US’s 2022 Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) negotiations

US SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

A 2020 survey found that ASEAN citizens were split roughly in half between supporting the US and China, with 7 out of the 10 member states favoring China more. This split response shows ASEAN’s tendency to “avoid making a binary choice between the US and China,” as it can diminish ASEAN’s power when bargaining with these countries.



includes seven ASEAN members (excluding Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos). This framework centers on advancing fair and resilient trade, supply chain resilience, infrastructure, clean energy, and decarbonization, and anti-corruption.²⁵⁶ ASEAN and the US have promised to pursue cooperation through “corresponding activities, conformity to obligations under international law, in accordance with their respective domestic laws, regulations, and policies”.²⁵⁷ The similarities and differences between the US’ Indo-Pacific Strategy and ASEAN’s

²⁵⁵ Miller, “Cooperation between ASEAN and the Quad Is Critical for Indo-Pacific Stability.”

²⁵⁶ Prakash, “What Kind of Indo-Pacific? It Is for ASEAN to Ensure.”

²⁵⁷ ASEAN, “Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-United States Strategic.”

‘Outlook on the Indo Pacific’ highlight both the breadth of US-ASEAN cooperation as well as the discrepancies in the goals for the region.

ECONOMY

ASEAN is in the midst of an economic transformation with the creation and implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The AEC has already been highly successful in starting to establish an ASEAN single market and eliminating almost all internal tariffs. Despite the many positives, ASEAN has faced challenges integrating all its boons into a cohesive economic success. Inter-ASEAN disagreements, local politics, and inefficiencies in the “ASEAN Way” have all slowed progress on ASEAN development and the implementation of the AEC. Secondly, Chinese investment through the BRI has become a driving source of foreign investment in ASEAN, connecting China’s economy with ASEAN member states and giving China fiscal and social influence in the region. The United States, Japan, and the EU are attempting to increase their own investment in the region and create alternatives to the BRI, seeking to counter the growing Chinese influence in ASEAN and elsewhere.

Southeast Asia as a region has a massive economic market due to its enormous population, low costs of production, geographical position comprising crucial global shipping routes, proximity to other large markets, high foreign investment, and access to natural resources (especially marine ones). The region has very high prospects and Southeast Asia is expected to have some of the most dramatic economic growth this century—all ASEAN nations have ambitions to fully modernize and become developed economies within the next one to three decades, taking cues from the so-called “Asian Miracle” states including China, South Korea, and Singapore.²⁵⁸ The AEC hopes to turn the member states’ separate economies into a unified, highly integrated, and globally competitive economy.²⁵⁹ ASEAN nations also participate in various bilateral and multilateral trade agreements such as the US-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement, the US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement, the Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement, and the

²⁵⁸ Vu, “ASEAN Economic Prospects Amid Emerging Turbulence: Development Challenges and Implications for Reform.”

²⁵⁹ ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025.

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (which includes all 10 ASEAN nations as well as China, Japan, South Korea, and Australia).

The Belt and Road Initiative has played a major part in shaping the region’s economic and political landscape in the past decade: by 2020 China had invested \$166 billion in Southeast Asia,²⁶⁰ and in 2023 the region made up 44% of BRI (non-construction) investment (Figure below, left).²⁶¹ There have been consistent highs and lows in BRI projects as ASEAN nations make deals on massive infrastructure and investment projects only to cancel or delay the projects as governments change, cases of corruption emerge, accusations of “debt diplomacy” and coercion by Beijing, and concerns over safety/longevity and environmental sustainability beleaguer the projects.²⁶² Despite these setbacks, ASEAN countries are still welcoming Chinese investment and China is making concerted efforts to produce more favorable and trustworthy projects with a focus on reducing their environmental impacts. America's massive foreign direct investment (Figure

below, right), Japan’s “Partnership for Quality Infrastructure,” and the EU’s “Global Gateway” strategy are all additional investment schemes competing with the BRI in Southeast Asia. Due to its status at the forefront of growth potential, Southeast Asia is becoming a hotbed for targeted investment internationally and one more way in which great power competition is manifesting in between China and the West.



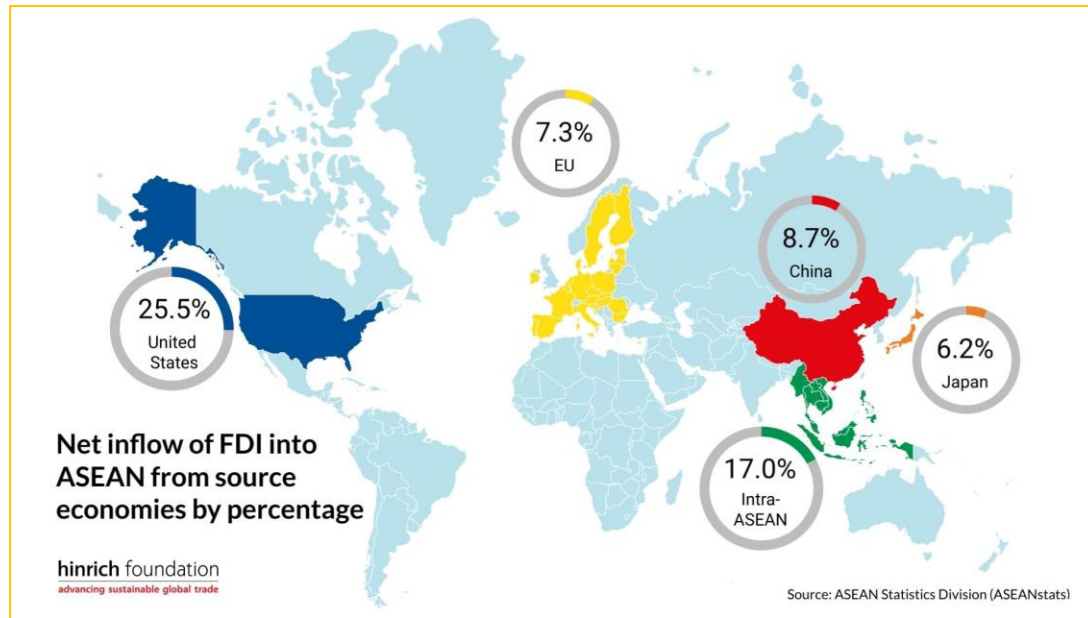
Left: East Asia made up 44% of non-construction BRI investment in H1 2023²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Lam, “Domestic Politics in Southeast Asia and Local Backlash Against the Belt and Road Initiative - Foreign Policy Research Institute.”

²⁶¹ Wang, “China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Investment Report 2023 H1 – Green Finance and Development Center.”

²⁶² Parameswaran, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative in Southeast Asia: The Next Decade.”

²⁶³ Armstrong, “The Global Reach of China’s Belt and Road.”



Above: More than a quarter of FDI to ASEAN came from the US in 2020²⁶⁴

The US economy is deeply tied to the economies of East Asia. As tensions have grown between the US and China and global events have strained both economies in recent years, the US has encouraged investors to look towards ASEAN for diversifying supply chains and as a site of new investment. The move from China towards ASEAN is natural for the US to encourage given ASEAN's proximity to China, the similarly low cost of production, the more favorable governments, and the desire to uncouple the US and Chinese economies where possible. Since the creation of the US-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2022, the US has undergone efforts to increase investment, lower barriers to trade, bolster the safety and sustainability of trade infrastructure, and open additional lines of dialogue with ASEAN partners.²⁶⁵ It is clear through these actions, and through the White House's Indo-Pacific Action Plan's core lines of effort that economic development of the region is central to the US's vision of the future of the Indo-Pacific.

The United States has done a commendable job in responding to China's increased activity in ASEAN and in making efforts to heighten the role of ASEAN in the US's economy. However,

²⁶⁴ Hinrich Foundation, "Trade and Investment in Southeast Asia."

²⁶⁵ White House Briefing Room, "FACT SHEET: US-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, One Year On."

many of these efforts appear to be reactive, either to China or to global events such as COVID-19, rather than proactive. In boosting proactivity, the US can hope to gain a stronger position in the Indo-Pacific as it becomes its primary foreign policy focus. Since US FDI comes mostly through private investment, the US may consider the ways in which it can utilize government-funded projects, and incentivize private firms' shift towards ASEAN.

The US should continue to advance its public and private investment in ASEAN and promote the transition towards diversified trade and production networks in ASEAN. Working with its allies globally, US firms and government projects may provide valuable alternatives to BRI initiatives for ASEAN states who are eager for foreign investment. The US must also stand by its commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, supporting ASEAN nation's rights to control their exclusive economic zones and ensure open shipping lanes in the South China Sea. The United States should also support ASEAN in its implementation of the AEC as per the ASEAN Blueprint 2025 and beyond, to elevate standards of living and strengthen the economic security and robustness of the region.

MARITIME

Maritime issues are the most poignant challenges that the Indo-Pacific faces currently and are perhaps the most salient for the ASEAN nations. ASEAN is largely composed of littoral states that lie on the boundary between the Pacific and Indian Oceans and along the hotly contested South China Sea. These waters are hugely important for both the domestic economies of ASEAN nations and the global economy as a key shipping lane for international trade, home to vast oil reserves and fisheries, and an important strategic zone for great power competition. Maritime issues make up most major challenges for both ASEAN's internal and external affairs.

The prevailing maritime concern for ASEAN and global politics is China's claims to nearly the entirety of the South China Sea. Competing claims on territorial waters between China and ASEAN members are a persistent issue that has been slowly escalating for decades. Tensions with China have grown in recent years as it has chosen to ignore the (UNCLOS 2016 ruling in favor of the Philippines and has been creating artificial islands, developing infrastructure on contested islands, engaging in altercations with the Philippines and other states, and increasing naval and coast guard militarization of the region.

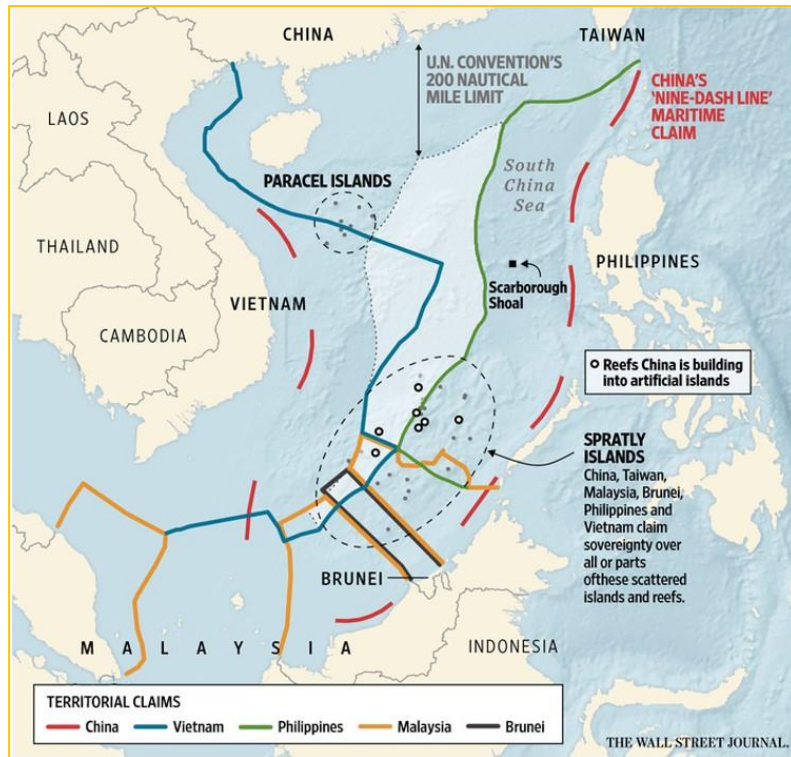


Figure: Competing territorial claims in the SCS, showing the ASEAN nation's UNCLOS supported EEZs, China's Nine-Dash Line, and contested islands and artificial islands in the Spratly and Paracel Islands²⁶⁶

Chinese hostility is not the only maritime issue important to ASEAN. The 2023 ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO) identified the following areas for

cooperation in the maritime sphere: proliferation of marine debris and pollution, environmental impact of marine transport, piracy and armed robbery against ships, cyberattacks against ships and port facilities, irregular movement of persons, illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing activities, the blue economy, offshore mining, and offshore renewable energy.²⁶⁷ These topics range from economic stability to security and defense, but it is clear that the environmental impact of maritime activities and health of the seas is of paramount concern to ASEAN.

China's historic nine-dash line—now the updated to the ten-dash line, expanding its claims to the east of Taiwan²⁶⁸— conflict with several ASEAN members' territorial claims including Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia. Conversely, Cambodia is at odds with the other ASEAN members and generally backs China's claims in the SCS. Though the level of risk of the SCS has elevated in recent years, these contested claims date back decades. In 2002

²⁶⁶ Wong and Larano, "ASEAN Unable to Coordinate Regional Response to China Territorial Disputes."

²⁶⁷ Association of Southeast Asian Nations, *ASEAN Maritime Outlook, First Edition*.

²⁶⁸ Chang, "ASEAN's Centrality in Southeast Asian Affairs: Miles to Go - Foreign Policy Research Institute."

