

The strategic implications of changing dynamics & regional partnerships on major power competition in the Indo-Pacific

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Executive Summary

Defining the scope of the Indo-Pacific is not an easy task. In geographical terms, it could be argued that there are reasonably clear boundaries to the region, but that these boundaries may have to be extended as far as the Antarctic and Arctic as the scramble for resources draws states into fresh competition in polar environments. From a historical perspective, it could be argued that over centuries major powers have competed with each other over different portions of the region, defining territory in terms that suited their political aims. However, from a political perspective, the Indo-Pacific is a new and contested concept that has frequently been used in a deliberately ambiguous and/or flexible manner, in order to provide states with the most advantageous hedging strategies. What characterises discussion of the Indo-Pacific concept since 2010 is that it is a very large geographical region, in which it is hoped that there will be free and open trade, increasing rule of law demonstrated through adherence to the international rules based order, in which tensions should ideally be ameliorated through dialogue within and between regional and global multi-lateral institutions.¹

Which great power will have the most influence in the region, willingly bear the cost of enhancing security, actively pivot resources toward the economic and general development needs of the region, and most effectively gain the support of small and medium states is, of course, contested. The states within the region both need and want increased physical development, such as direct aid, new infrastructure, and economic investment, along with enhanced behavioural frameworks, such as regional multi-lateral bodies, trade agreements, and treaties.

As a consequence of the ambiguous and flexible nature of the Indo-Pacific concept, Australia finds itself in the situation of having both enough real and diplomatic resources at its disposal to shape aspects of the Indo-Pacific vision in accordance with some of its own aspirations and

¹ M Auslin, 'Security in the Indo-Pacific Commons: Toward a Regional Strategy', AEI Paper & Studies, 2010; M Green, 'Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy as Grand Strategy', *We Are Tomodachi*, no.29, 2018, pp.28-29; R Medcalf, 'In Defence of the Indo-Pacific: Australia's New Strategic Map', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.68, no.4, 2014, pp.470-483; R Medcalf, 'Reimagining Asia: From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific', in G Rozman & JC Liow (eds), *International Relations and Asia's Southern Tier*, Springer, 2018, pp.1-6; S Thankachan, 'Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy": Reality Before the Rhetoric?', *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*, vol.13, no.2, 2017, pp.84-91.

interests, while also having to assess and respond to major power competition in the region. Every medium and small state in the region is having to decide how many comprehensive strategies it needs, or wants, to engage with, what level of resources it will invest in each of them, and how it will balance these activities with continuing to maintain its own interests, while working to attain its own aspirational goals.

In discussions of very large strategies concerned with very large regions, it is easy to under-appreciate how medium and small states find ways to achieve their preferred relationships and outcomes beneath and within these overarching strategies. Ambiguity does not just provide flexibility for major powers: it also provides medium and small states with room to manoeuvre, if they have the motivation and dexterity to do so.

Through the research undertaken to produce this report it became evident that most medium and small states in the region have a sophisticated sense of what they would like to achieve, along with a flexible perspective on how to achieve it, and that they look for points of alignment with states and comprehensive strategies where possible, but, if at all possible, without surrendering their independent preferences. They will partner with another state to achieve a shared goal, but, whenever possible, not at the expense of also being able to partner with other states to achieve other goals. Historical alliances still provide a degree of stability, but, as Ian Bremmer argues, states will choose to work with new partners who have a shared goal and more motivation and resources to achieve it.² Consequently, many states in the region are likely to pivot away from traditional partners to extend their network and achieve new goals, and Australia could choose to be one of the states that they pivot toward.

Since World War II Australia has actively contributed to the United States led international rules-based order, while the United States-Australia alliance has remained central to policy making in Canberra. Since the election of Donald Trump in 2016 the exercise of American power in the Indo-Pacific has been concerned with military posturing, as well as the securitisation of trade, aid, and commerce, largely aimed at the rising global Great Power, the People's Republic of China. This process certainly was not started by President Trump, but it has been accentuated by the United States' president as he attempts to gain advantage over Beijing. Trump has shown himself to be quick to bring the military instrument to the table, only to withdraw it just as quickly once it has been demonstrated that its use is unlikely to gain him kudos for improving Washington's overall position. Some have argued that this sort of posturing is 'highly rational,' in that the US is being run in a mercurial and unpredictable fashion gives the country the power of arbitrariness. It is that same power that is so difficult to deal with when used by Moscow or Beijing, but Moscow and Beijing neither defined, nor maintain, the contemporary global international order. They are without allies and capable friends, and, as such, are not expected to behave in a stable way if it is not in their interest to do so. In spite of Trump's claims to the contrary, America's friends and allies do need to know and understand where Washington sits on issues of common concern. This element of predictability might be a disadvantage when seen through the lens of Putin, Xi, or even Trump, but when managed well, the combined weight of American-led international condemnation, or the broad legitimacy of US military actions when in synch with Coalition allies, brings with it a level of power and influence unmatched by the Russian Federation or the People's Republic of China.

² I Bremmer, *Every Nation for Itself: Winners and Losers in a G-Zero World*, Penguin, Kindle Edition, 2012.

In the public imagination, contemporary China is often defined by its extravagant spending on modern buildings and technology, its deep manufacturing capabilities (upon which its profitable export industries are based), and its tourists and students, which until recently have been conspicuous international signs of China's wealth and influence. In many ways, the achievements of the People's Republic of China (PRC) are remarkable.

In the span of three generations the PRC has gone from an underdeveloped agrarian economy, barely able to feed its own population, to a developing urban economy with a burgeoning space industry, a modern military, a highly sophisticated surveillance-state, and a wealthy and entrenched political class.

This transformation has not been without its problems.

Indeed, China today is the accumulation of its experiences, both positive and negative, of building for itself a secure base from which it can consolidate and expand its national ambitions. But what is modern China? Is it a country, a people, a political ideology, or an economy? Most China observers tend to conflate each of these into a 'China construct,' whereby the People's Republic is the sum of all of these parts, a monolithic triumph of Chinese communist evolution, an unbroken chain of thought from Mao to Xi. However, the truth of the rise of the PRC to global pre-eminence is far more complex, and the China of today, like all other contemporary states, is actually the sum of all its conflicts—internal and external.

Meanwhile, Russia has smaller, but not insignificant, goals in the Indo-Pacific region: to demonstrate that Russia is an Asia-Pacific Power; to be involved in an area of increased Great Power focus; to demonstrate that Russia is a global actor; to promote its specific interests in the region; and to challenge Western hegemony in the region, while avoiding creating direct conflict with these Western powers. Russia is limited in how much hard power it can project and has less soft power to utilize. Russian power is, as it has recently been elsewhere, the power to involve itself and destabilise, not the power to construct, and it has shown little desire to become a constructive agent anywhere outside of Central Asia. Arms sales enable Russia to wield what influence they have, and it causes the world to think they are more involved globally than they are in reality.

Japan has unresolved territorial disputes with Russia and a complex, interdependent relationship with China. Japan was an early initiator and promoter of the idea of the mingling of the two oceans: the Pacific and the Indian. This strategic construct has crystalized as the Indo-Pacific, and Japan has outlined its comprehensive strategy for the region as the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). The idea of considering both oceans together as being strategically significant emerged from Tokyo's growing appreciation that the structure of international society was heading in a new direction. With the rise and assertiveness of China and a relative overall decline of the US, Japan's long-term security needed to be reconceptualised. While engaging with China, Japan began to hedge as its sense of anxiety (and later fear) grew as a consequence of Beijing's aggressive behaviour around the region and irredentist claims on territories—more notably since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012. Furthermore, China has far surpassed Japan as Asia's largest, and the world's second largest, economy. In addition, China's defence spending has skyrocketed, leaving Japan's spending on its Self-Defence Force far behind.

Japan's Indo-Pacific orientation is also driven by its assessment that, while the United States remains the linchpin of Japan's security (including a nuclear umbrella), in view of the declining influence of the US, Tokyo sent out signals that Japan was keen to form partnerships with like-minded countries within and beyond the region. The aim has been to maintain a rules-based international order, which does not disturb the current norms and principles of international society. Such partnerships would support US foreign policy goals and, to some extent, unburden Washington as the sole global security provider. Through such a role Japan would improve its diplomatic profile, as well as changing the perception that, much like Australia, it is simply following in the footsteps of United States' foreign policy. Today, Japan's Indo-Pacific initiatives are well acknowledged in regional states and beyond.

Like Japan, India is a key player in the Indo-Pacific and is regarded as a leading stakeholder in the region. States, such as Australia, Japan, and the United States, regard India as having a critical role to play in this new geo-strategic space. India was neither an early proponent for, nor an enthusiastic promoter of, this strategically-relevant geo-political term as it was being developed and promoted—for example, by Australia in the 2010s. Indeed, India was hesitant to embrace the term in its official lexicon until very recently, even though both government and think-tank strategic communities in India could see why others in the region (Australia, Japan, and the United States) were keen to see an emerging strategic role for India after decades of India's marginalisation in the region. The Indo-Pacific narrative dovetails well with India's Act East policy and its aspirations to become a major world power, not just a regional power. India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, wants India to become a 'leading power.'

India's desired (and emerging) role stems from two key considerations: as the world's second most populous nation after China and with its economic potential as a huge future market (although the Covid-19 pandemic will have a significant negative impact on India's economy in the short-term), with a current middle class population of over 200 million and rising, combined with its high proportion of young people; and as a strategic balancer to China, whose economy has already far surpassed that of Japan as the world's second largest economy. India is unsettled and alarmed by Beijing's increasing global influence, along with its assertiveness and aggressive military behaviour, especially in the maritime domain in the Indo-Pacific. China's maritime footprint is spreading far beyond the South China Sea and the Pacific into the Indian Ocean and its littoral states. Beijing's defiance of international norms, such as its disregard for the independent tribunal's verdict on the South China Sea, and frequent use of trade as a weapon for gaining compliance have raised concerns in India along with other Indo-Pacific nations.

While Japan and India have already begun to re-define their roles in the region, the United Kingdom has radically altered its relationship with Europe and is beginning to define how it will re-engage with other regions of the world. In 2020, Britain left the European Union and has embarked upon a new journey: if this journey is based more upon her maritime links, including those within the Indo-Pacific region, she may regain some of her lost prestige and influence. As a maritime nation, protection of her sea lines of communication and trade are vital. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), '[a]round 80% of global trade by volume and over 70% of global trade by value are carried by sea and are handled by ports worldwide.'³ This is not going to change in the short to

³ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 'Review of Maritime Transport 2018' (highlights), <https://unctad.org/webflyer/review-maritime-transport-2018>.

medium term and the UK's stated ambition for free trade will require the ability to intervene whenever necessary in conjunction with its allies.

Britain, however, cannot act alone: it has never been able to historically, as its defeat by Japan in 1942 clearly demonstrated. It is less able to do so now, and it must, perforce, join like-minded allies to be able to bring influence to bear on the future direction of the Indo-Pacific.

France has deep historical ties with the Indo-Pacific and is a country that is steeped in its revolutionary past and the philosophy of Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Descartes. The structure of the French state owes much to Bonaparte, himself steeped in the philosophy of the revolutionaries. In the 20th and 21st Centuries, these antecedents have given the French state a reputation for independence of thought and action, which, at times, might be seen as being in opposition to those of their closest Western allies. However, at heart, the French are firmly entrenched in what might be described as Western values and Democratic processes. This implies that they can be counted upon to support clearly defined strategies that are designed to enhance these values within a group of like-minded nations.

At the time of writing, our world is still in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since February of this year panic has risen, then fallen slightly, and is now on the rise again. The global media chatter incessantly about a second wave and even a third wave, while epidemiologists speak calmly about the fact that we are still in an early phase of the first wave. As the pandemic is global, it is difficult to assess its implications in specific regional terms, so key themes will be given preference over geographical proximity throughout our report. What happens next, and where we go from there, is open to emotional speculation and/or educated assessment. In short, no one knows what happens next and everyone is responsible for doing their part to minimise the on-going impact of COVID-19 on our species. If COVID-19 begins to mutate in a way that increases the mortality of the infection, or in a way that makes developing a vaccine improbable, then all bets are off concerning how Humanity will respond to an increasingly dire situation. However, what we do know from historical experience is that Humans have overcome existential threats when they have recognised and transcended the limitations of cognitively conservative leaders and hierarchical institutions. The Greatest Generation showed us what is possible, and medical researchers have shown us that commitment, courage, and creativity are still alive and well in 2020. What we need to do now is to put more cognitively adaptable people into significant positions, and to free our hierarchical institutions to take creative risks and opportunities, so that we can live up to our past and our potential.

Our recommendations include: Australia should embrace a comprehensive geographical conception of the Indo-Pacific; Australia should acknowledge and incorporate Durable Disorder into strategy and policy development; Australia should identify the continuities within the diversity across the Indo-Pacific; Australia should increase Defence spending and extend the role of the ADF; Australia should develop a strategic international education policy; Australia should take a lead role in enhancing cyber security across the region; Australia should systematically assess and replace Conventional Wisdoms; Australia should transfer knowledge and technology to increase Human Security and Societal Security across the region; and Australia should assess the implications of multi-alignment on the region.

A trilateral strategic relationship between Australia, Japan, and the United Kingdom would simultaneously enable Australia to better achieve its Middle Power aspirations, enhance

alliances and regional development, and provide additional support and impetus for the global rules-based order. The majority of small and medium states across the Indo-Pacific are looking to be a part of increased stability, opportunity, and security, and Australia in partnership with Japan and the United Kingdom could do much to contribute toward these desirable ends.

If we include all of the states that fit within the broadest conception of the Indo-Pacific, as we should to develop the most inclusive and collaborative regional assemblage possible, the sheer diversity of geography, history, culture, economic development, and political institutions is breathtaking. At first glance the region appears heterogeneous to the point of incoherence, but nothing could be further from the truth. Every state in the region wants to provide itself with as much Human Security and Societal Security as possible, and there is broad agreement between states that working together within a matrix of multilateralism and multi-alignment provides the best way to do this. All small and medium states are determining how to balance individual needs and wants against regional opportunities and risks, while trying to avoid the pitfalls of great power competition and exclusion. For potential preferred partners in change, like Australia, continuity between words and actions is vital, as the future of the region depends on the quality of the Smart Power policies and partnerships that states can create. Australia is well positioned to both contribute to and thrive within an enhanced Indo-Pacific, if it recognises and acts on its strategic values and resources.

Recommendations

1 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD EMBRACE A COMPREHENSIVE GEOGRAPHICAL CONCEPTION OF THE INDO-PACIFIC:

At present, Australia's geographical conception of the Indo-Pacific is limited by its historical experiences and alliances, while its rhetoric concerning the region is more expansive and inclusive. As a consequence, there is a perception gap between Australia's regional strategic rhetoric and its regional policy reality, which is not advantageous for a state that aspires to be an effective Middle Power. Australia should develop regional strategy and policy based on the Indo-Pacific extending from the East African coast, across the entire arc of Asia, to the West coast of the Americas, and including the Arctic and Antarctic. Australia's interests extend far beyond its immediate region, and states across this expansive area are interested in partnering with Australia to develop the Indo-Pacific. Australia should aim to achieve continuity between its regional strategy and policies, and its conception of the region, so that states who wish to partner with Australia do not perceive that they are excluded from working with us.

2 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD RECOGNISE THE PRC FOR THE THREAT IT REALLY IS:

China is not the military threat the Australian public, media and political leadership assumes it is. The PLA has no long-range conventional military capacity to attack Australia, nor the motivation to do so. The PRC's military posture is largely defensive, with much of its 'offensive assets' tied to the Taiwan Strait and the East and South China Seas (sheltering under the PRC's extensive A2AD umbrella), and now also along the Ladakh LAC in the Himalayas. This is a reality that is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. China can, however, influence the behaviour of Australia through the country's dependence on the 'China market' by refusing to purchase Australian goods and services, or by corrupting the Australian political process. It can also severely disrupt Australia by launching cyber-attacks, as it did in June of 2020, but these acts, while hostile and harmful, are not warlike. China's actual threat to Australia lies in its ability to penetrate and influence people in politics and business, in order to maintain Australia's dependence on China, and the relative power disparity between the two states through which China dominates Australian trade and commerce. China is, therefore, primarily an *intelligence threat* to Australia, not a military threat. It only becomes a military threat to Australia when elements of the ADF support FONOPS close to the PRC's A2AD umbrella, or when in close proximity to forward deployed PLAN/PLAAF assets based in the South China Sea. Priority should be placed on curtailing China's intelligence threat to Australia's political and business leadership.

3 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD TAKE A LEAD ROLE IN ENHANCING CYBER SECURITY ACROSS THE REGION:

There is no doubt that electronic commerce, education, and culture have played a more important role in people's lives across the region since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interconnectedness and overcoming the digital divide were always going to be important development issues within the Indo-Pacific, and are now critically important. As Australia is a technologically advanced country, with a lot of experience of working collaboratively within multilateral organisations, and has an excellent education sector that can train information and communication technology professionals, it should aim to take a lead role in enhancing cyber security across the region. If the region is going to cohere into something effective and cohesive, then improved communication and security are going to be vital, so Australia should take the lead in shaping the future. Enhancing regional cyber security would provide another good way to build regional trust, competence, and collaborative action, all of which would positively affect Australia's Middle Power aspirations.

4 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD ACKNOWLEDGE AND INCORPORATE DURABLE DISORDER INTO STRATEGY AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT:

Even before COVID-19 turned the world upside down, it was becoming apparent that progressively more problems and situations across the region and the world could no longer be successfully, or permanently, resolved. The world is in a state of Durable Disorder, under which problems can only be managed and temporarily mitigated until circumstances change, and under which any action taken to ameliorate a situation will also disturb, and further problematise, every other situation it is connected to. Under circumstances of Durable Disorder, strategy needs to be comprehensive, policy needs to be flexible, and both need to be regularly re-evaluated in light of inevitable, disruptive change. The Australian Federal Government should ensure that Australians understand that, while Australia's vision for the region may remain relatively stable, adaptable thinking and flexible policy settings will provide the best path forward to achieve Australia's preferred outcomes.

5 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD RECOGNISE ITS ROLE AS A CRITICAL REGIONAL PRIMARY PRODUCER AND EXPLOIT THIS TO STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE:

Strategy is not just about weapons and the kinetic effect of weapons on military targets. As we have witnessed, the PRC has and continues to use Australia's dependence on the 'China market' against Australia. For the PRC strategy is a more nuanced phenomenon, with its dominance in trade, commerce, and cyber employed as key non-kinetic levers to be used against countries that are unwilling and/or unprepared to effectively counter Chinese belligerence at this level. Therefore, Australia should invest in creating a strategic unit designed to counter Chinese economic coercion. As a leading commodity exporter, power comes from the willingness and ability to use this advantage to strategic effect. It also means coming up with alternative markets and paths for rapidly adapting to new economic circumstances for local agricultural and mining producers, should the need arise. This would create a basis for Australian sovereign strategic power and influence beyond weaponry.

6 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD INCREASE DEFENCE SPENDING AND EXTEND THE ROLE OF THE ADF:

While deterrence appears to be the obvious primary role for the ADF in the near term, it should be acknowledged that the ADF has made a significant contribution to Australia's Smart Power policies and position in the region for decades. Defence resourcing and training should reflect the fact that winning and keeping friends is at least as important as deterring competitors. Consequently, Australia should consider how to deepen and extend its Defence alliances and partnerships, as well as considering what additional equipment and training might be required to partner with more states across the region. As Australia is an isolated island-continent where national power is best projected by maritime means, this may involve training more personnel to deploy on Australia's LHDs, while the analysis of how many more LHDs Australia requires is undertaken. In addition, particularly if Defence spending is increased, research should be undertaken into whether the ADF should become a multi-role force, within which a significant proportion of personnel would have both a warfighting and a public emergency role.

7 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD CONDUCT FURTHER STUDY INTO RAMSI-STYLE COALITION BUILDING:

Between 2003-2013, the Australian-led RAMSI Mission to the Solomon Islands showcased the country's ability to lead a diverse international coalition to assist a South Pacific country in trouble. At all times the Australian military component of this force, under Operation ANODE, conducted itself with discipline and restraint and was open to working seamlessly with civilian agencies. The success of this stabilisation mission came about largely as a consequence of Australia setting up members of the coalition, including the Solomon Islands government, as valued stakeholders. As stated in this report, if the world is moving towards Durable Disorder, the Small Island States of the Pacific, wracked by poverty, overpopulation, ecological damage, climate change, secessionist movements, transnational crime and social instability, is highly vulnerable to state failure and collapse. Therefore, Australian policy makers are bound to become more involved with ensuring their survivability and stability. Indeed, in a recent Lowy Institute Zoom webinar with USMC General Jim Mattis, Mattis made clear that RAMSI was an exemplar of modern coalition building and security intervention, one he wished the US could adopt. Australia, through RAMSI, managed to act strategically and independent from large powers. It was the country's first time at 'going it alone' and at successfully solving a pressing regional crisis. More needs to be done to analyse the success of this mission in order for future Australian or allied governments to emulate it should the need arise.

8 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD IDENTIFY THE CONTINUITIES WITHIN THE DIVERSITY ACROSS THE INDO-PACIFIC:

If Australia includes all of the states that fit within the broadest conception of the Indo-Pacific, as it should to develop the most inclusive and collaborative regional assemblage possible, then the sheer diversity of geography, history, culture, economic development, and political institutions is breathtaking. At first glance the region appears heterogeneous to the point of incoherence, but nothing could be further from

the truth. Every state in the region wants to provide itself and its citizens with as much Human Security and Societal Security as possible, and there is broad agreement between states that working together within a matrix of multilateralism and multi-alignment provides the best way to do this. All small and medium states are determining how to balance individual needs and wants against regional opportunities and risks, while trying to avoid the pitfalls of great power competition and exclusion. Australia should aim to identify and leverage as many continuities within the diversity across the Indo-Pacific as it can. If Australia focuses on the fundamental factors that enhance Human Security and Societal Security in all states, then it will be able to effectively contribute to enhancing socialisation, respect, and trust across the region, which are critical for inclusive and successful regional development.

9 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD CONSIDER CONTINGENCY PLANNING AND TRAINING FOR OPERATIONS IN ANTARCTICA & COALITION OPERATIONS IN THE ARCTIC:

Australia has the largest territorial claim to Antarctica. While there are no immediate, or medium-term, threats to the status quo ante on this largely uninhabited and environmentally hostile continent, climate change and the scramble for resources may see this change. Operating in a polar environment is not considered a priority for the ADF. However, there is some utility to be gained from providing the ADF with experience in southern polar conditions. It cannot be discounted that, as resource competition in the High Arctic intensifies, Australia may be expected by its allies, particularly the United States, to play some modest role in supporting its interests in that part of the world. Having experience in polar operations will prepare Australian service personnel to conduct Antarctic, or Subantarctic operations along the southernmost islands of the Indo-Pacific, where commercial resource exploitation is most likely to occur.

10 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD DEVELOP A STRATEGIC INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY:

Australia has excellent tertiary and vocational education institutions that have (and will continue to) provide world-class education for Australian and international students. The Australian education sector has become highly commodified over the previous few decades, which has provided significant income for Australia, but education has not provided an equivalent strategic benefit for Australia. Australia has traditionally viewed its education sector as a form of Soft Power, when it should be managing education as a strategic contribution to Smart Power policies across the Indo-Pacific. For many states that would like to partner with Australia, having their young people educated in Australia represents far more than an economic and knowledge transaction: it represents a way to build respect, trust, and care between people that will be reflected over time at the macro level (between states). Australia should aim to develop international education policies that treat education as a vital strategic resource, so that the education sector can contribute to Smart Power policies concerned with long-term regional co-operation and development.

11 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD SYSTEMATICALLY ASSESS AND REPLACE CONVENTIONAL WISDOMS:

Over the last fifty years the global economy has lurched from Neo-Liberal economics during good times to Reactionary Keynesianism during bad times, leaving the economy in a fragile and poorly managed state. Since 9/11 the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have forced Western militaries to rethink and adapt their strategies and tactics in the face of imminent failure and intractable conflict. Economic and military Conventional Wisdoms have shown themselves to be inadequate to the tasks at hand, and Australia should commit itself to systematically assessing the assumed value of Conventional Wisdoms before it finds itself in dire circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a bright light on states' vulnerabilities across the world, and it would be better for Australia to rid itself of outdated assumptions before systems and institutions are stretched beyond breaking point.

12 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD TRANSFER KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGY TO INCREASE HUMAN SECURITY AND SOCIETAL SECURITY ACROSS THE REGION:

Many developing states in the region need and want appropriate technological and knowledge transfer, so that they can increase their levels of Human Security and Societal Security. Whether it be in the agricultural, natural resource management, or ecological sectors, they would prefer to gain skills and tools that they can use and maintain on their own. Australia should aim to assist with this sort of development, even where there is a risk of the recipient state eventually becoming an economic competitor, as meaningful partnerships in the near future will provide the best foundations for shared prosperity in the long-term. Australia needs to balance its desire for continued prosperity with other states' needs for sustainable development, which is not easy, but will have an immediate impact on regional development.

13 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD ASSESS THE IMPLICATIONS OF MULTI-ALIGNMENT ON THE REGION:

Australia is in the relatively uncommon position of having had consistent partners and comprehensive alliances for an extended period of time. Australia is unaccustomed to the consequences of short-term alliances and the growing significance of multi-alignment. Even if Australia does not choose its own form of multi-aligned strategy, it should become familiar with how and why multi-alignment strategies are contributing to the future of the Indo-Pacific.

14 | AUSTRALIA SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TO A NEW MINILATERAL ALLIANCE TO HEDGE AGAINST DECLINING US INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP:

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 as US president was the single most disruptive event for US global leadership, based as it is on America's extensive post-World War II alliance network. From Europe to Asia, American allies were shaken in their confidence that the decade's old alliance network would survive. And while at time of writing it seems that Trump may lose the 2020 election to Joe Biden, the US has been diminished as a global power by its mismanagement of COVID-19 and the Trump administration's mercurial foreign and domestic policies. Even were Biden to

improve America's policy settings to where they were under Obama, presently a tall order, US allies would all benefit from undertaking a serious review into their own sovereign capabilities to undertake their own defence. Australia, being a small country with limited means, can only be expected to do so much. However, much could be achieved by pooling resources with two countries that it shares strategic culture with: the UK and Japan. All three states are US treaty allies, and all have experience of working closely with both US forces and with each other. This trilateral grouping could be a powerful hedge for all three countries, not only against any further reduction of US international power, but also in assisting the US in maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific based on the existing rules-based order. Three of the authors of this report, John Bruni, Purnendra Jain, and Pat Tyrrell, have written on this potential trilateral in *The Japan News* (February 2020), the Royal Navy's *Naval Review* (August 2020), and on the SAGE International website (August 2020), which was republished in Australia's Defence Connect website (also in August 2020).⁴ Further work on expanding and deepening this concept will be written by the SIA team in 2021.

⁴ P Jain, J Bruni & P Tyrrell, 'Japan, Australia, and Britain Should Forge Closer Security Ties in a Fast-Changing World', *The Japan News*, February 23, 2020, p.7; J Bruni, P Jain & P Tyrrell, 'A New Strategic Trilateral of the UK, Australia and Japan?', *The Naval Review*, vol.108, no.4, 2020, pp.362-368; J Bruni, P Jain & P Tyrrell, 'Why Australia, the UK and Japan Need Closer Security Cooperation', Strategic Concept Paper, SAGE International Australia, August 12, 2020, <https://www.sageinternational.org.au/general-discussion/why-australia-the-uk-and-japan-need-closer-security-cooperation/>; J Bruni, 'Why Australia, the UK and Japan Need Closer Security Cooperation', *Defence Connect*, August 13, 2020, <https://www.defenceconnect.com.au/key-enablers/6627-op-ed-why-australia-the-uk-and-japan-need-closer-security-cooperation>.

Introduction

Dr. John Bruni
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At the time of writing, the states of the Indo-Pacific are simultaneously dealing with a number of major global issues, each of which has either been exacerbated or caused by the novel coronavirus – COVID-19. Globally, the scope and interconnectedness of these issues is unprecedented, and it will take years of focussed effort and innovation to bring the world to a new equilibrium.

Some of the main issues include:

- 1) Mass unemployment across the advanced and developing worlds.
- 2) A significant reduction in international trade and commerce.
- 3) Instability in the price of oil.
- 4) A revival of the nation-state as the primary geopolitical unit.
- 5) A conscious renunciation of existing multilateral organisations/frameworks.

Each of these issues will have impacts on the world as a whole. The Indo-Pacific construct, a vast, diverse, overarching ‘strategic space’ difficult to contemplate, suffers from its size and differing visions among the region’s key players. The novel coronavirus has accentuated this dimensional aspect of the Indo-Pacific region.

While it may be premature to declare the death of the pre-COVID-19 international order, if history is any guide, COVID-19 is one of those moments where everything changes. We can say with some confidence that, unlike the end of the Soviet Union (1992), the Asian Financial Crisis (1997), 9/11 (2001), or the Global Financial Crisis (2007-08), even though each of these events had major impacts on the international system, COVID-19 has the potential to fundamentally alter the trajectory of our species and the nature of political priorities.

Despite this, our report was commissioned in early 2019 with the aim of examining the push-pull factors within the Indo-Pacific. Nonetheless, we believe that the central point of enquiry is still valid, since in a world of nation-states, a structure that is unlikely to be superseded by

any other form of social and political organisation in the near term, there will always be large, middle, and small states with vastly different levels of power and influence jostling for position.

In Australia, we place a lot of emphasis on being a middle power. Indeed, while the United States has a sense of ‘mission’ and ‘manifest destiny,’ contemporary Australia has an equivalent idea about itself, but uses the language of bureaucracy and middle power diplomacy – acting as ‘a bridge’ between the United States and other countries, or as a ‘facilitator’ between multilateral organisations and small states. This concept is what distinguishes Australia from its near-peer rivals in the Indo-Pacific.

For Australia, the concept of the Indo-Pacific as a primary strategic space is critical. As an island-continent highly dependent on overseas trade, it is in Canberra’s interest to ensure that the seas upon which its trade depends remain free and open. In so doing, Australia’s close working relationship with the United States, unofficially founded in 1943 during World War II, but enshrined in the 1951 ANZUS Treaty, allows Australia to leverage off the enormous military strength and global reach of its primary ally.

How do we define the Indo-Pacific?

As a strategic space it is vast, taking in almost two-thirds of the Earth’s surface area. For this report, we will define the region of the Indo-Pacific thus: being from the Bering Sea in the northern Pacific to the Antarctic coast in the south. From the west along the East African littoral to the entire Western coastline of the Americas. The Indo-Pacific region, with its existing major strategic power discrepancies, stand-offs, and conflicts; its huge disparities in wealth and privilege between and within countries; differences in technologies, infrastructures, and other capabilities; no country can afford to approach this complicated region with a simplistic ‘one-size-fits-all’ policy approach. Consequently, understanding how this region works at the higher strategic level is critical to possessing the right policy toolkit, and understanding how power is utilised between large, medium, and small states, is the central underpinning of this report.

In its own report into the Indo-Pacific, published in June 2019, the US Department of Defense argued that its vision for the region is:

a free Indo-Pacific... one in which all nations, regardless of size, are able to exercise their sovereignty free from coercion by other countries.⁵

We can confidently extrapolate that Australia shares these same sentiments. However, these sentiments are an ideal. Realising the goal of a free Indo-Pacific will be far more difficult to achieve in practice.

⁵ United States Department of Defense, ‘Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region’, June 1, 2019, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

1 | A HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND A CONCEPTUAL LENS

David James Olney

The purpose of this section of our report is to provide an integrated historical context and conceptual lens through which to situate Australia's potential future role in the Indo-Pacific region. As the Indo-Pacific is an enormous region, which is linked via oceans and land masses to the rest of the world, this section will focus on elucidating trends and concepts that are both significant within the region and throughout the world, even though they frequently occurred and/or emerged outside of the region. Deciding at what point in time to begin a historical perspective is an entirely arbitrary decision. Historical events, economic forces, cultural norms, and social pressures can be woven together to form as detailed a tapestry as authors desire, but relevance and succinctness require a recent enough timeframe and consideration of only a few particularly significant events. Consequently, this section will begin with the end of the Cold War and the liberation of Kuwait, and then reflect on the rise and fall of the New World Order, the United Nations mission in East Timor, 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Global Financial Crisis, and our present COVID-19 world. Each of these events caused the international community to have to make sense of new circumstances and to decide what outcomes were desirable—and how to achieve them. Most of these events did not take place in Australia's immediate neighbourhood, but they illustrate how Australia has sought to behave in the contemporary interdependent, globalised international environment. Australia's role has varied across these events, but in each of these cases it has set out to be a meaningful participant in responding to the present and shaping the future.

From a conceptual perspective, the period of time since the end of the Cold War has been characterised by contestation over the continued relevance of traditional political ideologies and contestation between supposedly universal ideologies, particularistic behaviour, and more flexible explanatory concepts. Along with optimism, the end of the Cold War was followed by triumphal statements about the success of Capitalist Liberal Democracy, even though by the late 1990s much of the world was not even beginning to flourish in the Liberal-Democratic way that had been expected. In 2002, Robert D Kaplan made an uncomfortable and very persuasive argument in his book, *The Coming Anarchy*,⁶ about the destructive forces that had been unleashed in the 1990s. While Neo-Liberal Economic theory and Neo-Conservative political ideology were being employed by many Western nations (including

⁶ RD Kaplan, *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War*, Vintage, 2002.

Australia) to attempt to demonstrate the universality of Western ideals and models, much of the rest of the world was choosing its own path, or succumbing to disruptive and destructive forces. Under these circumstances Social Constructivist theory⁷ offered more cohesive explanations as to why nations behave in the particular ways they do, and conceptual tools such as Strategic Culture, Human Security, and Societal Security were developed and applied to elucidate progressively more nuanced and dynamic situations. While these three concepts can help us to understand why states and institutions do what they do, we will also consider how Conventional Wisdom⁸ influences decision making, and how the characteristics of High Reliability Organisations⁹ influence the implementation of strategy and policy.

In 2012, Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson added to this comprehensive and effective conceptual tool-kit, providing scholars and practitioners with perhaps the single most insightful and robust explanatory model as to why some states succeed and why many states fail in their book, *Why Nations Fail*.¹⁰ Central to this book is the argument that if a state has inclusive institutions, which treat and benefit society as a whole, and effective rule of law, then the state in question is likely to be successful. In contrast, if a state has extractive institutions, which accumulate resources for the benefit of a minority at the expense of the majority, and ineffective rule of law, then the state is likely to fail—because there is no basis for social solidarity and trust, both of which are critical to the success of future planning and development. Inclusive institutions do a good job of providing Human Security and cultivating the levels of social trust necessary to develop and maintain effective rule of law. Significantly, institutions do not have to be Western in style to be inclusive, and effective rule of law does not have to be based on a mature Liberal-Democratic system.

In their follow-up book, *The Narrow Corridor*, Acemoglu and Robinson take this argument further, proposing that successful states manage to create a delicate and incessant balance between liberty and authority, which has to be struck and then maintained between both the state and society as a whole and between elites and the rest of the citizenry.¹¹ *The Narrow Corridor* is an apt title for the book, as achieving and maintaining a positive balance between liberty and authority requires on-going commitment from a vast majority of the citizenry, well founded and functioning inclusive institutions, a high degree of social trust and solidarity, and a belief in the value of maintaining effective rule of law. Australia is historically privileged to have all of these things, and we should never forget how unusual this is, and that our continued success depends on conscious, on-going commitment to this project.

Throughout this arbitrary period from 1989 until now, Australia has continued to benefit from already being a successful Capitalist Liberal-Democratic state, and has done so in a world in which achieving equivalent success appears to be becoming progressively more difficult. Many developing states want as much modernity as they believe they can make independent use of, and wish to maintain their identity without being unnecessarily altered by Western norms. Consequently, like much of the rest of the Western world, Australia can no

⁷ T Risse, 'Social Constructivism and European Integration', in A Wiener & T Diez (eds), *European Integration Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp.159-176.

⁸ JK Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, Audible, Audiobook Edition, 2009 (first published in 1958).

⁹ KE Weick & KM Sutcliffe, *Managing the Unexpected: Resilient Performance in an Age of Uncertainty*, Audible Studios, Audiobook Edition, 2012.

¹⁰ D Acemoglu & JA Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, Random House, Audiobook Edition, 2012.

¹¹ D Acemoglu & JA Robinson, *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty*, Penguin Audio, Audiobook Edition, 2019.

longer reasonably assume that states and societies predominantly behave like each other. The Rational Actor model continues to be discussed in economics, but it has lost most of its explanatory value in International Relations since the end of the Cold War.¹² These circumstances provide both a challenge and an opportunity for Australia, as new ways of understanding, planning, and acting will be required in the 2020s, but the benefits of cultivating and acting in an adaptable and antifragile¹³ manner could include a significantly expanded role for Australia in the Indo-Pacific region. In conceptual terms, the world is currently characterised by what Sean McFate describes as Durable Disorder,¹⁴ and Australia may wish to become what Ian Bremmer calls a Pivot State¹⁵ to achieve the most advantageous outcomes under these circumstances.

Our world has experienced a remarkable degree of change and consequent uncertainty over the last thirty years, resulting in successive periods of strikingly different sentiment across the international community. Beginning with a mix of astonished and triumphal optimism at the collapse of Communism in Europe, along with effective international cooperation to rescue and restore Kuwait's sovereignty, the New World Order emerged in the early 1990s full of an apparent willingness to act and an abundance of good intentions.¹⁶ Significantly, the coalition of states that liberated Kuwait operated within the parameters of United Nations Security Council Resolution 678, adopted on 29 November 1990, pushing Iraqi forces out of Kuwait without pushing on to bring about regime change in Iraq. Possessing so much power, but using it sparingly, suggested that the 1990s New World Order was going to be characterised by a sophisticated level of enlightened action, good outcomes and a form of collaborative restraint.

Unfortunately, as the 1990s progressed, beginning with the Battle of Mogadishu (October 3-4, 1993), and followed by the Rwandan Genocide (beginning on April 7, 1994) and the Srebrenica Massacre (July 12, 1995), an ever-widening gap opened up between the international community's good intentions and its willingness to take and complete effective action. In the post-Cold War world cultural norms, historical experiences, moral imperatives, and economic opportunities and costs came to the fore in complex combinations, largely displacing traditional political ideologies from their previous, central and explanatory role in international relations. Francis Fukuyama's famous book, *The End of History and the Last Man*,¹⁷ which was first published in 1992, represents the height of what came to be short lived post-Cold War triumphal optimism. Fukuyama appeared to believe that the ideological battle between Liberal Democracy and Communism had been conclusively won, and that it was only a matter of time before all of the countries of the world would inevitably become modern, Capitalist Liberal Democracies. When the countries of the former Communist and developing worlds failed to live up to these ideological expectations, a proportion of Western ideologues were seen to have failed to recognise that American Exceptionalism and Western ideals are not universal. The useful lesson that can be drawn from Fukuyama's book in its early 1990s context is that commitment to a preferred ideological perspective, as well as

¹² A Mintz & K DeRouen Jr, *Understanding Foreign Policy Decision Making*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, chs.4-5.

¹³ NN Taleb, *Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder*, Penguin, Kindle Edition, 2012.

¹⁴ S McFate, *Goliath: Why the West Doesn't Win Wars. And What We Need to Do About It*, Penguin Audio, Audiobook Edition, 2019.

¹⁵ I Bremmer, *Every Nation for Itself: Winners and Losers in a G-Zero World*, Penguin, Kindle Edition, 2012.

¹⁶ D Runciman, *The Politics of Good Intentions: History, Fear, and Hypocrisy in the New World Order*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2006, pp.31-45.

¹⁷ F Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Simon and Schuster, 2006.

giving too much weight to an argument based on insufficiently scrutinized optimism, can result in assessments that are out of step with events even as they are unfolding.

As a result of the fast paced and largely unforeseen international events that occurred during the early to mid-1990s, it became increasingly more difficult for international relations scholars and practitioners to find a single theory that could adequately explain what was going on in the world. While Neo-Liberal economic theory was used to explain where the economy was at and where it could go, making sense of why nations were behaving so differently to each other was most comprehensively explained by Social Constructivist theory¹⁸ which argues that historical experience and cultural norms inform what people do and why they choose to do it. While Neo-Liberal economic theory and Neo-Conservative ideology contend that both people and markets are rational, Social Constructivist theory provides a lens through which to assess and understand why individuals and the institutions they create are predictable, but not particularly rational. Social Constructivist theory has found its way into the areas of security and war studies,¹⁹ via the related concept of Strategic Culture, which has become its own independent and contested school of thought.²⁰ Strategic Culture theory began with Jack Snyder's analysis of the strategic behaviour of the Soviet Union,²¹ which has stood the test of time, providing assessments that have been vindicated by later research and analysis. In recent decades Strategic Culture has been effectively employed to comprehensively explain the post-9/11 global security environment.²² Assessments based on Strategic Culture concepts do not unnecessarily reduce complexity, reify reality to fit preferred abstractions and Conventional Wisdom, and do not provide ideologically pre-determined conclusions. Strategic Culture based assessments of messy circumstances provide complex, culturally aware insights, which are potentially even more useful today than they were when Snyder first developed and applied them in the 1970s. In hindsight, 1990s Mogadishu, Rwanda, and Yugoslavia make sense from a Strategic Culture perspective, even though they seemed opaque at the time, and our aim is to provide this sort of assessment in as close to real time as possible.

Even though many people were disappointed by the ephemeral nature of the early 1990s New World Order and the Uni-polar moment, the 1990s came to an end with the international community once again joining together to support a small nation's desire for self-determination and sovereignty. While Kuwait received assistance from the international community at a time of unbridled optimism at the end of a historical epoch, in 1999 the East Timorese received assistance from a more chastened international community, which had begun to seriously reflect on the consequences of both ineffective action and inaction during the previous decade. This reflection culminated in the unanimous adoption of the

¹⁸ C Agius, 'Social Constructivism', in A Collins (ed), *Contemporary Security Studies*, 3rd edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.96.

¹⁹ J Huysmans, 'Defining Social Constructivism in Security Studies: The Normative Dilemma of Writing Security', *Alternatives*, vol.27, no.1, 2002, pp.41-62.

²⁰ C Gray, 'Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back', *Review of International Studies*, vol.25, no.1, 1999, pp.49-69; JL Johnson, *The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture: Lessons Learned and Lost in America's Wars*, Redwood Audiobooks, Audiobook Edition, 2020; AI Johnston, 'Strategic Cultures Revisited: Reply to Colin Gray', *Review of International Studies*, vol.25, no.3, 1999, pp.519-523.

²¹ JL Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California, 1977.

²² L Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War*, Routledge, 2006.

Responsibility to Protect by all members of the United Nations General Assembly at the 2005 World Summit.²³

Despite this multilateral commitment to action, the Responsibility to Protect still lacks an equivalent commitment to complete effective action, illustrating that balancing intentions, actions, and outcomes has not become any easier for the international community over time. the final significant portion of the original Responsibility to Protect report,²⁴ the Responsibility to Rebuild, has never been ratified, and the consequences of this omission continue to be debated.²⁵ While the international community has come to accept moral imperatives to act, a broadly understood and accepted strategic logic of how to undertake effective action still remains unclear in the face of competing motivations and increasing global complexity. If everyone wanted to live in the same sort of society, and to participate in the economy and politics in the same ways, then it might be possible to have a cohesive and consistent set of solutions. Instead, the world is full of a spectrum of institutions ranging from entirely extractive to consistently inclusive, and rule of law ranges from absent to robust, meaning that how to act to achieve good outcomes is much more difficult than deciding when it is necessary to act in the first place.

The Responsibility to Protect is underpinned by two important security concepts that were both developed during the 1990s, Human Security and Societal Security, which are even more important today—as we attempt to deal with larger populations and dwindling resources. As scholars and practitioners reflected on the fact that there was far more intra-state violence and aggressive identity politics in the world after the Cold War than had been expected, they needed concepts to explain how security was being defined and what action needed to be taken to achieve satisfactory levels of security. Human Security was the first of these concepts to emerge in response to the destruction and insecurity caused by intra-state conflict. From a Human Security perspective, the physical, psychological, social, economic, and political well-being of the people within a state is at least as important as the security of the state's borders and the relationships that the given state has with its neighbours.²⁶ From a Social Psychological perspective, which reinforces the argument that people and the societies they live in are of central importance to discussions about security, Human Security represents a practical application of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.²⁷ The concept of Human Security contends that a state cannot be described as being successful unless its citizens are well, safe, socially engaged, economically and politically occupied, and confident enough in their circumstances to plan to do new and self-actualising things in the future.²⁸ Outside of early literature on Counter Insurgency written in direct response to the period of decolonisation immediately after World War II,²⁹ which had not been read widely for decades, no one had formally articulated that the well-being of a population has a direct and measurable impact on the level of security within a state, and that this aspect of security is

²³ United Nations General Assembly, *2005 World Summit Outcome*, GA Res 60/1, 60th sess., 8th plen. mtg., UN Doc A/RES/60/1 (September 16, 2005), paras.138-139, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/556636?ln=en>.

²⁴ GJ Evans & M Sahnoun, 'The Responsibility to Protect', Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001, <http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/ICISS%20Report.pdf>.

²⁵ E Choria, 'NATO's Libya Intervention and the Continued Case for a Responsibility to Rebuild', *Boston University International Law Journal*, vol.31, 2012, p.365.

²⁶ S Tadjbakhsh & A Chenoy, *Human Security: Concepts and Implications*, Routledge, 2007.

²⁷ For an overview of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, see, eg, S McLeod, 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs', *Simply Psychology*, 2007, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>.

²⁸ G King & CJL Murray, 'Rethinking Human Security', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol.116, no.4, 2001, pp.585-610.

²⁹ D Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006.

vitality important to enhancing security, until literature on Human Security emerged in the mid-1990s. International aid and international peace keeping had been contributing to what we now call Human Security for decades, but it had not been considered in direct terms in calculations of necessary resources and desirable outcomes for strategies, policies, projects, and missions.

The second new security concept that emerged in the mid-1990s was the idea of Societal Security, which was developed by the Copenhagen School and is concerned with the significance that societies place on being able to define, live by, and secure their own identities.³⁰ For example, if two societies are in tension over how a national identity is to be defined and expressed within the same state, then there is a heightened risk of intra-state violence. If a society believes that factors such as immigration, access to resources, economic transformation, or environmental degradation are going to threaten its way of life, then Societal Security posits that any of these issues can be securitised and defined as an existential threat to the society in question. Both Societal Security and the Copenhagen School have been criticised for dealing in intangibles and abstractions,³¹ but the Copenhagen School has robustly argued for the ongoing and increasing significance of protecting a society's sense of identity as a central issue for security policy.³² Therefore, borders can be as important for preserving a society's identity as they can be for protecting a state's resources and territory. As we can see in the era of COVID-19, governments are coming up with policy settings to simultaneously preserve lives, livelihoods, and ways of life, so that societies can eventually return to living lives something like what we used to call normal. The concept of Societal Security provides a way to explain how the combination of protecting lives, protecting the economy, and providing a path toward living in a way that society values are interdependent pieces of a cohesive strategy and policy platform.

If we combine what people need to flourish in terms of Human Security, and how people want to live and define themselves in terms of Societal Security, then we have both a practical way to assess if a society is physically secure and a way to assess if a society believes that its identity is secure. Being able to put these two things together is valuable, because failing to achieve either one of these aspects of security is likely to destabilise the other, resulting in increased insecurity. Since the early 1990s too many states have been buffeted by economic upheaval, social tension, environmental disasters, and political entropy, often resulting in poor levels of both Human and Societal Security. The Responsibility to Protect normalised these ways of assessing the security of a society, and in doing so clarified when action might be required, what kind of action might be required, but what kind of ends the international community should have in mind when intervening in a state is still only vaguely defined. As we can see from the aftermath of the international intervention in Libya, which was justified in terms of the Responsibility to Protect,³³ even a supposedly morally inspired intervention can result in terrible outcomes. It is important that the international community should question when and how the Responsibility to Protect should be applied, but the concepts of Human Security and Societal Security that preceded it should continue to

³⁰ O Wæver, 'The Changing Agenda of Societal Security', in HG Brauch et al. (eds), *Globalization and Environmental Challenges: Reconceptualizing Security in the 21st Century*, Springer, Berlin, pp.581-593.

³¹ MC Williams, 'Modernity, Identity and Security: A Comment on the Copenhagen Controversy', *Review of International Studies*, vol.24, no.3, 1998, pp.435-439.

³² B Buzan & O Wæver, 'Slippery? Contradictory? Sociologically Untenable? The Copenhagen School Replies', *Review of International Studies*, vol.23, no.2, 1997, pp.241-250.

³³ AJ Bellamy & PD Williams, 'The New Politics of Protection? Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and the Responsibility to Protect', *International Affairs*, vol.87, no.4, 2011, pp.825-850.

be employed, because they provide a nuanced way to make sense of societies' needs and states' behaviour across the world. For Australia, the concepts of Human Security and Societal Security can both help us to assess previous successes and avoid future failures as we partner with and seek to assist societies across the Indo-Pacific region. A significant proportion of the states in the Indo-Pacific region have fragile Human Security and face internal and external threats to their Societal Security. In each case the causes and effects are slightly different, but Australia can employ a consistent mode of assessment to facilitate strategic and policy responses across the region. Australia's actions will inevitably have to differ across divergent circumstances, but the comprehensive strategy that can underpin Australia's regional policies can be consistent.

The arrival of Australian troops in Dili on September 20, 1999 provides an excellent example of the balancing act that has to be achieved and maintained in order to successfully combine good intentions and the costs and benefits of action. For the East Timorese, the arrival of INTERFET marked another milestone on their path toward self-determination and defining the future nature of the sovereign state of Timor-Leste.³⁴ For Australia, the mission demonstrated the kind of role it could play as a regional security actor, and what it means for Australia to be a proactive member of the international community. Australia's contribution to INTERFET provided comprehensive foundations on top of which Australia could define its future security and humanitarian strategies,³⁵ and signalled Australia's growing potential to be an active middle power.

While the East Timor mission confirmed how capable an international actor Australia can be, over subsequent years the world witnessed the tension that can exist between a moral intervention and economic opportunities, as Australia and Timor-Leste's governments struggled to reach a mutually acceptable agreement over access to natural resources.³⁶ Timor-Leste requires the revenue from natural resources to enhance its levels of Human Security and to consolidate the inclusive institutions it continues to build, while Australia wanted access to resources to maintain its economy and the standard of living that Australians expect their government to facilitate. While the World War II generation of Australians, and the Australian Defence Force in particular, appreciate the historical debt of honour that Australia owed East Timor,³⁷ the Australian government had to reconcile historical debts and new obligations and opportunities, which is never easy. For a people striving to achieve self-determination and sovereignty almost any cost can be borne in pursuit of their goals, but for a country considering providing a people with assistance both immediate costs and benefits of action have to be compared with estimated future costs and benefits, notwithstanding moral imperatives across the entire time frame. Like the ripples that spread outward when a stone is dropped into water, the implications of Australia's involvement in East Timor did not end when the majority of Australian personnel returned home at the end of their mission. The ripples of capability, influence, altruism, and opportunity that spread outward from Australia and Timor-Leste across the Indo-Pacific region may not have been huge, but they provided an impetus to ask a series of questions that are as relevant to the region today as they were twenty years ago: what can Australia do in the region, what does Australia want to do in the

³⁴ KA Annan, *The United Nations and East Timor: Self-Determination Through Popular Consultation*, United Nations, New York, 2000.

³⁵ P Chalk, *Australian Foreign and Defense Policy in the Wake of the 1999/2000 East Timor Intervention*, Rand, Santa Monica, CA, 2001.

³⁶ P Cleary, *Shakedown: Australia's Grab for Timor Oil*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2007.

³⁷ H Benbow, 'East Timor, War, Coffee and Australia's Debt of Honour', *The Conversation*, April 24, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/east-timor-war-coffee-and-australias-debt-of-honour-55311>.

region, and what will Australia do in the region. The oceans and seas surrounding Australia carry ripples west to Africa, North to Asia, and East to the Americas, and, even though Australia is unlikely to drop a very large stone in the water, the ripples that result from Australia's actions are observed and considered across this immense region. Immaterial of whether Australia's primary focus is local or distant, and despite the multiplicity of issues requiring resources to be distributed and applied across a broad area, Australia should aim to keep the entire immense region in focus.

Australia's experience of taking the lead in the Solomon Islands³⁸ is a great example of what Australia can do. Unfortunately, there is not enough empirical evidence in the public sphere to underpin a deeper 'lessons learnt' analysis or to provide a basis for a future strategy. When more information is available we expect it will show how well Australia can work with small regional partners.³⁹

On September 11, 2001, nineteen Islamist extremist terrorists succeeded in shifting the focus of much of the international community, including Australia, by successfully undertaking a spectacular attack on the United States. The use of four passenger jet aircraft as weapons had an immediate detrimental impact on the global aviation industry only now surpassed by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Within days of al-Qaeda's terrorist operation much of the world's attention shifted from the complexity of everything that had come before the attacks to narrowly focus on al-Qaeda, Islamist Extremism, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia. The spectacular nature of the attack unleashed a sense of imminent danger in the United States and much of the Western world, motivating an immediate, Cold War like response to counter the unexpected threat. It is perfectly normal for people to respond strongly to an apparently clear and imminent threat with high shock value, according to the argument that Daniel Gardner puts forward in *The Science of Fear*,⁴⁰ while not responding strongly to significant but opaque and long-term threats with low shock value. Responding immediately to a perceived imminent threat has served our species well, saving untold individuals and small groups from terrible ends, but the social and political systems we have developed are now significantly more robust than we are as individuals or small groups. The 9/11 attacks demonstrated how our historical perception of spectacular and apparently imminent threats make us vulnerable to terrorism, even though Islamist Extremist terrorism has shown itself to be a much greater threat to the Muslim world than to the Western liberal-democratic system.

Even though the 9/11 attacks were shocking, they did not have to become as culturally and politically significant as they have, defining a period of time we now refer to as the post-9/11 world. The loss of life from the attacks was large, and the sense of outrage and calls for retribution were powerful, but the statements and claims that were made by the Western world after the attacks were out of proportion to the attacks themselves. In the months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks Western leaders repeatedly claimed that terrorism posed an existential threat to the Western way of life,⁴¹ which gave the terrorists a level of status and

³⁸ See, eg, Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), 'About RAMSI', <https://www.ramsi.org/about/>.

³⁹ T Anderson, 'Ramsi: Intervention, Aid Trauma and Self Governance', *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, issue 62, 2008, pp.62-93.

⁴⁰ D Gardner, *The Science of Fear: Why We Fear the Things We Should Not—and Put Ourselves in Great Danger*, Gildan Media, Audiobook Edition, 2009.

⁴¹ J Wolfendale, 'The Narrative of Terrorism as an Existential Threat', in R Jackson (ed), *Routledge Handbook of Critical Terrorism Studies*, Routledge, 2016, pp.130-139.

influence that they could not have achieved on their own. The Bush administration began to compare and conflate Islamist extremist terrorism with the countries of the Axis of Evil,⁴² even though no conclusive evidence was released in support of these assertions. Al-Qaeda's terrorist actions were presented as the precursor for a new wave of potential state sponsored terrorism, in order to justify pre-emptive action against rogue states. Political leaders and Western media began to speak about the Global War on Terror⁴³ as if it was possible to make war on a concept of political violence that is at least as old as the Jewish Sicarii who fought back against their Roman oppressors in the only way that was available to them.⁴⁴

In a few short months al-Qaeda and its affiliates, along with terrorism in general, were framed as existential threats to the Western world and in direct competition with Western ideology. The confluence of factors that had caused the spark and fanned the flames of Islamist extremism were reduced to a Cold War logic of us versus them and our ideology versus their ideology. The world had never been this simple during the Cold War and should not have been simplified in this way after 9/11, because over-simplification both limits understanding and distorts consequent action.

In a very real sense, and from a Social Constructivist and Strategic Culture perspective, the post-9/11 world was framed in terms of traditional competing ideologies and existential threat as if the world had returned to a kind of Cold War bipolarity. As at least three generations of political and security leaders had been shaped by and trained within their Cold War experiences, it makes sense that they would initially seek to understand and explain events from the cognitive perspective they were most familiar with. Consequently, Islamist extremism was presented as a monolithic and universalistic existential threat, and the rest of the world had to be Liberal-Democratic, or at least allied with it. This radical re-presentation of complexity as a new form of familiar bipolarity lasted longer than it should have and shaped the conduct of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for years. Organisations, institutions, and individuals who had been shaped by and trained within the Cold War behaved in ways that fit previous experience, rather than comprehensively acknowledging that different circumstances required different tools of assessment and action. This illustrates how prior habituation to a way of seeing and assessing the world is at least as problematic to good strategy and policy making as complexity is in and of itself. The only safe assumption in the post-Cold War world is that things are not the same as they were yesterday, so it is vital that International Relations practitioners, policy makers, and scholars become habituated to looking for, and not shying away from, difference.

The aims of the military action that followed 9/11 fit squarely within a reconstituted Cold War paradigm, beginning with United States Special Forces undertaking spectacularly successful operations to bring about regime change in Afghanistan. As presented by Doug Stanton,⁴⁵ the combination of highly professional Green Berets with access to advanced and devastating technology, working alongside motivated Northern Alliance forces who knew the cultural and physical ground, quickly led to the Taliban being swept from power. After this

⁴² M Ryan, 'Inventing the "Axis of Evil": The Myth and Reality of US Intelligence and Policy-Making After 9/11', *Intelligence and National Security*, vol.17, no.4, 2002, pp.55-76.

⁴³ R Foot, 'Exceptionalism Again: The Bush Administration, the "Global War on Terror" and Human Rights', *Law and History Review*, vol.26, no.3, 2008, pp.707-725.

⁴⁴ RA Horsley, 'The Sicarii: Ancient Jewish "Terrorists"', *Journal of Religion*, vol.59, no.4, 1979, pp.435-458, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1202887> (accessed May 29, 2020).

⁴⁵ D Stanton, *12 Strong: The Declassified True Story of the Horse Soldiers*, Simon & Schuster, Audiobook Edition, 2011.

initial success came the hunt for al-Qaeda, which has been presented in books like *18 Hours*,⁴⁶ in which we get an Australian Special Operations perspective on Operation Anaconda, as SAS Signalman Jock Wallace fights for his life alongside United States troops ambushed in the Shahi-Kot Valley. By 2006 the fighting in Afghanistan was still intense, with Green Beret's like then Captain Rusty Bradley fighting the resurgent Taliban in the Panjwayi Valley as part of Operation Medusa.⁴⁷ The common thread in early accounts of the war in Afghanistan is highly professional Western troops achieving remarkable things in the battlespace under extremely adverse circumstances, but there being almost no correlation between what happened in the battlespace and what happened in the contested political space of Afghanistan. Levels of Human Security in Afghanistan remained stubbornly low, and there was no broad agreement as to what kind of societal identity should be consolidated, resulting in still ongoing societal insecurity, which has stymied multiple attempts to significantly improve Human Security in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, in Iraq (after 2003) Coalition forces had to change their tactics as quickly as they could to adapt to the destructive intensity of the insurgency. Coalition forces simultaneously rediscovered Counterinsurgency,⁴⁸ making use of David Kilcullen's positive experience with the Australian Army in East Timor to secure ground and save lives,⁴⁹ while also ratchetting up Counterterrorism operations in order to push the insurgency onto its back foot, as illustrated by Mark Urban in his book about British SAS operations in Iraq.⁵⁰ General Stanley McChrystal's books on his experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan provide us with the most cohesive way of understanding how tactics, doctrine, organisational structure, and missions changed on the ground, and how these changes came to be represented in policies and strategy. General McChrystal transformed Counterterrorism operations in Iraq, came to see the necessity and benefits of Counterinsurgency during the Surge, and integrated Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency into one operational plan in Afghanistan.⁵¹

While General McChrystal reconceptualised the larger operational picture, Green Beret officer's like Major Jim Gant⁵² and Captain Ron Fry⁵³ combined their operational experience and cognitive adaptability to demonstrate that better outcomes were indeed possible in intractable wars. In both Gant and Fry's cases, they focused on enhancing levels of Human Security in their immediate areas of operation, while assisting local populations to consolidate and expand their preferred form of Societal Security, both of which fit within McChrystal's conception of combined Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism operations. What becomes clear after assessing McChrystal, Gant, and Fry's experiences is that cognitively adaptable military personnel do not keep fighting the war they were trained for if they are not winning: instead, they learn to fight differently to win the battles in the war they

⁴⁶ S Lee, *18 Hours*, Bolinda Publishing, Audiobook Edition, 2006.

⁴⁷ R Bradley & K Maurer, *Lions of Kandahar: The Story of a Fight Against All Odds*, Brilliance Audio, Audiobook Edition, 2012.

⁴⁸ Johnson, *The Marines, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Culture*.

⁴⁹ DJ Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, Audible, Audiobook Edition, 2011.

⁵⁰ M Urban, *Task Force Black: The Explosive True Story of the SAS and the Secret War in Iraq*, Abacus, Kindle Edition, 2010.

⁵¹ S McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir*, Penguin Audio, Audiobook Edition, 2013; S McChrystal, D Silverman, T Collins & C Fussell, *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World*, Penguin, Kindle Edition, 2016.

⁵² AS Tyson, *American Spartan: The Promise, the Mission, and the Betrayal of Special Forces Major Jim Gant*, HarperCollins, Audiobook Edition, 2014.

⁵³ R Fry & T Tuleja, *Hammerhead Six: How Green Berets Waged an Unconventional War Against the Taliban to Win in Afghanistan's Deadly Pech Valley*, Hachette Audio, Audiobook Edition, 2016.

are engaged in. In wars where the combatants, commanders, and political leadership on both sides have nearly instantaneous access to information about the battlespace (thanks to digital technology), tactics, strategy, and policy need to evolve as quickly as possible under the scrutiny of a 24/7 digital media environment.

The ability to adapt from insights gained at the front line of the problem, in as close to real time as possible, fits firmly inside the scope of the work done by Karl Weick and Kathleen Sutcliff on High Reliability Organisations.⁵⁴ The personnel in High Reliability Organisations have consistently been seen to quickly learn from near-misses and failures, to embrace complexity and resist simplification, to accept that most problems are messes, and to acknowledge that most new knowledge comes from personnel working on the front line of the problem. The lessons learned and solutions implemented by Western Special Operations forces at the front lines of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as exemplified by McChrystal, Gant, and Fry, reflect all of the characteristics of High Reliability Organisations. In the post-Cold War world, in which complexity is unavoidable, and the post-9/11 world, in which time compression is becoming progressively more extreme, all tactics, strategy, and policy need to be reconsidered and revised in as timely a manner as is possible, based on open minded assessment of new front line experience. In many circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic we find ourselves in now, insights will have to be gained on the front line and implemented in as near to real time as is possible. Gary Klein describes doing this as Creative Desperation, where there are no new resources and no extra time available, but we need to take more effective action by using what we have differently.⁵⁵ In the post-COVID-19 world we need whole-of-government responses based on the characteristics of High Reliability Organisations to deal with circumstances that are likely to change very quickly—with no extra resources available to throw at the problem. Highly professional Special Operations forces are not the only examples of personnel and institutions functioning as High Reliability Organisations in the post-9/11 world, but, because of the pressure-cooker environment they work in, they provide an excellent time compressed example of how adaptable and effective whole-of-government responses need to be in the COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 world.

In an interview with Bob Woodward in July 2010, President Obama created a media storm when he said, “We can absorb a terrorist attack. We’ll do everything we can to prevent it, but even a 9/11, even the biggest attack ever . . . we absorbed it and we are stronger.”⁵⁶ Nothing about President Obama’s comments should have been controversial in 2010, other than the fact that they directly challenged the post-9/11 bipolar rhetoric of competing ideologies and existential threat, which still had lives of their own. President Obama’s comments illustrated that insight had been accumulated across the whole-of-government within the United States, and that it was time to update the messaging to go along with updated strategy and policy. On top of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq President Obama also had to develop a strategy and policy to respond to the Global Financial crisis, which was eliminating years of economic growth just at the time he was elected.

⁵⁴ KE Weick & KM Sutcliff, *Managing the Unexpected: Resilient Performance in an Age of Uncertainty*, Audible Studios, Audiobook Edition, 2012.

⁵⁵ G Klein, *Seeing What Others Don’t: The Remarkable Ways We Gain Insights*, Brilliance Audio, Audiobook Edition, 2014.

⁵⁶ M Memmott, ‘Obama Says “We Can Absorb A Terrorist Attack”’; Your Thoughts?, *NPR*, September 22, 2010, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2010/09/22/130040247/obama-says-we-can-absorb-a-terrorist-attack-your-thoughts>.

Economic crises tend to have one thing in common: they occur when the existing Conventional Wisdom cannot see that trouble is brewing, or why trouble is brewing, or knows what to do differently to move circumstances beyond the crisis. In 1929 Wall Street came crashing down ushering the world into the Great Depression. Initial attempts to revive economies across the world were unsuccessful, because governments kept trying to apply the 19th Century economic theories and beliefs about the gold standard to events that had been caused by these same beliefs. It took new economic ideas from John Maynard Keynes as outlined in his book, *The General Theory*,⁵⁷ and implemented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the New Deal to begin to get the United States out of the Great Depression, and to show how other countries could get out of the economic crisis. Keynes presented further refined ideas in 1940 in his short book, *How to Pay for the War*,⁵⁸ which became central to managing the British economy through World War II and into the post-war period of reconstruction. Economists such as Keynes were having to develop ideas very quickly and then assist leaders to see how they could use the ideas to achieve their preferred outcomes. Even in the economics profession, Creative Desperation has its place to overcome Conventional Wisdom.

It was in 1958 that the American economist, John Kenneth Galbraith, coined the term “Conventional Wisdom” and explained its significance in his book, *The Affluent Society*. According to Galbraith’s explanation, Conventional Wisdom is the generally held set of beliefs that are concerned with a certain topic. These beliefs are determined after the events that caused them to be created, and, consequently, are useful for explaining what previously happened, but may be of limited use to explain what is now happening, or what may happen later on.⁵⁹ Even though *The Affluent Society* is predominantly concerned with questions about what kind of society people want to live in, and what kind of economic policies are therefore necessary to facilitate the outcomes a society prefers, the idea of Conventional Wisdom is central to the book, because it provides a reason not to just compare competing theories, but to assess whether those theories are even likely to deliver preferred outcomes under the circumstances in question.

When Wall Street crashed again in September 2008, both economists and politicians began to question the Conventional Wisdom of whether Neo-Liberal economic theory was suitable to overcome the crisis, which a majority of professional economists had not seen coming.⁶⁰ Over subsequent years economists have asked a variety of important questions to determine how we should revise our economic Conventional Wisdom. Yanis Varoufakis asked whether the post-World War II economy had stopped working in the way it had been expected to, and whether we really understood the unintended consequences of trying to manage a global economy with economic theories that had been developed before the end of World War II.⁶¹ Mark Blyth asked whether large-scale austerity could be an effective, or legitimate, response to a modern crash, or whether we were suffering from a Fallacy of Composition.⁶² Joseph Stiglitz asked whether our current economic model can deliver the kinds of outcomes society

⁵⁷ JM Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, Ukemi Productions, Audiobook Edition, 2018.

⁵⁸ JM Keynes, ‘How to Pay for the War’, in *Essays in Persuasion*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2010, pp.367-439.

⁵⁹ Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*.

⁶⁰ A Tooze, *Crashed*, Penguin Books, Audiobook Edition, 2018.

⁶¹ Y Varoufakis & P Mason, *The Global Minotaur: America, Europe and the Future of the Global Economy*, 3rd edn, Zed Books, Kindle Edition, 2015.

⁶² M Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*, Audible Studios, Audiobook Edition, 2014.

desires, and, if not, what are we going to do instead.⁶³ Mariana Mazzucato asked whether the economy should be primarily focused on value extraction, or value creation, and what impact this would have on societies and the economy as a whole.⁶⁴ Each of these questions had the same issues at their core: what do we need to do to protect and enhance Human Security, and what kind of economy are we willing to create to have the sort of societies we want, or to secure the societies we have?

In Australia's case, these questions were quickly answered and action was taken as the crisis was unfolding. Australia's banks were appropriately regulated in 2008, reducing much of the recklessness and risk that was experienced overseas, and the Federal Government pumped AUD 42 billion into the economy before it could stall. Australia had been questioning and revising its economic Conventional Wisdom for decades via the democratic election cycle, and, as a consequence, came through the Global Financial Crisis in an enviable position.⁶⁵ Competing visions of the future, along with comprehensive plans to get there, are not just an important part of the democratic process, they also provide a testing ground for adapting strategy and policy to changing global circumstances. As Voltaire famously wrote, the perfect is the enemy of the good. If we aim to continue to reconsider and revise the good, then Australia will always be ready to take rapid, effective action.

At the time of writing this report, Australia has done a very good job of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the Federal Government revising policies as necessary and making at least two hundred billion dollars available to mitigate immediate problems from the consequent economic crisis. Australia has saved lives, protected livelihoods, and done a great deal to secure our way of life. All of these actions will have a marked impact on Human Security and Societal Security for a while, but when circumstances change our Conventional Wisdom will once again be challenged. A vision of the future is always vital, to explain and justify the difficult things that will have to be done on the way there, but Australia should remember that it is visions that last, not the Conventional Wisdom that is applied to get us there. If the world is unfortunate, and we get a second, third, and forth wave of COVID-19, similar to what happened with the Spanish Flu, then the threat to Human Security and Societal Security will be far greater. Under such potential circumstances new economic theories will have to be assessed to determine if they can more effectively move us in the direction we want to go. At present, Stephanie Kelton's recent book on Modern Monetary Theory, *The Deficit Myth*,⁶⁶ is receiving a similar level of interest as Keynes's writings did in the 1930s⁶⁷ and Friedrich Hayek's book, *The Road to Serfdom*,⁶⁸ received in the United States in the 1950s. Whether Australia revises its economic Conventional Wisdom during this crisis, or not, it is important that we remember that our allies and partners will have their own

⁶³ JE Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*, Tantor, Audiobook Edition, 2012.

⁶⁴ M Mazzucato, *The Value of Everything: Makers and Takers in the Global Economy*, Penguin Books, Audiobook Edition, 2018.

⁶⁵ JG Hill, 'Why Did Australia Fare So Well in the Global Financial Crisis?', *Sydney Law School Research Paper*, vol.12, no.35, 2012, pp.203-300, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2063267; R Wetenhall, 'Global Financial Crisis: The Australian Experience in International Perspective', *Public Organization Review*, vol.11, no.1, 2011, pp.77-91.

⁶⁶ S Kelton, *The Deficit Myth: Modern Monetary Theory and How to Build a Better Economy*, Hodder & Stoughton, Audiobook Edition, 2020.

⁶⁷ ZD Carter, *The Price of Peace: Money, Democracy, and the Life of John Maynard Keynes*, Random House Audio, Audiobook Edition, 2020.

⁶⁸ F Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, Routledge, Kindle Edition, 2012.

visions, and will make their own unique decisions about how to achieve Human Security and Societal Security.

In 2012 the President and Founder of Eurasia Group, Ian Bremmer, published a new book in which he put forward his assessment of how states could respond to the painfully slow recovery from the Global Financial Crisis, the cost of ongoing wars, and the ongoing threat from terrorism. Unlike many authors who either wanted to get the world back to where it had been before 2008, or quickly move us forward into a significantly revised and improved world, Bremmer wrote about what states could do in the actual difficult situations they found themselves in. In *Every Nation for Itself*,⁶⁹ Bremmer argues that no one had a clear idea of how to deal with the multitude of problems that the world was facing in 2012, including the G7, G8, G20, UN, and European Union. According to Bremmer, the United States, China, and Russia all had power, and were willing to use power to get the things they wanted, but no powerful state or institution was willing to use the power it had to lead the world in a direction that enough other states wanted to go.⁷⁰ Consequently, what Bremmer proposed was that every state should assess which other states it had common interests and goals with, and then work out how to work together to achieve these common ends. Bremmer did not propose a Hobbesian nature, red in tooth and claw, where all states would be at each other's throats, but, instead, that old alliances and Conventional Wisdom were not going to solve any major problems any time soon, so it was time to work with new partners in new ways. Bremmer has repeatedly made it clear that he does not believe that these circumstances are permanent, but that it could take significant time for a powerful state or institution to use its influence to lead in a direction that other states are happy to follow in order to develop comprehensive solutions for our myriad of shared problems.

Critical to Bremmer's argument in the book is his idea of Pivot States, which are the states that have a vision to offer, enough resources to get things started, and who are willing to work with, but not unduly influence, other states to achieve their common goals. Australia has everything necessary to be one of Bremmer's Pivot States, except for the consistent experience of presenting a vision that can be achieved with a variety of partners with significantly different resources. Australia has a lot of experience of working with powerful allies like the United States, and contributing to multilateral consensus within international institutions, but scaling a vision and action to our particular circumstances would take time.

In 2012 Australia may not have perceived any imminent reason to think and act like one of Bremmer's Pivot States, but in 2020 when economic, travel, and public health relationships between states that are not used to working closely together are becoming very important, it may well be a strategic choice Australia wishes to consider. There is certainly room for a state like Australia to use its insights, vision, experience, and resources to facilitate shared positive outcomes. As United Nations Secretary General António Guterres said in April 2020, "There is, indeed, a problem of leadership or, if you want, a disconnect between leadership and power. We see remarkable examples of leadership, but they are usually not associated with power. And where we see power, we sometimes do not see the necessary leadership."⁷¹ Australia has limited amounts of power, but its potential to be a capable and inclusive leader is significant, and what role Australia plays in the 2020s will largely depend

⁶⁹ Bremmer, *Every Nation for Itself*.

⁷⁰ I Bremmer, 'Every Nation for Itself—Ian Bremmer', 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Pq0KTyOcMY>.

⁷¹ A Guterres, 'UN Secretary-General's Press Briefing', United Nations, New York, April 30, 2020, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2020-04-30/un-secretary-generals-press-briefing>.

on what kind of strategy it decides to develop, and on what kind of vision it decides to project.

In order to be such a capable and inclusive leader, Australia needs to further develop the things it has shown itself to be good at, such as contributing to regional security and maintaining a stable economic base over time, and revising its Conventional Wisdom where necessary to accommodate changing global circumstances. Perhaps the most interesting and valuable new concept that has recently emerged to explain why Conventional Wisdom should continue to be open to revision is Sean McFate's concept of Durable Disorder, which he presents in his book, *Goliath*.⁷² For McFate, the world is now characterised by what he calls Durable Disorder: a situation in which problems can only be managed (not permanently solved), and in which solutions will only work for a while, and in which each action will cause a new reaction that changes the original problem. Under conditions of Durable Disorder assessing potential risks and gains is more difficult, and those who act first have the advantage of changing the situation and calculation, which complicates and slows their competitor's response to the now altered circumstances.

As we can see from Russia's intervention in Ukraine and China's behaviour in the South China Sea, some states have not just accepted the existence of Durable Disorder, they have worked out how to exploit it to their strategic advantage. In both Russia and China's cases, they have taken as much action as they believe they can get away with to achieve their preferred outcomes, without pushing so far that the international community is compelled to forcefully respond. Each time they act in this way they increase the scale of their successes, and in doing so they further problematise the situation and add to the Durable Disorder. Under such circumstances Hybrid Warfare makes perfect sense, as it provides gains for a state while making it more difficult for a competitor to assess a situation and effectively respond,⁷³ and it is no surprise that it is now more difficult to achieve lasting diplomatic solutions to so many problems.⁷⁴ On top of all of the examples McFate provides in his book, we now have the COVID-19 pandemic adding its variables and uncertainties to Durable Disorder. For all countries, Australia included, Durable Disorder has increased during 2020, and the importance of acting quickly and confidently to ameliorate problems today, so that we are ready to deal with new problems tomorrow, cannot be overstated.

At a tactical level, concepts have already been turned into processes to confront something like a combination of Durable Disorder and Conventional Wisdom. As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan ground on, the United States Marine Corps decided that it needed to create a process its personnel could use to get ahead of the IEDs and ambushes. Out of this desire grew the Combat Hunter program, which once implemented across the Marine Corps resulted in a significant reduction in casualties. The creators of the Combat Hunter program, Patrick Van Horne and Jason A Riley, have summarised the Marine Corps' achievements and the implications of applying the concepts in other situations in their book, *Left of Bang*.⁷⁵ The essence of Combat Hunter/Left of Bang is that if you are in a situation similar to one that you have been in before and three out of the ordinary things happen (anomalies), then you have to

⁷² McFate, *Goliath*.

⁷³ J Sciutto, *The Shadow War: Inside Russia's and China's Secret Operations to Defeat America*, HarperCollins Publishers, Audiobook Edition, 2019.

⁷⁴ R Farrow, *War on Peace: The End of Diplomacy and the Decline of American Influence*, HarperCollins, Audiobook Edition, 2018.

⁷⁵ P Van Horne & JA Riley, *Left of Bang: How the Marine Corps' Combat Hunter Program Can Save Your Life*, Tantor, Audiobook Edition, 2015.

take immediate action to avoid a potential problem, or to make the problem become apparent. It is a form of pre-emptive action based on observation and a predisposition toward action, and is not a justification for ideological pre-emption. Van Horne and Riley shift the onus from refining what was done last time to observing and responding to what is different this time. This shift may sound trivial, but it is exactly the sort of shift in perception and action that Gary Klein found was critical for gaining insights and improving performance in his book, *Seeing What Others Don't*. The fact that Van Horne and Riley developed a way to train thousands of personnel to do in the battlespace what Klein had discovered was so rare historically is very important.

Acknowledging that the world is in a condition of Durable Disorder is significant, but coming up with processes that empower personnel and states to quickly and effectively respond to it is even more important. The Marine Corps demonstrated that awareness and action can be improved at scale in non-permissive environments, which suggests that awareness and timely, effective action can be increased in all environments. Dan Heath has met this challenge in his book, *Upstream*,⁷⁶ setting out how to address social and economic problems in civil environments, by identifying and responding to the earliest signs of their presence. If more difficult and interconnected problems are going to confront Australia and the Indo-Pacific from now on, then more timely identification, analysis, and action will provide both tactical and strategic advantages. It is no longer good enough to just refine and repeat yesterday's process, unless that process is tailored to identifying and analysing difference in order to facilitate rapid, insight driven action.

In order to be as capable as possible of thriving in, rather than just dealing with, the circumstances the world finds itself in, Australia needs to embrace the idea of being more than robust and/or resilient. In his book, *Antifragile*, Nassim Nicholas Taleb sets out to demonstrate that there are systems and institutions that gain from disorder. The underlying premise of his argument is that just surviving circumstances (being robust or resilient) is not good enough, because it illustrates that something is only robust enough to survive as it is, but that it does not demonstrate a deliberate ability to learn and improve through experiencing difficult circumstances. For Taleb, the aim should be to become antifragile, which he defines as, “*anything that has more upside than downside from random events (or certain shocks) is antifragile; the reverse is fragile.*”⁷⁷ Australia has shown itself to be robust and resilient, and therefore has a substantial base on which to craft antifragility.

Consequently, Australia should continue to develop as broad a set of Sovereign Capabilities as possible as soon as it can.⁷⁸ Interconnectedness is still vital to the future of Australia and the international community, but enhanced self-reliance as a manifestation of antifragility is likely to be the most advantageous solution for the short and medium term. How many strategically significant skills Australia always has in practice is more important than how much of any particular practice we are already doing, because with increased capability comes the inevitable potential to increase capacity when necessary. So far, Australia has been able to flatten the COVID-19 curve, so that our medical system has not been overwhelmed. How many highly trained medical personnel Australia, or any other country has, is always going to present a limit to capability, but, for example, having to wait for personal protective

⁷⁶ D Heath, *Upstream: How to Solve Problems Before They Happen*, Penguin Audio, Audiobook Edition, 2020.

⁷⁷ NN Taleb, ‘Nassim Taleb: A Definition of Antifragile and its Implications’, 2014, <https://fs.blog/2014/04/antifragile-a-definition/>.

⁷⁸ SAGE International Australia, ‘Sovereign Capability—Lessons to Learn From COVID-19’, *STRATEGIKON* Podcast, April 6, 2019, <https://omny.fm/shows/strategikon/sovereign-capability-lessons-to-learn-from-covid-1>.

equipment to arrive from overseas is an undesirable limit to capacity that should be overcome through constantly improving capability.

In 2020 levels of Human Security and Societal Security are at risk in states across the Indo-Pacific, and if Durable Disorder is not acknowledged and addressed rapidly circumstances are likely to become worse. Australia has the resources and experience to be a significant leader in its region, but doing so will depend on clear sighted assessments, comprehensive strategy, a persuasive vision, and a willingness to work with partner states who wish to maintain their own paths and identities. If Australia allows its Conventional Wisdom about economics, international relations, and the practice of war to be reconsidered and revised too slowly, then it will not just miss opportunities, it will risk misunderstanding the complexity within which it must function. Too many assumptions were made about the future at the end of the Cold War, and after 9/11, that were based on the past, and as a consequence the world has several examples of what not to do, but it also has an abundance of good assessment tools to successfully forge its future strategy and policy. Australia has the capacity to enhance its capability in the 2020s, and the Indo-Pacific will benefit along with Australia if it decides that this is what it intends to do.

2 | THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

John Bruni

A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF CANNOT STAND

United States President Abraham Lincoln

At the time of writing, the Trump administration has been rocked by months of protests, civil disobedience, and a series of riots,⁷⁹ sparked by public outrage over the killing of Black American citizen, George Floyd while in police custody. Curfews were imposed on 20 US cities.⁸⁰ Without going into the specifics of the Floyd case and subsequent racial tensions in the US, what this has revealed about American power is that while there are few doubts about the strength of the country's military reach and significance, the United States, politically, is a country internally divided. The growing disparity between the rich and poor while not exclusively race-based, is generally considered to be a major factor.⁸¹ White police violence against minorities, particularly against the Black community, remains a significant hang-over from the American Civil War 1861-65. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s ushered in some semblance of progress and social inclusion, with the aim of rectifying America's problems with 'institutionalised' racism. Over time, the current civil unrest in the United States will subside, or be brought under control, but it is unlikely that the underlying causes will be dealt with to prevent their reoccurrence. If we remember the military implications of racial tensions among US forces during the Vietnam War, when barracks resegregated among those who supported militant Black movements in the continental US and those who supported 'White power'.⁸² This caused the Pentagon multiple problems throughout the 1968-72 period and was considered a significant crisis in confidence in US military efficiency and effectiveness. Social cohesion is a vital component of national strategic power.

For much of the post-World War II era, American power was perceived as a goliath on the world stage: a monolithic presence that determined the fate of many regions of the world, depending on whether Washington took an active interest in a region's affairs or not. This perception of American superpower status, quite possibly always a flawed construct, has

⁷⁹ R Lowry, 'The Left Shifts the Blame on Riots in American Cities', *Boston Herald*, September 2, 2020, <https://www.bostonherald.com/2020/09/02/the-left-shifts-the-blame-on-riots-in-american-cities/>.

⁸⁰ A Nally, 'The Curfews in Place in US Cities and States After the Death of Black Man George Floyd', *ABC News*, June 2, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-02/what-curfews-are-in-place-in-the-us-after-george-floyd-death/12313140>.

⁸¹ JA Powell & S Menendian, 'Progressive Politics: The Strategic Importance of Race', Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, Ohio State University, November 2006, pp.4-16, http://www.kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/reports/2006/11_2006_ProgressivePolitics_Race.pdf.

⁸² JS Bruni, 'Our Exclusive Possession of This Continent', MA Thesis, Discipline of Politics, Flinders University, South Australia, 1992, pp.108-110.

been foremost in the minds of countries that sought to counter the influence of the United States. It was also a considerable factor for those states who depend on promises of US support and intervention for their defence, such as Japan and Australia.

The American story in the Indo-Pacific is punctuated by continuity and discontinuity. Arguably the continuity rests on the fact that much of America's post-World War II network of alliances still feature prominently in any description of the US being a global superpower. This network of alliances facilitates American military and strategic power not just in the Indo-Pacific, but in the Atlantic as well. Australia, Japan and South Korea—each, significant Indo-Pacific states in terms of wealth, development, and military strength are key American pillars in this region. The discontinuity comes from the 'America First' movement under the Trump administration and its effect on the American alliance network. Allies, who were at one time absolutely committed to US power, are no longer sure that Washington will honour its alliance commitments. Under the Trump administration 'fear of abandonment' is forcing allies to rethink their strategies, meaning that hedging has become a part of the defence nomenclature among many US allies.⁸³

THE 1990s GAME OF ACRONYMS: BATTLE FOR THE MULTILATERAL 'HIGHGROUND'

Strategy and strategic power are, of course, not just about the possession of and willingness to use military force to achieve national objectives. It is also a battle for primacy in terms of political influence and identity. Writing and implementing the rules by which trade and commerce will flow is as much a signal of the will to national power as it is a way to legitimise and normalise international leadership.

Arguably, the first shot in this non-kinetic war for influence took place in 1989 with the foundation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) multilateral organisation. This Australian initiative, proposed by then Prime Minister of Australia Bob Hawke,⁸⁴ was created with the idea of promoting free trade among its 21 member countries. It has to be remembered that, at the time, the US had been preoccupied by Japan's economic and technological success during the 1980s, which fomented the 'Japan scare': the idea that Japanese economic and technological initiatives might overtake those of the United States.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, during the 1980s in Europe, the member states of the European Economic Community (EEC) were integrating more closely with the aspiration that economic integration would lead to a full political and currency union. And while the EEC at that time seemed to have no ambition to alter the international balance of power in the late Cold War period, Europe's moves were, in some quarters, considered to represent a potential shift in strategic power within a world of competing regional trade blocs.⁸⁶ APEC was seen as an answer to those who sought to break down trade barriers within Asia and keep trade free among its members. As the largest economy in the group, the United States (by dint of its overwhelming size) came to dominate APEC, much to the disappointment of smaller Asian

⁸³ P Buttigieg & PH Gordon, 'Present at the Destruction of US Power and Influence', *Foreign Policy*, July 14, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/14/trump-biden-foreign-policy-alliances/>.

⁸⁴ For useful contextual information, see: APEC, 'History', <https://www.apec.org/About-Us/About-APEC/History>.

⁸⁵ MJ Heale, 'Anatomy of a Scare: Yellow Peril Politics in America, 1980-1993', *Journal of American Studies*, vol.43, no.1, 2009, pp.19-47.

⁸⁶ N Wang, 'The Relationship Between Regional Trading Blocs and Globalisation', *International Journal of Economics and Finance*, vol.2, no.1, 2010, pp.171-173.

members who, while seeing utility in APEC, also saw it as a stalking horse for American dominance and control of the Pacific economies in spite of its claims to inclusiveness and objectivity.⁸⁷ This perspective was not helped by the fact that the greatest supporters of APEC were Australia and Japan, American allies who seemed to move together as a powerful sub-organisational grouping within APEC.