China and ASEAN signed a joint, nonbinding, “Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea”;²⁶⁹ recently, they have been negotiating a binding “Code of Conduct”, though it remains to be seen if either side will be willing to actually submit an agreement.²⁷⁰ In 2016 the UN court ruled broadly in favor of the Philippines over disputes with China, rebuffing China’s historical SCS claims as infringing on the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone. Despite this ruling from the international court, China has fully rejected the decision and continues to expand its activities in breach of the decision. The US and Quad members have backed the Philippines and other ASEAN members threatened by Chinese encroachment, including conducting Freedom of Navigation Operations in support of the Philippines.²⁷¹

The White House’s Indo-Pacific Strategy includes “Reinforce deterrence” and “Strengthen an empowered and unified ASEAN” as two of a ten-part Action Plan. The US has stated its interest in assisting ASEAN and its member states in resolving the maritime issues that the bloc faces, both internally and externally. ASEAN members, on the other hand, have tried to avoid promoting or exacerbating US-China great-power competition in the region when possible. ASEAN recognizes that China is a major stakeholder in the region and is looking for ways to engage with China instead of confronting it. Given the relative size and strength of China, even compared to the whole of ASEAN, and the escalation of Chinese antagonism, reliance on the US and its partners in the Quad may be unavoidable.

The United States must decide to what extent it is willing to participate in squabbles over the SCS and the level of investment in ASEAN’s other maritime problems. Regarding the South China Sea, the US can take an active role in defense of the Philippines’ and other ASEAN nations’ waters and UNCLOS, or a more passive approach, letting these nations deal with China in their own ways. The US is naturally inclined towards intervention, but it must balance its obligations to its allies and partners against the serious threat of escalation with China. Regarding the wide array

²⁶⁹ Member States of ASEAN and People’s Republic of China, Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

²⁷⁰ Parameswaran, “What’s Behind the New China-ASEAN South China Sea Code of Conduct Talk Guidelines?”

²⁷¹ US. 7th Fleet Public Affairs, “US. Navy Destroyer Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in The So.”

of other maritime issues, the US must once again decide on the level of investment it is willing to make in the region. Outside actors like China or Russia are eager to make investments in the region through initiatives like the BRI, and any absence by the US will be quickly filled by other countries looking to push their influence. Conversely, most states will have a negative opinion of US attempts at unilateral solutions that leave ASEAN members out of the process.

Given the shift towards placing the Indo-Pacific at the center of US foreign policy in the last two decades, and the outsized importance of the maritime sphere in this region, it is clear the US must make substantial headway in this area. In the complex and precarious situation in the South China Sea, the US must take a reserved approach that avoids over-militarization that would endanger those living in the region and have widespread economic and political consequences. Whenever possible, the US and its international partners should rely on political and economic pressure, rather than military pressure, to bring China into compliance with the UNCLOS ruling. On other maritime issues, meaningful investment and collaboration with ASEAN and its members is the best way to boost self-reliance, improve human security and public health, implement sustainable practices, contest rising Chinese influence, and ensure security of free and open seas. To create an “Empowered and Unified ASEAN,” the US and its global partners should promote private and governmental investment in non-militarized sectors in collaboration with local organizations and governments who will one day be able to develop and protect the region independently.

MILITARY

Since its inception, ASEAN has struggled to rise above internal quarrels and present itself as a strong, unified bloc. One of ASEAN’s core operations is the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC),²⁷² The APSC is focused on “peaceful processes in the settlement of intra-regional differences” and ensuring that ASEAN is “a rules-based Community of shared values and norms; a cohesive, peaceful, stable and resilient region with shared responsibility for comprehensive security; as well as a dynamic and outward-looking region.”²⁷³ From their own

²⁷² ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025.

²⁷³ ASEAN, “ASEAN Political Security Community.”

directives, it is clear that ASEAN's security operations are more focused on preventing internal conflict rather than addressing outside threats. ASEAN nations suffer from border disputes, ethnic and religious conflicts, generalized distrust, persistent transnational crime, and increasing militarization; these factors prevent ASEAN from forming the sense of solidarity or unity necessary to establish a true "security community."²⁷⁴ Each ASEAN member state has its own military, but joint operations or centralized command are rare, though ASEAN has been trying to form a more unified front and bolster its joint military capacity, especially in the naval domain. This is largely viewed as a response to increased Chinese activity in the South China Sea. Joint exercises within ASEAN, including the first ever ASEAN-exclusive exercise in 2023,²⁷⁵ and with the other partners such as the US,²⁷⁶ have been increasing in recent years. Overall, ASEAN nations do not make up a strong military presence while the larger regional powers of China, India, and Australia, as well as outside actors such as the US and the UK, far exceed the local military apparatus.

In Southeast Asia, the US is focused on deterring China in the SCS and the Taiwan Strait, its obligations to treaty allies Thailand and the Philippines, and its partner states in ASEAN and elsewhere. While most ASEAN nations are adamant on opposing the nine-dash line, they are much more reluctant to challenge China on Taiwan. Thus, while a functional and secure ASEAN security community focused on conflict prevention and promoting unity is desirable, it is not immediately clear if increased militarization of ASEAN as a whole or by its individual constituent states is in the interests of the United States.

The future of ASEAN military trajectories can be roughly grouped into three possibilities: 1) diminution of the current arms build-up by individual states, 2) continued armament by individual states in a disintegrated manner, or 3) armament in a unified manner towards a simultaneous ASEAN security community and strategic alliance. The desirability and feasibility of these three paths from a US perspective vary widely, and no single path is immediately superior.

²⁷⁴ Rosyidin, "ASEAN (in)Security Community."

²⁷⁵ Lean, "ASEX-01N Strengthens the intra-ASEAN Military Landscape."

²⁷⁶ Commander, Logistics Group Western Pacific Public Affairs Office. "First ASEAN-US Maritime Exercise Successfully Concludes."

Reduction in militarization may be the best for human security, but it would cede the balance of power to China and weaken the Southeast Asian states, something they are not willing to do. A fragmented militarization seems most likely but will exacerbate inter-ASEAN tensions, it also allows other powers such as the US and China to advance their own interests through selective assistances. Finally, unified militarization under the banner of ASEAN will be hard fought given the deeply rooted tensions between the nations and general distrust, but it centralizes ASEAN in the region and could create a power strong enough to contend with China or the US and its allies.

The promotion and empowerment of the APSC as a security community to enhance solidarity and alignment with ASEAN goals without excessive armament by any individual state would both centralize ASEAN as a regional supranational union and minimize the threat of escalation of tensions and endangerment of human security. The US should continue to develop its relations with its allies and partners in Southeast Asia with an emphasis on unity and de-escalation that is in line with both ASEAN's APSC directive, and the White House's Indo-Pacific strategy. This also leaves room for the US and other outside partners such as Australia and the United Kingdom to have a presence in the region.

CYBERSECURITY & TECHNOLOGY

The US and ASEAN have many existing cooperation policies and projects within the cybersecurity and technology sphere, including policies building frameworks and the capacity for security and defense in the cyber realm, as Southeast Asian countries are a high target for cyberattacks and ransomware. The figure to the left demonstrates the number of documented ransomware attacks on ASEAN member states in 2020, demonstrating how significant a threat it is to the region with Indonesia being the target of almost half of the attacks in the region.

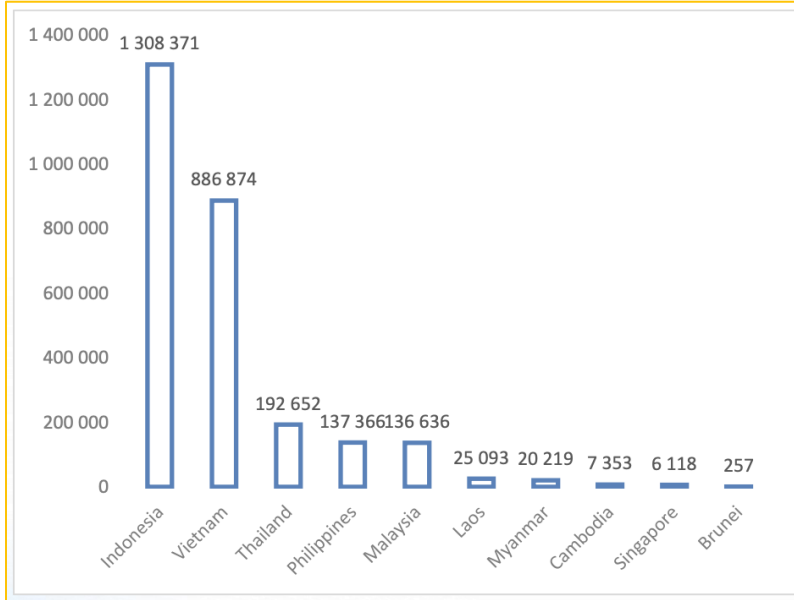


Figure: Ransomware detections in ASEAN countries 2020²⁷⁷

The fourth ASEAN-US Cyber Policy Dialogue that occurred in October 2023, co-chaired by the US and Indonesia, demonstrated the focus of a shared vision of an “open, peaceful, interoperable, reliable, and secure cyberspace that

supports international trade and commerce, strengthens international security, and fosters economic prosperity, free expression, and innovation.”²⁷⁸ This Dialogue showed commitments to implement a framework of responsible state behavior in cyberspace, with multiple avenues of cooperation between the US and ASEAN in the cyber space.⁷

Despite the past lack of cyber frameworks, ASEAN is slowly making headway, as the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore is working with ASEAN member states to implement a regional ASEAN Regional Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) to increase the facilitation of information sharing “cyber incident response” across member states. The creation of this CERT will help other sectors and increase the regional cybersecurity incident response coordination in industries such as banking and finance, maritime, communications and aviation.²⁷⁹

In terms of cooperation, the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting Cybersecurity and Information Centre of Excellence (ACICE) officially established an office in 2023, with hopes of

²⁷⁷ ASEAN Desk, “Interpol ASEAN CYBERTHREAT ASSESSMENT 2021.”

²⁷⁸ US. Department of State, “Co-Chairs’ Statement on the Fourth ASEAN-US. Cyber Policy Dialogue.”

²⁷⁹ ETCIO, “Singapore Moves Ahead to Establish ASEAN Regional Cert to Strengthen Regional Cybersecurity.”

more global cooperation to increase information gathering and collection to better assess threats.²⁸⁰ Additionally, ASEAN is in talks to cooperate with Japan on cybersecurity and systems for managing and operating artificial intelligence.²⁸¹ This cooperation is also focused on the transfer of information, by including cooperation in education with a higher exchange of foreign students and scholarships, and more exchange programs.

A recent cybersecurity initiative collaboration between the US, Japan, EU and India and ASEAN was a cyber defense drill which lasted five days to help train engineers in India and ASEAN to help increase global cyber defenses.²⁸² Despite the number of agreed cooperation and efforts to expand their cybercrime security capacity and the progress with Singapore's investment and establishment of CERT, ASEAN needs to continue establishing effective regional cyber frameworks in order to participate in mutual assistance in national cyber emergencies.²⁸³

ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY

ASEAN has stated they are following the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of 2030, and the SDG targets are in line with the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 as well as the East Asia Summit (EAS) vision.²⁸⁴ Regarding the US-ASEAN cooperation on environment topics, the US and ASEAN held their first Ministerial Dialogue on Environment and Climate Change in 2023 discussing increased cooperation for the future.²⁸⁵ The US is actively supporting ASEAN to attain and accelerate the transition to clean energy in the region through eight specific initiatives, on topics including integrating EV ecosystems for clean energy transitions, technical assistance, satellite data and geospatial technologies for climate change mitigation, and forest conservation.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁰ Dominguez, "ASEAN Sets up Regional Office for Cybersecurity Cooperation."

²⁸¹ Sato, "Japan and ASEAN to Team on AI and Cybersecurity."

²⁸² Nagao, "Japan, US, EU Hold Cyber Defense Drill with India, Asean Support."

²⁸³ Tay, "ASEAN Cyber-Security Cooperation: Towards a Regional Emergency-Response Framework."

²⁸⁴ ASEAN, "Final ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific."

²⁸⁵ The United States Government White House, "Fact Sheet: US-Asean Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, One Year On."

²⁸⁶ The United States Government White House, "Fact Sheet: US-Asean Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, One Year On."

ASEAN has established their own environmental goals blueprint known as the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Vision 2025, which guides ASEAN’s cooperation initiatives and touches on multiple facets of becoming more sustainable.²⁸⁷

The US and ASEAN have additional energy targeting initiatives such as the US-ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership, consisting of multiple targeted projects²⁸⁸ including the Water Smart Engagements program between the US and ASEAN cities bringing together “city governments, water districts, and utilities” to expand access to clean water. The US also has the Smart Cities Business Innovation Fund (BIF), which is the US’ investment in grassroots sustainable solutions to urban challenges to support climate action in ASEAN. Grants of up to \$300,000 for net zero/low carbon solutions for documented urban problems were set for the first iteration of BIF in 2022. Despite no recent updates to the BIF, the US Department of State recently hosted the Symposium on Accelerating Science, Technology, and Circular Innovation in Southeast Asia in Indonesia September 2023, in which the US-ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership (USASCP), Arizona State University, and Rochester Institute of Technology will collaborate on topics such as innovation, smart sustainable cities, circular economy, and entrepreneurship to increase sustainability in Southeast Asia.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ Association of Southeast Asian Nations, “ASEAN Environment Outlook.”

²⁸⁸ US. Department of State, “The United States-ASEAN Relationship.”

²⁸⁹ US. Department of State, “Symposium on Accelerating, Science, Technology and Circular Innovation in Southeast Asia.”