Within Asia itself, however, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which was founded by an initial grouping of five countries in 1967, was modern Asia's first multilateral trade organisation. Born out of the security fears of non-communist Southeast Asia, which had experienced having to counter local communist revolutionary movements supported by Maoist China, worried about their vulnerability of becoming the next Cold War battleground in Asia after Vietnam.⁸⁸ The ASEAN five (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines) initially had in mind creating a neutral security space that would sidestep great power competition in Southeast Asia. Their initial problem, however, was that being recent post-colonial states (with the exception of Thailand) their economies were underdeveloped, making them vulnerable to communist insurgency. The ASEAN five also had a number of unresolved territorial disputes that, if not well managed, could lead to war.⁸⁹ The other complication was that the US had a base agreement with the Philippines, its former Asian colony.⁹⁰ And Thailand was the headquarters and a front-line member of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO),⁹¹ assisting US forces in their war in Vietnam⁹² as well as their covert operations in Laos and Cambodia. Nonetheless, the ASEAN Declaration was signed with the idea of creating a regional group based on social and economic progress and peace. Existing security ties to the US were not considered contradictory to the spirit of the ASEAN Declaration, as they were bilateral in nature, while ASEAN was multilateral. Although some questioned the neutral nature of the grouping, considering that it was a non-communist bloc and largely dependent on the US for its survival, as the organisation grew, and American forces withdrew from Vietnam in 1975, this gave ASEAN the time and space to evolve, strengthen, and expand, the organisation gaining its tenth member, Cambodia, in 1999. In the twenty years since its founding, ASEAN internal mechanisms became more codified and with the organisation going to great lengths to be seen as a neutral, region-wide Southeast Asian entity. ASEAN neither harmed Washington's strategic nor foreign policy objectives in the region, since the US continued to have strong bilateral ties to Southeast Asian militaries, though its grip began to wane after the fall of the USSR and the withdrawal of Soviet forces from their Vietnamese base at Cam Ranh Bay.⁹³ In 1991, the Philippines (the poorest of the ASEAN states) decided not to renew the USAF lease on Clark Airfield and the USN lease on Subic Bay, both having been central rear echelon bases for the Americans during the Vietnam War. How much of this was driven by

⁸⁷ TJ Cheng, 'APEC and the Asian Financial Crisis: A Lost Opportunity for Institution-building?', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, vol.6, no.2, 1998, pp.27-28; N Nesadurai, 'APEC: A Tool for US Regional Domination?', *Pacific Review*, vol.9, no.1, 1996, pp.31-57.

⁸⁸ E Albert & L Maizland, 'What is ASEAN?', Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), last updated December 20, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-asean>.

⁸⁹ For more information on ASEAN's unresolved land and maritime disputes see: A Gerstl & M Strašáková (eds), *Unresolved Border, Land and Maritime Disputes in Southeast Asia: Bi- and Multilateral Conflict Resolution Approaches and ASEAN's Centrality*, Brill, Leiden, 2016.

⁹⁰ R Marlay, 'US Bases in the Philippines', *Defense Analysis*, vol.2, no.1, 1986, pp.47-48.

⁹¹ US State Department, Office of the Historian, 'Southeast Asian Treaty Organization, 1954', <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/seato>.

⁹² Nuclear Vault, 'Thailand's Role in the Vietnam War (1967)', posted August 18, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTHrSSRUVEk>.

⁹³ L Storey & CA Thayer, 'Cam Ranh Bay: Past Imperfect, Future Conditional', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol.23, no.3, 2001, pp.452-473.

nationalist politics in Manila is debatable: nationalist Filipino politicians were certainly unhappy about the bar and brothel culture that had arisen around these two US bases, but the eruption of Mount Pinatubo was probably the deciding factor for both the US military and the Filipino government.⁹⁴ Neither Clark nor Subic were considered vital to US forward deployed forces, a fact underpinned by the end of the Cold War, as well as new longer-range weapons in America's arsenal that could be deployed further away from Southeast Asia.

America's relationship with ASEAN is complex. On the one hand, the organisational culture of ASEAN was and remains the antithesis of that of the United States. The United States continues to prefer clear directives and firm action. On the other hand, according to some critics, ASEAN is a talkfest that achieves very little in terms of tangible results. In 1994 the organisation created the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The ARF has provided ASEAN members with a platform through which to discuss and consult each other on common political and security concerns.

During the 1990s, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed as well as Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Kwan Yew championed 'Asian Values',⁹⁵ a concept that the states of ASEAN were said to embody. But Asian Values were only appealing to those countries that could already relate to them. It was an effort to give ASEAN its own regional cultural identity. This call to 'Pan-Asianism',⁹⁶ which emerged from Southeast Asia, may be seen as a less threatening initiative than any similar assertion driven by either Japan or China. Nonetheless, while not expressly anti-Western, the Asian values movement did measure itself by what it was not—an appendage of US/Western power. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis put an end to a lot of the Asian Values rhetoric, as economic cooperation did not live up to expectations. ASEAN weathered the storm and survived, but Pan-Asianism changed shape under the ASEAN + 3 architecture (1997), which included the PRC, Japan, and South Korea.

ASEAN + 3 was thought to be able to build closer ties to the Northeast Asian financial giants by drawing on common 'Asian-ness'. It was hoped that by encouraging Asian cooperation in this way, that Asia could build a form of structural and cultural integration similar to that achieved by the European Union. Ideally, the ASEAN collective would come to be seen as a Southeast Asian pillar, equal to, but *not subject to*, the dictates and dominance of its larger partner countries. While this was the theory, the practice was rather different. Even while the economies of ASEAN were growing, and taken collectively, represented a significant economic and trading space, they lacked a coordinated approach toward Beijing, Tokyo, and Seoul. Indeed, each ASEAN member-state saw their bilateral relationships toward China, Japan, and South Korea in different ways, according them different priorities from a *national* perspective. ASEAN was, in many ways, less ambitious than the European Union, refusing to contemplate higher inter-ASEAN coordination beyond what each nation-state was comfortable with. There was no comprehensive effort to create an ASEAN foreign policy, or security policy, that could make the organisation appear stronger. According to ASEAN defenders there was no need, because Asian people did not see the world in the same way as Europeans or Americans. Instead, the intrinsic value of ASEAN, the ARF, and ASEAN + 3 was in the enmeshing of states into the *ASEAN cultural norm*. The geostrategic machinations

⁹⁴ Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, 'Politics, Pinatubo and the Pentagon: The Closure of Subic Bay', May 31, 2016, <https://adst.org/2016/05/politics-pinatubo-pentagon-closure-subic-bay-philippines/>.

⁹⁵ SY Kim, 'Do Asian Values Exist? Empirical Tests of the Four Dimensions of Asian Values', *Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol.10, no.2, 2016, pp.547-576.

⁹⁶ CWA Szpilman & S Saaler, 'Pan-Asianism as an Ideal of Asian Identity and Solidarity, 1850-Present', *Asia-Pacific Journal*, vol.9, issue 17, no.1, 2011, pp.1-30.

of larger and more powerful partner states could be moderated by them belonging to and acknowledging the advantages of ‘peaceful cooperation and trade’. This belief wilfully ignored the ongoing commercial and strategic competition between China, Japan, and South Korea.

Rather than addressing institutional deficiencies that, in time, would have allowed ASEAN to independently deal with crises to the regional bloc, the organisation expanded further in 2005, creating the ASEAN + 6.⁹⁷ This forum included the +3 states of China, Japan, and South Korea, with the addition of India, Australia, and New Zealand. This expansion exacerbated the old problem of incorporating without reconciling the diverse interests of these states, which left them all with profit as their only common denominator, and making profit is not something that draws states together. Since each state has had their own way of conducting trade and commerce, and each state has had their own perceptions of what constitutes a threat to trade and commerce, the accumulation of wealth has not provided a shared perspective from which to build a like-minded economic community within ASEAN, let alone with the bloc’s partners under the +3 or +6 groupings. Complicating this situation further, every nation-state within ASEAN and across its trading partners have, to a greater or lesser extent, continued to be economic competitors. How much cooperation is too much, in terms of playing to each state’s sovereign economic imperatives and ambitions, has never been satisfactorily resolved. Consequently, as a loose power grouping, it might have been united enough to give a sense of a regional, non-confrontational cultural bureaucracy and identity, but ASEAN has failed to become a multilateral strategic entity, independent from great power machinations, that can more fully define and protect Southeast Asian interests without actually defining what these interests are.

PIVOT TO ASIA

The Obama administration put much of its foreign policy effort into extracting the United States from its ongoing military commitments to Afghanistan and Iraq. These wars, initiated and prosecuted under the previous Bush presidency (2000-08), were not only a net drain on American military resources, they were a net drain on the American economy. It has been estimated that the wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) cost the United States at least USD 6.4 trillion, inclusive of funds spent on the broader Global War on Terrorism (GWoT, FY 2001-FY 2020).⁹⁸ From a historical perspective, the wars were ‘casualty-light’, meaning that the numbers of US service personnel killed or wounded were not high, but they were still significant, as are the costs involved with caring for injured service personnel returning from the Afghan and Iraqi battlespaces. Not only did these wars fail to provide the promised peace, security, and development for Afghans and Iraqis, nation-building efforts were scuppered by Afghan and Iraqi militia forces hostile to American occupation. The introduction of the US and Coalition forces into these countries created weak comprador classes in Kabul and Baghdad, where their commitment to the Bush administration’s ‘export of democracy’ was questionable at best. The power vacuum created by the US-led Coalition in both Afghanistan and Iraq disrupted local politics to the extent that there were no credible alternatives to rule in place of the Taliban or the Hussein regime. Consequently, both countries fell into a state of

⁹⁷ MH Toh, ‘ASEAN +6 as a Step Toward an Asian Economic Community’, *East Asia Forum*, May 15, 2009, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2009/05/15/asean6-as-a-step-towards-an-asian-economic-community/>.

⁹⁸ A Macias, ‘America Has Spent 6.4 Trillion on Wars in the Middle East and Asia Since 2001, a New Study Says’, *CNBC*, November 20, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/11/20/us-spent-6point4-trillion-on-middle-east-wars-since-2001-study.html>.

civil and political chaos, ironically enabling Iran, a sworn enemy of the United States, to establish itself in both Afghanistan and Iraq in ways unthinkable before US military intervention.

Sensing the futility of the American position in Afghanistan and Iraq, Obama saw political, economic, and strategic capital in withdrawing from these theatres. Furthermore, considering the ‘rise of China’, Obama believed that Asia had been displaced by the Middle East in America’s strategic thinking.⁹⁹ He believed that the United States had been playing too passive a role in Asia for too long and wanted to alter this perception in order to better position the US for future economic and strategic competition with the PRC.

In 2011, after having achieved a number of tactical victories against the Taliban during the previous year, Obama announced a withdrawal of the bulk of US forces from Afghanistan. This was to give the US president the space necessary to alter American international priorities. However, it would be wrong to credit Obama alone for the pivot to Asia. This ‘re-balancing’ was merely an acceleration of a process that had begun under Clinton and was continued under Bush, with the redeployment of key US military assets to its forward bases in the region. Obama gave this process a public face, formalising it in a speech to the Australian parliament in November 2011, at which he said:

As President, I have therefore made a deliberate and strategic decision—as a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future, by upholding core principles and in close partnership with allies and friends. ... As we end today's wars [Afghanistan and Iraq], I have directed my national security team to make our presence and mission in the Asia Pacific a top priority. As a result, reductions in US defence spending will not—I repeat, will not—come at the expense of the Asia Pacific.¹⁰⁰

According to West, however,

Obama's Asia pivot got off to an awkward start. Its initial emphasis was on the military, rather than economic or human dimensions. The speech was very pointed at China, on which the region depends economically—but in which it has little trust politically and militarily.¹⁰¹

For the host country of this speech, Australia, the awkwardness was even more pointed, as the PRC was its major trading partner, even though it shared the United States scepticism regarding China’s peaceful rise. Indeed, some even attribute the PRC’s more assertive role in the South China Sea to Obama’s speech, which was considered to be an American plan to contain China by Beijing—that had to be countered.

⁹⁹ J Ford, ‘The Pivot to Asia Was Obama’s Biggest Mistake’, *The Diplomat*, January 21, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/the-pivot-to-asia-was-obamas-biggest-mistake/>.

¹⁰⁰ B Obama, ‘Address by the President of the United States of America’, in Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, November 17, 2011, pp.12848-12849, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/chamber/hansardr/15888e39-7a11-4ca2-9456-f088c9812ef0/toc_pdf/House%20of%20Representatives_2011_11_17_663_Official.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22chamber/hansardr/15888e39-7a11-4ca2-9456-f088c9812ef0/0006%22.

¹⁰¹ J West, ‘Obama’s Pivot to Asia’, Asian Century Institute, March 22, 2017, <https://asiancenturyinstitute.com/international/1278-obama-s-pivot-to-asia>.

When scrutinised closely, the United States pivot was less successful than had been desired. Obama did little to stop Xi Jinping from continuing China's land reclamation projects in the South China Sea, which turned small and geographically insignificant atolls and islands into outposts of Chinese military power. This lack of American push-back only encouraged Xi and the CCP to continue their plans to create a security buffer for themselves in the South China Sea.

Furthermore, the ASEAN states and their commitment to a loose labyrinth of interlocking multilateral and bilateral agreements did nothing to prevent Xi Jinping's 'island building' campaign in the South China Sea. Therefore, the theory of moderating Chinese 'great power' behaviour by enmeshing Beijing into the 'ASEAN family' was not successful.

Also, Obama's reticence for direct diplomatic action against China reflected a truth about American power at the time. While active steps were being taken to downsize the US presence in the Middle East, extricating the US from this region was far more complex and involved more time and energy than anticipated. Furthermore, the strategic landscape in the Middle East included countries such as Saudi Arabia that had little interest in seeing the Americans reduce their role in the Gulf. They were concerned about newly emboldened Iran, now with controlling interests in Iraq and Afghanistan, and, according to US and other intelligence assessments, with an active nuclear program. Superimpose the chaos of the Arab Spring (2010) and concerns over Iran exploiting the political fissures of the Arab world in the midst of an American draw-down, and the difficulty of President Obama's was clear. He may well have wanted to portray himself and his presidency as 'Pacific-focussed', but he lacked the policy bandwidth to see this through.

Making matters worse, the key economic plank of Obama's pivot to Asia, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)¹⁰² was meeting resistance in the US and among some of its partners. Not all members of this US-led effort saw the TPP as an obvious win-win. There was also the ever-present fear among American workers that more multilateral trading bodies would lead to more domestic unemployment as older industry sectors shut down or were transferred to less developed economies with lower labour costs.¹⁰³ Public scepticism about government promises of 'new industries' being created by multilateral trade mechanisms at a time of relatively high underemployment *and* unemployment gave rise to political movements like the Tea Party (2009), a splinter movement of the Republican Party, and eventually provided the base of support for Donald Trump to succeed in his bid for the presidency in 2016.

In Australia, public controversies included concerns with a clause within the TPP that would have allowed private companies to sue governments for limiting the free movement of goods such as tobacco, a substance that multiple Australian governments have been attempting to control and eliminate.¹⁰⁴ Then there was the apparent secrecy surrounding Australia's participation in the TPP, which gave rise to many conspiracy theories about what that would mean for Australian economic and political sovereignty.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² The TPP began as an outgrowth of the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement in 2005 (Brunei, Chile, Singapore and Chile).

¹⁰³ P Pham, 'Why Did Donald Trump Kill This Big Free Trade Deal?', *Forbes*, December 29, 2017, <https://asiancenturyinstitute.com/international/1278-obama-s-pivot-to-asia>.

¹⁰⁴ The Investor-State Dispute (ISDS) Settlement mechanism.

¹⁰⁵ P Ranald, 'Trans-Pacific Partnership and Australia's Right to Know', *The Conversation*, November 19, 2013, <https://theconversation.com/the-trans-pacific-partnership-and-australias-right-to-know-20334>.

Meanwhile, in the Middle East, the Arab Spring gave rise to political turmoil in many states, and to civil war in others. The United States could not avert its gaze from the unravelling of the Middle East. Distracted by this chaos, and bowing to Saudi concerns about Iran's nuclear program, President Obama sought to contain Iranian belligerence by developing a plan designed to limit Iran's nuclear ambitions to civilian purposes. It was hoped that (in time) this plan, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) would lead to normalisation of relations between Iran and the United States after decades of hostility.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the Islamic State, a far more ambitious and vicious terrorist movement than Al Qaeda that grew out of the post-Saddam Iraqi civil war, injected itself into the Syrian civil war and created a geopolitical space for itself in Iraq and Syria called the Islamic State Caliphate. As part of America's continuing war against terrorism, as well as wanting to actively preserve the territorial status quo in the Middle East, President Obama launched an air campaign against the Islamic State (also popularly known by the acronym, ISIS) and began backing local proxy forces in order to defeat ISIS.

While American military power and diplomatic efforts once again returned to the Middle East, the TPP did not seem as critical to Washington as the perennial cauldron of the Middle East. The twelve member states signed the TPP agreement in February 2016, after a series of negotiations on tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade.

Many observers argued that the TPP was not an instrument of trade, but one of geopolitics, attempting to lessen Asia's growing dependence on Chinese trade and investment. The fact that the TPP excluded China, Asia's largest economy, might well have compelled Beijing to create an alternative arrangement. When Trump withdrew the US from the TPP in 2016, the remaining states, known as the TPP-11 revived the concept in 2017, minus the US, renaming it the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). This came into force in December 2018. So far, salvaging the TPP seems more like a holding action, designed to outlive the political fortunes of anti-multilateralist Donald Trump, leaving open the prospect for an eventual US entry into the CPTPP, post-Trump. How this trade agreement will evolve in the post-COVID environment, which so far has called for less dependence on international trade networks based on a few primary manufacturing centres and global supply chains, with greater emphasis on developing sovereign manufacturing capabilities is still up for debate.

ENTER THE DRAGON

Following the 2012 ASEAN Summit in Cambodia, the PRC initiated its own variant of a regional trade bloc, which included the ASEAN states, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, and New Zealand. Called the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), this became China's answer to APEC and the TPP.¹⁰⁷ While not explicitly pan-Asian, through the inclusion of Australia and New Zealand, it was hard not to see this as an extension of Chinese strategic power and influence dressed up as a trade bloc.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, many commentators conceded that RCEP might make significant inroads in harmonizing trade rules and business

¹⁰⁶ Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

¹⁰⁷ F He & P Yang, 'China's Role in Asia's Free Trade Agreements', *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies*, vol.2, no.2, 2015, pp.416-424.

¹⁰⁸ Y Khan, 'China is Leading a 15-Nation Pact That Would Create the World's Biggest Trade Deal. The US Isn't In It', *Business Insider*, November 12, 2019, <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/china-led-rcep-pact-to-be-biggest-trade-deal-without-us-amid-tariffs-2019-11-1028680170>.

transactions in a region known for multiple layers of overlapping bilateral and multilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).

In 2013, Beijing announced its other major initiative, One Belt, One Road, later renamed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a bold plan that would see the creation of a road and rail hub and spoke network spanning Eurasia, connecting the Chinese market to those of the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Europe. This was considered a major challenge to the United States, in that it sought to bypass America's control of much of the world's key sea lines of control (SLOC). Many national governments did not appear to care about how this project, if successfully completed, would affect American global power, instead concerned with how this would affect the profitability of companies that had relocated to China to exploit the country's cheaper labour costs.

Both RCEP and BRI, if viewed from a purely economic perspective, can be interpreted as mostly harmless Chinese projects, designed to uncomplicate and generally ease trade between the PRC and the rest of the world. In particular, the Belt and Road Initiative could be seen as a magnanimous gesture by the CCP, a generous spending of Chinese capital on infrastructure that will economically benefit every country that lies across its path. As Joseph Nye might describe it: a Chinese case of Smart Power.¹⁰⁹ The BRI is no simple magnanimous gesture. It is a means of expanding Chinese power in a manner not dissimilar to Britain's control over Latin America in the 1890s. The creation of an 'indirect empire'. In addition, China's RCEP initiative can be seen as a way for the PRC to consolidate its reputation as the leading Asian economic and cultural power, recreating its idealised Middle Kingdom in the modern age. The RCEP could benefit other member-states so long as the CCP's rules, regulations, and expectations are followed.

WE CAN'T ALLOW CHINA TO RAPE OUR COUNTRY AND THAT'S WHAT THEY'RE DOING

United States President Donald Trump

Upon the election of Donald Trump in 2016, it was anticipated that US foreign policy might continue along the trajectory set by policy makers in previous administrations, on a relatively uncontroversial and non-partisan path.

Since there is value placed on policy continuity at the decision-making level, campaign rhetoric frequently does not become administration policy. Trump's campaign platform was largely a grab-bag of populist ideas about returning outsourced jobs back to the United States, repatriating manufacturing plants that had been sent to low wage countries (under various multilateral or bilateral trade agreements), and winding back domestic legislation that impeded old industries (such as the coal industry) from continuing. It was all about 'America First'.

What all of this meant for foreign policy was not clear until President Trump took office and assembled his administration in Washington. It soon became apparent that neither Trump, nor his staff, were content to let Obama-era policies continue. Trump wanted his presidency to represent a break from past practice. He wanted to disrupt what Americans thought about themselves and how other countries viewed the United States, and, more than anything else,

¹⁰⁹ D Gavel, 'Joseph Nye on Smart Power', Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, July 3, 2008, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/joseph-nye-smart-power>.

he wanted to walk away from ‘bad’ deals done under Obama, such as JCPOA, the TPP, the careful yet unremarkable management of North Korea, maintaining the NATO status quo, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Relations with China were initially accorded a high priority, with President Trump meeting President Xi at Trump’s Floridian property, Mar-a-Lago, in April 2017.¹¹⁰ It was hoped that the two leaders would be able to amicably sort out bilateral differences concerning the US trade deficit with China, cooperate on the contentious issue of North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs, and find other areas of common ground. In an inauspicious start to this meeting, President Trump had ordered a bombing raid against a Syrian airfield thought to have carried out a chemical weapon attack.¹¹¹ This put President Xi in an awkward position, as he had hoped to meet Trump in Florida on equal terms. As two leaders of two great nations. But the Syrian strike proved an embarrassment for Xi. President Xi supported the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, as well as the Russian military presence in Syria. The American attack delegitimised the Chinese position in supporting Syria and Russia, making Xi look as though he was supporting a war criminal who flaunted the international prohibition on the use of chemical weapons. The attack also underscored the global military reach of the United States, a key element of US global power that the PRC could not match. President Xi therefore could not appear Trump’s ‘co-equal’. Furthermore, because of this US military strike, President Xi and the CCP had to reassess what this action meant for areas that Beijing hoped to dominate and control, such as North Korea, the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and Taiwan.

As the 2017 Mar-a-Lago Summit ended, the media and the White House portrayed it as a great success and proclaimed that a ‘bromance’ had been started between Trump and Xi.¹¹² It seemed that President Trump held the initiative, and that the two leaders had concluded with broad pledges of mutual cooperation.

Weeks later, whatever the apparent successes of the personal bonds of friendship struck between Xi and Trump at Mar-a-Lago, President Trump bitterly complained about the lack of cooperation from Beijing to rein in North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. He even publicly shamed the Chinese leader by accusing President Xi of having aided North Korea with its weapons modernisation program. There was also evidence suggesting that while China did attempt to halt some of its shipments of coal to North Korea, China’s bilateral trade with North Korea on other goods and services had increased, angering US officials who expected stronger Chinese action against Pyongyang.¹¹³

America’s deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system to South Korea as a deterrent against North Korea’s ballistic missile forces, a deployment that had been scheduled for late 2017,¹¹⁴ which was strongly opposed by both the PRC and the

¹¹⁰ T Phillips, ‘Chinese President Xi Jinping Arrives for First Meeting with Donald Trump’, *The Guardian*, April 7, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/apr/06/trump-china-meeting-xi-jinping-mar-a-lago>.

¹¹¹ J Perlez, ‘US Strikes on Syria Put Xi in Tough Position for Trump Meeting’, *The New York Times*, April 7, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/07/world/asia/trump-china-xi.html>.

¹¹² B Blanchard & P Wen, ‘Asia Weighs Risk and Reward in Trump “Bromance” with China’s Xi’, *Reuters*, April 28, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-xi-analysis-idUSKBN17U1M5>.

¹¹³ J Heatley, ‘After 100 Days and Much Hype, US-China Talks Fall Flat’, *Forbes*, July 21, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/insideasia/2017/07/21/after-100-days-and-much-hype-u-s-china-talks-fall-flat/#13f095422010>.

¹¹⁴ J Kim, ‘South Korea, US to Deploy THAAD Missile Defense, Drawing China Rebuke’, *Reuters*, July 8, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-usa-thaad-idUSKCN0ZO084>.

Russian Federation, was brought forward to May 2017.¹¹⁵ Sino-American relations unravelled as it became clear that Beijing and Washington's interests were very different and could not be reconciled. North Korea's sixth nuclear test in September 2017 intensified this tension. In December 2017, President Trump once again criticised China for supporting North Korea economically.¹¹⁶ By this stage it seemed clear that if the US wanted to denuclearise the Korean peninsula, that it could only do so with the cooperation of Pyongyang and with US ally South Korea acting as America's primary partner in this venture.

In June 2018, the US president got his 'diplomatic coup' by meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore.¹¹⁷ Repudiating the previous administration's efforts at reaching out to Pyongyang, Trump sought to cleave North Korea from the PRC. But prior to the Singapore Summit, Kim met with Chinese leader Xi (in March) in order to clear the path for Kim's meeting with Trump, underscoring the centrality of China's relationship with North Korea.

Again, hyperbole over another 'bromance' made the media rounds this time between Kim and Trump. But as with most efforts by the US president at personal diplomacy this again was a case of style over substance. Little was agreed to on delaying or dismantling critical parts of the country's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs, irrespective of North Korea's public though unverified closure of its Punggye-ri nuclear test site. Optimists claimed that the face-to-face meeting started the basis for trust between the two leaders which could translate into tangible action over time. Indeed, aided by the pro-unification South Korean leader, Moon Jae-in, there were at least improvements in relations between Pyongyang and Seoul. There was also a significant break in North Korean and US tensions in the months that followed which in many ways was a sort of success over the brinkmanship that characterised relations between the two countries in 2017.¹¹⁸

The 2018 Singapore Summit between Trump and Kim raised expectations of a breakthrough when the two leaders met again in Hanoi (February 2019). However, this meeting ended abruptly with no agreement being reached. President Trump put it down to a disagreement over economic sanctions, claiming that the North Koreans sought a lifting of all economic sanctions in return for more movement on the nuclear weapons front. According to North Korean foreign minister Ri Yong-ho, Pyongyang requested only a partial lifting of sanctions, specifically those imposed on the country by the United States in 2016 and 2017. Essentially, the North Koreans' position on permanently dismantling their nuclear weapons program could only be achieved if the United States was prepared to offer some clear and immediate economic incentives. In June of the same year, President Trump met with Kim again on a visit to South Korea, becoming the first United States president to walk across the 38th parallel. Unfortunately, nothing else of note occurred at, or emerged out of, this meeting.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP), 'THAAD on the Korean Peninsula', ISDP, October, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-usa-thaad-idUSKCN0ZO084>.

¹¹⁶ Reuters, 'After Trump Criticism, China Says No to Illicit Oil Sales to North Korea', *CNBC*, December 29, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/12/29/after-trump-criticism-china-says-no-illicit-oil-sales-to-north-korea.html>.

¹¹⁷ A good account of preparations for the US-DPRK Singapore Summit is given in: J Bolton, *The Room Where It Happened: A White House Memoir*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2020.

¹¹⁸ U Friedman, 'Inside the Collapse of Trump's Korea Policy', *The Atlantic*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/12/donald-trump-kim-jong-un-north-korea-diplomacy-denuclearization/603748/>.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

June 2018 was also an important date for contemporary Sino-American relations. The Trump administration fired the first shot in a trade war against Beijing, the White House angered by China's inability, or unwillingness, to deal with its 'unfair trade practices.'

This marked a high point in tension between Washington and Beijing, only recently surpassed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The type and level of tension can be explained via Power Transition Theory,¹²⁰ or through the historical lens of Thucydides Trap, which is an insight first discussed by the Ancient Greek historian Thucydides (460-400 BCE) as he contemplated the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta (431-404 BCE). Or, as Graham Allison put: '[w]hen a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power alarm bells should sound extreme danger ahead.'¹²¹

The most oft quoted modern variant of the Thucydides Trap is the rivalry between Britain and Germany during the 1890s, which eventually led to the outbreak of World War I. Here, the newly created German state (1871) quickly rose to economic and military prominence, challenging the supremacy of the British Empire and the status quo of continental Europe. The rise of Germany destabilised the existing order, projecting Berlin as a direct rival to Paris and London. In the Thucydides Trap, this type of situation almost always leads to war. The established power refuses to make way for the new power entrant, or compromise with it, while the challenging power refuses to give up on its ambitions and sees itself and its world view as superior to the contemporary order.¹²²

The United States sees itself as the established power, fighting to hold on to its superpower status and its global economic lead, and sees the PRC as the challenging power, which threatens to overturn all that America has created since 1945. The contest between the US and PRC is often referred to in purely strategic terms, however, underpinning this competition is an ideological contest. The United States form of capitalism, largely drawn from the Chicago School of economic theory in the early 1970s,¹²³ holds that the superior form of capitalism is one in which the state has little or no desire to act as an economic player. Government and economic activity are separated, with the state's role limited to regulation for the sake of the 'public good.' Consequently, the best form of government is one with a limited and balanced budget. The only aspects of government spending that fall outside of this orthodoxy are the Department of Defense and intelligence agencies, which, while also considered extravagant, are seen as critical to national security and America's superpower status.

The Chinese model of capitalism is different.¹²⁴ Chinese citizens are theoretically free to conduct business and lead a quiet *apolitical* life, with politics being conducted solely by

¹²⁰ W Kim & S Gates, 'Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China', *International Area Studies Review*, vol.18, no.3, 2015, pp.219-226.

¹²¹ AG Misenheimer, 'Thucydides' Other "Traps": The United States, China, and the Prospect of "Inevitable" War', National War College, National Defense University, Washington DC, June 2019, p.1, https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/casestudies/nwc_casestudy-3.pdf.

¹²² Harvard Belford Center, 'Henry Kissinger and Graham Allison on the US, China, and the Thucydides Trap', posted August 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKI6M2UiCGk>.

¹²³ RM Ebeling, 'Milton Friedman and the Chicago School of Economics', Foundation for Economic Education (FEE), December 1, 2006, <https://fee.org/articles/milton-friedman-and-the-chicago-school-of-economics/>.

¹²⁴ D Sallai & G Schnyder, 'What is "Authoritarian" About Authoritarian Capitalism? The Dual Erosion of the Private-Public Divide in State-Dominated Business Systems', *Business and Society*, December 1, 2019, pp.1-52, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3373637>.

members of the Chinese Communist Party. Members of the party are also economic actors who are regularly managers and owners of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) that support the economic activities of the CCP. There is no real separation between economic activity and the state. Private entrepreneurs are encouraged and supported, however, their alignment to CCP values is expected, so there is no clear dividing line between the public and private spheres of economic activity. Indeed, the PRC often uses its economic heft internationally as a form of non-military coercion, punishing and rewarding foreign governments who depend on Chinese investment and economic activity. Furthermore, some developing states that have signed up for the BRI are looking at the 'Chinese model' of authoritarian capitalism as a way of rapidly modernising failed economic and fragile government management structures. Politically, power is highly centralised in Beijing, with the communist party General Secretary holding executive power (presidential powers) over the Politburo. Under Deng and Jiang, the CCP did exercise a form of plurality, which allowed for limited divergence of opinion from the party, constrained as it was. From the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, this limited form of diversity was stopped in favour of strict party discipline, which has intensified under President Xi.¹²⁵

Seen from this perspective, the US and PRC are two competitive political economies as well as two strategic competitors. The problem from Thucydides' perspective is the inevitability of war between the US and the PRC, and this tension has become much starker during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While it is true that relations between Trump and Xi were already showing signs of strain prior to the COVID outbreak, Beijing's inability to decisively deal with political protests in Hong Kong has opened up yet another vector of tension between the world's two leading international powers. The problem that Hong Kong poses to the Rise of China theory is that the harder the Chinese crackdown on the rebellious city-state, the more likely that Taiwan walks away from the One China Two Systems approach it adopted in 1979.¹²⁶ This is important, because Taiwan is a key high-quality, high-tech manufacturer of items not made in the PRC. Beijing would prefer to inherit this manufacturing base via a peaceful unification with Taiwan, rather than having to attempt to take it by force and risk destroying the very things it covets. Nonetheless, President Xi has expressed his desire to see unification take place, one way or another, and as positions harden in the Taiwan Strait and diplomacy is accorded a lower priority, the likelihood of an uncontrolled escalation of tensions is very high.

For the Americans another potentially destabilising 'cause célèbre' has been aimed at the Chinese government. Beijing's behaviour against the Turkic Muslim Uyghur people of East Turkestan (Xinjiang). The development and deployment of a fully functioning surveillance state apparatus in East Turkestan, coupled with other instruments of state repression, has been reported widely around the world and condemned by the United Nations. While the US government has no desire or means by which to intervene in the internal affairs of China on behalf of the Uyghur people, it has successfully brought international pressure to bear on Beijing over this issue, culminating in the *Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2019*.¹²⁷ This

¹²⁵ See: K Brown & UA Bērziņa-Čerenkova, 'Ideology in the Era of Xi Jinping', *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, vol.23, no.3, 2018, pp.323-339.

¹²⁶ J McCarthy, 'Taiwan Monitors How China Deals With Hong Kong Protestors', *NPR*, August 16, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/16/751693587/taiwan-monitors-how-china-deals-with-hong-kong-protesters>.

¹²⁷ See: United States Congress, 'H.R.649—Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2019', <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/649>.

Act requires US government agencies to report on China's treatment of its Uyghur people, including Uyghur 're-education' centres, in which up to a million people have been interned by Chinese authorities. This pressure, while symbolically significant, has not been able to achieve more than shining a very bright light. On June 17, 2020, President Trump signed into law a revised version of the above act, calling for sanctions to be placed on the PRC for its behaviour against the Uyghur people, a subject of growing bipartisan interest in Washington.¹²⁸

Also in June 2020, the US Navy deployed three aircraft carriers (out of its total force of seven active carriers) to the Western Pacific,¹²⁹ as a demonstration of strength designed to show that COVID-19 has not affected naval readiness levels. While the PLAN still cannot match the US Navy in high quality, long range, and technologically sophisticated warships, it does not have to. The PLA strategic doctrine is primarily defensive in posture, reliant as it is on its multilayered A2AD systems. Therefore, the closer US warships get to the Chinese mainland, the more difficult it is for them to operate, since the PRC's DF-21D and DF-26 anti-ship ballistic missiles can potentially take their toll on US Navy surface ships, especially large ones like aircraft carriers.¹³⁰ Washington would have to take these weapons into consideration even in the case of intervening to defend Taiwan from Chinese attack. Also, PLAN submarines would be expected to put up fierce resistance to any major American force element of the USN were the two countries to come to blows.

Of course, as the old adage goes, no plan survives first contact, and this rule would apply to Chinese as well as American forces. Furthermore, to ensure that American carriers would not be easy targets for Chinese anti-ship missiles, it is likely that US Cyber Command would attempt to partially render much of the PLA's C4ISR systems inoperable. But in recent years the PRC has invested a lot of money in its own cyber offense/defence capabilities. It also has a rapidly maturing space industry with anti-satellite weapons as well as quantum computing, which will make it difficult for any American pre-emptive cyber assault to take out China's C4ISR infrastructure. In many ways, the situation between the US and the PRC is analogous to the standoff between the Wehrmacht and the Soviet Army in Poland in 1939-40: with both sides on relatively high alert, actively observing each other's strengths and weaknesses, and waiting to see who will move first. However, the Indo-Pacific theatre is a far larger chessboard than the confines of a small European country. Both the US and the PRC have a range of options they can use against the other to avoid a direct and potentially disastrous confrontation. The US has its regional network of friends and allies that, under the direction and management of US Indo-Pacific Command, could move against Chinese forces whenever they appear threatening. There is also the avenue of trade sanctions, tariffs, and the distribution of foreign aid, all of which can be utilised to thwart Beijing. The Indo-Pacific is the Sino-American chessboard, and it could become the world's most active battlespace should either Beijing or Washington sleepwalk their way into Thucydides Trap. The PRC's commercial interests are global in reach, as are America's, and there are plenty of places in the Indo-Pacific where Sino-American power can clash.

¹²⁸ *Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020*, Pub L No 116-145, 134 Stat 648, <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ145/PLAW-116publ145.pdf>.

¹²⁹ J Johnson, 'Three US Aircraft Carriers Operating on Doorstep of South China Sea', *The Japan Times*, June 21, 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/06/21/asia-pacific/three-us-aircraft-carriers-south-china-sea/>.

¹³⁰ Al Jazeera & News Agencies, 'China Fires "Aircraft-Carrier Killer" Missile in Warning to US', *Al Jazeera*, 27 August 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/08/27/china-fires-aircraft-carrier-killer-missile-in-warning-to-us/>.

CONCLUSION

The United States' role in the Indo-Pacific is that of an established superpower. It is heavily engaged in pressuring the Chinese state through its trade war, by giving political support to Hong Kong protesters and to the heavily repressed Uyghur population, and, strategically, by continuing freedom of navigation exercises in areas of contention, such as the South China Sea. The United States is strengthening ties with existing allies in the Indo-Pacific region, such as Japan and Australia, and growing ties with friends such as India.

It is a truism that American power today is both drawn from its very real global economic and military capabilities. No other country, including the PRC, has these capabilities, which can radically alter or influence any area of the world by dint of its absence or its presence. The United States is, therefore, the ultimate 'swing-state.' But arguably more important than anything else is America's global network of allies and friends, without which deploying US military and non-military assets internationally would prove difficult, if not impossible. Retaining this network, a network that China in spite of its own global interests *does not* possess, remains a high priority for senior civil servants in the US State Department and the US Department of Defense, in spite of the 'America First' rhetoric coming out of the Trump White House. This divergence of views on American policy priorities from within Washington is deeply confusing and destabilising, especially for America's allies and friends whose security is dependent on guarantees of American support.

Since the 2016 election of Donald Trump as president, however, a combination of factors have conspired to give the perception of American decline and weakness. The Trump administration's 'new way' of foreign policy has been derisive of long-standing allies. The president has publicly mused about the 'free-riding' nature of America's NATO allies in Europe. He has publicly mused about withdrawing US forces from South Korea, and more recently he has publicly mused about withdrawing a significant proportion of remaining US forces from Germany.

These policy 'thought bubbles' may be intended to force America's allies into paying more for their own defence, however, the message that allies are receiving from the White House is that America's power under Trump is transactional and can no longer be relied upon.

Allied capitals have all redoubled their efforts at hedging against potential US draw downs in areas where an American military presence has been critical in maintaining regional strategic stability and peace. In the Indo-Pacific this includes America's commitment to the defence of Japan and South Korea, and America's commitment to freedom of navigation exercises in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

To be fair to the current administration, America has long desired its allies to do more for themselves (going back as far as the 1968 Nixon Doctrine). However imperfect alliance relationships may be perceived in certain quarters of the Washington beltway, the United States global alliance network remains the country's *most critical* strategic asset, one that has not been replicated by either of America's identified opportunistic challengers (Xi's China or Putin's Russia).

Contemporary American power in the Indo-Pacific is noted for the following:

1. The existing network of friends and allies critical to upholding and legitimising US global leadership and power projection, but this network is being eroded by the politics of 'America First'.
2. The securitisation of trade, aid, and commerce in America's dealings with the People's Republic of China, with its rapidly expanding non-military influence in the Indo-Pacific.
3. The development of a multidimensional strategic confrontation that includes not just the deployment of significant military assets close to areas of contention with the People's Republic of China, but also general declaratory statements in support of Hong Kong protestors, the Uyghur people of East Turkestan, and Taiwan's continuing separation from the Chinese mainland.
4. Numerous White House and press statements on expanding the US military budget to counter the military modernisation and expansion programs of the PLA.
5. Increased focus on cyber security as a way of probing the technological vulnerabilities of China's 'Great Firewall', possibly preparing the ground for potential pre-emptive action against the PRC's C4ISR infrastructure, whether on the Chinese mainland or in peripheral areas where PLA military assets are forward deployed to friendly or 'aligned countries'. The problem with this domain of operation is the plausible deniability aspect accorded to cyber, meaning that attacking states can often hide/deny any cyber incursion attributed to them. This relatively new domain of warfare has been a constant one in recent years. In June 2020, the Australian public and private sectors were allegedly hacked by a sophisticated state actor, with the attacks largely attributed to the PRC by local experts in the field, though the Morrison government was reluctant to declare it a 'Chinese attack.' Cyber is arguably the single most destabilising aspect of contemporary strategy in the Indo-Pacific, and as cyber technology evolves to include AI algorithms on both the American and Chinese sides, supported by quantum computing, it is hard to determine what capabilities will be available to these state actors to raid, pilfer, manipulate, damage, or destroy the cyber infrastructure of opposing states. It is, as put by former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, an 'unknown, unknown', introducing another layer of uncertainty to the Indo-Pacific, and contributing to the notion of the US and the PRC stumbling into Thucydides Trap.

The exercising of American power in the Indo-Pacific since the election of Donald Trump in 2016 has been about military posturing, as well as the securitisation of trade, aid, and commerce, largely aimed at rising global Great Power, the PRC. This process certainly was not started by President Trump, but it has been accentuated by the United States' president as he attempts to gain advantage over Beijing. Trump has shown himself to be quick to bring the military instrument to the table, only to withdraw it just as quickly once it has been demonstrated that its use is unlikely to gain him kudos for improving Washington's overall position. A case in point was his rescinded order to strike Iran in retaliation for Iran's shooting down of a USAF surveillance drone that strayed close to Iranian airspace in June 2019. An order he only rescinded minutes before US aircraft were in a position to bomb Iranian targets. President Trump's justification for the backdown was that it was not proportionate and would have resulted in the deaths of scores of Iranian service personnel. But if it was not proportionate, why, as Commander-in-Chief, did he give the order in the

first place? Some have argued that this sort of posturing is ‘highly rational,’ in that the US being run in a mercurial and unpredictable fashion gives the country the power of arbitrariness. It is that same power that is so difficult to deal with when used by Moscow or Beijing, but Moscow and Beijing do not run the contemporary global international order. They are without allies and capable friends, and, as such, are not expected to behave in a stable way if it is not in their interest to do so. In spite of Trump’s claims to the contrary, America’s friends and allies *do* need to know and understand where Washington sits on issues of common concern. This element of predictability might be a disadvantage when seen through the lens of Putin, Xi, or even Trump, but when managed well, the combined weight of American-led international condemnation, or the broad legitimacy of US military actions when in synch with Coalition allies, brings with it a level of power and influence unmatched by the Russian Federation or the People’s Republic of China.

From a public policy perspective, however, the White House still favours the military option. It makes the US Commander-in-Chief appear strong in the eyes of the American people, which promotes domestic prestige for the American president and for the political party that supports him. Nonetheless, using trade and commerce as part of a strategic competition with China has complicated the American corporate and business landscape, which have profited from its trade with the PRC for decades. The Trump administration’s attempt to win back business from the PRC is through the Blue Dot Network an initiative of the U.S., Australia and Japan aimed at developing and supporting ‘quality’ infrastructure projects globally, in contrast to the many of the BRI projects that are often dubbed debt traps. The concept announced by US Secretary of Commerce, Wilbur Ross in late 2019 at the 35th ASEAN Summit in Thailand is based on G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment and the G7 Commitment on Innovative Financing for Development. It has been labelled as America’s answer to China’s BRI, however, Beijing doesn’t see this as a threat to its interests. Indeed China’s state media said: “[The Blue Dot Network] should never be used as a stumbling block to ‘rival’ China and hinder China’s cooperation with other regional members,” and further, as cited by the Australia’s ABC: “the Global Times argued that forcing Asian countries to “serve the Star-Spangled Banner wholeheartedly” was an “insult to their wisdom and dignity”.¹³¹ But there has been little progress, possibly due to the global pandemic and the recessed global economy.

As this report was written in a US presidential election year, and there is some chance that Donald Trump may not get a second term in office, we now turn to what a Biden presidency could mean for the US in the Indo-Pacific.

While much of the following is speculative, it is based on what we know of Biden’s former positions as Vice President in the Obama administration and his history as a member of various committees on US foreign policy. Just as Trump sought to overturn the Obama legacy on foreign policy, Biden may seek to resuscitate it in part or in whole. Hypothetically, it will mean the US seeking to re-enter the TPP (now CPTPP) and reenergising this multilateral, US-led trade bloc. Should this occur, the US would be able to use this mechanism to counter China’s RCEP, but this would require regional states in Southeast Asia to warm to the American trade presence and to feel comfortable acting under Washington’s umbrella. After a four-year term of disturbance and disruption under President Trump, where he not only ignored ASEAN, but with a stroke of a pen, took the US out of the TPP, it might

¹³¹ M Walden, ‘What is the Blue Dot Network and is it Really the West’s Response to China’s Belt and Road Project?’, *ABC News*, November 9, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-11-09/blue-dot-network-explainer-us-china-belt-and-road/11682454>.

take some time for the states of Southeast Asia to regain their trust in US diplomatic overtures, no matter how attractive they may sound.

Strategically, a Biden presidency might attempt to reenergise the Quadrilateral Dialogue between India, Australia, Japan, and the US. Trump's personal diplomacy with India's Prime Minister Modi kept US-Indian bilateral relations relatively sound, and the same can be said for President Trump's relations with Australia's Prime Minister Morrison and Japan's Prime Minister Abe. Perhaps Biden might consider shifting further US military resources into the Indo-Pacific theatre and allocating more US budgetary support for this move. Were this to occur, it would become increasingly obvious that the US was using 'the Quad' as a means to contain China's reach through its BRI and String of Pearls strategy—irrespective of the more delicate language used by a Biden White House to refute this.

Biden, who speaks of being open to dialogue with China, has a record of being quite critical of the CCP and Xi Jinping. Here, we may see continuity with elements of Trump's confrontational foreign policy. Biden has long been a supporter of Taiwan's democracy and this is unlikely to change. He has also strongly advocated for the Hong Kong protestors since the start of the troubles in this Chinese city-state, and has also championed the Uyghur people of East Turkestan, so Taiwan and Human Rights will likely be accorded an important role in Biden's foreign policy on China. All of this suggests that these two pressure points will remain thorns in Beijing's side for the foreseeable future.

In the Middle East, Iran, which is both part of the Arabian Sea and Gulf area of operations at the northwest end of the Indo-Pacific, Biden may attempt to resuscitate JCPOA, another deal that Trump walked away from. For this to have any positive impact on this highly combustible region, any Biden outreach to Tehran would have to come with a package of immediate and significant economic relief from sanctions. Trump's maximum pressure campaign on Iran has only made the situation worse for the Iranian people, with the Ayatollahs still firmly in control. The local political opposition to the regime is still unable to challenge it and flare-ups of opposition political protest and violence have been brutally crushed. Furthermore, an Iran without hope of relief from international sanctions has not, and will likely never, make the theocracy amenable to American demands for better external and internal Iranian behaviour. In fact, the Trump maximum pressure campaign has made the Iranian regime more combative. The 2019 attack on Saudi oil fields being a case in point, as well as continuing Iranian support for Houthi attacks inside Saudi Arabia. Ironically, the Iranians are open to dialogue, believing that peaceful and stable relations with the West, and with the US in particular, is key to the continued survival of the regime. Iran was never caught violating the terms of JCPOA. Trump walked away from the agreement largely as a result of his personal bias against the former Obama administration. But a desperate Tehran has, as a consequence of Trump's maximum pressure campaign, moved closer to Beijing. Both China and Iran signing a multibillion-dollar assistance package.¹³²

With regard to North Korea, Biden has signalled that he would not be following Trump's approach of unconditional personal diplomacy with Kim Jong Un. Instead, he has flagged a more structured path, including officials from South Korea and Japan. Here, we would likely see more of a continuation of Obama-era policy prescriptions. To many who saw Trump's unilateral move to engage with Kim Jong Un as a radical and potentially positive departure

¹³² F Fassihi & SL Myers, 'Defying US, China and Iran Near Trade and Military Partnership', *The New York Times*, July 22, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/11/world/asia/china-iran-trade-military-deal.html>.

from traditional American engagement with the ‘hermit kingdom,’ a return to past practice might be seen as a return to a painfully glacial and non-descript diplomacy. But more objective observers sceptical of the Trump approach have, with some justification, claimed that Trump’s outreach to Kim in both Singapore and Vietnam also ended with very little progress.

In the Pacific and poorer parts of Asia, and the African and Latin American littorals, American aid efforts may be further securitised under Biden, the more the PRC attempts to move into this region. Kiribati has the US and its Pacific allies, especially Australia, worried that as the US cordon tightens around the waters closer to the Chinese mainland (through USN Freedom of Navigation Exercises) that Beijing will use its own aid to build ties to the microstates of the Pacific to break out of this American stranglehold. But of course, seeing Sino-American competition from this perspective one might be unconsciously buying into the idea that strategic power flows from the top down. In fact, as we will see later, in the Indo-Pacific strategic power also flows from the bottom up, sometimes complicating the well-planned pursuits of a superpower and aspiring great power alike.

3 | THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

John Bruni

In the public imagination contemporary China is often defined by its extravagant spending on modern buildings and technology, its deep manufacturing capabilities (upon which its profitable export industries are based), and its tourists and students, which until recently have been conspicuous international signs of China's wealth and influence. In many ways, the achievements of the People's Republic of China (PRC) are remarkable.

In the span of three generations the PRC has gone from an underdeveloped agrarian economy, barely able to feed its own population¹³³, to a developing urban economy with a burgeoning space industry, a modern military, a highly sophisticated surveillance-state, and a wealthy and entrenched political class.

This transformation has not been without its problems.

Indeed, modern China today is the accumulation of its experiences, both positive and negative, of building for itself a secure base from which it can consolidate and expand its national ambitions. But what is modern China? Is it a country, a people, a political ideology, or an economy? Most China observers tend to conflate each of these into a 'China construct', whereby the People's Republic is the sum of all of these parts, a monolithic triumph of Chinese communist evolution, an unbroken chain of thought from Mao to Xi.

However, the true story of the rise of the PRC to global pre-eminence is far more complex. Indeed, the China of today, like all other contemporary states, is actually the sum of all its conflicts – internal and external.

EVERY COMMUNIST MUST GRASP THE TRUTH, "POLITICAL POWER GROWS OUT OF THE BARREL OF A GUN."

Mao Zedong (1893-1976)

Mao's China was characterised by war. War against non-communist forces during the Chinese Civil War (1927-49), and war against Imperial Japan (1937-45). China's invasion and occupation of Tibet in 1950. War against the US-led United Nations forces in Korea (1951-53). Military confrontation with Taiwan (1954 and 1958), political purges within CCP

¹³³ For more information on the state of Maoist China, see: J Chang & J Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story*, Vintage Books, London, 2007.

ranks, and disastrous flirtations with agrarian and industrial modernisation (the Great Leap Forward of the 1950s) leading to the deaths of millions of Chinese people.

The Sino-Soviet split (1956-68) broke relations between Moscow and Beijing, as both communist giants had their own ideological doctrine, supporting different forms of communist revolution throughout post-colonial Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

In 1964, with the test of an atomic bomb at its Lop Nur testing facility (Project 596)¹³⁴, the PRC became a nuclear power. At the time, the countries most threatened by the PRC's entry into the nuclear club were both the USSR and Taiwan, the island-state still considered at the time by the international community as the legitimate seat of the Chinese government. Then came the bloody and chaotic Cultural Revolution (1966-76), culminating in the uncertain rule of the Gang of Four. With the death of Mao in 1976, and the downfall of the Gang of Four in the same year, the rise of Deng Xiaoping saw the formation of what we now consider to be the modern PRC.

Arguably, the only strategically significant high point of China's Maoist period was its outreach to the United States during the period known as Ping-pong diplomacy (1970-71), but even this was a result of fears of Soviet strategic manoeuvres, after China's split with the USSR and its border war with the Soviets in 1969 along the shared Ussuri River¹³⁵. The collapse in Sino-Soviet relations was considered a strategic opportunity for the Nixon administration,¹³⁶ since bringing Mao's China in from the cold enabled Nixon to outmanoeuvre the USSR. The US lifted its existing economic embargo on the PRC, transferred the China seat at the UN from Taiwan to the PRC (under UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 on October 25, 1971).¹³⁷ In 1972 the Shanghai Communique recognised the PRC as the legitimate government of all of China, including Taiwan (the One China Policy), and sought for the normalisation of Sino-American relations.

HIDE YOUR AMBITIONS AND DISGUISE YOUR CLAWS

Deng Xiaoping (1978-89)

Drawing a line under much of Mao's legacy, Deng brought political stability to the PRC and the CCP, along with a new model with which to revive its legitimacy among the long-suffering Chinese people. Deng introduced the Four Modernisations as his guiding principles to advance Chinese economic, social, and military development.¹³⁸ He also permitted criticism of the Maoist era, in order for China to learn from the mistakes made by Mao and the Gang of Four. In 1978, Deng Xiaoping opened China's economy to the world and trade

¹³⁴ The Kinolibrary, '1960s China Lop Nur Atomic Bomb, Nuclear Testing, Project 596, From 16mm', posted August 5, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILaYng51R2w>.

¹³⁵ This sort of historical documentary demonstrates how Sino-Soviet animosity arose. Note: this is a historical piece created at a time when cultural sensitivities were not the same as those of today. Periscope Film, 'Dragon and Bear—1969, Soviet Union, China, Chairman Mao, Long March 32630 HD', posted April 22, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1n0Fch1_qs.

¹³⁶ B Girard, 'Nixon's China Sell-Out', *The Diplomat*, July 10, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/07/nixons-china-sell-out/>.

¹³⁷ See: United Nations General Assembly, *Restoration of the Lawful Rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations*, GA Res 2758, 26th sess., 1976th plen. mtg., UN Doc A/RES/2758(XXVI) (October 25, 1971), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/192054?ln=en>.

¹³⁸ See: ICY Hsu, *China Without Mao: The Search for a New Order*, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011 (originally published in print in 1990).

ties between the PRC and the advanced Western economies grew exponentially. Deng opened negotiations with Britain and Portugal on the handover of Chinese colonial entrepôts, Hong Kong and Macau.¹³⁹

As the PRC's economy grew, the expectations of a new generation of Chinese people hoping for political liberalisation made themselves felt in 1989 in Tiananmen Square, only to be crushed by the CCP.¹⁴⁰ New incoming CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin, fearing renewed outbreaks of pro-democracy sentiment, further reformed the Chinese economy,¹⁴¹ so that the energies of restless young people could be directed by the state toward making money and boosting national prestige. Jiang's reforms, as well as his concerted effort to eliminate domestic political dissent, worked to his and the CCP's advantage. Instead of ending in the collapse of a bankrupt political ideology, the Chinese Communist Party outlived its equivalents in Eastern Europe, all having been successfully ousted from power between 1989-90. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992, the PRC's greatest political exemplar and strategic rival, made the CCP even more committed to its model of political authoritarianism coupled to laissez faire capitalism, which proved a winning formula. In the West, the PRC was seen as communist in name only and an emerging capitalist power. Beijing was perceived as 'the stable hand', guiding China's 1.1 billion people, and utterly committed to the ruthless elimination of any internal challenge to its rule. For Western investors, consistent high returns negated concerns about authoritarianism.

One of Deng's most important tenets was to grow the PRC's international power in a way that would not be obvious to Western observers. The leadership of Deng and Jiang was not characterised by 'peace' alone. Under Deng, Beijing launched a major cross-border incursion into Vietnam in 1979, as 'punishment' for Vietnam's 1978 invasion of Cambodia to overthrow the Chinese-backed, genocidal Khmer Rouge. China's incursion into Vietnam failed, due in part to the People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) obsolete equipment, outmoded tactics, and as a result of the quality and experience of battle-hardened Vietnamese forces. Successive attempts at modernising the PLA were undertaken with varying degrees of success. In 1988 the PLA Navy (PLAN) defeated the Vietnamese Navy during the Johnson South Reef Skirmish in the South China Sea.¹⁴² While restoring some pride within the PLAN, this short exchange was not considered a defining moment for Chinese power. Indeed, while its economy was growing and its economic reach was starting to be felt as far afield as Africa, the PRC was considered far behind all other major countries in terms of its military capability.

The greatest shock came for the Chinese in 1991, when the US-led Coalition defeated the forces of Iraq's Saddam Hussein. It was only then that Jiang and the CCP leadership saw that military modernisation had to become a national priority.¹⁴³ Leveraging off a desperate and

¹³⁹ The Economist, 'What is China's "one country two systems" policy?', *The Economist*, June 30, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2019/06/30/what-is-chinas-one-country-two-systems-policy>.

¹⁴⁰ ND Kristof, 'Tiananmen Killings Not a "Tragedy", Chinese Party Chief Says', *The New York Times*, September 27, 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/09/27/world/tiananmen-killings-not-a-tragedy-chinese-party-chief-says.html>.

¹⁴¹ S Kobayashi, J Baobo & J Sano, 'The "Three Reforms" in China: Progress and Outlook', *RIM*, September 1999, <https://www.jri.co.jp/english/periodical/rim/1999/RIMe199904threereforms/>.

¹⁴² KSL Collin & NM Tri, 'Learning from the Battle of the Spratly Islands', *The Diplomat*, March 20, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/learning-from-the-battle-of-the-spratly-islands/>.

¹⁴³ United States Embassy Beijing, 'The Gulf War: Lessons for Chinese Military S&T', November 1996, <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/stmill14.htm>.

economically shattered post-Soviet Russian Federation, Beijing began using its growing wealth to buy and licence produce modern Russian military equipment.¹⁴⁴ More effort was also placed on training military personnel to higher technical standards, building more mobile Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs, many of which were aimed at Taiwan), and transitioning the PLAN from a brown water to a blue water navy.¹⁴⁵ Importantly, under Jiang, the PLA was directed to fight ‘local wars under high technology conditions.’¹⁴⁶ The aim was not to match the United States in firepower, but to develop selected military systems that could deny access to American forces operating close to the PRC and its immediate areas of interest, such as Taiwan. These means came to be known by the United States as anti-access/area-denial (A2AD).¹⁴⁷ The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis (1995-96) tested Jiang’s military modernisation, and while it was not a resounding success for Beijing, the fact that the PLA fired its MRBMs into waters off Taiwan demonstrated a new Chinese capability, which if left unmolested would only grow in size and effectiveness over time, possibly altering the balance of power between itself and Taiwan.

THE TAIWAN PROBLEM

Jiang presided over the peaceful handover of Hong Kong from Britain to the PRC in 1997, which was deemed a model for the One China Policy. Two years later (1999) Portuguese Macau was handed over to the PRC, leaving Taiwan as the only Chinese territory unrecovered by the mainland.

Taiwan was a strategic complication.

Between 1949-71, Taiwan was the seat of the internationally recognised government of China, the remnant Nationalist forces of the Kuomintang that had retreated from the mainland after its defeat in the Chinese Civil War. The Formosa (former name of Taiwan) Resolution of 1955,¹⁴⁸ and the *Taiwan Relations Act of 1979*,¹⁴⁹ pledged the United States to prevent a PRC military invasion of the island. Considering the PLA and PLAN were not capable of mounting such an invasion in 1955 or 1979, it was hoped that the PRC would eventually win over the Taiwanese people by political means. However, the continuing military intimidation of Taiwan and its people served to remind Taipei of the PRC’s absolute commitment to unification with the mainland, one way or another. Part of the reason for Beijing’s two-pronged strategy was to push the Taiwanese political elite out of thinking that it was a separate Chinese entity. While Taiwan was the government of China, the ruling Kuomintang aimed to unseat the CCP and reconquer the mainland. This ambition was largely

¹⁴⁴ And in some instances illegally re-engineer Russian military technology.

¹⁴⁵ S Micallef, ‘Evolution of the PLA navy and China’s security interests’, Australian Naval Institute, December 3, 2017, <https://navalinstitute.com.au/evolution-of-pla-navy-and-chinas-security-interests/>.

¹⁴⁶ ACC Huang, ‘Transformation and Refinement of Chinese Military Doctrine: Reflection and Critique on the PLA’s View’, in JC Mulvenon & AND Yang (eds), *Seeking Truth from Facts: A Retrospective on Chinese Military Studies in the Post-Mao Era*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, 2001, p.138.

¹⁴⁷ For more on the history of the term A2AD, see: CP Cavas, ‘CNO Bans “A2AD” As Jargon’, *Defense News*, October 3, 2016, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2016/10/04/cno-bans-a2ad-as-jargon/>; M Munson, ‘A2AD Since ‘73’, *CIMSEC*, February 13, 2014, <http://cimsec.org/a2ad-since-73/9801>.

¹⁴⁸ A Glass, ‘House Approves Formosa Resolution, Jan. 25, 1955’, *Politico*, January 25, 2011, <https://www.politico.com/story/2011/01/house-approves-formosa-resolution-jan-25-1955-048058>.

¹⁴⁹ CJ Zablocki, et al., ‘United States–Taiwan Relations Act’, US House of Representatives, 96th Congress, 1st Session, March 8, 1979, pp.1-27, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85-00003R000100050016-5.pdf> (report submitted by CJ Zablocki, Committee of Foreign Affairs, with additional views).

thwarted by the United States, uninterested in sparking and supporting a major Asian war. But domestic politics in Taiwan was largely guided by what it was not – an appendage of the communist mainland. This, together with ongoing US military support, made it difficult to extinguish a distinctly Taiwanese political identity from taking root. US military support of Taiwan, regularly criticised by Beijing, gave the country a sophisticated defensive capability, making an invasion by the PRC a difficult and costly enterprise.¹⁵⁰ When the US Navy intervened in the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis (1995 and 1996), the likelihood of rapid international escalation of any Chinese military advance against Taiwan meant that, in the long term, unless the PRC could fund a more sophisticated military-industrial complex, the status quo between itself and Taiwan would remain.

American firepower demonstrated its destructive capabilities again during the NATO air war over Belgrade in 1999, when the Chinese Embassy was struck by 5 JDAM missiles fired from two B-2 Spirit bombers. The attack killed 3 Chinese journalists and outraged Chinese public opinion, as well as the CCP itself. As a consequence of the bombing, anti-American protests took place on the streets of China, and the CCP strongly condemned the American military action.¹⁵¹ President Clinton, eager to reduce Sino-American tensions, publicly apologised for the bombing and Jiang Zemin quickly reciprocated by ending the anti-American protests. But in April 2001, another incident pitted the US against the PRC: ten weeks into the first term of President George W. Bush, an American EP-3E signals intelligence aircraft collided with a Chinese J-8 fighter plane while the US plane was flying a surveillance mission close to a sensitive Chinese military outpost on the Paracel islands. The Chinese pilot was killed in the collision, and the EP-3E was damaged, forcing it to land on China's Hainan island. Chinese authorities interrogated the twenty-four members of the crew, raising tensions between the two states even further until a face-saving resolution was found.¹⁵²

THE NEXT INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE POINTS – THE SOUTH CHINA SEA & BRI *From Hu Jintao (2002-12) to Xi Jinping (2012-)*

The history of the South China Sea dispute is long and complicated, involving periods of intense activity and periods of inertia, but modern interest in the area was sparked in 1969 when it was discovered that vast oil deposits lay under the seafloor.¹⁵³ In 1973, the first session on development of the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)* ruled that all countries with a coastline had access to a maritime Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) that extended from a country's coastline out to 200 nautical miles offshore.¹⁵⁴ This in

¹⁵⁰ RS Ross, 'The 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Confrontation: Coercion, Credibility and the Use of Force', *International Security*, vol.25, no.2, 2000, p.87.

¹⁵¹ M Hui, 'Photos: How China Erupted Into Anti-American Rage 20 Years Ago', *QUARTZ*, May 8, 2019, <https://qz.com/1614273/photos-anti-us-protests-after-bombing-of-belgrade-chinese-embassy-in-1999/>.

¹⁵² K Zetter, 'Burn After Reading: Snowden Documents Reveal Scope of Secrets Exposed to China in 2001 Spy Plane Incident', *The Intercept*, April 10, 2017, <https://theintercept.com/2017/04/10/snowden-documents-reveal-scope-of-secrets-exposed-to-china-in-2001-spy-plane-incident/>.

¹⁵³ MS Muscolino, 'Past, Present Resource Disputes in the South China Sea: The Case of Reed Bank', *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*, no.8, September 2013, <https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/e-journal/articles/muscolino.pdf>.

¹⁵⁴ SN Nandan, 'The Exclusive Economic Zone: A Historical Perspective', in Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Law of the Sea: Essays in Memory of Jean Carroz*, FAO, 1987, <http://www.fao.org/3/s5280t/s5280t0p.htm>. For a contemporary perspective, see: SO Williams, 'Law of the Sea Mechanisms: Examining UNCLOS Maritime Zones', *The Maritime Executive*, January 12, 2014, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/Law-of-the-Sea-Mechanisms-Examining-UNCLOS-Maritime-Zones-2014-12-01>. Full text

effect became part of a country's sovereign space, allowing the country unlimited access to the water's marine resources, as well as to geological resources on and below the seabed. For Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia, their EEZs in the South China Sea were seen as critically needed adjuncts to national food and fuel production, and potentially as sources of national wealth.¹⁵⁵

For the People's Republic, it was a different matter. Beijing did not see the South China Sea as a contested space open for division by the United Nations. It saw the South China Sea as Chinese. Beijing based its claim to the South China Sea on its preferred view of history, stretching back to the 15th Century, and drew an ill-defined boundary around the area known as the Nine-Dash-Line,¹⁵⁶ which encompasses 90 percent of the South China Sea.

For the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia their lack of modern naval and command and control equipment necessary to occupy and hold the few small islands and atolls in the South China Sea limited what each could do physically to further their claims. The PLAN and the Vietnamese Navy were the only regional maritime forces capable of seizing and holding the tiny amounts of land in this body of water. Of the two navies, the PLAN was the largest and was rapidly modernising. Beijing sought to use this advantage in order to intimidate the smaller, less capable claimant states into ceding much of their territorial interests. In 2002, the final year of Jiang Zemin's term as CCP General Secretary, the PRC and ASEAN signed the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.¹⁵⁷ This framework was put in place to allow the South China Sea claimant states to come to an eventual agreement on establishing a code of conduct, restraining each claimant state from using military force as a way of pressing their interests. For a while this seemed to work, but diplomatic sniping, relentless manoeuvring and fatigue led to the Declaration's demise.¹⁵⁸ The PRC began pressing its claims to the Nine-Dash-Line more aggressively, with the aim of achieving sovereign control over the disputed maritime territory. The South China Sea is known to have an estimated 11 billion barrels of oil, some 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, 10 percent of the world's fisheries, and it is a critical maritime trade route, with some 30 percent of international shipping traversing the region each year. Control, if not outright ownership, of the South China Sea would give the PRC a significant strategic chokepoint from which to potentially control the movement of and/or interdict shipping. Permanent basing of military assets in the South China Sea would enable the PLA and PLAN to extend their military power into Southeast Asia.

In 2002, under incoming CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao's guidance, the PLAN was strengthened. New naval ship building programs were undertaken with a view to be able to

of UNCLOS available at: https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_overview_convention.htm.

¹⁵⁵ CSIS Expert Working Group on the South China Sea, 'A Blueprint for Cooperation on Oil and Gas Production in the South China Sea', Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, July 25, 2018, <https://amti.csis.org/a-blueprint-for-cooperation-on-oil-and-gas-production-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

¹⁵⁶ S Mollman, 'The Line on a 70 Year Old Map That Threatens to Set Off a War in East Asia', *QUARTZ*, July 8, 2016, <https://qz.com/705223/where-exactly-did-chinas-nine-dash-line-in-the-south-china-sea-come-from/>.

¹⁵⁷ A Panda, 'China, ASEAN Come to Agreement on a Framework South China Sea Code of Conduct', *The Diplomat*, May 19, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/05/china-asean-come-to-agreement-on-a-framework-south-china-sea-code-of-conduct/>.

¹⁵⁸ E Collinson, 'China's New Enthusiasm Toward the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea', Australian Institute of International Affairs, July 24, 2019, <http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/chinas-new-enthusiasm-toward-the-declaration-on-the-conduct-of-parties-in-the-south-china-sea/>; HL Thu, 'The Dangerous Quest for a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea', Australian Strategic Policy Institute, July 13, 2018, <https://www.aspi.org.au/opinion/dangerous-quest-code-conduct-south-china-sea>.

extend Chinese maritime reach, beyond ‘near-seas’ to ‘far-seas.’¹⁵⁹ According to *Assessing the People’s Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era*, the Hu era saw a more concerted effort at expanding the capability and reach of the PLAN. For Hu, one of his most pressing concerns was the security of the Malacca Strait, through which most of China’s oil shipments from the Middle East sail. Hu believed that some ‘major powers’ were aiming to use the Malacca Strait as a way of choking off the PRC’s access to Middle Eastern oil and increasingly important African commodities. As the world’s second largest oil and natural gas consumer, the threat of such action could not be overlooked. It was under Hu that the Politburo Standing Committee approved work on refitting the former Soviet Kuznetsov-class aircraft carrier, Varyag, bought in 1998 by the PRC from the Ukraine, and renamed Liaoning.¹⁶⁰ This was as much a prestige item as it was a tool for naval strategy. A Chinese aircraft carrier would place the PLAN among the handful of countries with this operational capability, signifying intent to be seen as a serious (if not the preeminent) naval power in Asia. Work on the Liaoning was completed in 2011, with the ship commissioned into the PLAN the following year.¹⁶¹

SCS ISLAND RECLAMATION, THE EAST CHINA SEA & THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

The Shape of Strategic Confrontation During Xi Jinping

Building on years of gradual improvements to the PLA and PLAN, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping was far more overt about his vision for Chinese international power. Unlike his predecessors who were reluctant to show China’s hand regarding the modernisation of the PRC’s military, Xi believed that demonstrating the PRC’s military capabilities in areas beyond the Taiwan Strait would make China’s strategic superiority in the South China Sea clear, as well as enabling it to intimidate America’s forward bases in South Korea and Japan. Xi began a program of land reclamation on some of the larger islands and atolls in the South China Sea that were under its control.¹⁶²

The idea was to extend the land element of these islands and atolls, so that they could host permanent Chinese military installations from which they could launch a campaign of intimidation against rival Southeast Asian claimant states. This did not just involve sending PLAN warships into areas of contestation: Chinese fishing vessels were also used to challenge the EEZs of Southeast Asian claimant states,¹⁶³ supported by PLAN vessels ‘at a distance’, making it clear that any hostile moves to resist the Chinese presence would be met with overwhelming force.

As most Southeast Asian navies were small and possessed outdated equipment, challenging China at this level presented huge difficulties. Furthermore, largely as a result of this

¹⁵⁹ N Li, ‘China’s Evolving Naval Strategy and Capabilities in the Hu Jintao Era’, in R Kamphausen, D Lai & T Tanner (eds), *Assessing the People’s Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era*, Strategic Studies Institute & US Army War College Press, 2014, pp.257-299, <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/2273.pdf>.

¹⁶⁰ Naval Technology, ‘Liaoning (Varyag) Aircraft Carrier, China’, <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/varyag-aircraft-carrier-china/>.

¹⁶¹ For information on the characteristics of the Liaoning, see: ChinaPower, ‘How Does China’s First Aircraft Carrier Stack Up?’, <https://chinapower.csis.org/aircraft-carrier/>.

¹⁶² B Chellaney, ‘Beijing’s South China Sea Grab’, *The Japan Times*, December 18, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2018/12/18/commentary/world-commentary/beijings-south-china-sea-grab/#.XrIMGZrhWi4>.

¹⁶³ G Poling, ‘China’s Hidden Navy’, *Foreign Policy*, June 25, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/06/25/chinas-secret-navy-spratlys-southchinasea-chinesenavy-maritimemilitia/>.

weakness, many South China Sea claimant states sought protection from China's coercion through international arbitration and legal means.¹⁶⁴ But without the local ability to push back militarily, arbitration and the law had no teeth. Beijing participated in the legal game when it sought to de-escalate tensions, but all the while applying military pressure on Southeast Asian countries, clearly presenting them with both a conciliatory *and* a confrontational face. Complicating the issue for most of these states, is that China is vitally important to regional trade. Upsetting the CCP unnecessarily is in no-one's interest, since the prevailing fear is that Chinese trade and investment could also be used as tools of strategic coercion. The only form of Southeast Asian 'push-back' was the American naval presence in the Western Pacific. With the completion of China's first operational South China Sea base in 2014, Fiery Cross Reef, the US Navy started freedom of navigation exercises through international waters within the Nine-Dash-Line.

The South China Sea was not the only maritime area being contested by the Chinese. In the East China Sea, a small group of islands, long considered part of the Japanese island-chain, but also considered Chinese territory, made international headlines in 2013. The uninhabited Senkaku Islands, known in China as the Diaoyu Islands, had been left alone for much of their history. It was never considered to be a hotly contested area, though it had traded hands from time to time. After World War II the Senkakus were administered by the United States, between 1945 and 1972, after which Washington handed control of the islands back to Japan as part of the Okinawa Prefecture, a move that was formally protested by Beijing. The discovery of undersea oil (1968) changed the importance of the islands.¹⁶⁵ However, while the PRC claimed these islands by dint of Chinese former ownership from the 14th Century to 1895, it had no capacity to back these claims by force until 2013, when it declared an air defence identification zone (ADIZ) over the islands.¹⁶⁶ This move was protested by Japan and the United States. In 2014, President Barak Obama stated that the Senkaku Islands were covered by the US-Japan Security Treaty.¹⁶⁷ This would oblige Washington to come to the assistance of Japan should the PRC attempt to take the islands by force. China and Japan signed a bilateral Four Point Consensus document (2014) outlining both country's specific claims and points of difference on ownership of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Careful management by Tokyo and Beijing has seen an uneasy yet stable situation emerge, in spite of a number of Sino-Russian naval drills having taken place in the East China Sea in recent years.

In 2013, President Xi introduced the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) strategy, later renamed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹⁶⁸ The plan was to create a Eurasian land bridge linking Europe, Asia, and Africa to the PRC via Russia, Iran, and Central Asia, incorporating 'corridors' through Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. The principal aim of this strategy was to lessen China's dependence on transportation of goods and critical commodities by sea, which would make them vulnerable to interdiction by the US and allied navies in times of

¹⁶⁴ K Hunt, 'South China Sea: Court Rules in Favour of Philippines Over China', *CNN*, July 12, 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/12/asia/china-philippines-south-china-sea/index.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, 'Tensions in the East China Sea', <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/tensions-east-china-sea>.

¹⁶⁶ M Green, K Hicks, Z Cooper, J Schaus & J Douglas, 'Counter-Coercion Series: East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone', Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, June 13, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-east-china-sea-adiz>.

¹⁶⁷ B Singh, 'Obama's Statement on the Senkakus/Diaoyus: Why So Bold?', *East Asia Forum*, May 3, 2014, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/05/03/obamas-statement-on-the-senkakusdiaoyus-why-so-bold/>.

¹⁶⁸ P Ferdinand, 'Westward ho—the China Dream and "One Belt, One Road": Chinese Foreign Policy Under Xi Jinping', *International Affairs*, vol. 92, no.4, pp.941-957.

escalated tensions, or war. This strategy would be coupled with the creation of a number of overseas naval stations in the Indian Ocean (the String of Pearls), which would complement the overland route. While there was no thought of countering directly the technologically and numerically superior navy of the United States, the String of Pearls would be able to tie down the US Navy in a series of holding actions, denying the USN unfettered movement in the Indian Ocean area.

CHINA IS A SLEEPING GIANT. LET HER SLEEP, FOR WHEN SHE WAKES, SHE WILL MOVE THE WORLD

Napoleon Bonaparte

Since 1949 the People's Republic of China has gone from being a poor, agrarian, and unstable totalitarian state to being a rich, export-orientated, and stable totalitarian state, but much of its growth from the late 1980s until now has been plunderous and is fragile. In order to catapult to great power status in such a short time, Beijing authorised aggressive espionage campaigns against its trading partners, in order to gain both international advantage and technological parity.¹⁶⁹ The CCP has its own diplomatic style: ingratiating itself into the economy of a country before leveraging this into a weapon of strategic coercion. This process has been repeated to build its BRI network where, smaller, poorer states are lured into debt-traps from which there is no escape. We have seen that the CCP, but Xi in particular, gives no quarter even to Western states that believe they have good relations with China. This problem is accentuated because in the PRC the state is still heavily involved as an economic actor through its State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) usually distributed to loyal CCP members. This element of the economy is still subject to the whims of the Politburo since what can be given can also be taken away. SOE's therefore remain a powerful economic arm of the CCP. Private enterprise in the PRC may be less tied to government but there are advantages in being aligned to it whereas in much of the developed Western economies, there is a clearer distinction between business and politics. Politicians can act as facilitators for business or champions of industries but are generally dissuaded from active participation in business while they hold political office.

In Australia, since the 1990s, there has been a steady debate concerning whether the country will have to choose between its profitable economic ties to China and its strategic ties to the United States. Many corporate leaders in Australia believed that such a debate is facile, since they make so much money out of investment in (and trade with) China that it is inconceivable that friendly Chinese businessmen, and the pro-business Chinese political elite, would ever threaten Australia in any meaningful way.¹⁷⁰ Many government officials were hopeful that conflict with China could be avoided, but they were also cognisant of the political and strategic differences between Australia and the PRC.

As a democracy, Australia would always find it difficult to turn a blind eye to Chinese repression of its minorities. Indeed, Australian government officials are duty-bound to speak

¹⁶⁹ A good source of information on this is: B Gertz, *Deceiving the Sky: Inside Communist China's Drive for Global Supremacy*, Encounter Books, New York, 2019, chs.6, 8 & 9.

¹⁷⁰ On April 29, 2020, Australian mining magnate Andrew 'Twiggy' Forrest said in a media conference (in the Commonwealth Parliament Offices in Melbourne) that China will be key to an Australian recovery post-COVID-19. See, eg: N Toscano, "'Twiggy' Forrest's Fortescue Says China Key to Nation's Recovery", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April, 30, 2020, <https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/twiggy-forrest-s-fortescue-eyes-export-growth-as-china-recovers-20200430-p54oiy.html>.

out against the heavy hand of the Chinese state. This will always be considered highly offensive to Chinese officials, who will never tolerate interference in the internal affairs of China by a foreign country, even one with which it shared good people-to-people and commercial relations.

For Canberra the moment that extinguished hopeful optimism from Australia-China bilateral ties was news that Australian political parties had been corrupted by local Chinese businessmen seeking to further Chinese commercial interest in Australia. China came to be seen as Australia's primary intelligence threat when ALP Senator for New South Wales, Sam Dastyari, was forced to resign for having taken money from a donor with close ties to the CCP. Also, at a Chinese-language press conference, Dastyari spoke out against Australia's bipartisan position on the South China Sea.¹⁷¹ This scandal led to Australia enacting the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme in December 2018. This scheme requires people working for foreign interests in the Australian political space to disclose those interests on a website. In 2019 Victorian Federal Liberal MP, Gladys Liu,¹⁷² was found to have connections to the Chinese World Trade United Front (WTUF). This organisation's public remit is to promote free trade between Hong Kong and Australia, but it was later discovered that the WTUF is a front for CCP international 'influence operations.' Liu denied having been an active member of the organisation and said that she had left the WTUF in 2016. She is still the Federal Member for Chisholm.

Looking at the PRC from a historical perspective, its shift from a closed, insular, centrally planned communist economy, to an open, centrally planned, capitalist economy under Deng in 1978 was a seismic event in geopolitical terms. It was at this turning point that China's full weight as the world's most populated state could be brought to bear, unleashing its economic potential, which in time would translate into military potential. While it is not yet a superpower, President Xi has made it clear that his economic competition with the United States is also a strategic competition, and that his plan is to shepherd the PRC to superpower status before the end of his term in office. The CCP lifted the two-term limit on Xi's rule in 2013,¹⁷³ allowing him to be 'president for life.' As long as nothing critical to the PRC's great power trajectory occurs, Xi might well see his ambition fulfilled.

However, the Sino-American trade war, instigated in 2018 by President Donald Trump over what he alleged were unfair Chinese trade practices that disadvantaged American businesses, limited some of China's more expansive ambitions. Wealth through trade was what had made China the rapidly developing and strategically disruptive power it had become. Denying unfettered trade with China put a limit on how Chinese businesses could enter the US market. While the American economy was also negatively affected by the trade war, President Trump's promise of bring 'jobs back home' has until very recently kept the American people with him on this journey. When Sino-American relations were relatively harmonious and well managed, many American businesses relocated to the PRC to take advantage of the country's low-cost labour and operations. Now President Trump is calling on these

¹⁷¹ Q McDermott, 'Sam Dastyari Defended China's Policy in South China Sea in Defiance of Labor Policy, Secret Recording Reveals', *ABC News*, November 29, 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-29/sam-dastyari-secret-south-china-sea-recordings/9198044?nw=0>.

¹⁷² S Martin, 'Labor Targets PM Over Gladys Liu's Alleged Links to Chinese Communist Party', *The Guardian*, September 11, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/sep/11/gladys-liu-proud-australian-questions-raised-ties-with-china>.

¹⁷³ BBC News, 'China's Xi Allowed to Remain "President for Life" as Term Limits Removed', *BBC*, March 11, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-43361276>.

businesses to ‘come home.’ Chinese authorities see this as a threat to their economic model, which requires double-digit economic growth to fund China’s strategic programs and to keep its growing middle class compliant. Then, along came COVID-19, allegedly originating from illegal wildlife traded in a wet market in Wuhan, which has put an indeterminate pause on international trade, investment, and profits.

Many manufacturing and shopping centres have been closed as a consequence of medically mandated shutdowns, affecting both China and its global markets. Indeed, markets have crashed, and entire sectors of the economy have been wiped out as unemployment hits historic highs. This affects the PRC as profoundly as it does the Western economies that have utilised China for its low-cost labour and exports. Whether the PRC can recover its great power plans is unknowable at this stage. What can be said though, is that the Chinese ‘system’ is totalitarian and therefore brittle. Historically, such systems are not known for adaptability in times of crisis, since change can undermine the regime. The large-scale lockdowns and restrictions imposed on Wuhan and surrounding areas were arguably only possible because of the totalitarian nature of the CCP. However, the Chinese export-orientated economy cannot recover if there is no international economy to sell to, so the CCP’s decision to lift restrictions, so people can get back to work, may well see a series of rolling national and provincial lockdowns and restrictions re-imposed as the country deals with further COVID-19 outbreaks.

We have no way of knowing how COVID-19 has affected the readiness of the PLA and PLAN, but considering that it has had negative impacts on other armed forces around the world, it would be safe to say that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the Chinese armed forces’ readiness levels. For Xi and the CCP, it is critical that a public perception is set that China is strong in spite of COVID-19. If Xi and his CCP supporters cannot be seen to project Chinese strength, the ramifications may be dire for them. Historically, autocratic governments can quickly gain the support of followers, but they can also lose this support just as quickly, unleashing regime changing organised popular rebellion. It is therefore no wonder that Xi has been showing a muscular Chinese approach toward Hong Kong as well as against India in the contested Himalayan region of Ladakh, perhaps seeking to test the India military’s COVID readiness levels.

COVID’s spread will affect a number of national security agencies within China, along with the evolution of both the domestic and international security landscape over coming months and years. SAGE International Australia speculated that there was something wrong with the PLA last October (2019) while conducting research in Canberra for this SPGP project. The fact that the Umbrella Uprising in Hong Kong was not being dealt with decisively, making Xi look weak, even though it had the restive Special Administrative Region (SAR) surrounded by troops, indicated that there was something within the mainland preventing the CCP from giving the order to end the uprising. Little did we know at the time that that ‘something’ was coronavirus. We suspect that the PLA and PLAN will therefore avoid any major military entanglement in the near-term considering that the CCP may call upon the PLA to hold fast for an outbreak of domestic turmoil and violence within mainland China, should there be a crisis in confidence against the current pro-Xi CCP clique for its handling of COVID-19 or the economic crisis that coronavirus spawned. After all, the history of China is punctuated by periods of violent rebellion against autocratic rule, when this rule becomes too onerous to

bear.¹⁷⁴ There is nothing to make us believe that this historic cycle has changed in modern China. The recent creation of the Chinese ‘surveillance state’ may have bought the CCP extra time to prepare for the domestic challenges it may face, but there is no guarantee that the CCP will avoid these challenges as a result of its intrusive surveillance technologies.

Regarding the general public’s apathy in Australia (and elsewhere) concerning the People’s Republic’s status as a ‘strategic threat’, the fact that the PRC has pushed back against international criticism of its handling of the coronavirus crisis by threatening trade ties shows clearly that the CCP has always thought of its economic position in the world as inseparable from its strategic position. For the PRC, bilateral trade ties are more than potential tools of coercive statecraft. This may not resonate well with Western business leaders who have long thought of China as a ‘sure bet’, a mostly harmless capitalist autocracy, and not as a totalitarian state with a repressive and expansionist mindset. COVID-19 has revealed a different and confronting narrative for Sinophiles in business, politics, and academia. Some will, of course, maintain their pro-China narrative, that trade and economics will eventually turn the PRC into something more akin to modern Japan or South Korea (through slow evolution and the steady accumulation of wealth). Others will seek to change this narrative into something far more nativist, whereby Australian politicians and business leaders will seek to diversify where the country’s exports go. As positions harden, so too will international rhetoric. As the coronavirus crisis continues, the CCP’s eyes will be focussed inward against potential domestic enemies, therefore its ability to launch aggressive campaigns beyond China’s borders will be somewhat limited to shrill public diplomacy and orchestrated displays of nationalism.

For the Indo-Pacific, this will mean a lighter Chinese strategic footprint in the short to medium term. Business will continue in areas where it still commands advantage and where states, willing to trade compliance for investment, such as the East African littoral, the South Pacific, and Latin America, exist. But as the old global economic order upon which most of the PRC’s wealth was founded contracts and potentially transforms into something else, it will become harder for the CCP to maintain high-cost strategic programs, and to drive military modernisation. A more inward looking CCP may give countries under BRI more space to negotiate better terms with Beijing over debt-traps they have been forced into. Ultimately, these countries could threaten to default or walk away from existing Chinese arrangements, at a time when the CCP is occupied by China’s internal political dynamics.

For Australia, the public debate has already begun regarding diversifying investments away from China and into new markets, though the national business leadership that has profited so handsomely from bilateral Sino-Australian trade is split on this.¹⁷⁵

The intelligence threat that China poses to Australia remains. Information is key in continuing to probe Australian business sentiment and the public mood.

In spite of the hostile political rhetoric emanating from Beijing regarding the Morrison government’s push for an international enquiry into how the CCP dealt with the management of the coronavirus outbreak, it is the CCP that needs to find an alternative to Australian

¹⁷⁴ D Acemoglu & JA Robinson, *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies and the Fate of Liberty*, Penguin Random House UK, 2019, pp.201-236.