Despite these cooperation initiatives with the US, Southeast Asian countries are still heavily dependent on China, especially in the energy sector. While ASEAN member states such as Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam have been individually increasing their renewable energy capacity, they are still heavily dependent on gas and coal.²⁹⁰ China's capacity in solar energy has increased dramatically, surpassing the US' capacity by 41.7 gigawatts in 2023, almost 24% of the US' total solar production, which decreases the export prices of their solar modules, making it the most affordable option for ASEAN member states. As part of their Belt and Road Initiative, China has invested \$10.4 billion in solar power projects in Southeast Asia, hoping to realize ASEAN's growth potential in renewable energy production.²⁹¹

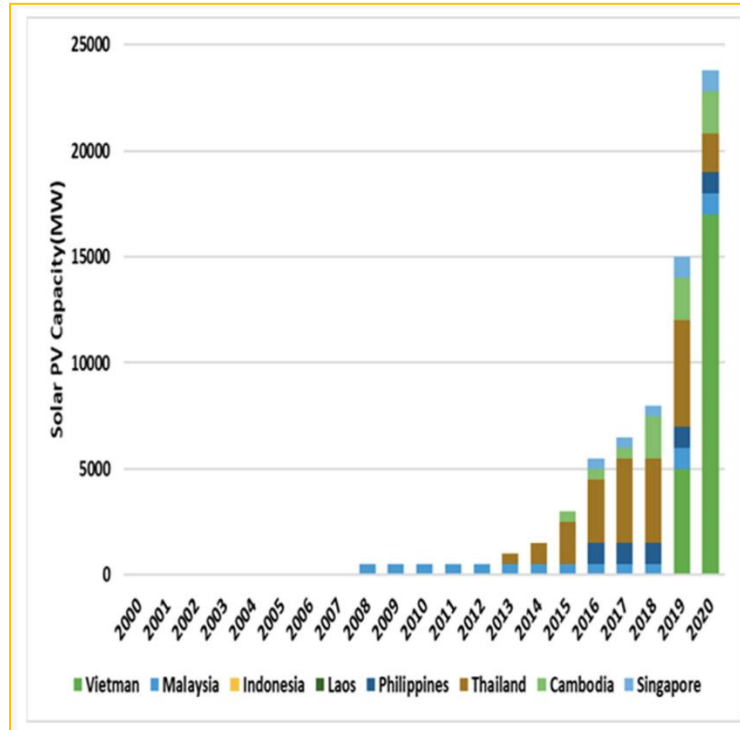


Figure: History of solar PV capacity in ASEAN²⁹²

The above figure depicts the notable increase in solar capacity in recent years, with it almost tripling from 2018 to 2020. Despite the potential for renewables, ASEAN member states struggle with construction and the transition to renewables due to the lack of infrastructure, policies and initiatives supporting renewables in the region, with significant slowdowns in their current construction projects.²⁹³ Other initiatives Southeast Asian countries are pursuing for cleaner energy are cross-border transmission lines for power sharing, forecasted to eventually generate

²⁹⁰ Mukherji, "ASEAN Renewable Energy Sector Gets Boost from China's Solar Projects."

²⁹¹ Mukherji, "ASEAN Renewable Energy Sector Gets Boost from China's Solar Projects."

²⁹² Fahim, "An Evaluation of ASEAN Renewable Energy Path to Carbon Neutrality."

²⁹³ Mukherji, "ASEAN Renewable Energy Sector Gets Boost from China's Solar Projects."

power equivalent to what “33 nuclear power plants could produce in a year”, with the goal of weaning Southeast Asian countries off coal and fossil fuels.²⁹⁴ Progress has stalled due to technical barriers and political mistrust, however ASEAN member states are recognizing the importance for the transition to cleaner energy as the demand for electricity has increased. However, building a power sector is an expensive investment, with a predicted minimum requirement of \$280 billion.²⁹⁵

Southeast Asia is a big investment target for China in terms of renewable energy as there is an increased need for electricity and cleaner energy sources in Southeast Asia, as well as the geographical proximity of the actors. Considering the circumstances, the US should leverage its partnership with India and Japan to connect ASEAN with cleaner energy sources to meet their energy needs, and to push for a less China reliant ASEAN. In 2020, only 14.2% of ASEAN’s energy mix was renewables,²⁹⁶ as they are significantly reliant on energy from fossil fuels, coal, and oil. ASEAN struggles to harness the region’s potential for renewable energy and has only installed an energy capacity of 26.6 GW for solar, and 6.8 GW for wind, only accounting for less than 1% of the region’s solar and wind potential.²⁹⁷

HUMAN SECURITY

ASEAN holds human rights and security as an important value and advocates for an equal, participatory, and “inclusive society through the structures of discrimination which drive poverty and inequality.”²⁹⁸ They take preventative approaches to addressing issues in the humanitarian, public health, regional and international sectors²⁹⁹ and continue to work to establish mechanisms to address problems through committees such as the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and other organizations. Despite working to best prevent threats to human security,

²⁹⁴ Ghosal and Milko, “Climate Change and the Shift to Cleaner Energy Push Southeast Asia to Finally Start Sharing Power.”

²⁹⁵ Ghosal and Milko, “Climate Change and the Shift to Cleaner Energy Push Southeast Asia to Finally Start Sharing Power.”

²⁹⁶ Wan, “Southeast Asia Looks to Renewable Power for Energy Security.”

²⁹⁷ Setyawati and Suryadi, “ASEAN’s Solar and Wind Growth Slowed Last Year, despite Huge Potential.”

²⁹⁸ Association of Southeast Asian Nations, “ASEAN Human Rights Outlook.”

²⁹⁹ Association of Southeast Asian Nations, “ASEAN Human Rights Outlook.”

the public health and human security concerns are widespread and complex, making it difficult to stay ahead of the issues. The US established the US Agency for International Development, (USAID), to provide technical assistance to ASEAN groups to promote regional cooperation on topics such as “human rights, transnational crime, disaster preparedness and management, and trade facilitation” for a more stable and secure Asia.³⁰⁰ A big focus of US support for ASEAN’s human security also backs equality through women’s equality initiatives. As detailed in the one-year review of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, the US strongly supports ASEAN’s goals of equal opportunities for the women in the region.

ASEAN has made steps to improve their health and security response strategy recently due to their struggle to address the COVID-19 pandemic in the early stages. ASEAN held many meetings to determine next steps when addressing COVID-19 but was not fast enough to “deliver tangible results,” resulting in increased infections.³⁰¹ Member countries’ ability to address health emergencies rely on their individual capacity to treat infections, and many member nations are much less equipped than others. Despite early ineffectiveness in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN has worked to create a more effective system by expanding their remaining COVID-19 response fund, a fund they created during the pandemic for member states to procure pandemic supplies in preparation for future pandemics.³⁰² ASEAN still continues to struggle with addressing human security issues due to the breadth of the issue and the multiple actors involved.

³⁰⁰ US. Agency for International Development, “Partnering with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN): Document.”

³⁰¹ Bhattacharya, “ASEAN’s Divided Response to Covid-19.”

³⁰² Shofa, “ASEAN Expands Covid-19 Fund to Prep against Future Pandemics.”

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

GENERAL

- Strengthen existing partnerships with ASEAN and its individual member states and respect ASEAN Centrality in the Indo-Pacific
- Avoid forcing ASEAN into picking sides between the US and China, forcing military cooperation, or exacerbating intra-ASEAN differences, instead, support areas of cooperation such as security and maritime issues, and act as a consistent economic partner as an alternative to China
- Build and maintain favor with ASEAN nations through earnest support of ASEAN goals and development
- Utilize the Quad to work with ASEAN to ensure a “free and open Indo-Pacific,” deliver humanitarian services, and build global and regional connections

ECONOMIC

- Continue to advance public and private investment in ASEAN by the US and its regional allies to increase regional prosperity and infrastructure and to provide alternatives to the BRI, promote ASEAN as a destination for investment diversification outside of China, and support and implement legislation and trade deals friendly to ASEAN nations
- Support ASEAN nations in the South China Sea to enforce their rights to their own EEZs, ensure open shipping and maritime commerce in disputed waters, and stand by the US’s commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific

MARITIME

- Back the 2016 UNCLOS ruling on the South China Sea while avoiding widespread militarization that would endanger the lives of those in the region and threaten the widespread economic and political consequences of open conflict with China
- Continue to expand the many collaborations and investments that the US and US companies make with ASEAN and its member states in the maritime realm
- Recognize ASEAN Centrality and avoid unilateral efforts undermining ASEAN nations

MILITARY

- Support the implementation of the ASEAN Political-Security community to enhance solidarity and alignment among ASEAN members.
- Encourage securitization with an emphasis on unity and de-escalation without rapid militarization, which results in distrust between ASEAN members
- Continue working with outside allies and partners such as the Quad, AUKUS, and NATO to secure the region while maintaining respect for ASEAN Centrality and sovereignty

CYBERSECURITY & TECHNOLOGY

- Continue participating and collaborating in Cyber Policy Dialogues and training programs with Singapore, India and the rest of the Quad
- Increase information sharing and training with ASEAN to build their infrastructure, and build more trust between ASEAN and the US, as ASEAN struggles to establish infrastructure and talent to maintain an effective cyber realm

ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY

- Create an energy and solar power distribution and cooperation initiative between India and ASEAN utilizing India's increasing solar production,³⁰³ and capabilities,³⁰⁴ which can benefit ASEAN and the Quad relations, as well be a gateway for future cooperations between the organizations
- Create initiatives and cooperation with ASEAN to support energy infrastructure construction for smoother transition to renewable energy

HUMAN SECURITY

- Continue aid through USAID to support ASEAN to address human security, especially when it comes to international issues such as drug and trafficking
- Initiate more targeted initiatives with input from ASEAN as to where more focus should be

³⁰³ Invest India, "India's Solar Power Revolution: Leading the Way in Renewable Energy."

³⁰⁴ Zeniewski and Singh, India Energy Outlook 2021 World Energy Outlook Special Report, page 12.

THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

BACKGROUND

The diplomatic and economic relationship between the United States and the Pacific Island nations in Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia is declining as the People's Republic of China has increased its presence and influence in the region. Previously, the United States engaged in the region on a more impactful level, particularly with the Marshall Islands, the countries of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau. For many years, the United States lost sight of the strategic importance of these nations which has allowed China to gain more favor with the Solomon Islands and Kiribati. Some Pacific Island nations are home to American military bases and provide a strategic location that facilitates agile combat deployment of the United States Air Force if required, facilitating the protection of important allies such as Japan and the Republic of Korea.

The diplomatic and economic relationship between the United States and the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau is shaped by the interactions during and after the second world war, the establishment of United Nations Trust Territories, and the Compacts of Free Association (COFA). With the COFA being approved by congress in 1986 and ratified by Palau in 1994, the United States provides security and financial aid to these nations in exchange for the exclusive right to maintain and operate United States military bases on their islands.³⁰⁵ This agreement reestablished the connection between the United States and these island nations after the end of the United Nations Trust Territories in 1994, COFA allowing citizens of the islands to live and work in the United States without visas.

The relationship with the Pacific Island nations is relatively strained as seen in the way the United States treated its long-term relationship with the Marshall Islands, starting in the Second World War.³⁰⁶ The utilization of the Marshall Islands for over 67 nuclear tests with compensation packages deemed by Marshallese citizens to be insufficient led to frustration with the US³⁰⁷ The

³⁰⁵ "Compacts of Free Association | US. Department of the Interior."

³⁰⁶ "US-Marshall Islands Relations | US. Department of State"

³⁰⁷ Hart, "A Closer Look at the US-Marshall Islands Relationship."

dismissive treatment of the resentment of the Marshallese citizens set a precedent of frustrations by the United States overlooking its partners and allies in the Pacific Islands, an example would be the dispute within the United States as to budget amounts for this critical region. This resulted in the 2023 September grant of \$16 million for the Federated States of Micronesia while Palau and the Marshall Islands received no new economic assistance.³⁰⁸ Although some services were continued, such as air transportation, this decision by congress risks damaging the relationships with the island nations as well as leaving them open to possible economic coercion by China.

China increases their favor with citizens of the Pacific Islands through small projects which more visibly affect the daily lives of their citizens.³⁰⁹ This requires an understanding of the concerns of the nation as well as collaboration to meet the needs of the people. Some of the values which are important to the majority of the countries in the region are regional cooperation, the celebration and respect of diversity and heritage, safe communities, and especially the protection of the environment. Understanding these values and taking on small, local projects would benefit the US as it would improve its reputation among citizens of these nations, as it did for China.

Outside actors are increasingly influencing the geopolitics of the Pacific Islands. As there have been increased investments from actors such as China, India, Australia, and the United States, there are concerns among Pacific Island leadership about interference in the foreign policy and legislative decisions made by the island nations.³¹⁰ With the increasing roles of China and the United States specifically, there are some concerns with the utilization of the region to exercise hard power in the duel for influence between the two. A fate which the Pacific Islands are attempting to avoid as many adopt a policy of “Friends to all and Enemies to none” while accepting financial packages from both contenders with the idea of improving their nations rather than choosing one side over the other.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Schardein, “How Washington’s Budget Fights Are Affecting Three Critical Pacific Island States”

³⁰⁹ Li, “The Belt and Road Initiative in Oceania: Understanding the People’s Republic of China’s Strategic Interests and Engagement in the Pacific”

³¹⁰ Wallis and Batley, “How Does the ‘Pacific’ Fit into the ‘Indo-Pacific?’”

³¹¹ Sakai, “PacNet #2 – Can the Pacific Islands Remain ‘Friends to All’ amid US-China Competition?”

The United States has worked to increase its diplomatic and economic engagement with the Pacific Islands in the past few years, recognizing the issue of the increasing influence China has over the region. The reopening of the embassy in the Solomon Islands after it had been closed was a great step in demonstrating a level of interest in the region that goes beyond the scope of military engagement. Such engagement emphasizes to these nations the importance of the region to the United States and the commitment to support the development of Pacific Island nations. The US-Pacific Island Forum Summit 2023 announced funding for new programs within the Pacific Islands, the recognition and establishing diplomatic relations with the Cook Islands and Niue, USAID working with local organizations to deliver more effective and pacific-informed aid, standing behind Pacific Island nations that may lose their country status due to sea level rise, utilization of USAID to deal with the impacts of climate change, and more.³¹² All of these emphasize more cooperation with the United States, with a focus on dialogue. Through engaging in discussions with Pacific Islands leaders, they are involved in the decision-making process and are working with the United States rather than for the United States. There has been a concern within the Pacific Islands of the past regarding larger states not working with Pacific Island leaders but instead utilizing the power they hold of the Pacific Islands. This led to suspicion of manipulation by even Australia, but by increasing the engagement of the United States with the leaders of Pacific Islands the relationship will be seen as more of a partnership.³¹³

The 2050 Blue Pacific Strategy highlights the most important issues as climate change, diversity among the islands, open and honest relationships, innovation, and knowledge.³¹⁴ The US is paying respect to the Pacific Islands by involving those Allies geographically close to the Islands, such as Australia and Japan to collaborate in the development of environmentally based programs, infrastructure, and the economy.

³¹² "FACT SHEET: Enhancing the US-Pacific Islands Partnership."

³¹³ Wallis and Batley, "How Does the 'Pacific' Fit into the 'Indo-Pacific'?"

³¹⁴ "2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent."

ECONOMY

Despite the presence of the United States in the region since the Second World War, the US economic and diplomatic ties to some of the Pacific Island nations have been declining while China has been establishing connections with many countries in the region. China has done so through diplomacy and the promise of economic assistance, such as in the case of the Solomon Islands. The agreement between these two nations includes cooperation on disaster response, humanitarian assistance, and efforts to maintain social order, in exchange for permanent Chinese military bases within the Solomon Islands.³¹⁵ For China, the importance of the Pacific Islands is clear. It seeks a foothold in the region to further its Belt and Road Initiative, also enabling it to develop an air freight hub along a route linking Asia with Central and South America. Thus, it makes efforts to deepen the relationship with all ten countries with which it has diplomatic relations. In return for the support of Papua New Guinea, Niue, Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Vanuatu, Fiji, the Cook Islands, Tonga, the Solomon Islands, and Kiribati, China invested in their economies. This investment has taken many forms, ranging from direct investment from Chinese enterprises to large- and small-scale projects taken on with the goal of improving life on the islands as well as constructing infrastructure for the BRI.³¹⁶ This investment without preliminary requirements has improved the relations between China and these nations, particularly those who Beijing approved as tourist destinations.³¹⁷

China's investment strategies in the region have resulted in greater pressure on the Pacific Island nations to agree to the BRI. One example of this pressure is Palau, a member of COFA. There was a sharp increase in the number of tourists from China to Palau in a period of a little over a year, from 21,706 visitors in 2014 to 91,174 visitors in 2015.¹⁵⁶ This increase was due to state run tourist packages out of China, although Palau never received Approved Destination Status from Beijing. This sudden influx to a nation that depends largely on tourism demonstrated the benefits that would be available to Palau if they established diplomatic relations with China, rather

³¹⁵ Liu, "What the China-Solomon Islands Pact Means for the US and South Pacific"

³¹⁶ Liu, "What the China-Solomon Islands Pact Means for the US and South Pacific"

³¹⁷ Li, "The Belt and Road Initiative in Oceania: Understanding the People's Republic of China's Strategic Interests and Engagement in the Pacific"

than Taiwan which currently still has ties with Palau. This influx of tourists ended rather soon as in 2017 Beijing ordered tour operators to stop sending tourists to the islands, resulting in a sharp decrease in Chinese tourists the following year. This demonstration of financial influence in the region explains why most Pacific Island nations have cut ties with Taiwan in favor of the PRC.³¹⁸

MILITARY

Since the Pacific Islands themselves do not have extensive military forces of their own, several nations rely on the United States, and a few China, for protection. The United States is responsible for the defense of those nations in the COFA agreement in exchange for the exclusive operation of American military bases on the Islands. The maintenance of these bases is strategically important as they create a launch point for the American Air Force within the region, allowing the United States to respond quickly if any conflict were to break out or threaten its allies. The PRC recognized this strategic importance when it signed the 2023 agreement with the Solomon Islands allowing them to establish a base there. China agreed to respond to any calls for military or police assistance by the Solomon Islands, offering riot gear and further police training.³¹⁹

CYBERSECURITY & TECHNOLOGY

The state of cybersecurity within the Pacific Islands is a factor for consideration as it provides an opportunity to deepen the partnership between the US and the island nations. In an attempt to combat cyber-attacks by independent and state actors, the Pacific Islands have multiple organizations that specialize in cyber security. The Pacific Islands Law Officers Network is working with the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime to create a framework for regional cooperation and collaboration on investigating and prosecuting cybercrimes. Another organization is the Oceania Cyber Security Centre, which works with Pacific Island nations to create a

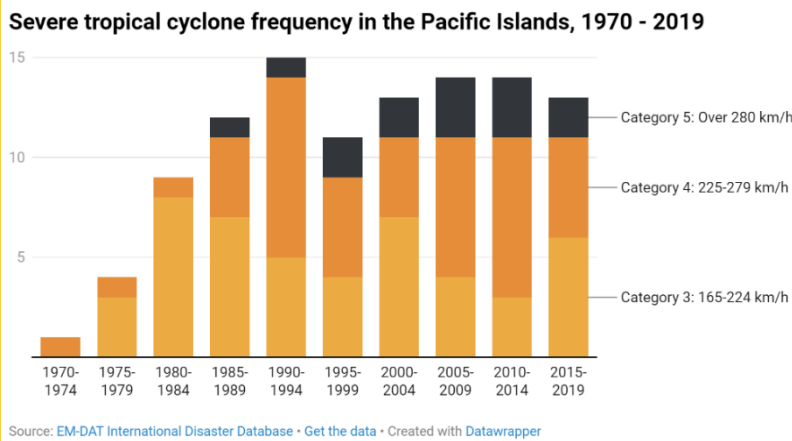
³¹⁸ Cameron, "Palau Faces the Dragon | Lowy Institute"

³¹⁹ Liu, "What the China-Solomon Islands Pact Means for the US and South Pacific."

framework that works to protect national security interests as well as the populations more vulnerable to cyber-attacks.³²⁰

ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY

One major concern of Pacific Island Leaders is the diversion of attention away from climate change.³²¹ The Boe Declaration on Regional security has declared climate change to be the greatest threat to the region as it impacts the living situation, food security, livelihood, and general security of island residents.³²² As this is an important topic within the Pacific Islands, a better understanding of the issue is necessary to determine what role the United States should play as it attempts to build resilience in the Pacific Islands. The impacts of climate change affect almost every part of life for the Pacific Islands, with rising sea levels, increasing salinization, dwindling freshwater supply, more intense frequent tropical storms, flooding, droughts, coral reef bleaching, and ocean acidification. In particular, the low-lying atoll nations are at higher risk, including Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands. This impact of rising sea levels has affected populations greatly although there have been effective regional plans for climate-related relocations.³²³ As Pacific Island nations



call for international support and commitment to end climate change this is a great opportunity for the US to gain more favor in the region by supporting the environmental impact plans within the various Pacific Island nations.

Figure: Frequency of severe tropical cyclones in the Pacific Islands from 1970 to 2019³²⁴

³²⁰ Cameron, "Palau Faces the Dragon | Lowy Institute"

³²¹ Sakai, "PacNet #2 – Can the Pacific Islands Remain 'Friends to All' amid US-China Competition?"

³²² "Boe Declaration on Regional Security – Pacific Islands Forum"

³²³ Cameron, "Palau Faces the Dragon | Lowy Institute"

³²⁴ Duke and De Gorostiza, "Measuring the Climate Cost to Pacific Development | Lowy Institute"

Another concern of the region is natural disasters, which the Pacific Islands are particularly vulnerable to. One impact of climate change is the increase in frequency of natural disasters. These disasters end in millions of dollars of damage. In Tonga for example the damage done by a volcanic eruption was equivalent to 18.5% of the country's GDP in 2022.³²⁵ Not only do the disasters place a financial burden on the island nations but the effects of climate change impact food security, as fish make up 70% of the protein intake in many Pacific Island diets. As well as impacting livelihoods and economic growth by affecting tourism, aquaculture, and agriculture on the islands. As a result, each nation created its own pledge to move towards reducing emissions and advocating for addressing climate change among partners.

HUMAN SECURITY

With the increase of displacement due to climate change, the relocation and accommodation of displaced individuals has become a concern to the Pacific Islands. In many cultures of the Pacific Islands the concept of land and belonging are intertwined and have great cultural significance, making migration a very impactful factor for the population.³²⁶ Australia understood this and took action in entering the Falepili Union with Tuvalu that allowed Tuvalu citizens affected by climate change to reside, work, and study in Australia as well as participate in multiple projects around Tuvalu. In exchange, Tuvalu may not enter any other international security arrangements without discussion and agreement with Australia. A measure which Australia implemented in an attempt to curb the influence of China in the region.³²⁷ The displacement of individuals is an influential concern for Pacific Island nations and the US could gain more favor with the region by assisting those who are displaced through a similar agreement allowing more Pacific Islanders impacted by climate change to seek refuge within the United States.

³²⁵ Ober and Waters, "Pacific Island Nations Seek Climate Solutions Outside of COP28"

³²⁶ Mortreux, "Migration, Evidence and Climate Change in the Pacific | East Asia Forum"

³²⁷ Ober and Waters, "Pacific Island Nations Seek Climate Solutions Outside of COP28"

US SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

“Under current international refugee law, those displaced by environmental factors are not eligible for protection as they ‘do not meet the legal requirements to be considered ‘Convention Refugees.’” In 2021, the Biden Administration ordered officials from multiple government agencies to produce a report on the effects of Climate Induced Migration, and the implications of this on current US immigration policy. This report was criticized by NGOs for not offering any policy recommendations, and instead just stated what was already known by many. While the United States *can* award foreign nationals from a specific country Temporary Protected Status, this is not the same as asylum. In order to change the framework that the US immigration policy abides by to award asylum in the sole event of environmental events, the legislature would need to agree on a change. While Republicans traditionally favor stricter immigration policies, with more open immigration policies being favored by Democrats, revising immigration policy to a state where those facing environmental events in their home country could claim asylum in the US would absolutely be a massive source of conflict in both the US House of Representatives and the Senate.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to engage with the leaders of the Pacific Island nations through the US-Pacific Islands Forum Summits and send a representative of the United States to the Pacific Island Forum discussions
- Increase smaller economic programs that focus on more locally based issues within the island nations through USAID in collaboration with individuals from the region who are working with USAID
- Create a program to assist individuals that are forced to relocate due to climate change by allowing more Pacific Island citizens to find refuge within the US, especially those in more vulnerable Islands such as Kiribati and Tuvalu as well as those who are a part of COF

Prospects

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INTRODUCTION

The term "prospects" conveys a broader meaning than "partners" and "allies" and encompasses a more diverse range of relationships. While most of the influential actors in the United States' Indo-Pacific strategy are partners or allies, some countries listed in this section do not explicitly fit these categories. Nevertheless, it is crucial to consider these countries' roles in the Indo-Pacific region and to leverage their relationships to both their and the US's interests.

Although not mentioned in the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, the Middle East, Pakistan, and Africa are interconnected regions that have significant implications for the broader Indo-Pacific region. PRC has focused much of its BRI efforts on these areas, using them as gateways to Europe to achieve its vision of a New Silk Road. In addition, the PRC's reliance on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for oil and natural gas imports, Pakistan's strategic land and maritime position, and the economic obligations created by the BRI in African nations have a significant impact on the Indo-Pacific region. The Middle East, Pakistan, and Africa have the potential to become crucial players in the Indo-Pacific economy and political landscape. The United States must develop meaningful relationships with these regions to advance mutual interests and promote stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

The PRC is the most important and influential actor in the Indo-Pacific strategy. Thus, much of the US's current and future strategic decisions will be designed to counter Chinese activities that are detrimental to US regional interests. The rapid growth of the PRC poses a challenge to US primacy and, in some instances, the stability of the Indo-Pacific or the world as a whole. Nonetheless, China's economic might, growing political influence, and geographical position offer tremendous potential for positive cooperation and development with the US. Given the possibility of both increased collaboration and worsening relations, economic conflict, and international distrust, it is best to address China in the "Prospects" section.

BROAD STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations provide a strategic direction that the US should take towards these different actors. While the implementation of these recommendations differ by country, the overall purpose is the same. The United States should prioritize four major categories when addressing issues related to these prospects: economic cooperation, climate and energy, public relations, and strengthening relationships with regional organizations.

Regarding economic cooperation, the prospect's regional boundaries include the world's most heavily used maritime trade routes and critical chokepoints. As a result, the US must work towards building and strengthening economic relationships with the countries in this region. This will help promote overall growth and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. When addressing climate and energy issues, the US should assist developing nations in implementing policies that can help combat climate change. Investing in green energy projects in these regions can help diversify their energy economies and promote a cleaner environment. Doing this could serve the dual purpose of increasing goodwill towards the US. Public affairs play a crucial role in cultivating positive sentiment towards US policy and values and ensuring the security of a free and open Indo-Pacific. Increasing humanitarian and cultural exchange programs, particularly student exchange programs, can help individuals in the region better understand US values and culture. This will ultimately promote a positive relationship between the United States and the region. Lastly, the US must facilitate the interaction between regional organizations to ensure that they are not too reliant on China and its growing influence.

MIDDLE EAST & PAKISTAN

INTRODUCTION

Indo-Pacific actors have increasingly recognized the Middle East as a pivotal region in global geopolitics and trade, particularly in the energy sector. China's expanding influence, highlighted by its status as the top trading partner and the most significant FDI provider in the Middle East, plays a crucial role in this dynamic. Evidencing this shift, the GCC witnessed over \$330 billion in two-way trade with China in 2021.³²⁸ Beijing's economic and political engagement in the region has further intensified with the implementation of the BRI. The US Indo-Pacific Strategy needs to include Pakistan and the GCC states as the two of the most important partners to further its objectives in the Indo-Pacific.