¹⁷⁵ APP, ‘Billionaire Andrew Forrest Criticised for Chinese Diplomat Crashing Government Press Conference’, *Perth Now*, April 30, 2020, <https://www.perthnow.com.au/news/coronavirus/billionaire-andrew-forrest-criticised-for-chinese-diplomat-crashing-government-press-conference-ng-b881534061z>.

resources. While much has been said of China's economic dominance over Africa, extracting resources out of politically unstable states, with most of these resources located in poorly governed, ungoverned, or ungovernable regions with limited infrastructure, comes at a far greater economic cost to China than trading in these same commodities with Australia. It will be interesting to see how far Beijing is willing to push Canberra on this issue, since punishing Australia will come at the cost of punishing the Chinese economy with far higher imposts on trade for critical fuel and resources to feed Chinese growth.

CONCLUSION

The PRC's role in the Indo-Pacific at the time of writing is that of an emerging power. In Acemoglu and Robinson's 2019 book, *The Narrow Corridor*, contemporary China is described as a 'Despotic Leviathan.' A totalitarian surveillance state, with a capitalist economy, and a massive population to keep on side. Repressive techniques can work much of the time to control popular expectations, particularly when times are good and international relations are generally stable, but the times in which this report was written are neither good nor stable.

Since Deng, the CCP has achieved remarkable economic growth and kept a lid on the internal ructions of over a billion people. Many of the methods used to control the country's dissidents and minorities are still considered barbaric in the West, but how China chooses to rule its citizens has, until recently, not been considered an obstacle to trade and investment. From Mao to Xi, modern China has been born out of conflict and confrontation. Conflict with its own people and confrontation with states considered by Beijing to harbour hostility toward it, its political ideology, or those who envy its economic and strategic success.

Strategically, the exercise of Chinese power on the contemporary international landscape has been limited by geography, which has imposed barriers to the country's outward movement. The Himalayan mountain range, to the country's southwest, forms a massive barrier to overland access to India. The inability to include Taiwan within all reclaimed Chinese territories prevents the PLAN and the PLA from exercising maritime power into the Western Pacific. A restless Hong Kong threatens to undermine the idea of 'One China' and certainly plays its part in keeping Taiwan a separate entity from the PRC. Internal disparities in wealth from the narrow strip of the Chinese coast and Beijing, where much of the country's productive capabilities lie, to the country's far poorer interior regions show an existing socio-economic problem yet to be resolved by the CCP. The PRC's position in the South China Sea, and to a lesser extent in the East China Sea, is provocative and confrontational. While revealing the weakness of the Southeast Asian claimant states, America's position in supporting these states through freedom of navigation exercises is a complication for Beijing, since close-quarter naval manoeuvres between PLAN and USN ships, or in the PRC's case, civilian proxy vessels, threatens a broader war for control over this body of water. It is here that the PRC represents a military threat to Australia, since it is highly likely that Canberra will be called upon by its senior ally, the US, to lend assistance to any American military move against Chinese forces in the South China Sea.

For Australia, the impending collapse of the existing economic order through COVID-19 will affect its relationship with China. Since Deng's opening of the Chinese economy, Australian businesses have been a prime beneficiary. So much so that the PRC is Australia's largest importer of commodities, such as iron ore, coal, and natural gas. The Australian tertiary

education sector has profited from providing services to Chinese students. For many years, making sure bilateral relations with China remain beneficial to both parties was accorded a high political priority, in spite of differences of opinion regarding China's treatment of political dissidents and minorities, but public anger at how the CCP misinformed the international community about the seriousness and spread of COVID-19 has led to a mood of retribution.

Chinese state media described Australia as being 'like chewing gum stuck on the sole of China's shoes' and argued that Australia risked long-term damage to its relations with the PRC.¹⁷⁶ China's Ambassador to Australia, Jingye Cheng, suggested that a Chinese consumer boycott of Australian goods could be possible.

In the short-term, the PRC's escalation of tariffs on Australian goods shows Chinese coercive power in the modern world, and, as the Australian media and politicians are sensitive to short-term shocks to the system, this will impact many agribusinesses, worried about their future. In the long term, however, the PRC cannot sustain this aggressive position without damaging its own economy, and, as the country is engaged in a trade war with the United States. Sparking what amounts to a trade war 'second front' against Australia cannot be advantageous, except for promoting fear and anxiety among Australians. Escalating tensions with Canberra will force Australia to look for alternative markets to the PRC for Australian goods. And once this decision is made, it will be very hard for Australia to return to China as it is currently politically configured.

Perhaps recognising the fact that interminable low-level conflict will damage China's long-term economic prospects and strategic ambitions, Xi Jinping agreed (May 20) to co-sponsor the World Health Assembly's Australia-EU independent review into the PRC's management of the coronavirus crisis. Just what sort of Chinese contribution can be expected is unknown. At this time, what can be speculated is that so long as the independent review does not cross a line regarding the CCP's concerns on 'national security', it may be allowed to conduct limited investigations. However, were the CCP to be displeased with the direction the review takes, we expect a similar degree of obstructionism from Chinese authorities as was witnessed in Iraq between 1991-98, when Saddam Hussein's internal security forces played a cat and mouse game with international WMD inspectors.

Another less discussed aspect of Chinese power in the Indo-Pacific is that in order to build the BRI infrastructure, many thousands of Chinese engineers and workers have been deployed to Central Asia and Africa. Travel restrictions imposed due to COVID-19 may well strand many of these people long-term in the places where they work. Without the ability to return to China, many single young men, denied Chinese partners by distance from home (and because of the PRC's significant gender imbalance¹⁷⁷) may choose to settle with locals and start families. These mixed families, comprised of expatriate Chinese engineers, or labourers, and locals might be seen as a potential extension of Chinese power and influence, but Han nationalism within China does not easily tolerate differences from the cultural norm. While some of these expatriate Chinese males might hold on to ideas of returning home to mainland China with their foreign girlfriends, wives, and mixed children, once the COVID-

¹⁷⁶ L Kuo, 'Australia Called "Gum Stuck to China's Shoe" by State Media in Coronavirus Investigation Stoush', *The Guardian*, April 28, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/28/australia-called-gum-stuck-to-chinas-shoe-by-state-media-in-coronavirus-investigation-stoush>.

¹⁷⁷ Q Jiang, 'Gender Imbalance and the Marriage Squeeze in China', *The Asia Dialogue*, November 18, 2019, <https://theasiadialogue.com/2019/11/18/gender-imbalance-and-the-marriage-squeeze-in-china/>.

19 travel restrictions are lifted, it is unlikely that the PRC state apparatus will enthusiastically welcome these ‘foreigners.’ Recent accusations of Chinese racism against African nationals working and studying in the PRC¹⁷⁸ may be a sign of things to come for children of mixed Chinese-African ancestry, and those Chinese BRI workers who hope for their children’s acceptance. This would be the law of diminishing returns: disappointed and angered by their treatment, Chinese expatriates may well be happy to settle permanently in their diaspora homes in Central Asia and Africa, and to view the PRC and Han culture generally as hostile and unattractive. In this light, it is difficult to see how the CCP can effectively use this growing diaspora community as a way to promote and consolidate Chinese control over areas where BRI projects and COVID-19 force cultures together for the foreseeable future.

In the end, contemporary Chinese strategic power under CCP rule in the Indo-Pacific is no ‘done deal.’ From a quality and quantity perspective, China may appear to be a global strategic power, but its reach is limited by the following:

1. The PRC is an asymmetric Great Power. Its military is only able to affect areas close to the Chinese mainland through a largely A2/AD defensive posture. The PRC is nowhere near achieving numerical and technological parity with the United States in conventional or nuclear forces.
2. The CCP has no ambition to become the next ‘world hegemon’. Its ambition is to dominate neighbouring states in order for China to be the leading regional power in Asia.
3. The PLA structure is, in spite of years of growing professionalisation, a force designed to protect the CCP from the Chinese people. While certain military formations are able to fight local wars under high-tech conditions, should there be civil unrest, the primary mission of the PLA would be regime survival, not war fighting.
4. Apart from mercurial North Korea, and to a lesser extent underdeveloped Myanmar, the PRC has no alliance partners to counter strategically US power in the Western Pacific. Its relations with Russia are opportunistic and pragmatic, and there is no reason to believe that Moscow would actively assist the PRC were it to go to war against the US.
5. The PRC has not achieved strategic dominance over Taiwan after decades of military modernisation and expansion. Its MRBM forces can theoretically level Taipei and other large Taiwanese cities, but the PLA is still lacking a modern amphibious warfare capability, and the PLA Air Force does not possess guaranteed air superiority over Taiwan, so the PRC cannot capture the island intact. Unification by force would mean Taiwan’s complete destruction and the alienation of its population.
6. The Nine-Dash Line in the South China Sea is not an easily defended strategic redoubt. The man-made islands and reefs that have been built to consolidate a permanent Chinese presence are aimed at the smaller claimant states of Southeast Asia. These states, with the possible exception of Vietnam, will find it difficult to

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch, ‘China: Covid-19 Discrimination Against Africans—Forced Quarantines, Evictions, Refused Services in Guangzhou’, May 5, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/05/china-covid-19-discrimination-against-africans>.

counter PLAN intimidation. In time of war (Sino-American), these islands can only host small PLAN/PLA contingents that would be vulnerable to air, missile, and long-range artillery attack from US forces operating in South Korea, Japan, Australia, or Guam, as well as from the continental United States.

7. The BRI does not signify Chinese strength, but it does pose a strategic vulnerability. This ambitious infrastructure program is a way to facilitate exports from distant parts of the world back to the Chinese market without having to go through American controlled waters. The PLA does not have the capacity to defend the BRI from near peer attack, or attack from local military/paramilitary/terrorist forces. With no global power projection, the CCP cannot guarantee the safety of its BRI infrastructure traversing through poorly governed territory. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a case in point.

Demonstrations of military power, such as hosting joint Sino-Russian naval manoeuvres, or flying provocative combat air patrols close to the national airspace of countries such as Japan, might rile political sensibilities, but this should not be mistaken for possessing a sustainable air war fighting capability. The South Koreans and Japanese both have powerful air defence and space surveillance capabilities, and when combined with those of the United States it is unlikely that the PLA Air Force could mount a serious challenge to Northeast Asia in the near term.

Further south, the dynamic is different.

At the current strategic threshold, falling well below that of wartime mobilisation, the PLA, PLA Air Force, and the PLAN have a numerical and technical advantage over the states of Southeast Asia. Should the US refuse to continue freedom of navigation exercises in the South China Sea, Southeast Asian military forces, individually and collectively, would find it very difficult to fend off the probing advances of Chinese forces. Here, without American support, Beijing could realise its goal of formalising the Nine-Dash Line as the South China Sea's actual boundary, but this would depend on Washington altering its commitment to sustaining the status quo. Should the US abandon this commitment, the PRC has enough military capacity to cower the ASEAN claimant states into accepting de facto Chinese control.

So, what of other aspects of Chinese power in the Indo-Pacific?

The PRC's *non-kinetic reach* is more persuasive than its military capabilities.

1. Beijing continues to use the loyalty of some of its citizens among its overseas communities to act as agents of the CCP in foreign countries, from within Chinese student bodies at universities, to Chinese business leaders acting as benefactors and philanthropists, facilitating 'political influence.'
2. HUMINT, spying, and espionage activities have enabled the Chinese military and State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) to accelerate their technological growth, especially in the realm of aerospace.
3. Underpinning the PRC's spying and espionage activities is cyber. China's adeptness at using cyber from which to steal government and industrial secrets, public data,

breaching privacy and sowing disinformation allows Beijing to destabilise targeted states, as was amply demonstrated by the June 2020 Cyber Attack against Australia.¹⁷⁹

4. Beijing has leased strategically important port facilities in Sri Lanka and Australia, which, in time, might be used against the national interests of both countries. In Australia's case, the lease of the Darwin Port places PRC commercial interests (of which the CCP is an economic actor through its SOEs) within a short distance from US defence personnel on rotation through the Northern Territory, much to the annoyance of Washington.¹⁸⁰
5. The massive BRI undertaking is seen from the Chinese perspective as a 'social good' to all trading nations along its route. A 'gift' from the Chinese people to the world. However, the price poor nations hosting this infrastructure have to pay for being part of the BRI initiative is being trapped in debt and potentially beholden to the CCP.¹⁸¹ Therefore, the BRI can be seen as an extension of Chinese strategic power rather than Chinese soft power diplomacy.

Contemporary China overtly uses its financial clout to build webs of dependency, from which smaller and less able states (including some 'Middle Power' states) find it difficult to escape. It exploits the more politically and economically vulnerable through convincing national business elites of the indispensable nature of the Chinese economy to the global capitalist system, and the centrality of Chinese foreign investment for national economic development. In the case of small states, it is difficult to escape the centrality of untied Chinese foreign aid. Because there is no clear separation between government and business in the PRC, this in turn creates local economic activity suited to supporting Chinese strategic initiatives. This PRC economic activism is a tool of Chinese statecraft, influencing local political elites to create an environment friendly to facilitating the continuation of Chinese trade and commerce. Such a strategy is useful in splitting 'public opinion' in countries trading with China, between those who profit from the trade and will always find commonality with what Beijing wants, and those who do not: who are more sceptical of the beneficent nature of the CCP. The PRC is ahistorical as a modern Great Power aspirant, in having no formal and highly capable allies helping it achieve its international diplomatic and strategic goals. The countries it is close to, North Korea and Myanmar, are regarded as too weak and strategically unsophisticated to apply pressure on Beijing to extract favours from the Chinese leadership. The CCP is effectively a pyramidal organisation that sees power flowing from the top-down within China, and from China to the rest of the world. Therefore, there is no reason to be responsive to the needs of what Beijing considers lesser powers, unless there is a clear requirement to adopt a different, more nuanced approach to achieving its ends.

As the economic aftereffects of coronavirus are still being felt internationally, whether the CCP can maintain *economic coercion* as its primary means of influencing the shape and direction of Chinese strategy remains to be seen. The international mood is swinging against the PRC for the damage caused to businesses around the world, as well as the follow-on

¹⁷⁹ J Bruni, 'Cyber Intrusion', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 2020, pp.50-53.

¹⁸⁰ P Coorey & L Tingle, "'Let Us Know Next Time': How Obama Chided Turnbull Over Darwin Port Sale", *Australian Financial Review*, November 19, 2015, <https://www.afr.com/politics/let-us-know-next-time-how-obama-chided-turnbull-over-darwin-port-sale-20151118-gl1qkg>.

¹⁸¹ TRT World, 'How China's Debt Trap Diplomacy Works and What It Means', *TRT World*, December 13, 2019, <https://www.trtworld.com/africa/how-china-s-debt-trap-diplomacy-works-and-what-it-means-32133>.

effects of mass unemployment caused by coronavirus lockdowns. As international ‘anti-PRC’ pressure mounts, it will be increasingly difficult for Chinese entrepreneurs to carry on in the manner they have been used to.

4 | THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Jonathan Z. Ludwig

WE DO NOT WANT CONFRONTATION WITH ANYONE. WE DON'T NEED IT. WE ARE NOT SEEKING AND HAVE NEVER SOUGHT ENEMIES. WE NEED FRIENDS.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, December 2016

We begin the secondary power contestants in the Indo-Pacific section by looking at the Russian Federation – long regarded as the principle antagonist of the United States led international order.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Since the time of Peter the Great (1672–1725), Russia and its successor states (the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation) have predominantly seen and projected themselves as a European power. The vast bulk of the Russian population and the country's industry is located West of the Ural Mountains, which encompasses the Moscow, St. Petersburg, Volga, and Ural regions. Its geographic proximity to Europe meant that Russia constructed an imperial court system similar to those found in Europe, spoke European languages, sought to live in accordance with European cultural norms, made European alliances, and fought in European wars. Having conquered vast swathes of Asian territories during a three-century long expansion to the Pacific Ocean, which concluded in the 1800s, Russia became an Asian-based empire. Nonetheless, the Russians still saw themselves as a European power. Siberia and Central Asia provided a geographical security buffer for Russia,¹⁸² providing the country with a vast area to “civilize,” to Russify, and to which they could send increasing numbers of political prisoners. Although they consolidated power against the Central Asian khanates, Russian successes in the greater Eurasian region were rare, for they were thwarted by the British in the Great Game (1813–1907), preventing them from seizing India and becoming a power in and around the Indian Ocean.

Russia briefly possessed an arc of settlements in the Pacific Ocean, but they were driven from Fort Elizabeth (Kauai, Hawaii, 1812), abandoned Fort Ross (California, 1842), and sold Alaska to the United States (1867), thus conceding much of their future potential to project power throughout the Pacific region and into the western parts of North America. Their defeat in the Crimean War (1853–56) stopped a Russian southward advance toward Turkey

¹⁸² T Marshall, *Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps That Tell You Everything You Need to Know About Global Politics*, Audible, Audiobook Edition, 2017.

and Persia, designed to challenge British commercial interests, especially in the Middle East and India. Following this, Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), in which the Japanese sunk two Russian fleets and took over the southern part of previously Russian-controlled Sakhalin Island, ended Russia's centuries-long bid to establish themselves as an Asian and Pacific power.

Russia's first modern success in the Asian sphere came at the end of World War II. Although the bulk of Russian fighting was done in the European theatre, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan in the waning days of the Pacific campaign, after which they gained control of the Kuril Islands. In the post-war years, as colonialism waned (except within the Soviet Union itself), they were able to parlay this success into an expanded presence in the Indo-Pacific region. India, seeking to preserve its non-aligned status in the Cold War environment and fearing American support for neighbouring Pakistan, became an ally and a recipient of Soviet armaments,¹⁸³ in spite of its non-aligned status.¹⁸⁴ Russia also developed a strong Pacific fleet that operated in both the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea (1968–91). As a consequence of the Soviet Union's military strength, no serious efforts were made to resolve the on-going Kuril Island dispute with Japan.

The fall of the Soviet Union (1991) interrupted Russia's ability to project itself as a dual-region power, resulting in Russia once again turning toward Europe and the West, hoping for some level of integration with Europe. Consequently, the United States, Japan, and China sought to fill the influence gap in the Pacific Ocean proper, while India and the United States sought to fill the influence gap in the larger Indo-Pacific region.

PUTIN'S "PIVOT TO THE EAST"

By 2004 Russian President Vladimir Putin began to re-establish a dual East-West strategy, typical of the strategic culture in which he was trained and in which the Soviet Union had, arguably, been successful.¹⁸⁵ The establishment of the Valdai Discussion Club in 2004, thought to be Putin's outreach to European intellectuals for support, did little to gain adherents. Therefore Putin's "Pivot to the East" in 2012, which included hosting an APEC Summit in Vladivostok in that year, is seen, in retrospect, as inevitable. It was generally assumed that Putin would use this directional change to concentrate on rebuilding relationships with the Central Asian nations through the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), as well as to re-develop Russian holdings in Siberia. The EEU has not lived up to Russia's expectations¹⁸⁶: it is largely dismissed by Kazakhstan, lacks Ukrainian participation, and is

¹⁸³ V Mastny, 'The Soviet Union's Partnership with India', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol.12, no.3, 2010, pp.50-90.

¹⁸⁴ This relationship was formalised in the 1971 Indo-Soviet Peace and Friendship Treaty. This treaty was pragmatic in that Moscow saw the value of continuing New Delhi's strongly held non-aligned status and did not require the Indian government's ideological commitment to the spread of international communism. However, in the West this treaty meant that, for much of the rest of the Cold War, India was viewed with suspicion, as a key supporter of Soviet strategic machinations. This treaty also allowed India greater latitude in regional affairs, knowing that the USSR would support it in the United Nations when necessary.

¹⁸⁵ F Ermarth, 'Russia's strategic culture: Past, Present, and ... in Transition?', Defense Threat Reduction Agency, 2006, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.456.3265&rep=rep1&type=pdf#page=234>.

¹⁸⁶ DG Tarr, 'The Eurasian Economic Union of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and the Kyrgyz Republic: Can It Succeed Where Its Predecessor Failed?', *Eastern European Economics*, vol.54, no.1, 2016, pp.1-22.

mostly subsumed under the Chinese-centred Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and various Belt and Road Initiative projects. Siberia is still very poor, with the vast majority of Russian economic and political power remaining centred in Moscow.

Russia's relationship with China has, however, been more successful, even though they have very different levels of international political influence and economic activity. Russia finds itself at odds with the European Union and in an obviously unequal relationship with China, resulting in economic and political turbulence flowing in both directions. Europe continues to sanction Russia, and China has done little to bolster Russia's regional status. China needs Russian energy and weapons systems, but it prefers not to build a more stable, or equal, partnership with its neighbour. In addition, Russia no longer has as strong a partnership with India, as India is both a power in its own right and is committed to a policy of multi-alignment. Although Vladivostok has been the base from which Russia projects power in the Indo-Pacific since May 21, 1731, when the Russian Pacific fleet was founded, economic limitations now reduce the impact of the Russian navy in the greater Indo-Pacific, while China and Japan both increase their naval strength in the region.

Today, Russia talks about open regions that are accessible to all and proposes multi-lateral solutions to problems, as it did during the Cold War. In the past, this rhetoric was directed against the West, which wanted to isolate the USSR and other communist supporters from meddling in democratic and emerging democratic nations. In this, the USSR had a number of supporters, including nations breaking free from their colonial past. Today, Russia employs similar rhetoric, wanting a free, inclusive, and open Indo-Pacific region, which they refer to as the Asia Pacific Region, but they have fewer supporters, less power, and even less commercial activity to project into the region.¹⁸⁷ Overall, they are aligning their goals for the Indo-Pacific with those of China in order to maintain as much influence as possible.

As with everywhere else, Russia is moving back into the Indo-Pacific from a position of relative weakness. While Russia wants to demonstrate that it is a global power, that it is a force to be reckoned with, and that it will be a player in the region long into the future, it is currently unable to achieve most of its preferred outcomes with, or without, allies. Moreover, Russia's Indo-Pacific concerns are relatively small, for while it talks about a greater Indo-Pacific, arguing for the inclusion of African nations and the Middle East in order to counter the United States' conception of an Indo-Pacific that ranges from India to the American mainland, in reality, Russia has tangible interests in even less of the area. Thus, while Russia talks about a broad and inclusive Asia Pacific, their actions do not demonstrate a commitment to it. They are primarily concerned with Japan, the Korean Peninsula, the United States' presence in both, and China.

¹⁸⁷ In a region known for trade and commerce, the Russian Federation has very few exportable commodities and manufactured goods to sell or trade. It is a key energy producer, particularly of oil and gas, but sanctions on Russia and Putin's use of Russia's energy resources as a weapon means there is a "trust deficit" in Moscow being a reliable energy supplier. For further information, see: G Collins, 'Russia's Use of the "Energy Weapon" in Europe', Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, Issue Brief 07.18.18, https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/ac785a2b/BI-Brief-071817-CES_Russia1.pdf. Russia is also a significant global producer and exporter of weapons and other military hardware, as well as a net agricultural exporter. Ports in Indonesia and Vietnam help Russia project economic power in the region.

A “COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP” WITH CHINA

Today, Russia's relationship with China is its most important in the region, but it is also the most perilous. Russia fell out with America and Europe during the George W. Bush administration over the Colour Revolutions in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005/2010). This falling out was exacerbated by the seizure of Crimea in 2014, after which sanctions were imposed on Russia, leaving it with progressively fewer states to partner with.

Consequently, there is no criticism of China in the Russian press and very little by independent Russian scholars. Russia also rarely says anything critical about Belt and Road Initiative projects stretching across Central Asia, although this area is Russia's “near abroad.” Russia's partnership with China is not questioned in public. It is because of this lack of criticism that Russia is the rare exception: a state that has not seen its public relationship with China deteriorate over the last year. China stated that it understood Russia's closing the Chinese border over Coronavirus fears, even as Beijing criticized the United States and others for preventing people from China from travelling to their countries.

Privately, however, there is great concern in Russia regarding the dangers of China's expansionist ambitions and the economic power China possesses, for there is substantial risk that Russia will lose in the long term. Russia's economy is not nearly as dynamic or innovative as China's. Oil and gas revenues are now relatively small, and indigenous Chinese defence production increases by the year. There is also the stark reality of geography: China is much closer to the resource riches of Siberia than is the Russian power centre. Moreover, the Russian Far East is progressively becoming more Asiatic in character.¹⁸⁸ Consequently, the relationship between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China is more one-sided than the Kremlin is willing to admit openly and is largely driven by the policy choices Putin has pursued over the past twenty years.

Russians have talked about risks from Asia for generations, and from China in particular in recent decades. The former extends from the Mongol invasion, and the latter from the Sino-Soviet split (1956–66) and the Sino-Soviet border conflict of 1969. This partnership is both strategically useful and deleterious for Putin, and, at some point, the question of China will return to the forefront of Russian civic discourse, although Putin will prefer continued silence. For example, the recent declaration by some Chinese elements, encouraged by Hu Xijin, the editor of the *Global Times*, that Vladivostok is historically Chinese¹⁸⁹ caused a minor bilateral spat that could, if revisited through more formal channels, easily raise the ire of patriotic citizens on both sides.

Russian military sales servicing the needs of Indo-Pacific geopolitical rivals China and India further complicates, rather than simplifies, Putin's ambitions. Indeed, in late July 2020, the Kremlin suspended the delivery of its S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile system to China,¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Ivan Tselichtchev, ‘Chinese in the Russian Far East: A Geopolitical Time Bomb?’, *South Morning China Post*, July 8, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2100228/chinese-russian-far-east-geopolitical-time-bomb>.

¹⁸⁹ EurAsian Times Desk, ‘Fact Check: Has China Really Claimed the Russian Port City of Vladivostok?’, *The EurAsian Times*, July 4, 2020, <https://eurasianimes.com/fact-check-has-china-really-claimed-russian-port-city-of-vladivostok/>.

¹⁹⁰ M Episkopos, ‘Russia Halted S-400 Air Defense Sales to China. Why?’, *The National Interest*, July 30, 2020; <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/russia-halted-s-400-air-defense-sales-china-why-165876>.

while aiming to speed up delivery of the same system to India.¹⁹¹ While the reasons behind the suspension are not clear, this action will have a negative effect on Russo-Chinese relations, sowing further distrust between the two countries. At a time of heightened Sino-American international tensions and simultaneous bilateral issues with India over its shared Himalayan border, Beijing being denied critical military equipment from its Russian supplier may accelerate Chinese re-engineering of Russian-made weapons already in service and spur further development and growth of its indigenous arms industry. Over time, the latter issue is likely to become a significant problem for Russia. As China produces more of its own weapons, it will be less dependent upon Russia, and Russia will be considered unimportant to bolstering Chinese international power and prestige. In addition, Russia will lose financially once the lucrative Chinese arms market is no longer open to them. The previous decade has already seen the beginnings of this decrease: in 2005, China made up 60% of Russian arms exports; by 2018, it had dropped to 18%. For now, much of this decrease has been made up for in other markets, but, if reductions in sales occur there as well, they will not be made up in China or elsewhere, for Russia already faces stiff competition from France, Israel, and the United States. Russia's chief advantage remains a willingness to tolerate technology transfer that other nations eschew.

For China, a Russian tilt in favour of India in any Sino-Indian confrontation will see better levels of Russian military technology enter the Indian armed forces. In the short to medium term, such a situation would likely alter the balance of power between China and India. Thus, the risks go both ways in any significant change in Russo-Chinese relations, although Russia still has the weaker hand overall. This may seem counter-intuitive, for overall China has the weaker military as measured by recent combat experience. This is, in fact, one of China's chief fears in confronting America directly: they have no idea how their armed forces will react once the fighting starts. Indeed, China is not certain they will even know how to conduct a long-term military campaign. Therefore, China has taken part in Russia's Vostok–2018 and Tsentr–2019 war games as part of their ambitious military reform program, meaning that China is reliant on their junior partner for military training and preparedness exercises. Nevertheless, China has the potential to quickly surpass Russia and, should relations sour, to use their newly trained and equipped forces against Russia across the border in Siberia.

JAPAN AND THE KURIL ISLANDS

Tensions are also never too far from the surface in Russia's relationship with Japan. Today, Russia has a number of areas of concern. The Kuril Islands/Northern Territories dispute remains unresolved and demonstrates the continuing fraught relationship between Japan and Russia. Technically the two nations are still at war,¹⁹² and Japan would be hard-pressed to explain an improvement in relations between the two nations without a settlement of the island dispute. Public opinion polls in Japan suggest that a return of at least two of the islands

¹⁹¹ Moscow Times & AFP, 'Russia to Speed Up S-400 Delivery to India Amid China Standoff', *The Moscow Times*, June 26, 2020, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/06/26/russia-to-speed-up-s-400-delivery-to-india-amid-china-standoff-a70707>.

¹⁹² L Kim, 'Russia and Japan Are Still At War—At Least On Paper', *NPR*, January 22, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/22/687319777/russia-and-japan-are-still-at-war-at-least-on-paper>. Upon the cessation of hostilities at the end of World War II, the Soviet Union and Japan did not sign a peace treaty, technically leaving a state of war in place between the Russian Federation, the Soviet Union's successor state, and Japan.

must precede an improvement in relations.¹⁹³ In Russia, on the other hand, The Moscow Times cited that 77 percent of all Russians favoured keeping all four Kuril Islands.¹⁹⁴ Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated in May 2019 that a build-up of Russian troops on the disputed islands that Tokyo “expressed concern over” were operating on “sovereign territory,”¹⁹⁵ showing that Russia does not perceive any immediate need to resolve the issue. For the present, Russia prefers to keep its relationship with Japan unbalanced, while also trying to keep the United States from enhancing defensive measures in Japan, which could be used to counter Russian aggression. In May 2019 Lavrov also stated his concern about part of the United States’ global missile defence being placed on Japanese territory.

Russia is also concerned about the modernization of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (JSDFs). It does not want a hostile Japan on its border, while at the same time Japan is concerned about a stronger Sino-Russian military alliance that could threaten them and the region. Since the beginning of the Trump administration, JSDF modernization has centred around the purchase of fighter jets, upgrades for naval destroyers, and consideration of the United States’ Aegis Ashore missile system, which would be placed in northern Japan. Russia is opposed to all of these purchases. While Japan has gone ahead with the first two, early in July 2020 it was decided that it will suspend purchase of the Aegis Ashore system due to cost and technical concerns.

Russia rightly assumes that Japan will choose their alliance with the United States over any accommodation with them. This makes Russia wary of any serious attempt to woo Japan away from its democratic ally. In fact, every time Russia has tried to link a return of island territory to Japan in exchange for Japan reducing its military relationship with the United States, Japan has refused to do so.¹⁹⁶ It would be of benefit to Russia to have Japan on its side to help contain China, but Russia is unwilling to make the accommodations necessary for this to happen, namely accepting the continuation of the American military presence in Japan, which is of greater benefit to containing China than Russia and Japan could achieve together. Moreover, the exit of US forces from Japan would be of greater benefit to China than to Russia.

In the long term, Moscow will look back and see that, with the resignation of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, it lost its best opportunity to resolve all of their outstanding issues with Japan. Abe was willing to go further than most Japanese politicians in meeting Russian demands, in order to secure his own political legacy, and to refocus Japanese defenses against China and North Korea, both of which they regard as a more serious threat. At a personal level, Prime Minister Abe wanted to fulfill the wishes of his late father, former Foreign Minister Shintaro Abe, who tried to normalize relations with the Soviet Union during his time in office.

¹⁹³ R Harding & H Foy, ‘Russia and Japan Push to Resolve Kuril Islands Dispute’, *Financial Times*, November 29, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/763b2eb2-f2f4-11e8-ae55-df4bf40f9d0d>.

¹⁹⁴ The Moscow Times, ‘77% of Russians Oppose Ceding Kuril Islands to Japan, Poll Says’, *The Moscow Times*, January 28, 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/01/28/77-percent-russians-oppose-ceding-kuril-islands-japan-poll-says-a64302>.

¹⁹⁵ Reuters, ‘Russia Rebuffs Japan’s Military Expansion Warning’, *The Moscow Times*, May 30, 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/05/30/russia-rebuffs-japans-military-expansion-warning-a65810>.

¹⁹⁶ See: D Chang, ‘Breaking Through a Stalemate?: A Study Focusing on the Kuril Islands Issue in Russo-Japanese Relations’, *Asian Perspective*, vol.22, no.3, 1998, pp.171-174.

THE KOREAN PENINSULA

Russia's relationship with the Korean peninsula is similarly uneasy and defined by unresolved historical issues. Russia supported Kim Il-Sung before and during the Korean War, resulting in North Korea being one of two Soviet client states in the Indo-Pacific. Today, however, Russia largely subordinates its desires for the peninsula to those of China, which has taken the lead in supporting the Kim regime.¹⁹⁷ Russia has been hedging its bets by saying that problems on the Korean Peninsula should be solved through US-North Korea negotiations, South Korea-North Korea negotiations, or six-party talks, of which Russia is a member.¹⁹⁸ It has made no offers for a solution based on Russia-North Korea negotiations, nor has it suggested that China negotiate alone. Russia has allowed China to take the lead, which has generally meant arguing that the United States should engage with North Korea directly.

In 2019 Kim Jong-un visited Putin in Vladivostok, where Putin portrayed himself as an honest and neutral broker in the on-going discussions over North Korea's nuclear weapons. However, Russia cannot play the role of neutral observer for a number of reasons: the two nations share a 17 km border; Russia has been consistently clear that it wants complete denuclearization of the Peninsula; Russia has been consistently clear that it wants the United States to fully and permanently leave the Peninsula, including the removal of all troops and THAAD missile systems; and Russia has a desire to increase trade with South Korea to diversify investment in the Russian Far East. In addition, Russia hopes to construct a trans-Korean railway, running from Russia through North Korea to South Korean ports, which will serve as an alternative to China's BRI transport infrastructure. This demonstrates that Russia is directly involved and has its own interests in de-escalating the situation. However, Russia is not strong enough regionally or internationally to compel the sides to come to terms on its own.

THE REGIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES

Since the late 1940s Russia has seen its relationship with the United States as a primarily European interaction, as troops stood eye-to-eye across from each other in Central Europe throughout the Cold War, during which time the United States also placed nuclear missiles in Western Europe to deter a Soviet invasion. However, since the end of World War II, there has also been an Indo-Pacific component, as the United States sought to contain the Soviet Union on all sides, deploying American troops to Western-aligned countries around the periphery of the USSR.

In post-Soviet times, wherever the Russian Federation acts around the world, the United States is in the forefront of Moscow's strategic planning. It cannot be ignored that Russia's actions in the Indo-Pacific are intended to weaken American global influence, as much as they are intended to strengthen Russian international influence. Russia makes the argument

¹⁹⁷ E Albert, 'The China-North Korea Relationship', Council on Foreign Relations, June 25, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/background/china-north-korea-relationship>.

¹⁹⁸ For historical context, see: C Moltz, 'DPRK Briefing Book: Russian Policy on the North Korean Nuclear Crisis', Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, April 2003, <https://nautilus.org/publications/books/dprkbb/russia/dprk-briefing-book-russian-policy-on-the-north-korean-nuclear-crisis/>. For a contemporary perspective, see: R Huiskens, 'The Korea Question: Six-Party Security Assurances Could Be the Answer', *The Strategist*, January 23, 2020, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-korea-question-six-party-security-assurances-could-be-the-answer/>.

that the United States' presence is that of an outsider: because the United States does not share land borders with Japan, the Korean Peninsula, or even with Russia itself. It does not belong in the region. Following this Russian argument to its logical conclusion would, of course, preclude Russian involvement anywhere in the Southern hemisphere, a suggestion Russia would think absurd.

Moreover, Russia sees the United States presence as a destabilizing force. This is one reason why Russian military flights have been harassing US surveillance missions through aggressively close interceptions in the northern Pacific for years and why, in August 2020, Russia conducted a massive military drill involving over 50 warships and 40 aircraft in the Bering Sea.¹⁹⁹ Russia's interest in the commercialization of the Arctic is an additional and increasingly important reason for these aggressive moves in the north.

Because the United States sees China as its main competitor in the Indo-Pacific, Russia could find an entry to improve relations. To do this they would need to find common interests with the democratic powers, in particular the United States, and convince them that they are serious about constructive action, rather than sowing discord and confusion. However, even if Russia were to make some type of alliance with the United States, it would still be a junior partner. At present, Russia's desire to be one of the "Big Three" Indo-Pacific nations is unrealistic. If the United States and China inhabit the top tier, then India, Japan, and South Korea inhabit the second tier. As Sino-American competition increases, as it has done throughout 2020, Russia will find itself having to choose a side if it wishes to retain any influence. History demonstrates that, in such situations, Russia chooses differently than the West would expect, which is unsurprising if viewed from a strategic culture perspective.²⁰⁰

OTHER ECONOMIC AND DIPLOMATIC ISSUES

Just because Russia has little geostrategic interest in other parts of the greater Indo-Pacific region does not mean that other states are not interested in Russia, or that Russia does not have other interests there. Russia sees much of the rest of the Indo-Pacific region as a place in which it is able to proliferate its sales of arms: the Indo-Pacific region currently accounts for over half of Russia's weapons sales.

According to Swedish-based think tank, SIPRI, in spite of a recent shift toward the US and US military equipment, India is still the world's largest recipient of Russian weapons,²⁰¹ which is the key reason why the Kremlin gave a tacit nod of approval toward India in its recent series of skirmishes with China in Ladakh. As noted by Seema Guha in *Outlook*:

Moscow has to walk a tightrope in its ties with India, what with its emerging military and political relations with China as they stand in unison against Western democracies. "We are not in the business of balancing India-China ties," Roman

¹⁹⁹ V Isachenkov & AP, 'Russian Navy Conducts Major Maneuvers Near Alaska', *The Washington Post*, August 28, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/russian-navy-conducts-major-maneuvers-near-alaska/2020/08/28/c6578836-e920-11ea-bf44-0d31c85838a5_story.html.

²⁰⁰ N Eitelhuber 'The Russian Bear: Russian Strategic Culture and What it Implies for the West', *Connections*, vol.9, no.1, 2009, pp.1-28, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26326192>.

²⁰¹ "Although India remained the chief recipient of Russian arms in 2014-18, Russian arms exports to India fell by 42 per cent between 2014-18 and 2009-13": PD Wezeman, A Fleurant, A Kuimova, N Tian & ST Wezeman, 'Trends in International Arms Transfers 2018', *SIPRI Fact Sheet*, March 2019, p.4, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/fs_1903_at_2018.pdf.

Babushkin, deputy head of mission in the Russian embassy in Delhi, says pointedly. “We have special but independent strategic relations with both India and China.”²⁰²

An Indian failure against the Chinese would have adverse repercussions for future arms sales elsewhere in the world. Vietnam, formerly the USSR’s other Indo-Pacific client state, is to this day another significant importer of Russian weapons²⁰³ and a recent recipient of a Free Trade Agreement with Russia through the Eurasian Economic Union.²⁰⁴ Although Vietnam has since reoriented itself politically, including toward the United States as a hedge against Chinese bullying, they still turn to Russia for much of their military supplies, hedging their bets in a rough neighbourhood. This also keeps Russia on the Chinese radar, reminding Beijing that Moscow can influence the region through arms sales, potentially tilting the regional balance of power against Chinese interests.

In addition, Russia has extended itself beyond its traditional Indo-Pacific markets. Beginning in 2012, generally under the auspices of the United Nations, Russia held meetings with a number of South Pacific island-states, including the Cook Islands, the Marshall Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu, Fiji, Samoa, Micronesia, and Palau. In 2012 Foreign Minister Lavrov visited Fiji in the Russian Federation’s first official visit to the Pacific nation. While there Lavrov discussed cooperative ventures, primarily in the fields of education and economics with Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama. During the previous year (2011) the Russian government wrote large cheques to Tuvalu, Nauru,²⁰⁵ and Vanuatu in return for their recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This recognition was short-lived, with Vanuatu withdrawing its recognition of the Georgian break-away provinces in 2013 and Tuvalu following in 2014. Such cheque-book diplomacy will work only as long as financial support continues and another state does not provide a better alternative. How long Russia can and will continue dispersing funds is up for serious debate, especially as energy prices remain low and available funds sparse. The advantage the island-states have, of course, is that Russia is far away, stretched thin (both militarily and financially), and might not be able to enforce agreements it has reached in the region. For Russia, while investments are small in comparison with other nations, they are acting now in order to keep from being completely locked out later on.

In August 2016, as published in the 45th Parliament of Australia (2016–19), Dr. Cameron Hill, a senior researcher on foreign affairs and related issues in the Parliamentary Library, noted that Russia had been planning to increase its presence in the Indo-Pacific, had sold arms and related materials to Fiji, which is the “first shipment of lethal aid into the Pacific by

²⁰² S Guha, ‘Why Russia Remains India’s Trusted Ally Despite Moscow’s Bonhomie with China’, *Outlook: The Fully Loaded Magazine*, July 13, 2020, <https://magazine.outlookindia.com/story/world-news-why-russia-remains-indias-trusted-ally-despite-moscows-bonhomie-with-china/303412>.

²⁰³ PD Wezeman, A Fleurant, A Kuimova, D Lopes da Silva, N Tian & ST Wezeman, ‘Trends in International Arms Transfers 2019’, *SIPRI Fact Sheet*, March 2020, p.6, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/fs_2003_at_2019.pdf.

²⁰⁴ Asia Regional Integration Center, ‘Viet Nam–Eurasian Economic Union Free Trade Agreement (Viet Nam–Eurasian Economic Union FTA)—Signed and in Effect: 5 October 2016’, <https://aric.adb.org/fta/viet-nam-customs-union-of-russia-belarus-and-kazakhstan-free-trade-agreement>.

²⁰⁵ G Wyeth, ‘The Sovereign Recognition Game: Has Nauru Overplayed Its Hand?’, *The Diplomat*, May 17, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/05/the-sovereign-recognition-game-has-nauru-overplayed-its-hand/>. The Republic of Nauru started diplomatic relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in December 2009 and continues to recognise these former Georgian territories.

a non-traditional partner,” and may be in search of naval bases from which to operate.²⁰⁶ It is unclear how much Russia can increase its presence here and elsewhere in the region, or how it can maintain its supply lines over time, even if it were to gain additional operating ports. It is worth noting that the Fiji action has been criticized within Fiji, so it is unlikely that establishing basing rights for the Russian navy will have popular support within the island nation.

In November 2017 Lavrov met with a number of regional counterparts at the APEC Summit in Vietnam. This was a continuation of the series of meetings that have taken place since 2012, through which Russia met with senior representatives from a number of small South Pacific island states. These states are part of Russia’s greater “Eurasian strategy,”²⁰⁷ as Putin continues to try to project Russia as a major Eurasian power. Although the South Pacific is increasingly mentioned in Russian foreign policy discourse, there is no evidence that it is a major part of Russia’s foreign policy strategy. Any changes here should be seen as being incremental and requiring considerable effort to maintain.

Throughout 2019 Lavrov wrote about having a “collective,” rather than a “bloc-oriented approach” to security in the Indo-Pacific. He has emphasized that Russia prefers to work through ASEAN for “security and cooperation issues” in the Indo-Pacific region and that, specifically regarding ASEAN, Russia understands the Indo-Pacific region is at a “crossroads.”²⁰⁸ Russia’s messaging strategy states that everyone must be equally involved in decision-making processes, rather than having “vague rules” imposed by others. Russia takes this perspective because, unlike during the Cold War, it does not have a bloc to which it can belong, or which it can lead. Russia is trying to both avoid being left out of United States centred security arrangements and having to be an obviously junior partner in any China-centred security arrangement. It is angling for relevance in a region in which it has little influence by trying to support nations, some of which are more concerned about growing Chinese influence than a continued or increased United States presence.

In October 2019 Russia stated that the United States’ vision for the Indo-Pacific is biased against East African coastal countries and the Middle East by excluding them from the name. Russia wants to include more nations that might be hostile to an increased US presence, many of which, particularly in Africa, have been seeing increased investment from China since the beginning of the 21st Century.²⁰⁹ Whether Russia is making this argument to appease or to support China, to counter the United States vision, or to increase the number of countries to the point that any one country or mini-bloc within the larger area is weakened, is unclear. All of these reasons are equally likely and do not necessarily conflict with each other.