The member states of the GCC - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates - established the organization on 25 May 1981 in Abu Dhabi. They aimed to achieve unity and a harmonized approach in various fields; such as economics, health, tourism, commerce, and administrative affairs, as outlined in Article 4 of the GCC Charter.³²⁹ These states share religious, cultural, and kinship ties, and are further consolidated by their geographic proximity. The formation of the GCC was a strategic response to the dual imperatives of regional security and economic development. To have a comprehensive grasp of their positions and decisions in the rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region, it is crucial to understand the GCC's foundational mission and the underlying cultural and historical ties that bind its member states.

Pakistan's strategic location and intricate relationships with major global powers make it a pivotal player in the Indo-Pacific. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as part of the BRI, deepens Pakistan's partnership with China and has significant economic and strategic implications, concerning the Chinese-built-infrastructure within Pakistan leased back to China.³³⁰

³²⁸ Jash, "Saudi-Iran Deal: A Test Case of China's Role as an International Mediator."

³²⁹ GCC, "Objectives."

³³⁰ Hussain, "THE US INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN."

The US Indo-Pacific strategy seeks to maintain its influence amidst China's expanding global reach, and therefore, the collaboration between Pakistan and China is a focal point. Simultaneously, Pakistan's historical ties with the US complicate its role in the region. The US strategy emphasizes strengthening India's position, particularly through alliances like the Quad and AUKUS, which have direct repercussions for Pakistan. This intensifies the Indo-Pakistan rivalry and adds pressure to the Sino-Pak relationship. Pakistan's role in regional security issues, especially concerning Afghanistan, Iran, and the broader Middle East, further underscores its strategic importance. The balance that Pakistan maintains in its relationships with China and the US is crucial for its own national security interests and has broader implications for regional stability in the Indo-Pacific arena.

The primary objective of analyzing Pakistan's and GCC's perspectives in the Indo-Pacific region is to highlight the importance of recognizing regions vital to the US Indo-Pacific strategy. By gaining an understanding of their interests and roles, the US can create effective policies to strengthen engagement with these countries. This section aims to provide insights into how these Pakistan perceives the BRI and CPEC; while analyzing military, maritime, energy, technology, and environmental domains for the GCC..

GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL

MILITARY AND SECURITY

In 1985, the GCC established the Joint Peninsula Shield Forces, a joint military command, as a security cooperation mechanism to deter external aggression.³³¹ As of 2018, the force comprises land, navy, and air units, as well as approximately 100,000 active-duty members, half of which are from Saudi Arabia.³³² General Abdulaziz Ahmed Al Balawi, a Saudi national, is the force's current commander, indicating Saudi Arabia's informal control over the command structure.

³³¹ GCC, "The GCC Joint Military Commander and the GCC Assistant Secretary General for Military Affairs Visit the Joint Peninsula Shield Force Command."

³³² Farouk, "The Middle East Strategic Alliance Has a Long Way to Go."

The GCC prioritizes deterring threats to its energy and maritime infrastructure through preventing regional conflict and terrorism, and has historically responded to incidents in both Yemen and Kuwait. Increasing joint military action and strengthening the joint military command is a priority among GCC member states.³³³ In January 2024, GCC members responded to the US-led coalition strikes of Houthi Rebel positions in Yemen, due to attacks on container ships passing through the Red Sea. Saudi Arabia called for de-escalation and resolution. Although they stood alongside the coalition in the name of further global security, their implications reaffirm their overall discontent of direct US involvement in their region.³³⁴

As of February 14, 2023, the US and GCC established an updated framework that builds on past US-GCC Military Working Groups. This framework allows the GCC states to receive more security infrastructure. Currently, the GCC does not have any formal multi-organizational military alliances and is not planning to do so. The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) with NATO allows for formal cooperation between states that are willing to join the ICI, which includes Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain with Oman and Saudi Arabia occasionally participating in selective activities. The agreement, however, has not been formalized, and each partner is free to choose the pace and extent of their cooperation with NATO.³³⁵

MARITIME

The GCC has expressed an increased interest in enhancing its maritime strategies to secure the waterways of the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz.³³⁶ The Red Sea witnesses the passage of 12% of all global trade, 30% of container shipments, and almost all trade out of GCC member states. Any disturbance to these routes poses a grave threat to the economies of GCC member states. The GCC aims to strengthen its maritime governance through establishing a company for marine navigation aids and developing safety rules for small-load vessels that are not subject to international conventions.³³⁷ These strategies outlined by the GCC aim to further consolidate the

³³³ Asharq Al Awsat, “GCC Joint Defense Council Discusses in Muscat Joint Military Cooperation.”

³³⁴ Asharq Al Awsat, “Saudi Arabia Voices Concern over Developments in Red Sea, Urges De-Escalation.”

³³⁵ Alvargonzález, “Topic: Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI).”

³³⁶ Tran, “What attacks in the Red Sea could mean for the global economy.”

³³⁷ GCC, “Achievements - Sea Transportation.”

already existing policies of their organizations, solidifying their cooperation and efficiency. It also indicates the GCC's need to leverage their states' resources to create a private entity that can assist in the maritime infrastructure of the region. With regard to China's expanding influence, the GCC welcomes the new Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI), the maritime component of the BRI. This initiative seeks to expand China-favored maritime infrastructure in the GCC states,³³⁸ increase the shipping volume of goods and services to the region, and also increase fuel exports.

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

The GCC member states have cooperated in the field of energy by creating a strategic plan for the use, trade, and marketing of petroleum, alongside enacting environmental energy initiatives and laws on mining.³³⁹ The member states must adopt unified policies in the development, procurement, and research of all oil, gas, and natural resources to achieve “optimal exploitation” while acknowledging the need to transition to a greener economy.³⁴⁰ Although the GCC’s main fuel export is oil, the IMF predicts a slow decline in the future of oil consumption, estimating that “primary non-oil deficits are expected to decrease to 24% in 2028”, suggesting that GCC countries will become less reliant economically on selling oil.³⁴¹ “This is a result of the push for new energy sources, which have forced the heavily oil-dependent countries of the GCC to diversify to new technologies like green energy. Diversifying their GDPs with new types of energy and other economic sectors is a significant priority for GCC states due to their economy’s heavy reliance on the oil industry, which accounted for an average of 37% of the total GDP of member states in 2016-2020.”³⁴²

The GCC's oil exports are of great significance to the energy of Indo-Pacific countries, particularly China. The BRI is heavily investing in this region to improve infrastructure for the

³³⁸ Fulton and Blanchard, “The Gulf Cooperation Council’s “Visions” of Maritime Silk Road Initiative Cooperation.”

³³⁹ GCC, “Cooperation in the Field of Energy - Achievements.”

³⁴⁰ GCC, “Cooperation in the Field of Energy - Objectives.”

³⁴¹ Staff of the International Monetary Fund, “Gulf Cooperation Council: Economic Prospects and Policy Challenges for the GCC Countries.”

³⁴² BNP Paribas, “GULF COUNTRIES AND THE CHALLENGE OF THE ENERGY TRANSITION.”

transportation of oil from these countries to mainland China, which is used to produce much-needed fuel for Chinese industrial plants. Due to these energy needs, China is making a significant shift toward the Middle East, making this region a vital factor for ensuring the development of Indo-Pacific Nations. Notably, China has invested \$10 billion into the Yanbu Oil Refinery in Saudi Arabia, and \$10 billion for a new industrial city in the UAE's Khalifa Industrial Zone near Abu Dhabi.³⁴³ The GCC is increasingly open to these investments due to the US's decreasing dependence on their oil, and is looking towards China to purchase its surplus. Since 2022, the GCC accounted for around 41% of total crude exports into China, which is up 35% from 2012.³⁴⁴

CYBERSECURITY

The GCC has achieved advanced positions in the sphere of international cybersecurity due to its vast infrastructure, funding, and achievements.³⁴⁵ The GCC's cyber capabilities revolve around its goal of protecting critical infrastructure and sensitive information. In 2023, the GCC faced four major incidents that highlighted the dangers of cyber attacks against it. These incidents included the compromise of the Hayya Card system during the 2023 World Cup, an unauthorized sale for a Saudi petroleum company, leaks on Qatar oil and gas companies as well as home ownership databases in Dubai.³⁴⁶ These incidents raised concerns about the growing threat of cyber attacks against the GCC. Within the GCC, the projected Internet of Things (IoT) devices (sensors, gadgets, appliances, machines, surveillance equipment, etc.) are expected to exceed one billion connections by the year 2030.³⁴⁷ This projection will create new and advanced vulnerabilities in the GCC's cybersecurity infrastructure. To address these challenges, the GCC is seeking to create new sophisticated cyber agreements with other security-based organizations to bolster its defense against cybercriminals and build relationships with stakeholders. Member states

³⁴³ Webster and Pelayo, "China is getting comfortable with the Gulf Cooperation Council. The West must pragmatically adapt to its growing regional influence."

³⁴⁴ Webster and Pelayo.

³⁴⁵ "HE GCCSG: The GCC Countries Achieved Advanced Positions Internationally in Cyber Security Indicators During the Recent Period, Reflecting the Leading Position of the GCC Countries Among the World's Countries in this Field."

³⁴⁶ Uzun, "Gulf Countries Threat Landscape Report: Cyber Security Posture of the GCC Countries."

³⁴⁷ Haddad, et al., "7 Digital Trends That GCC Leaders Need To Know About."

will also heavily invest in cloud infrastructure services, with the cloud's market value estimated to be around \$6 billion by the year 2025. An upgraded cloud infrastructure consisting of 5G networks and digital transformations will ensure the faster development of GCC member states. In summary, the GCC is taking proactive measures to enhance its cybersecurity infrastructure to protect its critical infrastructure and sensitive information.

HUMAN SECURITY

GCC's top priorities in human security are public health, employment, social welfare, and addressing the needs of marginalized communities. The UAE and Saudi Arabia have been actively investing in healthcare infrastructure and services, with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 including significant reforms in healthcare, aiming to increase the private sector's contribution to healthcare expenditure from 25% to 35% by 2030.³⁴⁸ The UAE has been focusing on advanced health technologies and has allocated substantial resources to public health, as is evident in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Migrant workers from South and Southeast Asian countries comprise around 70% of the GCC's total workforce, reaching as high as 95% of the workforce in Qatar's.³⁴⁹ GCC member states rely heavily on these 30 million migrants to work industrial jobs that pay low

US SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The United States is Saudi Arabia's largest economic partner. Similarly, the Saudi government is one of the largest customers of American defense companies. However, recent human rights violations in the nation have started to cause policymakers and legislators alike to question the role Saudi Arabia should play in the US foreign policy. Generally, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Washington has been strong enough to the point where calls to break ties with the nation have not had much effect on policymakers. President Biden visited the nation in 2022, and despite calls from Democrat policymakers in 2023 to cut all support to the nation, the United States still takes part in relations with the country. It is likely that further agreements with the Saudi government would be welcomed by the United States, but not necessarily pursued, barring any further escalations in Saudi Arabia's treatment of its citizens.

³⁴⁸ Alasiri and Mohammed, "Healthcare Transformation in Saudi Arabia: An Overview Since the Launch of Vision 2030."

³⁴⁹ Huckstep and Dempster, "After the Petro-dollars: Gulf Migration in a Climate Change Future."

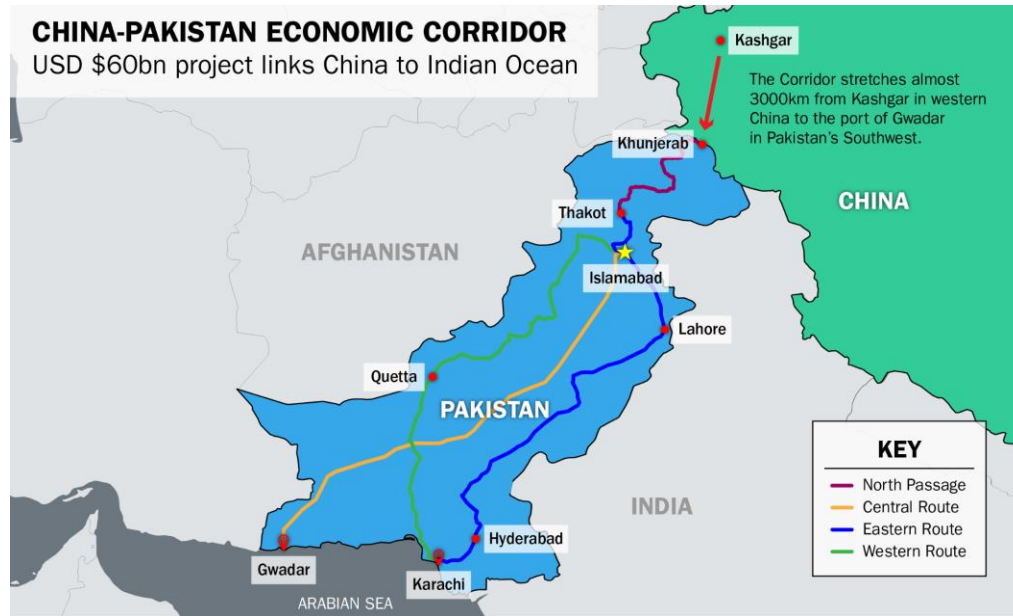
wages to maximize profit and generally populate the workforce needed to exploit their natural resources. The attainability of these workers is a top priority for GCC member nations because their economies would most likely crash without them. In the past five years, new policies have emerged that allow for the extended residency of migrants and enable them to have long-term upward economic mobility.³⁵⁰

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a robust maritime security program with the GCC, involving joining training exercises, intelligence sharing, and coordinated naval patrols, focused on safeguarding vital maritime routes in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the Red Sea and Strait of Hormuz
- Establish a partnership aimed at diversifying energy sources in the Indo-Pacific region to reduce reliance on China, involve US investments and technology transfers in renewable energy projects within the GCC, promote GCC as alternative energy suppliers to the Indo-Pacific nations to diminish the region's energy dependence on exporting to China.
- Spearhead an infrastructure development fund in partnership with the GCC to finance infrastructure projects in the region, provide competition
- Establish a joint cybersecurity task force with the GCC. This would focus on protecting critical digital infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region, offering training, resources, and technological support to counter cyber threats emanating from bad actors.
- Create a diplomatic engagement program that involves the US and GCC states working together to strengthen ties with key countries in the Indo-Pacific, foster closer diplomatic relations, enhance trade agreements, build security partnerships that align with US and GCC interests to provide a counterbalance to China's diplomatic influence in the region.