²⁰⁶ C Hill, ‘External Powers in the Pacific: Implications for Australia’, in Parliamentary Library, *Parliamentary Briefing Book, Key Issues for the 45th Parliament*, Department of Parliamentary Services, Canberra, 2016, p.154, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/4787355/upload_binary/4787355.pdf;fileType=application/pdf.

²⁰⁷ B Lo, ‘Once More with Feeling: Russia and the Asia-Pacific’, *Lowy Institute Analyses*, August 20, 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/once-more-feeling-russia-and-asia-pacific>.

²⁰⁸ ES Martynova, ‘Strengthening of Cooperation Between Russia and ASEAN: Rhetoric or Reality?’, *Asian Politics and Policy*, vol.6, no.3, 2014, pp.397-412, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264387897_Strengthening_of_Cooperation_Between_Russia_and_ASEAN_Rhetoric_or_Reality/link/5e464b8c92851c7f7f37be62/download.

²⁰⁹ See: S Michel & M Beuret, *China Safari: On the Trail of Beijing’s Expansion in Africa*, Nation Books, New York, 2009.

Most recently, Russia signed a deal with India at the 2019 Vladivostok Summit at which India announced a \$1 billion line of credit for investment and development in the Russian Far East.²¹⁰ The area is rich in natural resources, including coal, natural gas, and timber. This is a direct counter to China's investment strategy in the area, which currently accounts for about 70% of total foreign investment in the region.²¹¹ While investment projects have dried up elsewhere in the world throughout 2020, India and Russia continue discussions on the project, including whether only Indian firms will be able to participate, or if it will be open to all. The hope is that the two nations will meet a trade target of \$30 billion by 2025, in spite of sanctions against Russia. Cooperation between the two nations continues in the nuclear energy sector, including the construction of a nuclear power plant in Bangladesh, and scientific research in related areas.

Nuclear power plant construction is an additional way in which Russia can make inroads in the greater Indo-Pacific region. Through construction and training Russia is responsible for roughly 70% of the world's nuclear power plants. It has MOUs with Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam to construct future plants, and it is actively working with China, India, and others. Among the Pacific Island and ASEAN nations, Russia has the capability to offer a full-package deal when selling modular nuclear reactors: Russia can construct, service, and fuel the plants, as well as take away and dispose of nuclear waste.

CONCLUSION

Russia has five goals in the Indo-Pacific region: to demonstrate that Russia is an Asia-Pacific Power; to be involved in an area of increased Great Power focus; to demonstrate that Russia is a global actor; to promote its specific interests in the region; and to challenge Western hegemony in the region, while avoiding creating direct conflict with these Western powers. Russia is limited in how much hard power it can project and has less soft power to utilize. Russian power is, as it has recently been elsewhere, the power to involve itself and destabilise, not the power to construct, and it has shown little desire to become a constructive agent anywhere outside of Central Asia. Arms sales enable Russia to wield what influence they have, and it causes the world to think they are more involved globally than they are in reality.

The chief question for Australia to consider in this environment is whether it is worth the effort to engage with Russia. Russian incursions into the South Pacific indicate that Australia needs to keep a close eye on Russia; however, they can do little alone. Nevertheless, there is the opportunity to work with India, Japan, and the United States, all of whom are increasing their cooperation against China and, therefore, by default, against Russia. Russia will be an untrustworthy partner, certainly never an ally, as they will always prioritize their own concerns and desires over those of the Quad or any long-term alliance. However, Australia, as a member of the Quad, can help to leverage Russia's increasing distrust of China to ensure that at least some of Russia's desire to upset the *status quo* can be directed toward China, rather than solely toward the American-led Indo-Pacific order. Thus, Russia can be managed

²¹⁰ PTI, 'India Gives \$1 Billion Line of Credit to Russia Far East', *The Times of India*, September 6, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-gives-1-billion-line-of-credit-to-russia-far-east/articleshow/71001071.cms>.

²¹¹ DP Chaudhury, 'Russia Seeks to Balance China in Far East; Woos Indian Investments', *The Economic Times* (English Edition), July 24, 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/russia-seeks-to-balance-china-in-far-east-woos-indian-investments/articleshow/70366045.cms?from=mdr>.

to become an irritant to China, rather than to the democratic nations of the Indo-Pacific. In turn, this can help to keep China from refashioning the global order to their own illiberal model.

5 | JAPAN, INDO-PACIFIC AND AUSTRALIA-JAPAN RELATIONS

Purnendra Jain

Japan was an early initiator and promoter of the idea of the mingling of the two oceans: the Pacific and the Indian. This strategic construct has crystalized as the Indo-Pacific, and Japan has outlined its comprehensive strategy for the region as the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). The idea of considering both oceans together as being strategically significant emerged from Tokyo's growing appreciation that the structure of international society was heading in a new direction. With the rise and assertiveness of China and a relative overall decline of the US, Japan's long-term security needed to be reconceptualised. While engaging with China, Japan began to hedge as its sense of anxiety (and later fear) grew as a consequence of Beijing's aggressive behaviour around the region and irredentist claims on territories—more notably since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012. Furthermore, China has far surpassed Japan as Asia's largest, and the world's second largest, economy. In addition, China's defence spending has skyrocketed, leaving Japan's spending on its Self Defence Force far behind.²¹²

Japan's Indo-Pacific orientation is also driven by its assessment that, while the United States remains the linchpin of Japan's security (including a nuclear umbrella), in view of the declining influence of the US, Tokyo began to send out signals that Japan was keen to form partnerships with like-minded countries within and beyond the region. The aim has been to maintain a rules-based international order, which does not disturb the current norms and principles of international society, largely established by the US in the postwar period. Such partnerships would support US foreign policy goals and, to some extent, unburden Washington as the sole global security provider. Through such a role Japan would improve its diplomatic profile, as well as changing the perception that it is simply following in the footsteps of United States' foreign policy.

Today, Japan's Indo-Pacific initiatives are well acknowledged in regional states and beyond. However, the concept, its aims, and operations are not without challenges, as any initiative that Japan takes has to conform to the constraints imposed by the 'peace clause' of the constitution, take its difficult history with the turbulent Korean Peninsula into consideration,

²¹² In 2019, China spent USD 261 billion; Japan USD 47.6 billion, which is a little higher than South Korea's USD 43.9 billion and much lower than India's USD 71.1 billion. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 'Global Military Expenditure Sees Largest Annual Increase in a Decade—Says SIPRI—Reaching \$1917 Billion in 2019', SIPRI, April 27, 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/global-military-expenditure-sees-largest-annual-increase-decade-says-sipri-reaching-1917-billion>.

and maintain its relationships with China and Russia, with whom Japan has yet to conclude a peace treaty.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been the chief architect of the FOIP, with the aim of carving out a rules-based regional order. Available information suggests that, even in a post-Abe Japan, the FOIP strategy will guide Japan's foreign policy as Tokyo strives to build multilateral economic and security partnerships. The main challenge before Japan is to manage China, which has become more belligerent than ever before, and Prime Minister Abe's efforts to offer an olive branch have not produced any significant results: indeed, the relationship has hit a low point in recent months.

EVOLUTION OF THE INDO-PACIFIC IN JAPAN'S FOREIGN POLICY FRAMEWORK

Japan's post-war foreign policy has operated in accordance with the US-Japan security treaty framework and within the limits of Article 9 of Japan's pacifist constitution. Japan's foreign policy thus remains either 'reactive,' or it pursues 'quiet diplomacy,' which is sometimes described as 'leading from behind.' Japan has played a critical role in assisting many Asian nations to achieve prosperity through its three economic tools (aid, investment, and trade), while closely supporting broad US foreign policy agendas, which is a cost that Japan agreed to bear after the end of World War II.

In the post-Cold War period, Japan became more economically active and played a key role in bringing the Asia-Pacific region to the centre stage of the global economy by designing APEC, an architecture that allowed the free flow of trade and investment among APEC member states. Asia's economy gained new momentum when Japan pumped billions of dollars of investment and aid into China, which in turn created economic opportunities for both Japan and other member states in the region.

Fast forward to the turn of the century, and Japan-China and Japan-US relations remained on a steady course. Unfortunately, as China became prosperous and more assertive, old and unsettled matters such as Japan's colonial past, war-time history, the issue of a 'proper apology,' the Yasukuni Shrine (in Tokyo, where Japan's war dead are enshrined), and China's claims on the Japanese administered Senkaku islands, became sources of deep tensions. The first decade of the twenty-first century was often characterised by 'hot economics and cold politics,' because Japan-China trade grew exponentially, with denser production networks and supply-chains, but political issues made the bilateral relationship difficult and tense. The liberal peace theory, which says that economic interdependence dampens political conflict, did not seem to work, although at least the two successfully deescalated conflict when serious tensions arose. At the time of writing (August 2020) the relationship has hit a new low, with an escalation in military activities by both states around the Senkaku islands.

Japan has essentially followed a combined strategy of engagement and hedging to manage its relationship with China. High level political and official visits have continued, with Prime Minister Abe pulling out all the stops to welcome Xi Jinping to Tokyo in early 2020, even at the cost of delaying the application of tough policy to deal with the coronavirus crisis. Together with engagement, Tokyo has followed a hedging strategy: instead of simply depending on the US, Tokyo has sought to forge strategic relationships with a number of regional partners, including Australia, India, and some Southeast Asian nations. This policy

of multi-layered networks across the region has also been promoted by the Democratic Party of Japan, the party that replaced the LDP in 2009 and remained in government until 2012. When Abe returned to power for a second time in 2012, his early efforts to engage China did not bear much fruit and his administration has actively pursued a two-pronged foreign policy direction: deeper and thicker networks with like-minded nations and strengthening and expanding the scope of the SDF under his ‘pro-active **contribution** to peace’ policy.

FROM ASIA-PACIFIC TO INDO-PACIFIC

Until recently, Japan promoted the ‘Asia-Pacific’ as the main geo-economic construct to bring a number of regional powers together. Japan was the lead author (later endorsed by Australia) for the concept of the Asia-Pacific, which culminated in the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in 1989. It provided a template for regional and global economic cooperation through free and open trade. While Tokyo has not outright discarded the Asia-Pacific concept, or withdrawn from APEC, it now champions another geographical construct, the Indo-Pacific, underpinned by geo-strategic considerations. India, which was kept outside of the main Asia-Pacific grouping (APEC), has become central to this geo-strategic space. While Japan led the Asia-Pacific concept from behind and let Australia launch APEC in 1989, it is striving to lead the Indo-Pacific from the front. Today, many countries have embraced the Indo-Pacific concept, including the United States under President Donald Trump.

The recent origin of this widely used phrase can be traced to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s speech to the Indian Parliament in August 2007. In this speech Abe presciently introduced the term ‘broader and/or expanded Asia’ (*kakudai Ajia*) to refer to Pacific and Indian Ocean countries that share the values of democracy, freedom, and respect for basic human rights. He stated, “By Japan and India coming together in this way, this broader Asia will evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the United States of America and Australia.”²¹³

Abe did not use the term Indo-Pacific then, but it was implicit in his ‘broader/expanded Asia’ wording. The essential idea at the time was to emphasise the centrality of India in Japan’s strategic perception of the region. Since Abe’s speech in India, the term has evolved into ‘Indo-Pacific,’ with a deeper elaboration of the concept via the ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific.’ The term was only recently adopted by Japan’s think tanks, scholars, and journalists.²¹⁴ A book on Japan’s foreign policy and security under Abe published in 2015 has no reference to the Indo-Pacific.²¹⁵

When Abe returned to power in 2012, the term Indo-Pacific was still rarely used in Japan, as Tokyo had long privileged Asia-Pacific over other geo-political constructs. Abe raised the prospect of what he called ‘Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond,’ a strategy whereby “Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. state of Hawaii would form a strategic diamond of

²¹³ S Abe, ‘Confluence of the Two Seas’, speech at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>.

²¹⁴ P Jain & T Horimoto, 2016, ‘Japan and the Indo-Pacific’, in P Chacko (ed), *New Regional Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: Drivers, Dynamics and Consequences*, Routledge, 2016, pp.26-42.

²¹⁵ CW Hughes, *Japan’s Foreign and Security Policy Under the ‘Abe Doctrine’: New Dynamism or New Dead End?*, Palgrave Pivot, 2015.

democratic nations to safeguard the maritime commons, stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the western Pacific.”²¹⁶

By 2014–15 Japan’s ministries of foreign affairs and defence began to cautiously use the term. Some Japanese analysts and diplomats also highlighted the term at international forums. The Japan Institute of International Affairs, a MOFA-funded think tank, established a research group to study the concept and explore relationships with the Indo-Pacific region. In 2016 Abe added the prefix ‘Free and Open’ to the Indo-Pacific, based on the idea of democracy and freedom he had first spelt out in the Indian Parliament. Abe made the ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ his signature foreign policy statement, which has now taken conceptual root, even in Japan’s official development assistance (ODA) programme and ‘quality infrastructure development projects’, especially in Asia.²¹⁷

Japan will remain focused on this narrative and is on a mission to convince regional partners and friends, as it did with President Trump, of the utility and significance of this strategic construct in regional and global politics. While Japan pursues the idea of the Indo-Pacific vigorously, it has not abandoned its Asia-Pacific concept, as reflected in Japan’s recent leadership role in reviving the Trans-Pacific Partnership after the Trump administration summarily discarded it. Japan successfully persuaded other Asia-Pacific partners to conclude the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTTP), which entered into force in December 2018.²¹⁸

TOOLS OF THE FOIP

TICAD

Tokyo’s Indo-Pacific geographic boundaries combine the two continents (Asia and Africa) and the two Oceans (Indian and Pacific).²¹⁹ Africa takes an important position. It is notable that the ‘union of two free and open oceans and two continents’ announcement was made in Nairobi when Abe opened the 2016 Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD).²²⁰ Building solid ties with the African continent is one tool that Japan has adopted as part of the FOIP. This is clearly in competition with China, whose presence in Africa has grown with the aim of outplaying Japan.

QUAD

Japan is a key promoter of the Quad framework. In his first stint as prime minister, Abe had proposed the formation of a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in 2007, following collaboration with Australia, India, and the United States in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and the joint humanitarian effort by these countries in Indonesia. Abe proposed the

²¹⁶ S Abe, ‘Asia’s Democratic Security’, December 31, 2012, <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/vigg2XC8fhRfjTUIcctk0M/Asias-democratic-security-diamond.html> (accessed September 10, 2018).

²¹⁷ H Yoshimatsu, ‘Japan’s Exports of Infrastructure Systems: Pursuing Twin Goals Through Developmental Means’, *Pacific Review*, vol.30, no.4, 2017, pp.494-512.

²¹⁸ Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Malaysia and Peru have yet to ratify the treaty.

²¹⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000430632.pdf>.

²²⁰ S Abe, ‘Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI)’, Kenyatta International Convention Centre, Nairobi, Kenya, August 27, 2016, https://www.mofa.go.jp/afr/af2/page4e_000496.html.

formulation of a democratic coalition among Japan, Australia, India, and the United States (democratic security diamond) to protect the maritime commons, including freedom of navigation in both the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean in response to China's aggressive moves in the East China and South China seas. Abe has consistently expressed a political desire to create a quadrilateral grouping to deter unilateral action by China in the maritime sphere, but, as analysts have noted, there are no shared common interests that can unite most of the states in the region.²²¹ Quad 2.0 is still searching for a consensus among members.

DEFENCE AND SECURITY POLICY

In 2010, under the DPJ government, political and legal constraints on Japan's defence capabilities began to be relaxed, signalling a significant turning point. In 2014 Japan reinterpreted Article 9 of the Japanese constitution to enable it to exercise its right to collective self-defence. In addition, Japan passed a State Secrecy Law in 2013, along with further security legislation in 2015, which facilitated a seamless, rapid, and effective response to security contingencies. Japan now participates in joint bilateral and multilateral military exercises: with the Malabar exercise being one of the most prominent, in which Japan is a regular participant together with India and the United States (Australia may soon participate). Japan also provides surveillance aircraft and ships to Southeast Asian nations under its 'capacity building' program. The capacity building programme has two aspects, activities based on official development assistance (ODA) and activities that are defence-based, although the lines are blurred and overlap at times.

SOFT STRATEGIES

Supporting and funding infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific what Japan describes as 'quality infrastructure projects,' to distinguish them from Chinese projects, which are often criticised as 'debt traps.' Economic groupings of like-minded countries provide another example: Japan played a crucial role in concluding the TPP, which came to be known as CPTPP.²²² Japan has also linked its ODA to its FOIP vision and 'pro-active contribution to peace'. Through its ODA, Japan extends its diplomatic reach to small and microstates in the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean, such as Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Japan has tried to dilute the influence of China in regional institutions through its insistence to include Australia, New Zealand, and India, while China was opposed to the idea of expanding the ASEAN+3 to ASEAN +6. Japan has been very disappointed by India's withdrawal from the RCEP, as in Tokyo's view this economic grouping will simply become China dominated without India.

²²¹ K He & H Feng, 'The Institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific: Problems and Prospects', *International Affairs*, vol.96, no.1, p.165.

²²² This is of course not the only architecture that Japan has led; equally and perhaps more significant was its role in establishing the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) in 1994 without the US being a member. See: P Midford, *Overcoming Isolationism: Japan's Leadership East Asian Security Multilateralism*, Stanford University Press, 2020.

Hughes has called Japan's security and defence policy 'resentful realism,' 'driven by fear of China, lack of trust in the US, and a continuing desire for the reassertion of national pride and autonomy',²²³ while Koga has characterised Japan's Indo-Pacific as 'tactical hedging',²²⁴ that is, 'a declaratory policy doctrine that aims to utilize temporal strategic ambiguity to understand and determine whether any long term strategy shift is necessary or possible'.²²⁵ He distinguishes this from conventional hedging, which is conceptually located in-between balancing and band-wagoning, and treated as a long-term strategy, such that a hedger would not choose either balancing against or band-wagoning with a target state.

The Indo-Pacific is thus an evolutionary concept in Japan's foreign policy. It is interesting to note that Japan changed its Indo-Pacific strategy into an Indo-Pacific vision towards the end of 2018, due to concerns in Japan's neighbourhood that 'strategy' implied 'to defeat another country'.²²⁶

JAPAN-AUSTRALIA AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

Both Japan and Australia have long identified themselves as 'Pacific' nations, and were instrumental in giving Asia-Pacific a new regional identity, first through their epistemic communities and later through their governments and national leadership. Launched in 1989, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum was essentially a joint Japan-Australia project that designed an economic structure for the region, which has resulted in decades of regional prosperity.²²⁷

Now both states promote the Indo-Pacific. Australia was perhaps most appropriately the first country to adopt Indo-Pacific in its official narrative, since it is at home in both the Pacific and Indian oceans. It had begun to employ this concept even before Japan, and by 2013 some Australian and other regional scholars and commentators were vigorously discussing its geopolitical and strategic significance.²²⁸ The *2017 Australian Foreign Policy White Paper* promoted an 'open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific region, in which the rights of all states are respected.'²²⁹ The term Indo-Pacific is sprinkled throughout the White Paper, with one chapter specifically devoted to it. It can be argued that, more than any other countries, Japan and Australia have been enthusiastic promoters of the Indo-Pacific concept. Although on opposing sides during World War II, the United States encouraged Australia to reconcile with Japan soon after the end of hostilities, and Australia began to trade with Japan as early as the late 1950s. The two nations' economic ties grew from strength to strength and relations began to expand to other areas, as noted by the Japanese ambassador to Australia on

²²³ Hughes, *Japan's Foreign and Security Policy*, p.95.

²²⁴ K Koga, 'Japan's "Indo-Pacific" Question: Countering China or Shaping a New Regional Order?', *International Affairs*, vol.96, no.1, 2020, p.62.

²²⁵ Ibid., p.61.

²²⁶ Y Tajima, 'Abe Softens Tone on Indo-Pacific to Coax China's ASEAN Friends', *Nikkei Asia*, November 13, 2018, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Abe-softens-tone-on-Indo-Pacific-to-coax-China-s-ASEAN-friends#:~:text=TOKYO%20%2D%2D%20Japan%20is%20taking,countries%20wary%20of%20antagonizing%20China>.

²²⁷ Y Funabashi, *Asia-Pacific Fusion: Japan's Role in APEC*, Peterson Institute of International Economies, Washington, DC, 1995.

²²⁸ D Scott, 'Australia's Embrace of the "Indo-Pacific": New Term, New Region, New Strategy', *International Relations of the Asia Pacific*, vol.13, no.3, 2013, pp.425-448.

²²⁹ Australian Government, *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra, ACT, p.3, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/minisite/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper/fpwhitepaper/pdf/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf>.

the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the end of the Pacific War. Ambassador Takahashi appreciated ‘the spirit of tolerance and friendship that Australia has shown to Japan, and noted the ‘positive, friendly post-war relationship that Japan and Australia share today is vast in its scope, encompassing not only the economic, but also cultural, as well as political ties and defence co-operation.’²³⁰

Both states are close allies of the United States and have served as the northern and southern anchors of the alliance relationship. Their close bilateral ties with the US have led to a trilateral security dialogue process, linking the three together in defence and security matters.²³¹ They are both ‘junior’ security allies of the US: Australia because of its limited resources, and Japan because it is limited by its constitution.

While maintaining their deep economic bond, Australia and Japan have expanded and strengthened their security and defence ties, as both harbour serious concerns about the assertive rise of China. Notable are the 2007 Japan–Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation; the 2012 Japan–Australia Agreement on the Security of Information; and the 2013 Japan–Australia Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), which was revised and ratified in 2017. This allows the two nations to share ammunition and other specialist items during military exercises, relief operations, and peacekeeping operations, rather than just food, fuel, and supplies. Since 2014 they have forged a special strategic partnership and have been in discussion on a visiting forces agreement.

THE MORRISON-ABE VIRTUAL SUMMIT

Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s scheduled visit to Japan in January 2020 was postponed due to the bush fire crisis in Australia. Because of COVID-19 quarantine requirements a face-to-face meeting is unlikely anytime soon: Australia’s Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs had to go into mandatory quarantine upon their return from the US after their AUSMIN meetings. In the interim, Prime Minister Morrison and Prime Minister Abe conducted a virtual summit (although not as visible as the Morrison-Modi summit).

At their teleconferencing summit in early July, Morrison and Abe expressed concern about ‘coercive and unilateral actions’ in the East and South China Seas, and reaffirmed the importance of the “Quad” alliance between Australia, the US, Japan, and India. They also reaffirmed their cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. A highlight of the meeting was a partnership deal between the two nations’ space agencies, as well as better cooperation in defence and space science. Following this meeting, an MoU between the Australian Space Agency and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) was signed.²³²

²³⁰ R Takahashi, ‘Statement by Takahashi Reiichiro Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Australia’, Embassy of Japan in Australia, August 15, 2020, https://www.au.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/15082020_Statement_by_Takahashi_Reiichiro.html.

²³¹ P Jain, ‘Japan-Australia Security Ties and the United States: The Evolution of the Trilateral Dialogue Process and Its Challenges’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.60, no.4, 2006, pp.521-535; P Jain & J Bruni, ‘Japan, Australia and the United States: Little NATO or Shadow Alliance?’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, vol.4, no.2, 2004, pp.265-285; P Jain & J Bruni, ‘American Acolytes: Tokyo, Canberra and Washington’s Emerging “Pacific Axis”’, in B Williams & A Newman (eds), *Japan, Australia and Asia-Pacific Security*, Routledge, 2006, pp.89-106.

²³² Australian Embassy, Tokyo, Japan, ‘Australian Space Agency and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) Signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on Space’, https://japan.embassy.gov.au/tkyo/australian_space_agency_jaxa.html.

A reciprocal access agreement (RAA), which has been under negotiation for some time, is yet to be concluded. Once signed it will allow Japan's SDF and the ADF to operate in each country's jurisdiction. There are some sticking points, such as criminal proceedings against defence personnel, as Australia does not impose the death penalty while Japan does. Reports suggest that these issues have now been resolved and that the agreement is now ready for the two leaders to sign when next they meet.²³³ This will be an unprecedented and 'epoch-making' agreement between the two countries,²³⁴ reflecting their deepening trust and belief in new security and defence arrangements in the Indo-Pacific.

ASIA-PACIFIC VERSUS INDO-PACIFIC

The Asia-Pacific concept was a joint project and was generally welcomed in the region and beyond. In contrast, the Indo-Pacific is not a joint project, but both nations have similar concerns and challenges that are propelling them toward a practical elaboration of the concept.

Japan's vision of the Indo-Pacific is different to Australia's vision. Geographically, Africa has become important for Japan, in addition to India and Southeast Asia. Australia's focus is on its old Asia-Pacific vision, with India added on to it.

The Asia-Pacific was a product of post-Cold War politics and the 'end of history,' when liberal ideas and cooperation for prosperity became the mantra. The Indo-Pacific is a product of China's rise and America's relative decline, and an intense US-China rivalry. China's rise has brought prosperity for many, including Australia and Japan, but it has also brought costs with it. Balancing economic interests and political costs has been difficult.

Asia-Pacific collaboration and cooperation had few critics but the Indo-Pacific can be a divisive notion, even within the context of an individual country. In Australia, for example, while some think tanks and scholars (Rory Medcalf, Michael Wesley, et al.) promote it, others (Mark Beeson, Nick Bisley and Andrew Phillips, for example) see it as being anti-China.²³⁵ Collaboration at an international level currently lacks cohesion, with China and Russia in opposition.

Unlike the Asia-Pacific, institutionalisation and leadership is lacking in the Indo-Pacific construct. There is nothing like an APEC equivalent for the Indo-Pacific, nor an Australia-Japan type joint leadership, which led to the success of the Asia-Pacific construct. The Quad has had a chequered history, and even in its second iteration, joint responses to China's behaviour is lacking. However, if China does not change its course and continues to behave aggressively, the quad countries may begin to move from soft cooperation (ministerial level talks) to hard cooperation (military).

²³³ A media report suggested that Morrison was planning to travel to Japan for a face-to-face meeting Abe. See: MM Bosack, 'Five Key Takeaways From the Japan–Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement', *The Japan Times*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/06/12/commentary/japan-commentary/five-key-takeaways-japan-australia-reciprocal-access-agreement/>.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ He & Feng, 'Institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific', p.161.

CONCLUSION

Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific has evolved from a concept, to a strategy, to a vision, and is still evolving. It aims to forge ties between like-minded countries, to support connectivity and infrastructure projects (as a counter to China's BRI), to promote the values of the rules-based international order, and to enhance maritime security.²³⁶ Under its 'pro-active contribution to peace' policy, Tokyo has adopted capacity building strategies, through both its ODA program and military assistance for 'peace purposes.'

Japan's FOIP vision is broad and incorporates countries of the Indo-Pacific from Asia as well as from Africa. Tokyo is also building defence and security ties with other like-minded nations, such as France and the UK, and very recently Japan's defence minister Taro Kono raised the prospect of Japan becoming an observer, or even the 'sixth eye,' to the five eyes intelligence-sharing alliance (US, Canada, UK, Australia, and New Zealand).

The notion of the Indo-Pacific came into being in response to China's assertiveness and aggressiveness. However, countries that subscribe to the notion of the Indo-Pacific have different understandings of the term and their relations with China also differ. Each constructs China in their own imagination, and Japan and Australia have different responses to China. Their history and geography define their relations with China. China and Japan are neighbours and they have long-standing territorial disputes and other lingering historical issues that have troubled their relations for decades. Australia, on the other hand, is not burdened so much by history and it is geographically far away from China. It is natural then that their China response and rhetoric are different.

Although China may regard the Indo-Pacific concept as being nothing more than "like the sea foam in the Pacific or Indian Ocean: they may get some attention, but soon will dissipate",²³⁷ if it continues alienating country after country through its military behaviour, the Indo-Pacific nations, despite their lack of coordination at this stage, may begin to cooperatively push China back.

In summary, the Indo-Pacific has emerged not just simply as a *geographic/geo-economic sphere*, as was largely the case with the Asia-Pacific, but as mainly a *strategic* space in response to China's economic and military designs. The next stage of its development warrants attention as extra-regional powers such as France and Britain have also supported the idea. What shape and form it will take in the future remains unclear. What is clear, however, is that the Indo-Pacific as a strategic term will remain in the international relations lexicon for a long time to come, as power centres shift and new centres emerge. Post-Abe: Japan is likely to stay on its course with regards to the Indo-Pacific concept.

²³⁶ Government of Japan, 'Towards Free and Open Indo-Pacific', November 2019, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000407643.pdf>.

²³⁷ W Yi, 'Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, March 8, 2018, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1540928.shtml.

6 | INDIA, INDO-PACIFIC AND AUSTRALIA

Purnendra Jain

India is a key player in the Indo-Pacific and is regarded as a leading stakeholder in the region. States, such as Australia, Japan, and the United States, regard India as having a critical role to play in this new geo-strategic space. India was neither an early proponent for, nor an enthusiastic promoter of, this strategically-relevant geo-political term as it was being developed and promoted—for example, by Australia in the 2010s.²³⁸ Indeed, India was hesitant to embrace the term in its official lexicon until very recently, even though both government and think-tank strategic communities in India could see why others in the region (Australia, Japan, and the United States) were keen to see an emerging strategic role for India after decades of India's self-marginalisation in the region as a “non-aligned” nation.²³⁹ The Indo-Pacific narrative dovetails well with India's Act East policy and its aspirations to become a major world power, not just a regional power. India's External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar, as he said in a lecture for the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Singapore in 2015, wants India to become a ‘leading power.’²⁴⁰

India's desired (and emerging) role stems from two key considerations: as the world's second most populous nation after China and with its economic potential as a huge future market (although the COVID-19 pandemic will have a significant negative impact on India's economy in the short-term), with a current middle class population of over two-hundred million and rising, combined with its demographics of a high proportion of young people; and as a strategic balancer to China, whose economy has already far surpassed that of Japan as the world's second largest economy. India is unsettled and alarmed by Beijing's increasing global influence, and its assertiveness and aggressive military behaviour, especially in the maritime domain in the Indo-Pacific. China's maritime footprint is spreading far beyond the South China Sea and the Pacific, into the Indian Ocean and its littoral states. Beijing's defiance of international norms, such as its disregard for the independent tribunal's verdict on the South China Sea, and frequent use of trade as a weapon for gaining compliance have raised concerns in India along with other Indo-Pacific nations.

²³⁸ Australia's *Defence White Paper 2013* drew attention to the Indo-Pacific as a new theatre, explaining that a ‘new Indo-Pacific strategic arc is beginning to emerge, connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans through Southeast Asia’: Australian Government, Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2013*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, ACT, p.7, https://defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013/docs/WP_2013_web.pdf.

²³⁹ One Indian strategist wrote a paper with the title ‘India and the Idea of Indo-Pacific: A Hesitant Embrace’. Paper available from the author of this report.

²⁴⁰ S Jaishankar, ‘21st IISS Fullerton Lecture’, Singapore, July 20, 2015, https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/25493/IISS_Fullerton_Lecture_by_Foreign_Secretary_in_Singapore.

In the last two decades, especially since Xi Jinping came to power in China in 2012 with his ‘China Dream’ and strategic designs to pursue that dream through the One Belt and One Road (OBOR), re-branded by China as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), many leading powers consider China as an ambitious power and challenger to existing international institutions, norms, the post-war international order, and to the United States’ pre-eminence in the post-Cold War era.²⁴¹ In contrast, India has abandoned its long-held policy of non-alignment (and has a much weakened partnership with Russia). Although not in a military alliance with any country, India is willing to work with and support the norms, rules, and prevailing international order laid out under United States leadership following World War II. In other words, while Beijing is often construed as a disruptor aiming to design a new order in its own image, disregarding others’ wishes and displacing other players on its way to being a dominant global power. It most definitely sees itself as a “parallel power” to the US (a proposal for a G-2 structure emerged around the early 2010s)²⁴² and ultimately aims to replace the United States as the pre-eminent power.²⁴³

Today, India’s military, political and economic capacity, along with its influence in international society, is no match for China. Even in the near future India is not a match for China, but, crucially, in the future it might be the only country in the region (and indeed in the world) to offer a close match to China. Therefore, it is in Beijing’s interest to ensure that India’s capacity remains limited. Being a democratic country that believes in the rules-based international order, and a multi-polar world in which no country becomes a dominating power, India is obviously attractive to its allies in the Indo-Pacific and most Western powers. In institutional terms, India’s own domestic institutions (based on democratic principles) and its support for rules-based global institutions make India a good partner within multi-lateral and multi-aligned organisations. India, unlike China, has not proposed any regional or global initiatives that would threaten, or even alter, existing global institutions—nor is it likely to do so.

INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY TRAJECTORY AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

India’s foreign policy has evolved over decades from a non-aligned and Soviet-inclined position (during the Cold War period), to a broadly and inconsistently connected country during the immediate post-Cold War era, to finally orientating itself toward the Asian region and beyond to the United States, its allies, and other like-minded countries in the region. The latter was achieved while not abandoning its key former Cold War partner, Russia (the successor state to the former USSR), which is a good example of India’s recent multi-aligned approach. India’s Look East policy, later revised as the Act East Policy, signalled its interest in broader regional matters beyond its immediate neighbourhood of South Asia and willingness to engage with the region. Reaching out to the West via its partnership with the United States, and by shedding its past autarkic policies in favour of open market and liberal economic policies, has made India economically attractive to many of the United States’ allies and partners.

²⁴¹ B Macaes, *Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order*, Hurst & Co, London.

²⁴² RC Bush, ‘The United States and China: A G-2 in the Making?’, Brookings Institution, October 11, 2011, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-united-states-and-china-a-g-2-in-the-making/>.

²⁴³ M Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order*, Penguin Press, New York, 2009.

In the immediate post-Cold War period, during which India began to search for its identity, it found itself on the periphery of the region, as key actors did not see India as a nation of any real consequence. For example, when the Asia-Pacific construct became the defining feature of regional cooperation and economic prosperity, India stood outside of the main regional organisation, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC). Neither Australia nor Japan—the two key players in establishing APEC—wanted India to be in it, despite New Delhi's desire to be a member. Both Canberra and Tokyo were focused on the Pacific Rim and a narrow definition of Asia away from the Indian Ocean and the main player India. Australia's neglect and disregard of India remained stuck in the minds of Indian strategists and diplomats for a long time and it is only recently that some change in the Indian perception of Australia is visible.

India's calculated and risky decision to conduct nuclear tests in 1998 isolated New Delhi further from the regional and global communities, as expected, with severe opprobrium from the United States and its allies, led by Japan and Australia. However, subsequent events, such as the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001 and China's increasing muscle flexing, began to make India strategically attractive to many, including the United States. While India's material power is still constrained, its 'normative' power may be attractive to many countries, although in a limited way.²⁴⁴

Today, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi (although the trend clearly began during the Manmohan Singh government 2004-2014), India has forged closer ties with the United States and its allies, such as Japan, and slowly with Australia, and a host of other nations around the region and the world. India is now welcomed in most ASEAN-centred regional groupings and is emerging as a critical player in regional groupings such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). However, it is ironic that countries such as Australia and Japan that did not support India's membership in APEC are now trying to persuade India not to withdraw from the RCEP process.²⁴⁵ Nevertheless, it is not India's economy that primarily attracts regional players, but rather India's strategic position and its potential capacity to balance China in the Indo-Pacific region that matters most. Economically, India still resists economic groupings that it perceives would disadvantage it, as demonstrated by its last-minute withdrawal from the RCEP in 2019. India is also not a member of the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which includes countries like Japan, Australia, Singapore, and Vietnam, who are all close partners of India.

As already noted, India was not the first to propose and promote the idea of the Indo-Pacific as a geo-strategic concept. Indeed, it has only become a reluctant endorser of the concept. For her part, Australia has systematically articulated the concept since the early 2010s, although its roots can be traced to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's thinking and his speech to the Indian parliament in 2007 titled the 'Confluence of the Two Seas.'²⁴⁶ During the initial period when the term was being explored, examined, and embraced by other states, the Indian government was reluctant to endorse the Indo-Pacific concept.²⁴⁷ With Japan, India publicly embraced

²⁴⁴ I Hall, 'Narendra Modi and India's Normative Power', *International Affairs*, vol.93, no.1, 2017, pp.113-131.

²⁴⁵ India is still not a member of APEC. New Delhi is not pushing for membership in this organisation as it has become largely dormant.

²⁴⁶ S Abe, 'Confluence of the Two Seas', speech at the Parliament of the Republic of India, August 22, 2007, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>.

²⁴⁷ P Chacko (ed), *New Regional Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: Drivers, Dynamics and Consequences*, Routledge, 2016.

and endorsed the Indo-Pacific as the term appeared eleven times in a joint statement with Japan in 2017, but it was not until Prime Minister Modi's keynote speech to the 2018 Shangri La dialogue in Singapore that a fully-fledged Indian articulation of the term was introduced for the global public. In this speech Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed India's desire to make the 'Indo-Pacific' the defining factor for a new security architecture in Asia. He cast the Indo-Pacific as a "natural region" that ranges "from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas." In his speech he emphasised India's ethos of 'pluralism, co-existence, openness, and dialogue,' and noted that 'India does not see the Indo-Pacific region as strategy or as a club of limited members.'²⁴⁸ Prime Minister Modi's idea of the Indo-Pacific revolves around inclusiveness.

India's cautious approach to the Indo-Pacific concept stems from its close relations with Russia and New Delhi's membership in mini-lateral frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) where, inevitably, Russia and China dominate. Both Russia and China are opposed to the Indo-Pacific construct which they regard as a Western concept which is, essentially, anti-China. New Delhi, which still has a close relationship with Russia, has to tread carefully and not annoy one of its key and time-tested partners whom the West sees as a foe.

India has conducted 'informal diplomacy' since 2018, with Prime Minister Modi meeting twice with Xi Jinping to build personal ties and conduct 'soft diplomacy' with China. However, although not stated, it is generally accepted that India's Indo-Pacific strategy is linked to managing China.²⁴⁹ As illustrated by the Ladakh border incident, India is no longer willing to back-down and will spend more capital on internal and external balancing by building its defence capabilities and close security and defence partnerships with the US and its allies in order to isolate China and to create favourable international opinion for itself.

INDIA-AUSTRALIA

While at the 2020 Raisina Dialogue it became clear to this author that there is a general consensus in the strategic and diplomatic communities in India that Australia-India relations have become stronger and will continue to improve and deepen after some serious challenges in their past bilateral relations, including instances of neglect and distrust of each other. For India, Australia never had first rank status in its list of diplomatic priorities.²⁵⁰ However, 'strategic convergence' between India and Australia was the key message, and was highlighted several times by many of my interviewees and interlocutors in New Delhi.²⁵¹ Regarding strategic convergence, both Australia and India see China as a concern, or even as a threat to the regional order; both countries have close relations with the United States, although Australia is in a treaty alliance relationship while India remains without any military pact with the United States. Both states have developed deeper ties with the United States

²⁴⁸ N Modi, 'Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue (June 01, 2018)', Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, June 1, 2018, <https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>.

²⁴⁹ R Rajagopalan, 'Evasive Balancing: India's Unviable Indo-Pacific Strategy', *International Affairs*, vol.96, no.1, 2020, pp.75-93.

²⁵⁰ P Mayer & P Jain, 'Beyond Cricket: Australia-India Evolving Relations', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol.45, no.1, 2010, pp.133-148.

²⁵¹ See also: P Jain, 'Scomos over Zoom: What to Expect from Scott Morrison's Virtual Summit with India's Narendra Modi', *The Conversation*, June 3, 2020, https://theconversation.com/scomos-over-zoom-what-to-expect-from-scott-morrison-virtual-summit-with-indias-narendra-modi-139851#comment_2242985.

during the Trump administration,²⁵² despite Trump's inconsistencies in foreign policy. Although President Obama's policy of rebalance and/or pivot to Asia gave some confidence of United States' engagement to the region, his administration was hesitant to accept the Indo-Pacific narrative, while China became more assertive and expanded its military activity in the maritime domain.²⁵³ In contrast, the Trump administration embraced the Indo-Pacific concept 'lock, stock and barrel', according to one Indian interviewee in New Delhi. This has given confidence to both Australia and India that the United States appears to be committed to the idea of the Indo-Pacific, although it is hard to trust President Trump, as he has not hesitated to make demands and extract concessions from America's allies and partners.

The *Quad framework* (quadrilateral security dialogue) provides another point of strategic convergence between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia. India was an early backer of the Quad concept, while Australia was overly cautious and ultimately withdrew from it during the Rudd government, taking the wind out of the Quad's sails. It gave India the impression that China was too important for Australia, and that a change in government (from Howard to Rudd) can result in the reversal of critical decisions and strategic policies. After John Howard had enthusiastically supported the Quad framework, Rudd's foreign minister Stephen Smith ditched the framework in the presence of his Chinese counterpart signalling Australia's lack of commitment and deep attachment to China. However, how the first iteration of the Quad was killed has remained a subject of much discussion.²⁵⁴

After a meeting at the official level took place on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Manila in 2017, the dialogue was revived as Quad 2.0, and there is now a general consensus to pursue this format. In June 2019, during a G20 summit in Osaka, Japan's Prime Minister Abe symbolically seated the four leaders of the Quad together, directly across the table from President Xi of China. The Quad meeting was upgraded to the ministerial level and foreign ministers of the four nations met in New York in September 2019. The foreign ministers of the four nations met in Tokyo in October 2020. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, the conclusions drawn by the participating nations varied widely with, for example, only Australia mentioning UNCLOS and the importance of international rules and norms. There was a focus on the COVID-19 pandemic and they are looking at formalising the Quad.²⁵⁵

China is a common point of convergence in the relationship. However, unlike the United States, neither India nor Australia is likely to take an overly tough stance towards China, despite severe difficulties in managing the country's international expansion. For India and Australia, China is critical. For India, the PRC is a neighbour and significant economic partner. For Australia, the PRC is the largest market for its goods and services, such as raw materials, agricultural products, education, and tourism. Australia's position vis-à-vis China can be understood in economic and political terms. Strategically, Canberra regards China as a serious concern and China's interference in Australia's domestic politics and institutions has raised doubts about China's intentions. The dilemma before Australia is how to balance its economic dependency on China and its security concerns.

²⁵² Both Donald Trump and Narendra Modi have developed strong ties through personal diplomacy. Whether the strength of these ties can be carried over to a hypothetical Biden presidency is yet to be seen.

²⁵³ Indeed, there was quite a lot of criticism of Obama's Pivot to Asia in some quarters as the following article demonstrated: J Ford, 'The Pivot to Asia Was Obama's Biggest Mistake', *The Diplomat*, January 21, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/the-pivot-to-asia-was-obamas-biggest-mistake/>.

²⁵⁴ D Flitton, 'Who Really Killed the Quad 1.0', *The Interpreter*, June 2, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/who-really-killed-quad-10>.

²⁵⁵ A Rej, 'Quad Foreign Ministers Meet in Tokyo Amid Post-Pandemic Concerns', *The Diplomat*, October 7, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/quad-foreign-ministers-meet-in-tokyo-amid-post-pandemic-concerns/>.

For India, China poses different concerns. China is a significant trading partner, but it has faced China's aggression and military activities on the border areas. Currently a state of heightened tension exists between the two Asian giants, after fighting broke out in the Ladakh area of the Himalayas, resulting in the deaths of at least twenty Indian soldiers—and an undisclosed number of deaths on the Chinese side. China's strategic designs in India's neighbourhood through the so called 'String of Pearls' have unsettled India as New Delhi's influence in its neighbouring countries and small island states like Sri Lanka and the Maldives has reduced. China-Pakistan iron clad relationships are a constant source of irritation between China and India.