³⁵⁰ Al Ansari, "Intergenerational Migrants in the Gulf: An Overlooked Labor Force Resource."

PAKISTAN



<https://360info.org/pakistan-pays-high-price-for-china-corridor/>

CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

In 2015, China established the CPEC as part of its Silk Road Fund to expand regional connectivity and promote bilateral relations with Pakistan.³⁵¹ With an investment of around \$60-62 billion over a 15-year term, China funded 50 country-wide projects, including the construction of ports, power plants, highways, and an extension of the transportation networks by one thousand kilometers.³⁵²³⁵³ Over the past nine years, China has made significant investments in Pakistan's infrastructure, including the construction of ports, highways, and power plants. Pakistan has accumulated a tremendous debt to the Silk Road Fund, and the country is yet to make significant economic progress from the infrastructure projects. Nonetheless, at the Third Pakistan-China Think Tank Forum in 2023, Pakistani delegations noted that CPEC would create between 500,000

³⁵¹ CPEC, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Secretariat Official Website"

³⁵² Afzal, ""At all costs": How Pakistan and China control the narrative on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor."

³⁵³ Fazl-e-Haider, "China's big gamble in Pakistan: A 10-year scorecard for CPEC."

to 800,000 jobs by 2030, indicating that their outlook on the project is still favorable.³⁵⁴ Pakistani officials note that to make full use of CPEC, they need to address issues such as poverty, political instability, and unemployment. One of the most critical projects within CPEC is the port city of Gwadar, situated on the Arabian Sea only 208 nautical miles from Oman. China views this city as the gateway to the Middle East, and has invested significantly in its construction. China has a 40-year lease on the port, which has caused concern among GCC states. However, these states have started investing in Pakistan as well, recognizing the economic benefits of having a Chinese port so close to themselves. Despite being in debt, Pakistan sees China's investment as a win-win situation, as China provides the necessary funds and material products to modernize Pakistan's infrastructure while also achieving its economic agenda. Additionally, the newly constructed transportation systems create a strategic advantage for China, as oil shipments can bypass the "Malacca dilemma" and go through Gwadar and up through Pakistan to the East of China.³⁵⁵

THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION DILEMMA

The US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 led to a tumultuous relationship between Pakistan and the US. Following the raid on Osama Bin Laden in 2012, a Pew Research poll revealed that approximately 74% of Pakistanis largely view America as "the enemy."³⁵⁶ The US's actions in Afghanistan and drone attacks targeting terrorist cells within Pakistan's borders fueled this perception. These actions significantly influenced the Pakistani people's public opinion towards the US, resulting in deep-seated distrust of US policy.

In response to the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, Pakistan demanded recognition from the US for their "sacrifices" in fighting terrorism on the international stage.³⁵⁷ Prime Minister Imran Khan argued that the US should treat Pakistan as an ally and a sovereign state, claiming that the US had provided aid to Pakistan with the expectation of compliance with

³⁵⁴ ISSI Web Administrator, "Press Release "Third Pakistan-China Think Tank Forum focusing on the 'Decade of CPEC' held in Beijing."

³⁵⁵ Ahmad, "Gwadar: China's Future Gateway to the Middle East."

³⁵⁶ "Pakistani Public Opinion Ever More Critical of US"

³⁵⁷ Ahmad, "Issues and mistrust in US-Pakistan relations."

American directives. Following these events, authorities ousted Imran Khan from power and subjected him to a corruption trial, plunging Pakistani politics into turmoil.

Despite the deep-seated distrust sown within US-Pakistani relations, the US continues to engage in various humanitarian and diplomatic efforts in Pakistan through programs like the Peace Corps and the US Institute of Peace, among other organizations. These initiatives aim to mend and improve the bilateral relations between the two countries.

US SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The United States' involvement with Pakistan has largely been through military and humanitarian support so far. The US supplies Pakistan's military with a large portion of its military technology, and more recently donated more than 79 million COVID-19 doses to the nation. Economic support to the nation has dropped significantly since the Trump Administration, and in August of 2023, House Republicans pushed to ban the Department of Defense from supplying any aid to Pakistan as a result of the imprisonment of the former Pakistani Prime Minister. Further development of relations or support to Pakistan, depending on the kind, may raise party tensions between Republicans and Democrats throughout Washington. Also, the topic of US involvement in Pakistan is a large item of political debate for Pakistanis, and further involvement by the US, if not conducted carefully, may spur civil uprising within the nation.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Build New Relationships with the people of Pakistan:

- Use citizen diplomacy and US organizations to create connections with people on the ground in Pakistani citizens across the country, propose new Peace Corps Mission in more rural regions of Pakistan.

Support Industrial Development:

- Offer an alternative funding source from a US lender with competitive rates, due to China making huge gains in terms of strategic economic infrastructure in Pakistan.

Support Pakistan's Human Security:

- Provide new funding and programs to reduce poverty and help support employment campaigns within the country, increase non-military related aid to impoverished territories of Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

AFRICA

BACKGROUND:

Africa sits in a gray area between a fractured past and a hopeful, yet uncertain, future, serving at a crossroads in the modern efforts to develop and stabilize an interconnected world. As the rest of the world is slowly applying their national assets, trade, diplomatic efforts and economic strength into a shared vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Africa, particularly littoral and island nations, have to continue to fend for themselves despite sharing the same goals as those purported by the rest of the Indo-Pacific framework. The interests of many of the nations in Africa are in accord with those outlined in the American vision for the Indo-Pacific, with some fitting in perfectly, while others are likely to be directly affected by developments across the Indo-Pacific region. Sub-Saharan Africa lies along major sea lines of communication and trade in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden as well as the Atlantic Ocean.

In relation to the US Indo-Pacific strategy, Africa faces several challenges and opportunities: maritime security, the effects of the Belt and Road Initiative funding, and environmental issues from a growing energy demand and resource exploitation. As nations continue to modernize and develop industrially, socially, and infrastructurally, change will occur at an increasing pace. Therefore, it is imperative that the US addresses these issues now to prevent any adverse impacts. Shifting policy priorities have already become more and more apparent as the US has shifted its policy focus away from Europe toward the Indo-Pacific region. The nations that appear most ready to cooperate with a combined FOIP vision and those that align closely with the American FOIP outlook are Egypt, Djibouti, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Seychelles, Comoros, and Mauritius. These independent nations all share decent diplomatic relations with the US and have individually published or shared outlooks that echo those found in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific framework.

MARITIME SECURITY

While many African nations participate in international security frameworks in the Indian Ocean,³⁵⁸ they rarely operate together and have done little within their own capabilities to secure their own maritime borders to deter illicit activities in the region. Piracy and militaristic attacks on trade have become one of the most prevalent issues pertaining to Indian Ocean maritime security. Ongoing attacks on international trade off the coast of Yemen in the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb was a primary reason as to why the US has become militarily involved in the region, highlighting a need for increased maritime security in the hotspot regions along the Red Sea and along the coastlines of Somalia.³⁵⁹ Due to the increased US naval presence in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden and the ongoing fight against Al-Shabaab and pirates from Somalia, now is one of the best possible times to raise awareness for and impact change for the overall FOIP outlook.

Looking toward the broader Indian Ocean scale, it is important to note that the nations of Seychelles, Comoros, and Mauritius all share in diplomatic and trade agreements with the US. The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), in both Sub-Saharan Africa and the African island nations, has enabled preferable trade deals between the US and these geographic regions. In order to take advantage of these deals, maritime trade routes must be secure to facilitate this relationship. A couple of these nations already hold defense and maritime security arrangements with the US,³⁶⁰ whether for military and coast guard technologies or to perform more bilateral and cooperative training exercises. With an increasing focus on maritime security, especially considering the far flung geography of Indian Ocean islands, it would be within the US interests to consider the multilateral capabilities of these nations.

³⁵⁸ “Jeddah Agreement.”

³⁵⁹ Donovan, “Piracy in Somalia, Its Contribution to Instability, and Its New Path Forward.”

³⁶⁰ Louis, “The United States and Seychelles Sign Bilateral Agreement on Countering Illicit Transnational Maritime Activity Operations.”

As both of these regions contend with securing their maritime pathways to Europe,³⁶¹ Asia,³⁶² and the United States,³⁶³ they continuously seek to control and maintain free and open passages to their critical trade partners. The continuing military presence of the US in the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea, and the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb, especially in the face of rising attacks by Houthis, is critical to the maritime security of the region. In addition to allying with Western nations, the US should seek to partner with nations in the region. Expanding the FOIP ideals to the coast of East Africa opens up pathways to partner alongside local nations and incorporate them into the broader strategic vision. Further, partnering with multilateral organizations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA),³⁶⁴ the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC),³⁶⁵ the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCOC), and the Jeddah Agreement would enable the US to further these multilateral partnerships and promote security for the entirety of the Indo-Pacific region. Increased stability in the region would establish a foundation for expanding economic opportunities and security against illicit activity.

THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

Considering further development in the East African space and neglecting to reference the significant and contentious effects that the BRI has in Africa would be remiss. The combination of the Belt and Road and the Maritime Silk Road, stemming from China and stretching its into West Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, has raised alarms from many Western nations concerning debt trapping and repayment. Despite these concerns, many African nations report satisfaction and hopefulness for the continuation of BRI projects in their country and region.³⁶⁶ Chinese investment and construction or material support has touched nearly every country in the Indian Ocean rim and has resulted in more favorable partnerships between China and these various nations. However, despite more favorable trade relations, some of these nations experience

³⁶¹ “Successful Trade Mission Port Development.”

³⁶² “News - Press Room - Ministry of Finance, National Planning and Trade.”

³⁶³ Congressional Research Service, “African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).”

³⁶⁴ “Maritime Safety and Security – Indian Ocean Rim Association – IORA.”

³⁶⁵ “Governance, Peace and Stability - Project- Indian Ocean Commission.”

³⁶⁶ Coetzee, “The View From Africa.”

unfulfilled promises in their infrastructural development projects. This opens the door for China to take over of their “state-owned property” such as the port of Mombasa in Kenya or the railway from Mombasa which ends in the middle of the Great Rift Valley³⁶⁷.

Countering the ongoing Belt and Road Initiative is an issue that will require more discretion. While the funding is certainly causing nations to turn toward China for infrastructural development, this does not mean that these initiatives will impede the US and FOIP vision for the region. The US should focus on quickly supporting the development of infrastructural projects but with standards for safety and longevity in mind. As opposed to the current state of some of these projects, the US should encourage greater assistance from multilateral fund options such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the African Development Bank (AfDB), NGOs, or US based organizations. A shift away from reliance on a unilateral support system will diversify options for these nations and promote greater economic, cultural, and technological interoperability between these underdeveloped nations and the rest of the world.

US SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The United States has grown more concerned with the BRI by the year. As the program continues to go into uncharted waters both technologically and geographically, the US is without a doubt exploring options to combat the potential threats that come with Chinese expansion. Africa has long-been a recipient of direct investment by the United States government, but this aid has largely gone to more humanitarian efforts, compared to the much more infrastructure based focus of the BRI. The largest way that the US has partnered with the private sector to provide infrastructure assistance has been through the Power Africa Program, administered by the US Agency for International Development. Since its inception, the program has grown to include more than 170 private companies that have together committed over \$40 billion dollars of investments in energy infrastructure in the region. This program is the key example of the US partnering its government agency with private companies in order to develop its own infrastructure support in the African continent, and further expansion towards other infrastructure projects would likely be welcomed seeing the success of the Power Africa program

³⁶⁷ Dezenski, “American Innovation Can Counter China’s BRI.”

CLIMATE ISSUES AND ENERGY SECURITY

Increasingly, the issue of climate change and energy security have become intertwined, resulting in nations having to strike a balance between care for and protection of local natural environments and meeting the energy needs of the citizenry and industry. Currently Africa is the continent with the lowest level of electrical connectivity³⁶⁸ compared to developed nations (for example, in 2018 the US produced 2339 TW of power whereas Africa produced 866 TW with a population almost four times larger). Not only is the energy supply low, failing to reach 572 million people on the continent,³⁶⁹ it is also reliant upon fuel sources which produce significant amounts of pollution. Coal, oil, and gas are some of the most prominent fuel options due to the ease of access that these nations are able to produce, import, and utilize.³⁷⁰ The US is already committed to supporting clean energy transition and initiatives promoting greater levels of energy security on the continent through securing resources and partnering with the African private sector in order to further these goals. However, at this present moment the goals are yet undefined and are contingent upon each individual government's ability to set these goals and inhibit any response until they can be decided.

Combatting higher temperatures, rising sea levels, and ecological devastation will require international cooperation. The US should secure and export resources to expand and modernize electrification projects in Sub-Saharan Africa. These projects should be focused on renewables without diminishing the current usage of hydroelectric options or the usage of fossil fuels for the time being. Further, supporting the state apparatuses of environmental security would provide opportunities to cooperate between national organizations and provide some level of cultural exchange.