While maintaining their respective economic partnerships with Beijing, both India and Australia are seeking to reduce China's forward momentum, and share the view that China is a disruptor in the region.

MODI-MORRISON VIRTUAL SUMMIT 2020

At the virtual summit meeting between Prime Minister Scott Morrison and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi in June 2020, the relationship was elevated to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership. The two countries signed seven key agreements, including a landmark pact for reciprocal access to military bases, called Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA). An editorial in *The Australian* noted that “the pact highlighted the 21st century strategic convergence between Australia and the world's most populous democracy.”²⁵⁶ They have also upgraded their 2+2 meetings to the ministerial level, involving the ministers of defence and foreign affairs from the two nations. Interestingly, in their long virtual interaction, which was open to the public, neither prime minister mentioned China.

The bilateral India-Australia relationship has reached an inflection point, with Australia's new High Commissioner to New Delhi, Barry O'Farrell (who is an politician turned activist diplomat) having taken on the Chinese Ambassador to India in a fiery exchange of tweet messages. O'Farrell supported India on the India-China border clashes and reminded China of its activity in the South China Sea.²⁵⁷

CHALLENGES

India and Australia have had a difficult relationship in the past, and even though their relations have recently reached a new high, there are still challenges ahead.

India still maintains its 'strategic autonomy' policy and now follows multi-alignment in place of non-alignment. Such a policy orientation is difficult for Australia to follow, or appreciate, due to its iron-clad security ties with the US.

²⁵⁶ The Australian, Editorial, 'India Relationship Strengthened', *The Australian*, June 8, 2020, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/editorials/india-relationship-strengthened/news-story/5cbcaf0a80d822fbf305bc2864028a3>.

²⁵⁷ FPJ Web Desk, 'Australian, Chinese Ambassadors to India Just Had a Tiny Twitter Spat', *The Free Press Journal*, August 1, 2020, <https://www.freepressjournal.in/india/australian-chinese-ambassadors-to-india-just-had-a-tiny-twitter-spat>.

Although India has embraced the Indo-Pacific concept and established a new Division of the Indo-Pacific in 2019, India's Indo-Pacific strategy is different from that of Australia's.²⁵⁸ Given India's difficult neighbourhood and its strategic autonomy narrative, India will engage the countries of the Indo-Pacific through issue-based partnerships rather than by consolidating comprehensive alliance relationships.

India has more expansive relationships with the international community than does Australia. India's relations with Russia, as mentioned above, is a case in point. India is mindful that Russia is not a supporter of the Indo-Pacific concept. At the 2020 Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, stated that the 'Indo-Pacific' is a 'divisive' concept meant to contain China, and that India needs Russia's support to fulfill its aspiration to gain a permanent seat on the UNSC.²⁵⁹ Also, in relation to China, India seeks equilibrium with China. That is, the two Asian giants need to co-exist. Therefore, India does not just engage Russia and China bilaterally, but also through a number of multilateral frameworks, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS, within which both Russia and China are major players. Australia is not a part of either of these two groupings, nor is Russia considered to be a priority country for Australia. India leverages its engagement with Russia through buying arms and also its good offices for brokering deals as happened in the case of the current India-China military standoff. At the sidelines of the SCO meeting in Moscow in September 2020, foreign ministers of China and India signed a five-point agreement to diffuse border tensions.²⁶⁰ Putin must have played a critical role in bringing the two fuming foreign ministers to bring their temperature down.

Despite several rounds of negotiations over the years, India and Australia have not yet signed a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA). Each side has produced an expansive document identifying areas of economic engagement, but many of their recommendations, such as in education services and tourism may not become operational, because of travel restrictions due to COVID-19.²⁶¹ Economically, for both India and Australia, China remains a huge trading partner and neither India nor Australia can easily replace the PRC. Australia still remains outside of the Malabar exercises, a high sea naval exercise comprising India, the United States and Japan. Australia participated once in the past but as Canberra withdrew from the Quad during the Rudd administration, it did not join the Malabar, and now despite its willingness to join it, India has shown hesitancy.

Finally, while India is a valuable partner in the geo-political sphere that defines the Indo-Pacific, India could also cause frustration in geo-economic frameworks, such as the RCEP,

²⁵⁸ The Indo-Pacific Division was set up to oversee India-ASEAN relations, East Asia Summit, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS). See: Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 'Indo-Pacific Division Briefs', February 7, 2020, https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Indo_Feb_07_2020.pdf.

²⁵⁹ Remarks quoted in Raisina Dialogue 2020, 21@20: *Navigating the Alpha Century—2020 Conference Report*, p.40, https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RaisinaReport2020_Book_.pdf.

²⁶⁰ S Jaishankar & W Yi, 'Joint Press Statement—Meeting of External Affairs Minister and the Foreign Minister of China (September 10, 2020)', Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, September 10, 2020, https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/32962/Joint_Press_Statement_Meeting_of_External_Affairs_Minister_and_the_Foreign_Minister_of_China_September_10_2020.

²⁶¹ The Varghese Report was published in 2018: PM Varghese, *An India Economic Strategy to 2035: Navigating From Potential to Delivery*, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra, ACT, 2018, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/india/ies/pdf/dfat-an-india-economic-strategy-to-2035.pdf>. Although the Australia Economic Strategic report is reportedly ready, it has yet to be published.

where Japan, Australia, and others are keen to have India as a balancer to China. There are also dissonances in other areas. Australia has not opposed China's BRI, even though it has not signed up to it as a nation (Victoria has an agreement with China to support the BRI as a subnational unit). India has vehemently opposed the BRI and has refused to send representatives to the Belt and Road International Cooperation meetings. Pakistan is the biggest supporter of the BRI and a huge beneficiary through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), increasing security tensions for India.²⁶² New Delhi's view is that Beijing is not sensitive to the border issues between India and Pakistan, and the CPEC project is clearly a sore point.

CONCLUSION

Both India and Australia now support the concept of the Indo-Pacific as a geo-strategic space and acknowledge China as a disruptor and a threat to regional stability. However, their engagement with China differ, because of their geography, history, and economic frameworks. Just as when the term Asia-Pacific was created in the 1960s, the Indo-Pacific concept is having similar challenges within the Indian lexicon regarding acceptance, relevance, and practical application. With the establishment of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, an institutional identity was created and APEC members can consequently cooperate under the new economic organisation. While APEC was about economic cooperation, the Indo-Pacific is about strategic cooperation, but institutionally it still remains elusive. In this sense, an Indo-Pacific moment still seems far away.

²⁶² ZA Awan, 'Conference on BRI International Cooperation Calls For Unity in Face of Pandemic', *People's Daily Online*, June 22, 2020, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/0622/c90000-9702988.html>.

7 | THE UNITED KINGDOM

Patrick J. Tyrrell

WE NEED A BOLD, NEW, POSITIVE VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR COUNTRY.

British Prime Minister Theresa May

The journey from a small island situated off the northern coast of the continent of Europe to that of a global world power has been a long and complex affair. It really started off as a piratical expedition to enrich both the Queen and the ship owners at the expense of the then great powers of the time. The Tudor Age in England, after 1485, ended over 150 years of effective civil war and allowed merchants and entrepreneurs to look outwards from England and seek fortunes around the world. The discovery of the American continent by Christopher Columbus in 1492 coincided with this opportunity and fired up the great explorations of the 16th Century. Francis Drake (later Sir Francis) was the first Englishman recorded as having entered the Pacific Ocean in his 100-ton vessel, *The Pelican*, later renamed *The Golden Hind*, in October 1578. Drake enriched both himself and his Queen with the plundering of Spanish treasure ships.

It was almost exactly another two centuries before Royal Navy Captain James Cook sailed into the Pacific in search of the postulated *Terra Australis*. He arrived in the region in early 1770 and charted part of New Zealand before landing near Botany Bay in Australia in April 1770. He returned to the Pacific twice more (1772-75 and 1776-79) before being killed in a skirmish on Hawaii Island on February 14, 1779. Cook's voyages opened the door to trade between Britain and the Pacific nations, with extensive colonisation of Australia and New Zealand in particular. The First Fleet sailed for Australia from Portsmouth, England, on May 13, 1787, carrying over 1000 convicts. Within a decade they were followed by free settlers and the establishment of a viable base in the region, to support the Royal Navy and burgeoning British trade interests.

As trade and shipping became more reliable and the Australian base more robust, large numbers of Europeans took advantage of the opportunities on offer to emigrate to the region and involve themselves in trade, developing plantations for rubber, tea or coffee, exploiting natural resources, such as phosphates, fertilisers, tin ore, and, generally, denuding the landscape and, inter alia, causing huge environmental damage. Despite their significant presence in the region, Britain did not formally colonise any of the Pacific islands until after 1870; indeed, Great Britain never followed up on a request by the Hawaiian King to annexe the islands in 1794, owing to the imperatives of the Napoleonic War. Formal British colonisation was accelerated only after the Germans sought to expand their own colonies in an attempt to antagonise the French and British. Australia and New Zealand played a part in

assisting Britain, especially in sending troops to participate in the Boer Wars in South Africa. Britain supported the Australian Federation in 1901, partly to facilitate such assistance from former colonies.

Britain had felt somewhat isolated at the time of the Boer War and found some common cause with Japan (especially after Japan assisted the European nations in suppressing the Boxer Rebellion) agreeing an Anglo-Japanese alliance. Both Australia and New Zealand were suspicious of Japanese territorial ambitions in the region and developed their own militias to afford themselves a degree of protection. In addition, Australia established the Royal Australian Navy, which earned its nautical spurs at the Battle of Cocos Island where HMAS Sydney defeated the German Raider SMS Emden on November 9, 1914, ending the German threat in the Pacific Region.

After the First World War, the territorial ambitions of Japan raised suspicions amongst the Western Allies and Britain felt compelled to dissolve the alliance with Japan as part of the Washington Naval Conference on Disarmament held in 1921-22. The interwar years saw business much as before, with extensive trade interests and the building up of Singapore as the pre-eminent British base in the Pacific. Despite the United States and Britain having agreed a ratio of 5:5:3 with Japan for the size of their respective navies, both the US and Britain had extensive areas of interest stretching around the globe, while the Japanese did not and were able to position themselves strategically to develop their own ambitions when the opportunity arose. It is possible that had the Great Depression not struck the developed economies of the world, that the British would have further developed their position within the region.

The Second World War started in Europe and only became a direct issue in the Pacific when France fell in June 1940, leading French colonies to have to choose between the Vichy led French government in Paris, or the Free French contingent based in London. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour changed the situation dramatically, and the fall of Singapore on February 15, 1942, after only one week of hostilities, represented the largest capitulation of British forces ever seen. The way back into the Pacific arena for Britain would be as a mere supporting player on the American coat tails.

Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945, following the detonation of two atomic bombs, and Britain returned to both Hong Kong and Singapore, but in a very changed strategic dynamic. Within a little over 20 years, in January 1968, British Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced the total withdrawal of British forces from East of Suez. Britain would retain Hong Kong until the lease ran out in December 1997, and control of one or two of the Pacific Islands.

The British withdrawal did not signify a complete end to the British influence within the Indo-Pacific region: the soft power exercised by diplomacy, trade, and cultural exchanges continued.

Commonwealth activities across the region, Australia and New Zealand's activities in the south of the area, and Canada's activities in the northern reaches, demonstrated that the United Kingdom was still interested in the development of the region and continued to trade extensively. The Rule of Law developed from English Common Law continues to provide a valuable and lasting framework within which trade and good governance can occur.

BRITAIN RETRENCHES

As the British Empire crumbled to dust and the colonial system was consigned to the historical record, Britain looked more towards Europe for her trade and security. Joining the Common Market in January 1973 was a watershed moment for the United Kingdom. For a major sea power to align itself so closely with “a continental protectionist collective” would lead to some very different economic and political concerns.²⁶³ The free access for trade from the Pacific region to the UK was severely curtailed, and Canada, Australia, and New Zealand voiced their respective concerns at the damage that Britain’s accession to the EEC would do to their bilateral trade. It became a spur for these nations to look more towards the Pacific region for their future development and less towards the Old World. Britain’s trade with the European Union (as the EEC became) increased dramatically and trade with former colonies declined. None of this meant that Britain was, or is, irrelevant in world affairs. To this day, it is the only European member of the Western Alliance, apart from France, to maintain a capacity for power-projection outside the NATO area. Although precise rankings ebb and flow, in 2017 it was the 10th-largest exporter and fifth largest importer, and ranks among the top three in both inward and outward foreign investment. The result is a position in power and wealth that one might expect for a post-colonial state of its size, population, and resources. And the country’s history, culture, and language constitute immense ‘soft-power’ assets.

In 1997, Britain handed over both Hong Kong and the New Territories to China under the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984.²⁶⁴ This gave a level of autonomy to the government of Hong Kong under the “One nation, two systems” philosophy and allowed Hong Kong to flourish as the principal financial centre for China.²⁶⁵ The increasingly bellicose statements from the current President of China, Xi Jinping, and the imposition of an autocratic, undemocratic security law on July 1, 2020 has caused widespread concern over the future direction China will take. On July 20, 2020, the British Foreign Secretary added to his earlier statement on a route to British citizenship for some Hong Kong residents, suspending the existing extradition treaty between the UK and Hong Kong.

In 2000, in response to further budgetary cuts, the UK scaled down its presence in the Pacific region, closing High Commissions in Vanuatu and Tonga. There has recently been a move for a ‘Pacific Uplift’ Strategy, reopening High Commissions and doubling the UK’s presence in the region.²⁶⁶

In 2016, partly in an attempt to forestall an open revolt within the governing Conservative Party, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, agreed to hold a referendum on membership of the European Union. Against the grain, the election was won by the “Brexiters”, the name

²⁶³ See: A Lambert, *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict That Made the Modern World*, Yale Press, 2018.

²⁶⁴ *Joint Declaration on the Question of Hong Kong (with Annexes)*, China–United Kingdom, signed December 19, 1984, 1399 UNTS 33 (entered into force May 27, 1985), <https://treaties.un.org/Pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=08000002800d4d6e&clang=en>.

²⁶⁵ For analysis, see: L Brooke-Holland, ‘Hong Kong: The Joint Declaration’, House of Commons Library, Briefing Paper no.08616, July 5, 2019, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8616/CBP-8616.pdf>.

²⁶⁶ L Clarke, ‘UK-Pacific Partnerships and Shared Values’, Speech by the British High Commissioner to New Zealand, delivered at the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, Auckland, July 3, 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/oceans-apart-the-uk-the-pacific-partnerships-shared-values>.

adopted by those seeking an exit from the Union. The Prime Minister resigned, and the subsequent four years have been spent both on internecine warfare within the UK and with the European Union. On December 31, 2019, the UK formally left the EU with a 12-month transition period. Whatever agreements are reached with Europe, there will remain a number of critical constitutional issues relating to the very structure of the United Kingdom: support for a Scottish independence is growing in Scotland and the position in Northern Ireland is becoming more and more precarious as Sinn Féin, the party supporting unification of North and South, has grown in popularity against the more traditional Unionist Parties. In the event of a break-up of the United Kingdom, England will retain the majority of the population,²⁶⁷ but is likely to be a more insular and introspective nation as a result, which might suggest that it would play a lesser role globally and, in particular, in the Indo Pacific.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

The last thirty years, since the end of the Cold War, have seen huge changes in the world. Foremost amongst these has been the Information Revolution and the development of an interconnected world, quite unlike anything seen before. In 1989, Tim Berners-Lee developed his ideas for a ‘World-Wide-Web’ and the ability to share information effectively at the speed of light; social media has grown and proliferated into almost every aspect of our lives, and many of the traditional norms have been found wanting in the New Age. At the same time, humans are more aware of the fragility of our planet in the face of climate change, the pressure of human beings and the proliferation of harmful chemicals.

So, as Britain starts to look outward from its Euro-centric lair and to re-engage on a one-to-one basis with former colonies and allies in the Indo-Pacific, it is a very different world from that which Britain left fifty years ago. Trade patterns have changed dramatically, India and China, with their vast populations have grown out of recognition from where they were, and old relationships are not necessarily rekindled so easily. Britain has declared that she wishes to use her “voice as a new, independent trading nation to champion free trade, fight protectionism, and remove barriers at every opportunity.”²⁶⁸ On June 18, 2020, Liz Truss, the International Trade Secretary for HM Government, announced that the UK would seek membership of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).²⁶⁹

At the same time as Britain tries to develop better trading partnerships with the nations of the region, the geo-strategic issues will require her to explore her security relationship as well. In

²⁶⁷ In the UK’s 2011 Census, England had an estimated population of 53 million people, Scotland 5.3 million, Wales 3.1 million and Northern Ireland 1.8 million. See: United Kingdom Office for National Statistics, ‘2011 Census: Population Estimates for the United Kingdom, March 2011’, December 17, 2012, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/2011censuspopulationestimatesfortheunitedkingdom/2012-12-17>.

²⁶⁸ United Kingdom Department for International Trade, ‘UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement: The UK’s Strategic Approach’, July 17, 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uks-approach-to-negotiating-a-free-trade-agreement-with-australia/uk-australia-free-trade-agreement-the-uks-strategic-approach>.

²⁶⁹ O Wright, ‘Britain Ready to Seek Membership of Pacific Trade Bloc, Liz Truss Reveals’, *The Times*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/britain-ready-to-seek-membership-of-pacific-trade-bloc-truss-reveals-3zp82nvqf>.

a recent policy paper,²⁷⁰ it was argued that the UK needs to move from a ‘UK centric’ view of the world to a more nuanced, realistic view of the Indo-Pacific. Additionally, the UK should play a greater role in the maritime defence of the region with UK forces forward deployed in Australia. This might be a step too far with a major defence and security review taking place this autumn. In 2021, HMS *Queen Elizabeth II*, one of the UK’s two new aircraft carriers, will conduct her first global voyage into the Indo-Pacific Region. This is seen as a harbinger of deployments for the future, showing that the UK is committed to renewing its maritime presence within the region on a long-term basis. Whether or not it will be full time remains to be seen in a post-COVID-19 world.

CONCLUSION

Britain is a maritime nation and her empire was firmly based on sea-power. As Britain’s navy became less able to project power in the region, so Britain’s influence declined. When the Second World War ended, Britain was financially exhausted and aligned herself more and more with the continental powers represented by the USA and Europe. In 2020, Britain left the European Union and has embarked upon a new journey: if this journey is based more upon her maritime links, including those within the Indo-Pacific region, she may regain some of her lost prestige and influence. As a maritime nation, protection of her sea lines of communication and trade are vital. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), ‘[a]round 80 per cent of global trade by volume and over 70 per cent of global trade by value are carried by sea and are handled by ports worldwide.’²⁷¹ This is not going to change in the short to medium term and the UK’s stated ambition for free trade will require the ability to intervene whenever necessary in conjunction with our allies.

Britain, however, cannot act alone: it has never been able to historically, as its defeat by Japan in 1942 clearly demonstrated. It is less able to do so now, and it must, perforce, join like-minded allies to be able to bring influence to bear on the future direction in this important region.

The Commonwealth is, to some extent, an under-utilised asset: with 54 states and a combined population of 2.4 billion people.²⁷² Of those 54 states, 19 states are in the Indo-Pacific and represent 1.6 billion people.²⁷³ The Commonwealth Strategic Plan describes the Commonwealth’s special strength as lying “in the combination of its diversity and shared inheritance. Its members are bound together by respect for all states and peoples: by shared values and principles: and by concern for the vulnerable.”²⁷⁴ Dealing with the threats of the

²⁷⁰ A Patalano, ‘UK Defence from the “Far East” to the “Indo-Pacific”’, Policy Exchange, July 24, 2019, <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/UK-Defence-from-the-%E2%80%98Far-East%E2%80%99-to-the-%E2%80%98Indo-Pacific%E2%80%99.pdf>.

²⁷¹ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, ‘Review of Maritime Transport 2018’ (highlights), <https://unctad.org/webflyer/review-maritime-transport-2018>. For the full report, see: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Review of Maritime Transport 2018*, UNCTAD, https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/rmt2018_en.pdf.

²⁷² M Ward, ‘Statistics on UK Trade with the Commonwealth’, House of Commons Library, Briefing Paper CBP 8282, June 19, 2020, p.4, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8282/CBP-8282.pdf>.

²⁷³ Ibid., pp.5-6.

²⁷⁴ The Commonwealth, ‘Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2017/18–2020/21’, June 1, 2017, p.1, https://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/inline/CommonwealthSecretariatStrategic_Plan_17_21.pdf.

21st Century within the Indo-Pacific will take a concerted action by a coalition of nations sharing such a common heritage and aspirations for a more peaceful world.

KEY POINTS

- The United Kingdom is adopting a more maritime view after half a century focusing on Europe;
- There are disturbing geo-strategic pressures building up in the region with China as the most urgent issue;
- There are a number of residual issues yet to be resolved from the Brexit process, not least that of the potential break-up of the UK itself;
- The Indo-Pacific is a vital region for UK interests with a reliance on maritime trade and as a member of the Permanent 5 at the UN;
- The UK has expressed a desire to join the CPTPP;
- The UK has shown a willingness to re-look its security and defence posture in the region and, potentially, station forces in the region;
- The Commonwealth might be a vehicle through which some of the “soft power” can be delivered.

8 | FRANCE (Incl. THE EUROPEAN UNION)

Patrick J. Tyrrell

The United Kingdom is one of the two European nations to have extensive interests in the Indo-Pacific; the other being France. Both are Permanent Members of the Security Council of the United Nations and both possess nuclear weapons, but their respective paths to the development and custody of their far-flung empires was very different.

France had two distinct periods of empire building. The ‘first’ French colonial period, as with Britain, began in the 16th Century, after the end of a long period of conflict with their old nemesis, England. French explorers, predominantly in North America, Brazil, and in the Caribbean, were initially missionaries, but also developed new trading routes. This period also included an unsuccessful attempt to annexe all of Australia (1772). This ‘first’ period was effectively brought to an end by the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, by which time all but a handful of Caribbean islands and one or two colonies in Africa and India had passed into other ownership. The British returned a number of French possessions after the Congress of Vienna (1814-15), including Guadeloupe and Martinique in the Caribbean, and Réunion in the Indian Ocean. Consequently, French appetite for imperial conquest was satiated for a period.

The ‘second’ French empire was built during the heyday of European empire-building in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, starting in 1830 with the conquest of Algiers, and then Tahiti in 1838. Successive campaigns extended the French Empire to include New Caledonia (1853), Vietnam (1857), Cambodia (1863), and Laos (1887), with the French Empire becoming second in size only to that of Britain by the start of World War II.

A hallmark of the French colonial project in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries was *mission civilisatrice*, the principle that it was the European’s duty to civilise the rest of the world. Accordingly, the French ruled their colonies with the *dirigiste* philosophy²⁷⁵ that sprang from the French Revolution and the reforms of Napoleon. French colonial officials sought to mould their colonies in the shape of France itself, and, in the mid-19th Century, French citizenship was granted to the four major colonies of Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, and Réunion, together with the right to elect deputies to the Chamber of Deputies in Paris. Through the colonial education system, the French brought the brightest of their

²⁷⁵ Direct intervention by the state.

indigenous students to Paris for further education, to mould them as good Frenchmen (rarely were women selected).

The colonisation of the French islands within the Indo-Pacific region was primarily undertaken to counter the other major powers at the time, notably Britain, Germany, and the United States. They were acquired in a somewhat haphazard manner over a period of forty years (1840-80) and were seen more as trading partners with France, supplying raw materials and acting as customers for manufactured items. Most of the islands and recent colonies were aligned to the Free French Forces during World War II, with the exception of Indochina,²⁷⁶ which remained under Vichy and then Japanese control. France was reluctant to see her empire dismantled after World War II, but decolonisation movements (particularly in Indochina) led to many of France's former colonies achieving independence over the subsequent twenty-five years.

THE COLD WAR

Following their comprehensive defeat at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam in 1954, the French participated in the Geneva Conference later that year and signed the Geneva Accord, whereby they withdrew from any involvement with Indochina. France was left with her island colonies in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. For France, being able to test and develop their nuclear weapons (*Force de Frappe*²⁷⁷) was a principal advantage of maintaining a presence in the Pacific during the height of the Cold War. Between 1966 and 1996, France conducted 193 nuclear tests in what was then the Overseas Territory of French Polynesia. Forty-six tests were carried out in the atmosphere, the blasts producing radioactive clouds that floated with the winds, depositing radionuclides all over the environment and exposing people, fauna, and flora to abnormal levels of irradiation. The true impact of nuclear testing in French Polynesia, an archipelago of 118 islands and atolls spread across more than four thousand square kilometres of Pacific waters, was kept a closely guarded secret for years. According to recently declassified French Ministry of Defence documents, which have angered veterans and civilian groups alike, 'French nuclear tests in the South Pacific in the 1960s and 1970s were far more toxic than has been previously acknowledged and hit a vast swath of Polynesia with radioactive fallout', as *The Guardian* points out. The papers 'reportedly reveal that plutonium fallout hit the whole of French Polynesia, a much broader area than France had previously admitted.' Illustrating the spread of the fallout is that 'Tahiti, the most populated island in the archipelago, was exposed to 500 times the maximum accepted levels of radiation', with '[t]he impact spread[ing] as far as the tourist island of Bora Bora.'²⁷⁸

Underscoring the tight grip of French authorities on information about the nuclear testing is, as one news report notes, that '[e]ven to this day, all information about exposure levels is protected by the French military.'²⁷⁹ On the other hand, the persistence of many of the protest groups may require this data to be released in the future.

²⁷⁶ A colonial descriptive encompassing French controlled Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

²⁷⁷ Roughly translated to 'Strike Force'.

²⁷⁸ A Chrisafis, 'French Nuclear Tests "Showered Vast Area of Polynesia with Radioactivity"', *The Guardian*, July 4, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/03/french-nuclear-tests-polynesia-declassified>.

²⁷⁹ K Feldmann, 'Beyond Radioactivity: How French Nuclear Tests Changed Polynesia Forever', *Equal Times*, October 15, 2018, <https://www.equaltimes.org/beyond-radioactivity-how-french?lang=en#.X5eape1BVPY>.

The true utility of these islands to the overall French economy were, however, to come into added prominence in 1982, when the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea introduced the concept of a 200 nautical mile Economic Exclusion Zone (EEZ), which meant that France then controlled one of the largest EEZ of all nations.²⁸⁰ Control over such large areas of the world's oceans provides access to valuable resources, including fisheries, hydrocarbons, and, in the future, to sea-floor mining.

THE SITUATION TODAY

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992 and the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington in 2001, the French undertook a fundamental re-consideration of their position on security. As a result of this review in 2008,²⁸¹ introduced in the French White Paper on Defence and National Security,²⁸² France re-joined the military structure of NATO in April 2009 and moved to emphasise wider French strategic interests, including in the Indo-Pacific region. France decided that it should look towards an increased presence and influence in the Indian Ocean and into East Asia. In 2013, the next edition stressed the increasing importance of the area and the requirement for greater prioritisation of French interests.

In 2018, the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, proposed a new strategic alliance with Australia and India, and to build stronger security ties with Japan, in an attempt to check burgeoning Chinese regional ambitions.²⁸³

In 2019, at the Shangri-La Dialogue, French Minister of Defence, Florence Parly, updated the policy, stressing the need for “joint actions for shared security”.²⁸⁴ The Minister went on to state that: “France’s priority is a stable, multi-polar order based upon the rule of law, the free movement of people and goods, and fair and efficient multilateralism. The Indo-Pacific region is at the heart of this strategy.”²⁸⁵

This renewed interest by Paris is not just a response to the increasing wealth of Asian nations, but an attempt to restore France’s great power status. Some commentators have questioned whether France has the economic and military clout to make much impression within the region.²⁸⁶ This article points out that the call to restore French “*Grandeur*” is more a sign of

²⁸⁰ See: United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, Office of Legal Affairs, ‘The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (A Historical Perspective)’, https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_historical_perspective.htm.

²⁸¹ The review made the case that France should look beyond Francophone West Africa. See: F Nicolas, ‘France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy: Inclusive and Principled’, *East Asia Forum*, December 12, 2019, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/12/12/frances-indo-pacific-strategy-inclusive-and-principled/>.

²⁸² Présidence de la République, *Défense et Sécurité Nationale: Le Livre Blanc*, Paris, 2008, p.10 (English Translation): “This strategy carries a European and international ambition that is at the heart of France’s vocation in the world”. Quoted in: D Fiott, ‘The French White Paper on Defence and National Security: Peacebuilding, NATO, Nuclear Weapons and Space’, *European Security Review*, no.40, 2008, p.1, n.1, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/216768850_The_French_White_Paper_on_Defence_and_National_Security_NATO_Nuclear_Weapons_and_Space.

²⁸³ Reuters, ‘Macron Wants Strategic Paris-Delhi-Canberra Axis Amid Pacific Tension’, *Reuters*, May 3, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-france/macron-wants-strategic-paris-delhi-canberra-axis-amid-pacific-tension-idUSKBN1I330F>.

²⁸⁴ Nicolas, ‘France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy.’

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ QS Ng, ‘The Limits to French Grandeur in the Indo Pacific’, *The Interpreter*, July 26, 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/limits-french-ambition-indo-pacific>.

French economic weakness than of strength; a position further exacerbated by the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and demonstrated by President Macron's recent foray into Lebanon in the aftermath of the Beirut port explosion in August 2020, offering little more than fine words and Gallic gestures.

FRENCH FORCES IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

President Macron considers France to be an Indo-Pacific power with approximately 8000 troops permanently stationed throughout the region and over a million citizens spread over French territories. In the north of the Indian Ocean, in the UAE and Djibouti, there is a detachment of combat aircraft and helicopters; in the southern part of the Indian Ocean they have 2 surveillance frigates, a supply vessel, 2 patrol vessels (including a polar support vessel), and 2 tactical transport aircraft. These forces are split between La Réunion and Mayotte. In the Pacific Ocean, based in New Caledonia and French Polynesia, they operate 2 surveillance frigates, 3 patrol vessels, 2 multi-mission ships, 5 maritime patrol aircraft, 4 transport aircraft, and 5 helicopters.²⁸⁷ French officers are deployed in Singapore, New Delhi, and Madagascar, to assist in the surveillance of maritime spaces and sea lanes of communications.²⁸⁸ Currently, the French forces are augmented by annual deployments of major units from their European home bases. In terms of capital ships, France has a single aircraft carrier, *Charles de Gaulle*, commissioned in 2000. France would like to acquire a second carrier, but current economic conditions will not support it. The French Minister for the Armed Force, Florence Parly, has announced a replacement for the current carrier with a commissioning date in 2038.²⁸⁹

France regularly participates in Defence dialogues and exercises with the principal navies of the region, particularly with the United States, Australia, Singapore, and New Zealand.

France's experiences in participating in operations to bring peace and security to former colonies have not been particularly good over the last few years, with the current civil war in Mali having involved French forces since 2013, resulting in the deaths of 44 French soldiers to date.²⁹⁰ This might prejudice French politicians from entering into potential conflict situations in other regions of the world.

²⁸⁷ Ministère Des Armes (French Ministry of Armed Forces), 'France and Security in the Indo-Pacific', 2018 (updated May 2019), <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/layout/set/print/content/download/532754/9176250/version/3/file/France+and+Security+in+the+Indo-Pacific+-+2019.pdf>.

²⁸⁸ N Regaud, 'France's Innovative Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific', *The Diplomat*, April 3, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/frances-innovative-maritime-security-engagement-in-the-indo-pacific/>.

²⁸⁹ D Axe, 'The French Navy is Planning a New Aircraft Carrier. It Needs Two', *Forbes*, May 20, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2020/05/20/the-french-navy-is-getting-a-new-aircraft-carrier-it-needs-two/#3c7eb02b63b2>.

²⁹⁰ The above number of deaths is current as of early September 2020. See: M Dalton, 'Two French Soldiers Killed in Mali During Counterterrorism Mission', *The Wall Street Journal*, September 6, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/two-french-soldiers-killed-in-mali-during-counterterrorism-mission-11599392308>.

FRANCE AS AN ARM OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

With the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union at the end of 2019, France is the only remaining member with significant interests in the Indo-Pacific and the maritime capability to contribute positively towards security in the region. The EU is developing a formal Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which, as the European Defence Agency claims, will enable the EU “to take a leading role in peace-keeping operations, conflict prevention, and in the strengthening of international security.” According also to the European Defence Agency, the CSDP “is an integral part of the Union's comprehensive approach towards crisis management, drawing on civilian and military assets.”²⁹¹ Although the EU claims to be raising its profile while negotiating its post 2020 relationship with, amongst others, the Pacific nations, it is facing considerable challenges within Europe and is unlikely to be able to augment the current French presence in the region, unless a major crisis were to develop in the region. Command and control of such forces would have to be based on current agreements and procedures.

The EU has had a long relationship with China, having established formal diplomatic relations in 1975. However, the COVID-19 outbreak has seen public confidence in China slump to a low level. The Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, has been seen to be the one European leader who could handle China: Germany has extensive trading relations into China and has been keen to remain as open as possible to Chinese aspirations.²⁹² It is only recently that the EU has embarked on a more realistic approach to China, which may reflect a weakening of Angela Merkel's position within the EU as her retirement date approaches.

FRANCE AND CHINA

Official bilateral relations between France and the People's Republic of China began in January 1964, with their relationship being upgraded to a ‘global strategic partnership’ in 2004. Dialogue continues to take place at the most senior level, particularly in areas related to global economic governance, climate change, and regional crises. High-level exchanges between the French and Chinese governments began in 2014, and involve academic, scientific, and cultural exchanges, as well as “*the promotion of women's rights and gender equality*.”²⁹³

Currently, the relationship between France and China reflects the complexity of the two countries' economic and commercial ties over the past twenty-five years. Chinese President, Xi Jinping, made a state visit to France in March 2014, with another official visit at the time of the Paris Climate Conference in November 2015. Chinese Prime Minister, Li Keqiang, made an official visit to France in June and July 2015. In May 2018, and again in January the following year, the State Councillor and Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, also travelled to France.²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ European Defence Agency, ‘Support to CSDP Operations’, September 25, 2018, p.3, https://www.eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/brochures/eda_supporttocsdpopérations_a4.

²⁹² P Le Corre, ‘The EU's New Defensive Approach to a Rising China’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 1, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/07/01/eu-s-new-defensive-approach-to-rising-china-pub-82231>.

²⁹³ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs), ‘France and China: Bilateral Relations’, last updated March 2019, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/china/france-and-china/>.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

The President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, made his first State visit to China in January 2018. This visit set out the main themes for the future of the French-Chinese partnership, but it is not all smooth sailing ahead for the relationship. In April 2019, the French navy sent the frigate *Vendémiaire* to sail through the Taiwan Strait—a move designed to shore up its international efforts contributing to freedom of navigation operations. Beijing took a dim view of this action, since it considered it to be another Western provocation against its “One Country, Two Systems” policy on Taiwan, which includes China’s exclusive rights to the waters surrounding the island-state.²⁹⁵ China accused the French of conducting an “illegal operation” and raising bilateral tensions. However, despite this incident, Macron arranged for another face-to-face meeting with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in late 2019. At this meeting the French President brought up some less comfortable topics with his Chinese hosts, such as China’s human rights record, including the ongoing political tensions in Hong Kong, as well as the mass detention of Muslim Uyghurs in western China.²⁹⁶ However, as these meetings have their schedules and talking points arranged and curated well in advance, Macron was unlikely to be publicly dressed down by Xi Jinping for raising these issues. As this passage from *France 24*, from before the Macron-Xi meeting in November 2019, indicates:

Zhu Jing, a European affairs official at the foreign ministry, said China has prepared the “friendliest and warmest welcome” for the French leader.

But Zhu also warned that on human rights, the two countries should have “constructive” dialogue and avoid “mutually criticising each other or politicising the issue.”

“Hong Kong and Xinjiang are matters of China’s internal affairs...”²⁹⁷

FRENCH COMMERCIAL STRATEGIES WITH CHINA

For France, rebalancing trade is a top priority, a position that was re-stated during the 2018 presidential visit to Beijing. Trade between the two states is significantly imbalanced, with China being France’s seventh largest customer for French goods and services²⁹⁸ and France’s sixth largest importer.²⁹⁹ While bilateral trade is booming, France’s largest bilateral trade deficit (€29.2 billion in 2018) is with China, ahead of Germany.³⁰⁰

As summarised by the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs:

“France has a long-standing presence in China (foreign direct investment stock of €25 billion in 2017) in all sectors, including ‘agri-food’, industry, transport, urban development, major retail, and financial services. More than 1,100 French companies

²⁹⁵ K Hille & V Mallet, ‘China Accuses France of Illegally Sailing Warship in Taiwan Strait’, *Financial Times*, April 25, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/12f4ff22-674d-11e9-9adc-98bf1d35a056>.

²⁹⁶ But see: B Jeannerod, ‘French President Silent on Rampant Abuses During China Visit’, Human Rights Watch, November 11, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/11/french-president-silent-rampant-abuses-during-china-visit>.

²⁹⁷ AFP (Shanghai), ‘French Leader to Raise “Taboo” Topics in China’, *France 24*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20191104-french-leader-to-raise-taboo-topics-in-china>.

²⁹⁸ Trading Economics, ‘France Exports by Country’, <https://tradingeconomics.com/france/exports-by-country>.

²⁹⁹ Trading Economics, ‘France Imports by Country’, <https://tradingeconomics.com/france/imports-by-country>.

³⁰⁰ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, ‘France and China: Bilateral Relations.’

are present in China, where they employ around 570,000 people. Chinese investment in France has grown significantly in recent years (€6 billion in FDI [foreign direct investment] stock). A total of 700 subsidiaries of Chinese and Hong Kong companies have a presence in France, employing 45,000 people. France supports Chinese investment, which creates jobs and forges long-term and balanced partnerships.”³⁰¹

France and China have focused on a couple of particularly significant areas of collaboration: chief amongst these has been that of nuclear energy. France was an early adopter of nuclear power, opening her first power station in 1962 and, by 2019, nuclear power accounted for some 71% of total consumption.³⁰² Over the last decade France has exported over 10% of the electricity generated by nuclear power plants to other countries.³⁰³ During this period France was highly motivated to sell its nuclear expertise around the world. Agreements have been signed with nations within the former Soviet Union, Libya, Israel, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Iran, India, and Pakistan. The first nuclear agreement with China was signed in the 1980s, focusing on nuclear reactors and fuel preparation. French collaboration with China has developed considerably since then and is now focused on the Taishan Nuclear Power Plant, where a European Pressurised Reactor (EPR) will soon be operational. President Xi extolled the virtues of this collaboration between France and China,³⁰⁴ and the two countries are now Both engaged in building a large EPR at Hinckley Point in the United Kingdom.

The second significant area of collaboration is that of pharmacological research and development. In July 2018, the French company, Sanofi (one of the first foreign pharmaceutical companies to open an office in China in 1982), announced that it was to launch a global research and development hub in Chengdu with a specialised focus on digitisation and big data analysis.³⁰⁵ France collaborated in the design, construction, and training of the specialist staff at the Level 4 laboratory in Wuhan, which was accredited in January 2017 and which has been linked, however tenuously, to the COVID-19 outbreak.³⁰⁶ In total there are over 3,000 researchers from both countries involved in high level, strategic research from over 600 distinct research units.³⁰⁷ France is very committed to maintaining these links, with important ramifications for the French economy.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² International Atomic Energy Agency, ‘Country Nuclear Power Profiles: France’, IAEA 2019, <https://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/cnpp2019/countryprofiles/France/France.htm>.

³⁰³ M Schneider, ‘Nuclear France Abroad: History, Status and Prospects of French Nuclear Activities in Foreign Countries’, May 2009, <http://large.stanford.edu/publications/coal/references/nirs/docs/090502mschneidermukefrance.pdf>. (Note: the author’s research was carried out with the support of the Centre for International Governance Innovation, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.)

³⁰⁴ Xi Jinping, ‘Move Together Toward Common Development’, *Le Figaro*, March 23, 2019. Full text English version in *China Daily*, March 23, 2019, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201903/23/WS5c960dbba3104842260b2297.html>.

³⁰⁵ TPL, ‘French Pharma Major Plans Global R&D Operations Hub in China’, July 3, 2018, <https://www.thepharmaletter.com/article/french-pharma-major-plans-global-r-d-operations-hub-in-china>.

³⁰⁶ See, eg: L Kuo, ‘Global Report: Wuhan Lab Says Its Bat Strains Were Not Covid-19 as US Nears 100,000 Deaths’, *The Guardian*, May 24, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/24/global-report-wuhan-lab-says-its-bat-strains-were-not-covid-19-as-us-nears-10000-deaths>; MT McCaul, et al., *The Origins of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic, Including the Roles of the Chinese Communist Party and the World Health Organisation*, 116th Congress, House Foreign Affairs Committee Minority Staff Report, September 21, 2020, pp.37-43, <https://gop-foreignaffairs.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Final-Minority-Report-on-the-Origins-of-the-COVID-19-Global-Pandemic-Including-the-Roles-of-the-CCP-and-WHO-9.20.20-Coverpage.pdf>.

³⁰⁷ Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, ‘France and China: Bilateral Relations.’

DISCUSSION

President Macron has adopted a relatively low-profile approach to China and likes to see himself as the EU's pre-eminent strategic thinker. In many ways, his approach to China mirrors that of Germany's chancellor, with a recent analysis³⁰⁸ suggesting that this reflects the importance of not driving either China or Russia into each other's arms, which could be disastrous for Europe as a whole. By adopting a more subdued approach, France has managed to avoid the high-level disdain that China has manifested towards the United States and the United Kingdom, although, in the case of the latter, it may reflect the historical disdain the Chinese feel for 'imperialist Britain' and the two Opium Wars of the early nineteenth Century.

Nevertheless, the relationship between France and China has been under some stress over recent months. From the French perspective, the objective of her Indo-Pacific strategy is neither to antagonise nor contain China. There is no overt, anti-China tone in the statement of the French strategy, but the references to freedom of navigation, in particular within the South China Sea, may be seen by China as an implied criticism. However, faced with a more aggressive Chinese posture (often referred to as "wolf warrior" diplomacy on social media), a new, assertive brand of diplomacy favoured not only by younger diplomats, but also by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, French diplomats have been forced to take a more robust course of action. In an article published in *The Guardian* newspaper in the United Kingdom, their diplomatic editor claimed that the new head of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's information department, Hua Chungying, has lamented that the lack of spirit among Chinese diplomats, and in a chaotic world with deepening rivalries, Beijing had to do more to get the Chinese case across.³⁰⁹

By July 2020, however, Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that, "China and France should strengthen strategic communication and coordination in the face of mounting instability and uncertainty globally."³¹⁰ His call came just over a month after a China-Europe cargo train arrived in Paris after a 19-day journey loaded with medical materials direct from China.

THE FUTURE

France and China have a long history of close co-operation in both trade and scientific development. China has seen France as a European partner with a healthy cynicism toward the United States, and, consequently, a nation more likely to assist China to achieve its international ambitions. This has only been exacerbated by the actions of the Trump administration in Washington, with an inconsistent policy towards Beijing. With President Xi Jinping at the helm, and the development of a more aggressive diplomacy, President Macron has recognised the old adage of only supping with the devil using a long spoon.

³⁰⁸ B Hall, 'Macron's Low Profile on China is Strategic', *Financial Times*, August 19, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/a132f221-a102-46b6-a81f-635d81a3d4b6>.

³⁰⁹ P Wintour, 'France Summons Chinese Envoy After Coronavirus "Slur"', *The Guardian*, April 16, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/15/france-summons-chinese-envoy-after-coronavirus-slur>.

³¹⁰ Xinhua News Agency, 'China, France Should Enhance Strategic Communication, Uphold Multilateralism: FM', *Xinhuanet*, July 29, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/29/c_139247071.htm.