HUMAN SECURITY/CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Human security and cultural exchange is focused on longevity and developing the youth of tomorrow to form impactful partnerships and create the next diplomatic, industry, and social

³⁶⁸ Saifaddin, "Electricity Generation Africa 2040."

³⁶⁹ Saifaddin, "Africa."

³⁷⁰ Saifaddin, "Electricity Mix in Sub-Saharan Africa 2018."

leaders. Because Africa currently holds the youngest average population and is projected to expand the working age population greatly within the next three decades.³⁷¹ The US has established initiatives such as the Young African Leadership Initiative (YALI), the University Partnership Initiative (UPI), and others that are oriented toward promoting good faith and intercultural interactions.³⁷² Not only will the development of leaders be good for African societies by developing professional and proficient leaders but it will also create interoperable leadership. Working alongside and directly experiencing diverse cultures enables leaders to develop a growth mindset and understand how better to motivate a team and achieve goals.³⁷³

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Maritime Security:

- Partner with the Djibouti Code of Conduct, IORA, and IOC to support regional governance and deterrence against piracy, attacks, and other illicit activities.

The Belt and Road Initiative:

- Assist African nations by continuing to develop infrastructure projects in the region and encourage nations to turn to multilateral organizations such as the IMF, AfDB, and the World Bank

Energy Security/Environmental Security:

- Focus on securing, subsidizing, and assisting in implementing new energy production systems and distribution methods.

Human Security/Cultural Exchange:

- Continue to work alongside established initiatives, such as the YALI and UPI, while expanding their role to encourage greater outreach and impact.

³⁷¹ Bureau, "Increases in Africa's Older Population Will Outstrip Growth in Any Other World Region."

³⁷² House, "FACT SHEET."

³⁷³ McLoughlin and Tanneau, "Effective Global Leaders Need to Be Culturally Competent - SPONSOR CONTENT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COACHING FEDERATION."

CHINA

INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying that the entirety of the US Indo-Pacific policy is placed against the backdrop that it is the largest military and economic power in the region and second in the world only to the US: the PRC. All policy decisions in the region are made with heavy consideration of the influences they may have on the PRC's regional position. This has been an unavoidable fact for decades; with the US's establishment of diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1979, American politicians and the world at large came to recognize that the trajectory of PRC could place it as a regional superpower.

The economic reforms of the late 20th and the early 21st further solidified the PRC's potential as a global and regional superpower. Following Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2013, a resurgence of nationalist rhetoric within the PRC and a variety of domestic economic, social and environmental issues has created a sense of pressure within the CCP. Combined with the long-standing reality of the cross-strait conflict, an optimistic desire to move towards a multipolar world, and an institutionally ingrained shame towards its own "century of humiliation,"³⁷⁴ the complex interplay of ideology and material factors has led the PRC to a position where its influence in the region is seen by many to be a coercive, rather than a constructive, force.

By far the most concerning form of PRC coercion in the region is the dispute of ocean territories. Drawing from legal documentation dating back to the Qing dynasty, and the CCP's claim that it is the direct successor to the Qing government, the PRC lays claim over many important strategic islands in the region, Taiwan, and the entirety of the territory outlined by the infamous "nine-dash line."³⁷⁵ Due to these area's access to natural resources, strategic value, and at times complicated history, these areas have multiple claimants, and create a difficult situation to navigate.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation' and China's National Narratives."

³⁷⁵ "People's Republic of China: Maritime Claims in the South China Sea."

³⁷⁶ "Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea."

The PRC's dedication to reunification with Taiwan may have deep ramifications for future global perceptions of democracy. A ramping up of nationalist rhetoric within the PRC, demographic issues created by an aging population and low birth rate, economic stagnation, and the example posed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine suggest that the PRC may be running out of time if they intend to forcefully reunite the two sides of the strait.³⁷⁷ While CCP rhetoric towards their desire for reunification has been explicit, their actual plans and intentions remain uncertain, reflecting the US's own stance of strategic ambiguity.³⁷⁸ We must nonetheless consider the possibility that the PRC may seek military reunification with Taiwan, and what the US can do to discourage such actions.

Despite this, the PRC has tremendous potential as a stabilizing regional force, a strong economic power, and a source of healthy global competition. The PRC's establishment of the BRI, and stated dedication to work with the international community to slow the effects of climate change show that a large motivation for the PRC's push towards multipolarity is the parallel development of economic and climate infrastructure throughout the region and beyond. In the first half of 2024, the PRC and the US plan to hold a high level planning event for subnational cooperation on climate action, demonstrating a meaningful desire and capacity for cooperation on important global events.³⁷⁹

The complexity of the interplay between different circumstances within the military, economic, climate, and cultural spheres creates unique challenges when formulating policy that can effectively navigate the relationship between the US, its regional partners and allies, and the PRC. In evaluating and altering the US Indo-Pacific strategy, we must have discipline in creating policy that addresses each of these separate spheres individually, without requiring too great a sacrifice in others. To that end, our approach cannot be dogmatic, and must take into consideration factors beyond the US's interests alone.

³⁷⁷ "Understanding Beijing's Motives Regarding Taiwan, and America's Role."

³⁷⁸ Schulenburg, "The Emergence of 'Collective Strategic Ambiguity' on Taiwan."

³⁷⁹ "Sunnylands Statement on Enhancing Cooperation to Address the Climate Crisis."

MARITIME/MILITARY

Questions and disputes over territorial sovereignty are the greatest source of tensions and threats to stability in the Indo-Pacific. Freedom of Navigation, territorial sovereignty, and appropriate access to resources and trade routes are the backbone for regional stability in an area so dominated by maritime activities. To that end, the US is uniquely capable of advocating for and assisting in enforcing a rules-based approach to navigation in the region.

Up until this point, the US has been too soft-handed in its approach towards the maintenance of territorial sovereignty in the Indo-Pacific. Some issues are either not the US's place to mediate or are far too sensitive to warrant direct action such as the PRC and India's border clashes and the ongoing dispute over Taiwan's sovereignty. In light of such sensitive issues, the US has elected to also take an overly cautious approach in its dealings with the recent clashes between Chinese and Philippine vessels in 2023.

In 2016, the UN Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled in favor of the Philippine position that the PRC has no legitimate claim to the waters around Scarborough Shoal or Second Thomas Shoal.³⁸⁰ The PRC has repeatedly refused to accept the judgment, in part because of the implications it would have on the PRC's claim of the nine-dash line. It is not the US's place alone to determine the validity of territorial claims, but we must explicitly recognize and support the decisions made by the arbitration court.

The PRC has implemented tactics for denying access to Philippine vessels that clearly demonstrate an understanding that any outright military action would be met with force from the US. Despite this caution, international rulings and statements by the US have done little to relieve the pressure the PRC's coast guard is putting on the Philippines, and it is clear that a different strategy must be taken if we are to promote confidence in regional sovereignty. The US has a few options for reaching this goal.

First, the US can indirectly signal to the PRC that the US navy is willing to take decisive action in the defense of national sovereignty, maritime trade, and freedom of navigation. Recent

³⁸⁰ The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v. The People's Republic of China).

attacks by Houthis in the Red Sea have created an excellent opportunity to demonstrate this willingness.³⁸¹ To say nothing of the Houthis' motivation for their attacks, or the ongoing conflict in Gaza, Houthi activities are a direct and explicit threat to the international economy through their indiscriminate targeting of both military and civilian targets. Decisive action against Houthi rebels would not meaningfully endanger US forces, and, due to the importance of the Red Sea for regional and international trade, would go relatively uncontested by other regional powers.

With that being said, some considerations must be taken into account. Thus far, the Biden administration's handling of the ongoing conflict in Gaza has left President Biden politically disadvantaged. As a result, there is a relatively small window in which decisive action may be politically viable for President Biden, and any action taken must be communicated carefully and completely to the American public. The US populace's increased support for the Palestinian people has made what would be a simple and unproblematic response into one which could severely damage President Biden's re-election chances. In communicating the purpose and extent of the US's actions against Houthi forces, the White House must communicate explicitly with the American people that the military actions are not taken in support of either the Palestinian or Israeli people, and must implicitly signal to the PRC that any naval action interfering with sovereignty or trade will be met decisively.

Alternatively, or in conjunction with action against the Houthis, the US could provide direct material and political support to the Philippines, either through an increased US coast guard presence in the disputed region, or through directly providing equipment and training for Philippine coast guard personnel. While this approach will directly increase the possibility of non-lethal conflict between US and PRC coast guard forces, it would serve an important function in signaling to both our allies and partners, and the PRC, that the US is willing to put resources and personnel on the line to defend territorial sovereignty and international law.³⁸² This would play an important role in de-normalizing the PRC's current push to expand its maritime borders.

³⁸¹ "Rising Tensions between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea."

³⁸² "Rising Tensions between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea."

The Taiwan issue is possibly the modern PRC's greatest ideological and political concern. It is difficult to say what types of internal conversations the CCP has regarding Taiwan, but their outward facing stance on the matter is clear. The CCP believes that they are the only legitimate representative of China in the world, and that Taiwan is no more than a rogue territory, destined to reunite with the mainland.³⁸³ The CCP makes recognition of this One China Policy a requirement for all countries and organizations that wish to work with China, and as such, any blatant rejection of this understanding would create a deep rift between China and the country that rejects it. While the US population and even politicians individually have a more nuanced and complex understanding of the Taiwan issue, the US official stance is recognition of the One China Policy.³⁸⁴ China often calls back to historical documents, such as the Three Joint Communiques, the Taiwan Relations Act, and the Six Assurances,³⁸⁵ to reiterate this expectation of the US. The US cannot change

US SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The issue of Taiwan has grown into a heavily politicized one in the United States. Under the current administration, President Biden has stated on four different occasions that the US would support Taiwan in the event of an invasion. However, this is not the same sentiment expressed by former President Donald Trump. Whereas Biden made his commitment to Taiwan public and known, Trump made his lack of commitment to the island nation known, not once stating that the US would support the island should it come under attack. Even within parties, lawmakers are often split on the correct approach to take regarding Taiwan. Some lawmakers believe that the US should not intervene at all, while others believe that the US has a moral obligation to stop any and all threats from China towards the nation. Under President Biden, the US has grown into a strong, if not the strongest supporter of Taiwan, but should the Presidency be given to another candidate this fall, this stance could very well disappear. Depending on the candidate, the US could continue an iteration of its current strategy, or if former President Trump is elected once again, the support for Taiwan that the nation has grown accustomed to may very well disappear once more.

³⁸³ "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning's Regular Press Conference on January 15, 2024."

³⁸⁴ "Taiwan: The Origins of the US. One-China Policy."

³⁸⁵ Ian, "The Many 'One Chinas.'"

its official stance on Taiwan, but should continue to support Taiwan by continuing to conduct the relationship as put forward in the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979. Maintenance of the current status quo is unfortunately the greatest option when it comes to the Taiwan problem. Only a significant change in China's domestic circumstances would be able to reduce the CCP's current aggression towards the island.

ECONOMY

China's economic might is the leverage through which they are able to enforce international recognition of the One-China policy; it is the reason that international sanctions following the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989 were so short lived,³⁸⁶ and it is the backbone upon which the PLA's reach is built. These are uncomfortable facts, but nonetheless, they must be acknowledged in any honest evaluation of US foreign policy. This is not the time for any moral prescriptions of the PRC's actions; we must accept that all policy recommendations should aim to promote stability, the well being of the people of the world, and to further US interests while making minimal sacrifices.

To this end, Chinese economic power has great potential as a source of regional stability and healthy competition for the US. The PRC has displayed interest in furthering the economic capacity of the developing world through infrastructure and trade projects completed under the umbrella of the BRI.³⁸⁷ Early claims by many US media organizations and politician would have you believe that the BRI was designed as a debt trap for developing nations, opening up opportunities for the PRC to construct overseas military bases, forcing the support of developing nations in preparation for the eventuality of economic or military conflict with the western world, and creating a group of nations functionally in service to the PRC by nature of their debt.³⁸⁸ The development of the BRI has since shown that this view of the initiative is quite cynical, and doesn't

³⁸⁶ Drury and Li, "US. Economic Sanction Threats Against China: Failing to Leverage Better Human Rights."

³⁸⁷ "The Belt and Road Initiative: A Key Pillar of the Global Community of Shared Future."

³⁸⁸ Chance, "American Perspectives on the Belt and Road Initiative."

acknowledge the necessity of such initiatives from the global perspective, nor the true efficacy of the program.

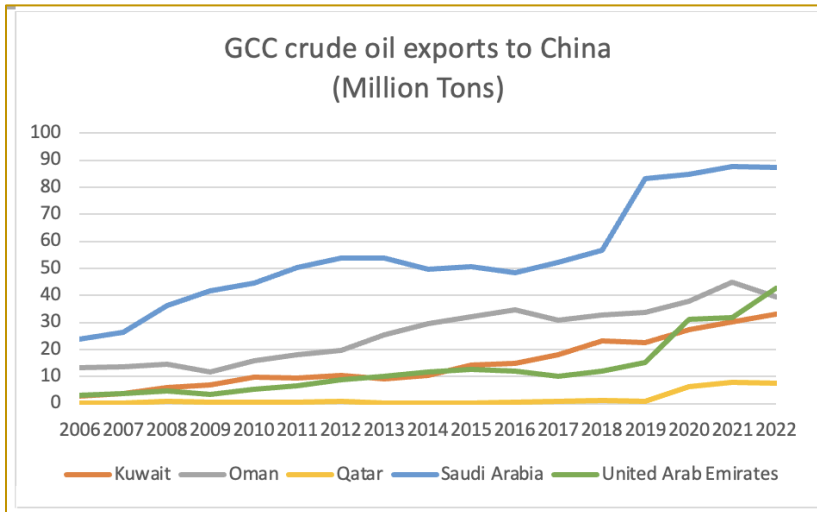
The CCP's rhetoric around the BRI has repeatedly shown that they are interested in parallel development with the countries that they are partnered with. To be sure, this does appear to be a truthful statement. Some nations have found themselves to be more indebted to China than others, although this is less a result of predatory loans and more as a function of the efficacy of the Chinese projects. The PRC has shown that the issue with the BRI lies less in its influence or the underlying ideology, and more with its implementation. The quantity and quality of direct Chinese infrastructure projects have decreased since the beginnings of BRI, primarily as a function of the risks associated with such projects.³⁸⁹ The ideological pressure that the CCP puts on private businesses creates an obligation for private businesses to participate in party programs regardless of feasibility. As a recurring theme in the Chinese cultural mindset, individual actors find ways to maximize personal benefit within the boundaries of the ideological restrictions and quotas placed on them by the CCP, this has meant a shift away from construction projects managed by Chinese firms and towards direct monetary investment, placing planning and management duties on the individual countries involved.

Viewed as a whole, the current trajectory and rhetoric of the BRI informs us that the PRC has a real ideological interest in developing regions often ignored by the west, but its internal inefficiencies can constitute a barrier to this goal. Development of global trade infrastructure will have an undeniably positive long-term benefit for global stability. To this end, the US should acknowledge that its original assessment of the BRI as a tool of extortion and extended influence was not so charitable. The US should signal to Beijing that it recognizes the PRC's efforts to develop global infrastructure, and seek to combat undue influence by instead offering to help cooperate in other global infrastructure projects.

³⁸⁹ Clark, "The Rise and Fall of the BRI."

ENERGY

China's massive growth in energy demand following its rapid economic development has caused it to surpass the United States as the world's largest energy importer. China increasingly relies on other countries' energy exports and has formulated relevant environmental protection strategies and policies. The following table demonstrates China's oil imports from the GCC, which composes 41% of China's total oil imports.



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To begin with, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, and other countries have become the most important energy trading partners of China. According to Chinese customs data, “China-Middle East trade

volume nearly doubled over the 2017 to 2022 period, from \$262.5 billion to \$507.2 billion.”³⁹¹ With an enormous increase in demand for natural resources such as petroleum and natural gas, China hopes to conduct more in-depth energy trade and exchanges with multiple countries in the Middle East. At the same time, China promises to provide green energy services to Middle Eastern countries by providing safe, energy-saving, and environmentally friendly extraction tools and resource techniques³⁹².

China is one of the largest investors in ASEAN energy programs.; China's investments in ASEAN grew from \$9 billion in 2019 to \$15.4 billion in 2022. Currently, the Chinese government is focusing its goals on opening Southeast Asian markets and trying to spread its influence to these regions. By strengthening the BRI together with ASEAN, China is engaging in dialogues with

³⁹⁰ Webster and Pelayo.

³⁹¹ Al-Sulayman and Alterman, “China’s Essential Role in the Gulf States’ Energy Transitions.”

³⁹² Wester, “Balancing Act: Assessing China’s Growing Economic Influence in ASEAN.”

Southeast Asian countries on renewable energy resources, capacity building, green investment, practical cooperation, and development.³⁹³

China and the United States cooperate on energy development. For

decades, China and the United States have discussed energy exchange, trade, and technology. China hopes to increase energy technology cooperation, with President Xi and President Biden jointly agreeing to work towards stabilizing the climate in the recent Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting. APEC seeks to implement more environmentally friendly and healthy energy development and to help more countries undergo energy transition and reduce carbon emissions.³⁹⁴



CYBER SECURITY/TECH

China has the largest number of mobile phone users and internet users worldwide. According to data surveys, China’s mobile phone subscriptions as of 2023 have already reached about 1.7 billion.³⁹⁵ Right now, China is one of the countries most vulnerable to cyberattacks on the internet, requiring them to spend a lot of money to update and maintain their network systems. Previously, most Chinese mobile phone systems and network implementations came from American companies (Apple, Microsoft, and Android), but this situation has changed in recent

³⁹³Wester.

³⁹⁴ Moritsugu, “China and the US Pledge to Step up Climate Efforts Ahead of Biden-XI Summit and UN Meeting.”

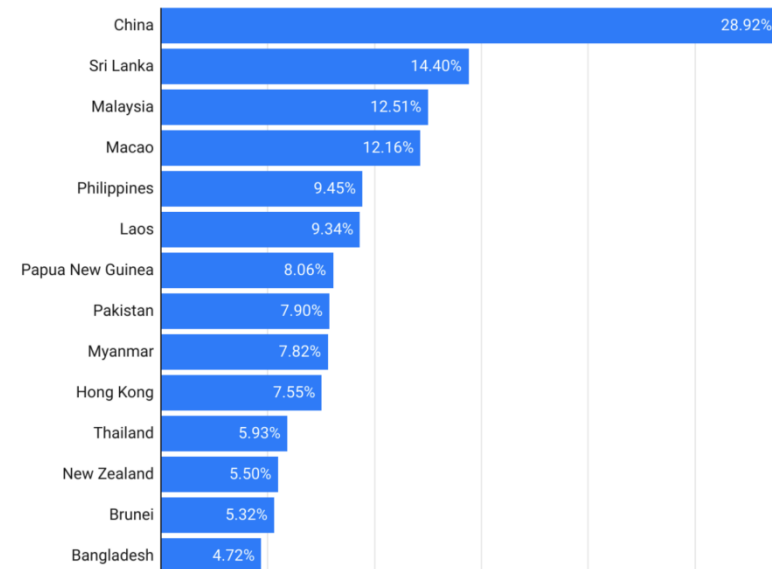
³⁹⁵ Slotta, “Topic: Smartphone Market in China.”

years. According to statistics, “iPhone sales in China were down more than 30% year over year for the first week of January.”

Although the influence and popularity of companies like Apple and Microsoft have declined, according to data surveys in 2023, Apple is still the most popular smartphone brand in China, accounting for 33% of the mobile phone market.³⁹⁶ At the same time, systems launched by international companies such as Microsoft and Google still occupy a large number of the Chinese market (Android- 47.91%, Windows- 30.21%), which shows that China’s electronics market is still favored by the United States, Japan, South Korea, and various European countries.

Right now, China is also developing its influence in the mobile phone market. The image below shows that Huawei mobile phones have developed their market and plans in Southeast Asia. This trend shows that China now hopes to use its technology, which is cheaper than the United

Market share of Huawei smartphones in the Asia-Pacific region in 2022, by country



States and Japan, to conduct more technological trade and exchange with other countries in the Indo-Pacific.

Due to the simultaneous development of modern networks and the increasing availability of information, authenticity also affects the stability and security of Indo-Pacific areas and the United States. One of the issues is the Chinese government’s control

of public opinion. According to a US Department of State release, “the PRC spends billions of dollars annually on foreign information manipulation efforts.”³⁹⁷ This situation affects the network platform that may be traced back to Indo-Pacific regions, countries, and organizations and

³⁹⁶ Bashir, “Most Popular Smartphone Brands in China 2023.”

³⁹⁷ “How the People’s Republic of China Seeks to Reshape the Global Information Environment - United States Department of State.”

threatens future global freedom of expression and stability. The Chinese government may use false information to lessen the credibility of United States agencies, representatives, celebrities, and even affect the views of other countries in the Indo-Pacific regions towards the United States to cause instability and misunderstanding.

ENVIRONMENT

Although China's market reforms in the late 20th century rapidly improved China's economy, global status, and quality of life, it has also resulted in increased industrial waste output, caused many environmental and health problems, and deeply affected people's quality of life across multiple countries.

The primary issue China is currently facing is air pollution. As one of the largest industrial countries in the world, China has established many factories and assembly lines, whose production generates a large amount of greenhouse gasses and toxic pollutants that cause significant air quality problems. According to data from the WHO, air pollution related health issues cause over two million deaths per year in China.³⁹⁸ Despite this, China is cooperating with countries in the Indo-Pacific region and has established many heavy industry factories in their countries.

Water pollution also poses a harmful problem for China. With the continued progress of the BRI and the MRSI, China has increased industrial exchanges and trade with neighboring countries in the region. As a result, countries around the world are increasingly concerned about plastic waste. China has become the world's largest emitter of marine plastic debris in recent years,³⁹⁹ and these chemical wastes have had a tremendous economic impact on the maritime, fishing, and tourism industries of Indo-Pacific regions. The data shows that the damage from marine plastic to APEC member's economies was estimated at over \$11 billion in 2015 alone.

Finally, illegal fishing and the lack of industry regulations is another issue. Chinese fishermen have been fishing in the Indo-Pacific in an unsustainable way, which brings significant damage and pressure on marine biodiversity. Chinese fishing vessels sometimes violate territorial

³⁹⁸ World Health Organization, "Air Pollution."

³⁹⁹ US. Mission Brazil, "Fact Sheet: US-China Cooperation on Climate Change."

rights, causing international disputes that negatively affect stability and safety of the Indo-Pacific region. The Chinese government set a zero-tolerance policy for illegal fishing in recent years. Although unlawful fishing still occurs, the incidents of illegal fishing has hugely decreased compared to before by active dialogue with other countries like Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines, which means that friendly cooperation will maintain the species diversity of marine life in the Indo-Pacific.

US SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The view of Americans on Chinese people is largely influenced by their political affiliation. In a recent Pew Research Center study, the group found that Republicans viewed the Chinese in a more negative light when compared to Democrats. In general, the domestic perception of Chinese people from the US has decreased among both political parties as tensions between the two nations have risen. 83% of Republicans stated that they held an unfavorable view of China, whereas 68% of Democrats said the same. This 15% difference between the two parties is also the largest difference since the survey started in 2005. In conclusion, the perception of China and Chinese people has decreased in favorability in the long term, but has likely deteriorated quicker due to rhetoric from both sides regarding the response from the nation to the COVID-19 pandemic, land disputes in the South China Sea, and other events to which China is largely the only nation to blame. Rebuilding relationships with China would be difficult due to having to combat the growing disapproval and skepticism of China and its people from Americans.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Maritime and Military

- Continue adhering to a strict, rules-based approach to maritime freedom of navigation and territorial sovereignty
- Signal to Beijing that violations of territorial sovereignty will not be tolerated through either overt or indirect means
- Encourage and support regional power structures like ASEAN and the Quad in order to reduce China's coercive potential

- Strengthen partnerships with regional allies and partners to enhance maritime security through joint exercises, information sharing, and capacity-building initiatives to counter common security threats such as piracy, illegal fishing, and transnational crime.

Energy:

- Foster collaboration between the US and China on energy technology research, and development in the Middle East, including joint research projects, technology transfer agreements, and knowledge-sharing initiatives to promote innovation and technological advancement in the energy sector
- Increase green energy tech export to China to reduce oil reliance and resource pressure, slowing down China's rapid energy expansion strategy

Cyber/tech:

- Reduce susceptibility to disinformation within India and Southeast Asia by increasing public knowledge of false information through education and awareness campaigns, and raise public awareness and vigilance against disinformation.

Environment:

- Strengthen climate change cooperation between the United States, India, and Pacific countries, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening climate adaptation, and improving climate governance capabilities
- Take the lead in promoting local energy transformation, reducing dependence on oil and natural gas to show our allies, partners and competitors that the US takes environmental protection seriously

CONCLUSION

The twenty-first century is no doubt the Indo-Pacific century, and the region holds an essential role in determining global stability. The United States recognizes this, and its official pivot to the region in the 2010s was enshrined in the publication of its Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2022, which ties Indo-Pacific affairs to national security and prosperity.

The People's Republic of China is the primary threat to the United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy. China lessens US primacy in the region through its economic policies such as the Belt and Road Initiative, and threatens regional stability through its aggressive strategies towards Taiwan and the South China Sea; a significant amount of US collaboration with its regional allies and partners centers around curtailing Chinese influence among different states.

We have analyzed the strong relationship between the United States and its allies in the region. The United States finds a strong backbone with its allies, whose participation ensures the success of the Indo-Pacific Strategy. While implementation of the strategy may vary among the allies, all of them are dedicated to the core vision of a “free and open Indo-Pacific” to ensure global stability and prosperity. Allies are also most involved in combating the encroachment of revisionist powers who pit themselves against the vision of the Indo-Pacific Strategy by undermining the rules-based international order in pursuit of their own coercive national interests. It is thus imperative that the United States continue to bolster the ties between its allies both within and without the Indo-Pacific, so that it can truly maintain a unified global strategy.

Partners prefer pursuing multilateralism through regional diplomacy as opposed to a direct alliance with the United States. Nevertheless, partners are equally valuable in ensuring the success of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy. India and ASEAN are both significant actors that are regional pillars in their own right, and their cooperation is vital to the enforcement of the regional balance of power. The Pacific Islands, while small and numerous, remain an important battleground on which the United States competes with China. Interests of the US and its partners primarily converge on maintaining a “free and open Indo-Pacific” to stymie over-encroachment of malicious actors such as the PRC. In addition to enforcing UNCLOS, the United States must participate in mutual capacity building and information sharing to strengthen its partnerships.

We view regional prospects as having ripe potential for increased collaboration with the United States. Prospects in the region encompass a wide area, from the east coast of Africa, to the Middle East, and beyond. A prospect is a potential partner or an ally, and the United States can best foster this relationship through economic, political, and environmental cooperation that promotes multilateral relationships. The PRC, while a global power and the main competitor in the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, still has the potential for future cooperation with the United States in certain affairs that can ensure a stable global security environment.

In the Indo-Pacific, the United States finds itself near the center of an interconnected network of national interests. These interests often compete, but through strong relationships with its allies and partners, the United States can navigate these difficult waters and ensure global stability.

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