France needs China for the economic advantages that it brings to the table, particularly in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic, providing China with huge leverage. At the same time, the investigation into the origins of the virus and potential CCP mismanagement in allowing it to spread so swiftly, coupled with the Chinese actions in Hong Kong and against the Uyghur population, will place great pressure on France to adopt a less generous approach in the future.

Future Chinese activities across the region will influence the profile of French forces within the region, as will the economic robustness of the EU. France is, essentially, a ‘Continental power’ rather than a ‘Seapower,’³¹¹ and it will always focus on Europe and its leadership within the EU.

France is a country that is steeped in its revolutionary past and the philosophy of Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Descartes. The structure of the French state owes much to Bonaparte, himself steeped in the philosophy of the revolutionaries. In the 20th and 21st Centuries, these antecedents have given the French state a reputation for independence of thought and action, which, at times, might be seen as being in opposition to those of their closest Western allies. However, at heart, the French are firmly entrenched in what might be described as Western values and Democratic processes. This implies that they can be counted upon to support clearly defined strategies that are designed to enhance these values within a group of like-minded nations.

KEY POINTS:

- France has clear interests within the Indo-Pacific Region and will safeguard these interests;
- France is taking a close interest in its EEZ, and is searching for opportunities to develop them;
- French colonies are well administered as an integral part of metropolitan France, but there are some issues of independence in New Caledonia that will need to be resolved after a relatively close referendum on the subject in 2018. (There are two more referenda scheduled in 2020 and 2022);
- France has a very close trading relationship with China, which may allow it to take a diplomatic lead in resolving some of the current issues between China and the rest of the world;
- The French economy is relatively weak post COVID-19, which may limit the practical assistance France can give to the region;
- France primarily sees itself as the leader of the European Union, so issues to do with the economic and political health of the EU may limit France’s role within the Indo-Pacific.

³¹¹ For a comprehensive discussion of the distinctions between ‘Continental’ and ‘Seapower’, see the excellent recent treatise on the subject: A Lambert, *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict That Made the Modern World*, Yale Press, 2018.

9 | SMALL ISLAND-STATES (SIS) OF THE INDO-PACIFIC, THE AFRICAN & LATIN AMERICAN LITTORALS & THE POLES

John Bruni

In spite of their cultural diversities the Small Island States (SIS) of the Indo-Pacific share a number of similarities.

- a) Small land size, often very isolated from other SIS or major states;
- b) Small populations relative to other areas of the Indo-Pacific (though in some quarters, populations too high to sustain from available local resources)
- c) Distance to international markets
- d) Extreme vulnerability to the effects of climate change (for example, increased severity of storms, tidal surges, flooding and erosion)
- e) Stewardship of some of the world's most important fisheries
- f) Small to non-existent local military/paramilitary forces
- g) Subsistence economies and high rates of poverty
- h) Tribal politics
- i) Part of transnational crime shipment routes

It is helpful to view the Small Island States (SIS) of the Indian and Pacific Oceans as an active sub-region of the Indo-Pacific contest that is being played out between Chinese and American interests.

An overview of the SIS environment is:

- a) The demographic and cultural tapestry of most of the islands in the Pacific are predominantly Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian—with minorities from Australia, the Americas, China (including Taiwan), Japan and India
- b) On the Indian Ocean side most of the islands are largely peopled by those of Indian, Arab or African descent with some Polynesians and Malays (especially in Madagascar) as well as European minorities
- c) Both on the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean sides the key colonial powers that occupied many islands were Britain and France.
- d) While Britain relinquished its control of most of its island possessions in the 1970s, holding the important Diego Garcia³¹² in the Indian Ocean (as part of the British Indian Ocean Territory) and the remote Pitcairn Island in the Pacific—the French, with a different colonial history to the British, turned two of their island-posessions into *départements* of France.³¹³ These are the Indian Ocean islands of Mayotte and Reunion. French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna, and New Caledonia—all in the Pacific are deemed ‘overseas collectivities’.³¹⁴ All French overseas territories have representation in the French National Assembly and Senate in Paris.
- e) The US has Compacts of Free Association with the following Pacific island states—the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau. The Aleutians in the Bearing Sea in the northern Pacific are divided between the Russian Federation and the US state of Alaska, the Hawaiian island chain is a US state while American Samoa and Guam are unincorporated territories of the US.

This snapshot of the SIS environment of the Indo-Pacific shows a diverse region with multiple overlays, some local to the region, others imposed by extraterritorial powers. But poverty and a lack of political and social development makes them vulnerable to the promises of ‘no strings attached’ development aid, much of this being provided by the PRC.

INDIAN OCEAN REGION

The Indian Ocean SIS has some separatist/irredentist issues, but they are of a far lower order than those in the Pacific. The Indian Ocean SIS share the same concerns with those of the Pacific SIS on climate change, the security of marine resources, the presence of transnational criminal groups, increasing salinity of domestic fresh water supplies and over-fishing. All of these ‘shared concerns’ pose significant immediate, medium-term and long-term threats to the island-states of the Indo-Pacific. But from a broader strategic perspective they continue to rate as low priority areas for the larger regional and extraterritorial powers seeking to exploit

³¹² Though Diego Garcia is part of the British Indian Ocean Territory inclusive of the Chagos Archipelago, being the largest island in the archipelago, it is home to one of the world’s largest and most important US military facilities. It is also the site of a dispute between the UK and Indian Ocean SIS of Mauritius over the sovereignty of the entire Chagos Archipelago, inclusive of Diego Garcia.

³¹³ A *département* is an administrative region classification in France below the level of a *région* and above the level of a *commune*.

³¹⁴ New Caledonia was granted status as a ‘special collectivity’, May 5, 1998, giving the island and its people more autonomy through the Noumea Agreement.

existing weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the island-states for their own commercial and strategic gain. COVID-19 has destroyed local tourism as a net earner for many local economies, giving transnational criminal groups more opportunity to manipulate newly unemployed, literate workers to their own ends. India's struggle with coronavirus infection rates and mortality levels has also affected manning and operational effectiveness of the Indian Navy, the largest regional maritime force in the IOR.³¹⁵ New Delhi, however, maintains confidence in the Indian Navy's abilities to achieve its core maritime objects in the IOR even though a number of Indian naval installations have been hit by the virus.

The existence of regional forums such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), headquartered in Mauritius, gives a regional voice at other international forums such as the African Union (AU) and the United Nations. It can identify specific problems of the Indian Ocean region, including the SIS, but its ability to actively assist Indian Ocean SIS governments is limited. It can study and analyse existing problems such as over-fishing, resource depletion, climate change, maritime safety for international shipping, disaster relief, drug, wildlife and human trafficking, but it has no budget or authority to address these problems which are still considered the purview of the nation-state. By way of addressing the problems, though, the IORA seeks to build consensus and linkages between diverse stakeholders:

IORA has also devised flagship initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Dialogue, which is held annually as a track 1.5 event, bringing together key representatives including scholars, experts, analysts, and policy makers from think tanks, civil societies and governments from IORA Member States to discuss pertinent issues including Maritime Safety and Security (MSS).

The Association aims at building upon existing national, regional and multilateral measures to support a more effective utilization of resources for enhanced cross-border co-operation and sharing of knowledge, experiences and best practices to secure the Indian Ocean as an ocean strengthening maritime cooperation for a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region.³¹⁶

While international cooperative structures of this nature are useful in accumulating regional data on shared and country-specific problems, thereby lifting the veil of ignorance, it is not the same as taking active measure to counter them. Perth's Future Directions International (FDI) argued in 2014 that the Indian Ocean region was a "veritable alphabet soup of sub- and intra-regional groupings, sometimes of limited effectiveness, and reflecting the fact that the region is more of a geographical entity than a political one."³¹⁷ Furthermore, because the

³¹⁵ D Scott, 'India's Strategy for the Indian Ocean in Light of COVID-19 and Confrontation with China', Center for International Maritime Security (CIMSEC), September 24, 2020, <http://cimsec.org/indias-strategy-for-the-indian-ocean-in-light-of-covid-19-and-confrontation-with-china/45883>.

³¹⁶ Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), 'Maritime Safety & Security', <https://www.iora.int/en/priorities-focus-areas/maritime-safety-and-security> (accessed September 1, 2020). On the webpage 'Indian Ocean Dialogue' is hyperlinked to the following source: IORA, 'The Indian Ocean Dialogue (IOD)', <https://www.iora.int/en/flagship-projects/the-indian-ocean-dialogue>.

³¹⁷ LG Luke, 'The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA): Replace, Reduce or Refine', Future Directions International, Strategic Analysis Paper, March 4, 2014, <https://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/the-indian-ocean-rim-association-iora-replace-reduce-or-refine/>. In the paper, 'alphabet soup' is a hyperlinked to the following source: LG Luke, 'United in Disunity? Pan-regional Organisations in the Indian Ocean Region', Future Directions International, Strategic Analysis Paper, April 30, 2010, <https://www.futuredirections.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/FDI%20Strategic%20Analysis%20Paper%20-%2030%20April%202010.pdf>.

budget of IORA and similar groups are largely drawn from contributions by the wealthier, more powerful Indian Ocean and extraterritorial countries with interests in the Indian Ocean, how the accumulated data is used and whether it directly benefits local populations depends on the urgency given to a problem and a government or coalition of governments' determination to solve it.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), founded in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 1985 with its Secretariate (established in 1987) located in Kathmandu, Nepal was an attempt to form a South Asian geopolitical entity, similar in some respects to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). By creating a culture-centric regional bloc primarily to develop cooperative mechanisms to facilitate South Asian trade and commerce, it was hoped that such cooperation would assist the less economically advantaged countries of South Asia to lift their communities' standards of living and their collective business productivity and profitability.

The hardest obstacle to effective intra-group integration lay with national and sub-national bureaucracies, where resistance to organisational change, the sharing of information and cooperation was rife. Writing for the *Financial Express* (an Indian newspaper with its headquarters in Uttar Pradesh), Krishan Kalra observed that from an economic standpoint, while Small-to-Medium-Enterprises (SMEs) were the backbone of the SAARC economies, “[a]ffordability, accessibility and timeliness of short-term and export credit are major constraints.” Krishan Kalra offers this further analysis:

Other hindrances that SMEs face to grow are timely payments, technology upgradation, right manpower, poor quality control, lack of business information, no training programmes and no extra resources on research and development. Apart from this, poor infrastructure facilities, airports, ports, roads, power, low internet connectivity, inadequate information about rules and regulations governing trade between SAARC countries and time consuming procedures for export and import which increase the transaction cost of business also are some the common obstacles that they face.³¹⁸

Nonetheless, in 2006, the grouping formed the South Asian Free Trade Area, giving the member-states of SAARC more regional economic coherence. Currently, SAARC has 8 member-states: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. As India is by far the largest and wealthiest of SAARC countries; its influence overshadows the rest. Critics, especially from existential strategic rival, Pakistan, have accused SAARC of being a stalking horse for Indian regional hegemony.³¹⁹ Indeed, the idea of having two ‘enemy states’ sitting side-by-side in an organisation calling for regional harmony and free trade is contradictory since the problems between Pakistan and India continue on account of Islamabad’s orientation towards China, being part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC); of Pakistan being a net importer of Chinese weaponry; of Pakistan actively backing anti-Indian proxy groups in the disputed territory of Kashmir; of both Pakistan and India’s ‘war for influence’ in Afghanistan; and the fact that both Pakistan and India are nuclear and ballistic missile armed strategic rivals. SAARC therefore has not

³¹⁸ K Kalra, ‘Tackling the Common Problems in Saarc Nations’, *Financial Express*, October 31, 2009, <https://www.financialexpress.com/archive/tackling-the-common-problems-in-saarc-nations/534963/>.

³¹⁹ Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), ‘Regional Implications of Indian Hegemony in the SAARC’, IPRI Roundtable, Islamabad, Pakistan, March 8, 2017 (posted March 20, 2017), <https://ipripak.org/regional-implications-of-indian-hegemony-in-the-saarc/>.

and cannot act as a balm for this major international rift between these South Asian neighbours.

The ‘giants’ of the SIS in the Indian Ocean are Sri Lanka and Madagascar. Both countries have emerged from major internal turmoil.

Sri Lanka suffered from civil war (1983-2009), which involved India (1987-90)—New Delhi deploying in a significant peace keeping force (IKPF) to separate Singhalese government forces from rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fighters. The civil war cost India and Sri Lanka dearly. An LTTE female suicide bomber assassinated Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi while he was campaigning for the Congress Party in 1991. While a shock to the Indian political establishment, Indian democracy was not imperilled by this assault. The 32-month deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Force cost India some AUD 200 million and led to the death of 1,200 Indian soldiers.³²⁰ The damage the civil war caused Sri Lanka was enormous. Some estimates put the total war damage to the country at USD 200 billion.³²¹ For a country that was considered underdeveloped at the start of the civil war, the multibillion-dollar post-civil war damage bill pushed the country further into dire economic straits. Eager to put the country on the path to repair and development, in 2017, the Sri Lankan government signed a deal with the People’s Republic of China for a debt-for-equity swap leasing 70 percent of Hambantota port to the Chinese company CMPort. Under the deal, CMPort commits to invest over USD 1 billion to modernise Hanbantota. Critics of the leasing agreement suggested that this Sino-Sri Lankan deal favoured the PRC more than it did Sri Lanka, potentially leading to Sri Lanka being trapped in debt it could never repay to CMPort.³²²

Madagascar is the world’s fifth largest island located 400 kms off the East African coast. A former French colony (1897-1960), since its independence Madagascar never enjoyed a high international profile. Its post-independence period was punctuated by a series of public protests, government repression, economic maladministration, two military coups, an assassination, disputed elections and an impeachment. This had a significant negative impact on foreign investment since the country was not considered stable enough for long term planning. On September 6, 2018, the PRC signed a USD 2.7 billion deal with Madagascar to access the country’s fishing resources over a 10-year period.³²³ The ensuing political controversy between those who supported traditional fishing against those who supported the introduction of industrialised fishing saw the deal conveniently ‘forgotten’ by the incoming newly elected government.³²⁴ By January 2019, however, the country stabilised enough for the government to introduce a package of economic reforms and to consolidate anti-corruption measures. These began to turn the Malagasy economy around until the arrival of COVID-19. The Malagasy economy sharply contracted as a consequence of a decline in

³²⁰ For more information on India’s intervention in Sri Lanka, see: VF Khobragade, ‘Indian Approach towards Sri Lankan Conflicts’, *Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol.69, no.4, 2008, pp.911-917.

³²¹ PK Balachandran, ‘Sri Lanka’s Internal War Cost \$US 200 Billion’, *The New Indian Express*, December 13, 2016, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2016/dec/13/sri-lankas-internal-war-cost-us-200-billion-1548433.html>.

³²² U Moramudali, ‘The Hambantota Port Deal: Myths and Realities’, *The Diplomat*, January 1, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/the-hambantota-port-deal-myths-and-realities/>.

³²³ La Tribune Afrique, ‘Blue Economy: Chinese Investment of 2.7 Billion Announced in Madagascar’, Stop Illegal Fishing, September 7, 2018, <https://stopillegalfishing.com/press-links/blue-economy-chinese-investment-of-2-7-billion-dollars-announced-in-madagascar/>.

³²⁴ N Hui, ‘Madagascar Rocked by Fishing Deal That Never War’, *China Dialogue Ocean*, October 17, 2019, <https://chinadialogueocean.net/10811-madagascar-rocked-by-fishing-deal/>.

global trade and international travel.³²⁵ Madagascar's top 5 trading partners are Mauritius, France, the US and the UK. The country is home to Africa's third largest overseas Chinese population (estimated at 100,000), many of whom came to the country during the French colonial period.³²⁶ Presently the country, while weak and economically hampered by COVID-19, does not appear to be part of the great power struggles in the Indian Ocean region. Whether this remains the case in the longer term is uncertain. Madagascar is a resource rich country. Its geographic position next to Africa and its high poverty makes Madagascar vulnerable to great power exploitation.

In 2019, the International Court of Justice, backed by the UN General Assembly found that British sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago—otherwise known as the British Indian Ocean Territory which includes the strategically important island of Diego Garcia—was illegitimate and that the archipelago was part of Mauritius.³²⁷ Located in the geographic heart of the Indian Ocean, the British government was well aware of Diego Garcia's high strategic value as far back as 1965 when the British compensated Mauritius for the loss of the Chagos islands to the tune of GBP 3 million. The British government relocated around 1,600 Chagossians to Mauritius & the Seychelles and then arranged a 50-year lease (in 1966) with the United States for its use of Diego Garcia as a key military base. Diego Garcia proved critical to US forces during the Liberation of Kuwait in Operations Desert Shield (1990-91) and Desert Storm (1991); in the punishment air raids against Iraq's Saddam Hussein in Operation Desert Fox (1998) and in the Global War on Terrorism (Afghan and Iraqi theatres) in Operation Enduring Freedom (2001-14). In 2016 the American lease on Diego Garcia was extended to 2036. However, as Mauritian claims to the Chagos archipelago have now escalated in the ICJ and UN³²⁸ this may legally complicate London's sovereign hold on the British Indian Ocean Territory, possibly jeopardising its arrangements with the US. Considering that the American presence in Diego Garcia remains a useful base from which to launch long range air strikes against state and non-state targets in the Middle East, the loss of this asset will be keenly felt by Washington and London. While there are arguments that next generation military technology such as hypersonic weapons and long-range stealth bombers render forward bases such as Diego Garcia less relevant, handing the Chagos archipelago to Mauritius opens the possibility of either India or China making bids to lease Diego Garcia, post the British-American presence, for their own strategic ends and in doing so, altering the balance of power in the Indian Ocean. As an interesting aside, India's Modi government, while on excellent terms with the Trump administration has voted in favour of Mauritian sovereignty. It is here where America's growing relationship with India, a country that promotes its own strategic autonomy, buys the bulk of its military technology from Russia and sees itself as a champion of post-colonial states, becomes less clear.³²⁹

³²⁵ World Bank, 'The World Bank in Madagascar', July 31, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/madagascar/overview>.

³²⁶ For more information on this see: G Veeck & SHA Diop, 'Chinese Engagement with Africa: The Case of Madagascar', *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol.53, no.3, pp.400-418.

³²⁷ LG Luke, 'The British Indian Ocean: Clouds on the Horizon for Diego Garcia?—Dr Peter Harris', Future Directions International, FDI Feature Interview with P Harris, August 18, 2020, <https://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/the-british-indian-ocean-territory-clouds-on-the-horizon-for-diego-garcia-dr-peter-harris/>.

³²⁸ See: *Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965* (Advisory Opinion) [2019] ICJ Rep 95, <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/169/169-20190225-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf>; United Nations General Assembly, *Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Legal Consequences of the Separation of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius in 1965*, GA Res 73/295, 73rd sess., 83rd plen. mtg., UN Doc A/RES/73/295 (May 22, 2019), <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/73/295>.

³²⁹ A Singh, 'Diego Garcia: India's Conundrum', *The Interpreter*, June 16, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/diego-garcia-india-s-conundrum>.

The French territory of Mayotte held a referendum in March 29, 2009, with around 95 percent voting in favour of that SIS becoming a *département* of France, this status officially achieved on March 31, 2011.³³⁰ The change to Mayotte's status was viewed dimly by neighbour, the Comoros Union. Both Mayotte and Comoros, forming the Comoros Archipelago, lie in the northern Mozambique channel. When Comoros won its independence from France in 1975, the inhabitants of Mayotte voted to remain a French administered territory in three referenda, one in 1974, and two in 1976. While Comoros still claims Mayotte, much of the fight has gone from this contest and it is unlikely that it will go beyond low level political disputes and harassment. Mayotte's status as a French *département* means that if Comoros were to take military action against Mayotte, a very difficult proposition considering the small size of the Comorian armed forces, it would find itself at war with France. With the French overseas naval station located on nearby Reunion Island this presence acts as a deterrent to any possible hostile action by the Comorian government against Mayotte, guaranteeing the status quo ante between these two SIS.

In the Arabian Sea, located at the gateway to the Red Sea, is Socotra Island. Though technically part of Yemen, the civil war in that country, and the fact that Saudi and UAE forces began diverging in their joint war aims in Yemen by backing different factions,³³¹ saw the island fall under the influence of the UAE and its Yemeni proxy, the Southern Transitional Council (STC). The complex and competing claims to the strategically important Socotra Island have yet to be fully determined while the Yemeni civil war continues and while Saudi and Emirati war aims in that country continue to differ. In June 2020, the STC seized control of the island. For the time being at least the island belongs to the STC. If the STC successfully breaks away from the Hadi national government and re-creates a southern Yemeni state,³³² Socotra will revert to the sovereignty of a new southern Yemeni entity. For now, the new détente between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (through the Abraham Accords) has seen long-standing covert Israeli-Emirati cooperation come out in the open, uncomplicating security ties between the two countries. The website for the Turkish news agency, *TRT World*, has suggested that, Socotra island, sitting close to major international shipping routes transiting to the Gulf and the Red Sea may well become the staging base for joint Israeli-Emirati surveillance facilities to monitor Yemen's Houthi forces and their Iranian backers.³³³

In 1975, the Seychelle Islands were granted independence from the UK. The newly independent Indian Ocean SIS was subjected to two coups. In 1977, supporters of the Prime Minister, France Rene overthrew President James Mancham with Rene declaring a one-party state. In 1981, South African mercenaries, led by the infamous mercenary commander Mike Hoare and backed by the South African military, attempted to overthrow Rene and re-instate Mancham as president. This and a number of other South African supported coup attempts failed to dislodge Rene, who restored multiparty rule to the Seychelles in 1993 and retired

³³⁰ See: RW Crabtree, "Maore Farantsa": The Self-Determination of Mayotte to Become a *Département* of France', PhD Thesis, Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Adelaide, 2015.

³³¹ IK Harb, 'The "Forever War": The Saudi-Iranian Contest for Power', *STRATEGIKON* Podcast, episode 60, May 16, 2019, <https://www.sageinternational.org.au/uncategorised/the-forever-war-the-saudi-iranian-contest-for-power-feat-dr-imad-harb-strategikon-ep-60/>.

³³² Yemen was a divided state upon its independence from the UK in 1967. South Yemen existed from 1967 (as a Soviet vassal) till unification with North Yemen in 1990. The current Civil War began in 2014 with the Hadi government, backed by both the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, against the 'Iranian-backed' Houthi rebels.

³³³ TRT World, 'What is the UAE Doing on the Yemeni Island of Socotra?', *TRT World*, September 1, 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/what-is-the-uae-doing-on-the-yemeni-island-of-socotra-39385>.

from politics in 2004 in favour of his Vice President, James Michel. Having come out of years of political turbulence and repression, this former British SIS has become a bastion of stability and wealth in the Indian Ocean with a relatively high standard of living.³³⁴

The Maldives achieved independence from the UK in 1965. It is a chain of 26 atolls, some 700 kilometres off the Indian coast. In 1968, the Maldives voted to become a republic, ending a local monarchy that had lasted for over 800 years. The 1970s saw the country enter a period of prolonged instability, severely hampering its economic development. A period of one-man rule began in 1978 with the rise of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. Gayoom oversaw the economic reforms which led the Maldives becoming a major international tourist destination. However, political disaffection with Gayoom's politics fomented a series of unsuccessful coup attempts. In 1988 one of these coup attempts saw the Indian armed forces intervene to restabilise the country under Operation Cactus. Gayoom's rule ended in 2004, the same year that the Maldives was devastated by the 2004 Tsunami. In the latter part of Gayoom's rule, he softened his approach to politics and allowed for political reforms, culminating in a new constitution in 2008. Political instability returned to the Maldives in 2011 and 2012 including a police and army mutiny against the sitting government. An assassination attempt against President Abdulla Yameen, half-brother to the former ruler, precipitated further instability and a government crackdown on dissent. The Maldives remains vulnerable to the vagaries of its internal politics. The loss of local revenue from the collapse of international tourism will hit this SIS hard and potentially lead to more domestic socio-political conflict.

In sum, the geopolitical dynamic among the SIS of the Indian Ocean seems to concern border disputes, civil war and political instability. But including them in a broader strategic picture inclusive of the Indian Ocean's littoral we can see how great power competition is affecting this region.

Within the confines of the Indian Ocean, India is by far the largest regional power. Apart from its major naval bases along the Indian coast—(west) Mumbai, Karwar and Kochi; (east) Visakhapatnam—India also has a naval presence in its sovereign island chain of the Andaman Islands at Port Blair, covering both the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (also under Indian jurisdiction) in the Bay of Bengal. India has listening stations on the Seychelles, Madagascar and Mauritius. It extends naval protection to the Maldives and to the African country of Mozambique.³³⁵ India also has an air and naval station in the Gulf country of Oman and has a security pact with Qatar. India has also been involved in many anti-piracy missions in the western Indian Ocean as stated by the Indian Department of Defence:

Piracy in [the] Gulf of Aden, Somalian Coast, Omani Coast and seas between the African coastline and Maldives is a global menace, being fought not only by IN [Indian Navy], but also by numerous Navies of the World. India on its part is actively engaged in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and the Eastern Arabian Sea.

³³⁴ BBC Monitoring, 'Seychelles Country Profile', *BBC*, May 14, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14093816>.

³³⁵ The Indian Navy was invited by Mozambique to provide security for the country during the 2003 African Union meeting in Maputo as well as for the World Economic Forum the following year. For more information on the importance India places on African naval security, see: A Mishra, 'India-Africa Maritime Cooperation: The Case of Western Indian Ocean', *ORF Occasional Papers*, no.221, November 4, 2019, https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ORF_OccasionalPaper_221_India-Africa-Maritime.pdf.

The Indian Navy commenced anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden from October 2008 and since then a ship has been deployed continuously.³³⁶

While India has long range capabilities in the Indian Ocean Region, including the capacity to surveil and interdict hostile shipping, its power is limited, and other states have a major footprint in the region. The US has its IOR base in disputed Diego Garcia, a naval expeditionary base at Camp Lemonnier in the African state of Djibouti, the Headquarters of the US 5th Fleet is located in Bahrain, and US air and naval installations are present in all Gulf States with the exception of Saudi Arabia. The US has intelligence gathering facilities in western and central Australia (Harold E Holt Naval Communications Station, and Pine Gap), and a rotational presence of 2,500 US Marines in Darwin in the Northern Territory. The US has approximately 30,000 personnel operating in the IOR, which scales up and down depending on threat levels, especially with regard to Iran.

France is the only other Western extraterritorial country with a permanent naval presence in the IOR. It has forces in the United Arab Emirates, a major base in Djibouti as well as the Armed Forces in the Southern Indian Ocean (FAZSOI) based in Reunion and Mayotte. As mentioned in other observations, the French presence in the IOR is modest (approximately 4,500 personnel) by the standards of the US and India, however, it is significant in terms of its technology and training when compared to many East African navies.

Eager to embed itself into the IOR, the People's Republic of China is increasingly active in the region ostensibly to support its global road, rail, and port network, the Belt and Road Initiative. Beijing has conceptualised a complementary maritime strategy designed to extend the reach of the PLAN. Called the 'String of Pearls', its primary aim is to act as a counterweight to Indian maritime power, and to potentially act as a tool of Indian encirclement. Its longer-term secondary role is to keep the US Navy off-balance, thereby preventing the USN 5th Fleet from concentrating its power beyond the Malacca Strait to the critical South China Sea area of operations. To date, the concept is still far from fruition.

In reality, the PRC has only one operational overseas military base in Djibouti (in 2017) where it shares naval installations with the US, France, Germany, Japan, Italy and Saudi Arabia. Djibouti's importance is primarily as a base from which to conduct international anti-piracy operations. For China, its presence in the tiny African country also provides it with intelligence on Western naval movements along the East African littoral and through the Red Sea.

Since 2018 there have been rumours, generated in large part by US defence reports, that the PRC is building military and naval bases in Pakistan. While these rumours remain unsubstantiated, the PRC has invested heavily in Pakistan following the country's abandonment by the US for its role in supporting and sheltering anti-US militia groups including the Afghan Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters since 9/11. Islamabad's ties to the PRC are of great concern to India, because Pakistan is considered to be an existential threat to the country. Since its formation in 1947 the two states have fought three conventional wars, in 1947, 1965, and 1971. Significantly, Pakistan has a confirmed nuclear capability (1998) and has demonstrated belligerent intent toward India in disputed Kashmir (the worst Kashmiri clash between Indian and Pakistani forces being the Kargil Incident in 1999, which almost precipitated a nuclear exchange), and was accused of having assisted the Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists responsible for the 2008 Mumbai Attacks. In 2013, China and Pakistan formally

³³⁶ Indian Department of Defence, 'FAQ', <https://www.mod.gov.in/dod/faq?page=1>.

signed a multibillion-dollar infrastructure project, part of China's BRI network, called the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This USD 87 billion project is developing a main arterial rail and road link from the Pakistan-PRC border through to Pakistan's deep-water port at Gwadar, which faces on to the Arabian Sea. While ostensibly a civilian project, contemporary China's use of 'debt-trap diplomacy' as a way of coercing economically vulnerable states into following Beijing's line, it is likely that the CPEC may well have a dual civil-military use for both China and Pakistan, allowing PLA and Pakistani forces to move freely within Pakistani territory. It should also be noted that China has displaced the United States as Pakistan's primary weapons supplier.³³⁷ China and Pakistan have close military ties, with agreements extending from cooperation in arms exports to technical agreements on sharing military technology.³³⁸ Writing for *Modern Diplomacy* in August 2020, Rayan Bhagwagar wrote: "While Beijing denies any military or naval involvement in the [CPEC] project, sources report what seems to be a high-security compound being built by the Chinese, which some believe could support naval operations... The compound comes complete with sentry towers and pillboxes along with fortifications and high walls with barbed wire."³³⁹

In the Maldives, Bhagwager said that while the Chinese had long been keen on creating a submarine pen there for the PLAN, most of China's efforts at accomplishing this ambition were rebuffed. However, in 2016 the Maldives President Abdulla Yameen struck a 50-year lease with an undisclosed Chinese company for its use of Feydhoo Finolhu atoll for the sum of USD 4 million.³⁴⁰ Satellite imagery taken of the atoll has seen it radically transformed from a small, underdeveloped local picnicking area to something akin to the islands and atolls built up by the Chinese in the South China Sea. Currently under the management of the Chinese firm, Pearl Atoll, a subsidiary of Shenzhen Mireach Industries Limited, its strategic location, some 1,000 kilometres from the southern Indian coast strongly suggests that the built-up atoll serves a purpose beyond tourism or commerce. The Maldives, being indebted to China to the tune of USD 1.4 billion will find it difficult to rescind its lease with Pearl Atoll (should the country's internal politics change³⁴¹) or the Maldives exercise its right to refuse renewal of the lease when it expires in 2066.³⁴²

Like Pakistan, Myanmar is also part of the PRC's BRI network. Myanmar has signed on to be part of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC). As a writer for *The Diplomat*, Sebastian Strangio, states: "[is] a planned overland network of highways, railways, pipelines, and industrial zones intended to link China's Yunnan province to Myanmar's coast on the Bay of Bengal."³⁴³ While the exact amount of money the PRC is sinking into CMEC is not

³³⁷ R Sohail, 'Pakistan Biggest Importer of Chinese Arms: Report', *The Express Tribune*, October 18, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1828531/pakistan-biggest-importer-chinese-arms-report>.

³³⁸ F Bokhari, 'With China as Its Mentor, Pakistan Triples Arms Exports', *Nikkei Asia*, November 9, 2019, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/With-China-as-its-mentor-Pakistan-triples-arms-exports>.

³³⁹ RV Bhagwagar, 'China's Overseas Military Bases', *Modern Diplomacy*, August 31, 2020, <https://modern.diplomacy.eu/2020/08/31/chinas-overseas-military-bases/>.

³⁴⁰ Maldives Independent, 'Feydhoo Finolhu Leased to Chinese Company for US\$4m', *Maldives Independent*, December 24, 2016, <https://maldivesindependent.com/business/feydhoo-finolhu-leased-to-chinese-company-for-us4m-127572>.

³⁴¹ As it has done in 2018 with the defeat of Yameen and the election of Ibrahim Solhi who is much more wary of the nature of Chinese investment in the Maldives.

³⁴² S Kannan, 'How China Has Expanded Its Influence in the Arabian Sea', *India Today*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/how-china-has-expanded-its-influence-in-the-arabian-sea-1678167-2020-05-15>.

³⁴³ S Strangio, 'China's Top Diplomat Checks in on Myanmar Projects', *The Diplomat*, September 3, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/chinas-top-diplomat-checks-in-on-myanmar-projects/>.

publicly available, the best estimate at the time of writing is around USD 21 billion.³⁴⁴ Strangio further observes:

While the CMEC is a recent initiative, its fundamental goals have been present in Chinese official thinking since the mid-1980s when strategists in Beijing first began to eye Myanmar as a potential overland outlet for Chinese exports, and later as an alternative overland route for Middle Eastern oil imports that would reduce its heavy reliance on the narrow Straits of Malacca.³⁴⁵

Work on elements of the CMEC began in 2013. But it is the PRC's building of and access to Myanmar's deep-water port of Kyaukphyu (at the cost of USD 7.5 billion) that is causing most concern for American and Indian defence policy planners. Were there a strategic subtext to Chinese investment in Myanmar beyond its commercial BRI ambitions, the possibility of PLAN warships being rotated through or permanently based at Kyaukphyu would give PLAN commanders the ability to monitor Indian naval traffic in the Bay of Bengal and operate close to India's Visakhapatnam and Port Blair naval facilities.

Recently the government of Myanmar publicly expressed concerns arising from its cooperation with the PRC on CMEC.³⁴⁶ Some of them caused by the fear that Myanmar will succumb to China's debt trap diplomacy.³⁴⁷ However, in January 2020, Myanmar signed another 33 bilateral agreements with the PRC concerning projects related to the Belt and Road Initiative.³⁴⁸ Myanmar is getting closer to Beijing, and while there is no direct evidence suggesting that any of China's investment in Myanmar is aimed at turning the country into an extension of Chinese strategic power, as with Pakistan, it is not inconceivable that much of what China builds has a dual use, facilitating economic activity *and* strategic advantage for China.

From 2018 to mid-2019 reports of a naval base deal between the People's Republic of China and Cambodia³⁴⁹ were scotched by the Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, who claimed as far back as 2018 that such reports were 'fake news'. Indeed, Hun Sen came out again in October of 2020 to deny any allegation of the Cambodian government wanting to host PLAN forces at its Ream Naval Base situated on the Gulf of Thailand.³⁵⁰

Returning to the Middle East, the ongoing tension between the US and Iran has provided the PRC with yet another opportunity to extend its ambiguous reach. Cut off from international trade by US sanctions, which have been made even more severe under the Trump

³⁴⁴ L Myers, 'The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor and China's Determination to See It Through', *Asia Dispatches*, 26 May, 2020, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/china-myanmar-economic-corridor-and-chinas-determination-see-it-through>.

³⁴⁵ Strangio, 'China's Top Diplomat Checks in on Myanmar Projects.'

³⁴⁶ Current Affairs Correspondent East Asia, 'Myanmar Fears Chinese Debt Trap', *Belt and Road News*, February 28, 2020, <https://www.beltandroad.news/2020/02/28/myanmar-fears-chinese-debt-trap/>.

³⁴⁷ B Lintner, 'Myanmar Risks Falling Into a China Debt Trap', *Asia Times*, June 5, 2018, <https://asiatimes.com/2018/06/myanmar-risks-falling-into-a-china-debt-trap/>.

³⁴⁸ J Reed, 'China and Myanmar Sign Off on Belt and Road Projects', *Financial Review*, January 19, 2020, <https://www.afr.com/world/asia/china-and-myanmar-sign-off-on-belt-and-road-projects-20200119-p53sqv>.

³⁴⁹ H Ellis-Petersen, 'China Reportedly Signs Secret Deal to Station Troops in Cambodia', *The Guardian*, July 22, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/22/china-signs-secret-deal-to-station-troops-at-cambodia-naval-base>.

³⁵⁰ S Cheang, 'Cambodia Denies New Speculation About Chinese Base Plans', *Associated Press*, October 6, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/thailand-china-archive-cambodia-345a88965b1c0272448c2270e966fc39>.

Administration's 'maximum pressure' policy,³⁵¹ the leadership in Tehran have been left with few options to keep their regime intact other than to explore deeper ties with the PRC. Indeed, as the current affairs correspondent from the *Belt and Road News* notes:

Internally, the agreement can be an economic lifeline for Iran, saving its sanctions-hit, cash-strapped economy by ensuring the sale of its oil and gas to China. In addition, Iran will be able to use its strategic ties with China as a bargaining chip in any possible future negotiations with the West by taking advantage of its ability to expand China's footprint in the Persian Gulf.³⁵²

In February 2016, China's first freight train reached the Iranian capital, Tehran, heralding another milestone in the PRC's effort to establish a 21st Century version of the 'Silk Road' trading route, linking Europe to China via Central Asia. In 2016, however, no one foresaw the difficulties that would emerge in the US-PRC relationship with the election of Donald Trump as president, and the openly belligerent behaviour instigated by Chinese Premier Xi. In addition, no one believed that President Trump would walk away from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, especially the Europeans, but as these things have happened President Xi has taken the initiative to develop strong and lasting ties with the Iranian theocracy, signing a USD 400 billion bilateral trade and security deal with Iran.³⁵³ The threat of the theocracy being involved in debt-trap diplomacy appears to be a better option than being strangled by American international sanctions, which have both crippled the Iranian economy and weakened the regime's hold on its citizens. Should this relationship be allowed to mature, Iran will be the PRC's grateful foil against the American presence in the Gulf and the IOR, complicating the position of the US 5th Fleet. It is now highly likely that any Iranian intelligence on 5th Fleet disposition and movements will be passed on to Chinese intelligence and PLAN command, giving the PLAN significant added insight in the IOR.

While the String of Pearls concept of PLAN naval installations remains a distant goal, China having only one confirmed overseas military base in Djibouti, the People's Republic has potentially increased its strategic footprint in the IOR in recent years through its commercial activities with Myanmar, Pakistan, Iran, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. For now, however, China's role in the IOR is still relatively weak and further development will take time, reflecting the CCP's immediate priority to secure their sovereignty over the South China and East China Seas. The US Navy, together with the Indian Navy, the French Navy, and the Royal Australian Navy currently outgun and outclass any minor PLAN presence in the IOR. However, at the current rate of Chinese naval shipbuilding and infrastructure development in the IOR states it deems relevant for its interests, over the next 10-15 years the PRC's strategic presence in the IOR is likely to strengthen and to become more of a challenge to the status quo.

³⁵¹ A Taylor, 'While Coronavirus Ravages Iran, US Sanctions Squeeze It', *The Washington Post*, March 19, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/03/19/while-coronavirus-ravages-iran-us-sanctions-squeeze-it/>.

³⁵² Current Affairs Correspondent East Asia, 'Iran's Pact with China is Bad News for the West', *Belt and Road News*, August 12, 2020, <https://www.beltandroad.news/2020/08/12/irans-pact-with-china-is-bad-news-for-the-west/>.

³⁵³ D Lawler, 'China-Iran Deal Envisions Massive Investments From Beijing', *Axios*, July 13, 2020, <https://www.axios.com/china-iran-investment-deal-oil-infrastructure-c919646d-2ece-4ee5-bfd7-c8a16a7f53b0.html>.

Small Island-States of the Indo-Pacific

INDIAN OCEAN

Name	Population	Land Size	Politics	Religion	Military	GDP	Culture
Comoros	780,971	2,235 sq km	Federal Presidential Republic	Muslim	500	USD 1.214 billion	Swahili-Arabic-French
Mayotte	270,372	347 sq km	Department of France	Muslim	FAZSOI – French military	USD 3.3 billion	Swahili-French-Comorian
Madagascar	23,812,681	581,540 sq km	Semi-Presidential Republic	Christian	13,500	USD 35.44 billion	Malay-Bantu-Swahili
Seychelles	96,762	455 sq km	Presidential Republic	Christian	650	USD 2.417 billion	Afro-Asian-European
Reunion	859,959	2,512 sq km	Department of France	Christian	FAZSOI – French military	USD 4.97 billion	Creole-Afro-Tamil
Mauritius	1,339,827	2,030 sq km	Parliamentary Republic	Hindu	National Police Force 10,000	USD 24.57 billion	Creole-Afro-European
Socotra Island (Yemen)	60,000	3,796 sq km	Southern Transitional Council	Muslim	STC/UAE forces	N/A	Arab-Afro-Asiatic
British Indian Ocean Territory (incl. Diego Garcia)	4,000 British and US military personnel & contractors	60 sq km	Commissioner Foreign & Commonwealth Office	N/A	4,000 population fluctuates depending on military tempo	N/A	UK-US
Maldives	393,253	298 sq km	Presidential Republic	Muslim	20,000	USD 5.191 billion	Indo-Sinhalese-Arabic
Sri Lanka	22,053,488	64,630 sq km	Presidential Republic	Buddhist	346,000	USD 223 billion	Sinhalese-Tamil
Andaman Islands (India)	434,192	8,250 sq km	Indian Administrative District	Hindu	Indian Naval Facility, Port Blair	N/A	Bengali-Indo-Tamil
Nicobar Islands (India)	36,842	1,841 sq km	Indian Administrative District in Union with Andaman	Hindu	Indian Naval Facility, Port Blair	N/A	Indo-Sentinelese
Cocos (Keeling) Islands (Australia)	596	14 sq km	External Territory of Australia	Muslim	NT/WA based Australian Defence Forces	N/A	Malay-Australian
Christmas Island (Australia)	1,402	135 sq km	External Territory of Australia	Muslim	NT/WA based Australian Defence Forces	N/A	Chinese-Malay-Australian
Prince Edward Islands (South Africa)	Uninhabited	335 sq km	Subantarctic South African Territory	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Crozet Islands (France)	18-30	352 sq km	Subantarctic French Territory	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Kerguelen Islands (France)	130	7,215 sq km	Subantarctic French Territory	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Heard Island & McDonald Islands (Australia)	Uninhabited	368 sq km	Subantarctic Australian territory	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Prince Edward Islands (South Africa)	Uninhabited	335 sq km	Subantarctic South African Territory	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 1. Information for this table was compiled from the following sources: *WorldABC/The CIA World Factbook*, <https://apps.apple.com/au/app/worldabc-the-cia-world-factbook/id412637620>; *EveryCulture*, <https://www.everyculture.com/>; *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com>

PACIFIC OCEAN REGION

The Pacific is also an area of strategic contention, but here, the dynamics are different. Strategically, the Pacific is still regarded as an ‘American lake’. The US and allied navies have almost total control of the Pacific up to the PRC’s anti-access, area denial (A2AD) terminal range.³⁵⁴ And while the PLAN’s naval ship building and modernisation programs continue apace, how CCP authorities have dealt with COVID-19—a subject of some contention and controversy—will determine how fast new ships, aircraft and missiles can reach operational status. COVID-19 has and will continue to affect all maritime forces within the Pacific theatre until infection levels are brought under control through the deployment of a successful vaccine.

NEW ZEALAND’S FOREIGN POLICY

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has published their ‘Strategic Intentions’ for 2020 to 2024.³⁵⁵ Although this predates the COVID-19 pandemic, these relatively broad-brush objectives are unlikely to be much changed by the Labour Party’s victory in the recent polls.³⁵⁶

Key policies contained in this document are designed to lead to a safer, more prosperous, and more sustainable future for New Zealanders, and depend on the conditions within and connections across the wider world.

As cited in Strategic Intentions:

We must therefore engage with and seek to influence other countries in line with New Zealand’s values and our interests in:

- *A rules-based international order that supports New Zealand priorities;*
- *A security environment that keeps New Zealand people and activities safe;*

³⁵⁴ P Knott, ‘OSINT—Chinese A2AD’, *ADBR*, June 16, 2020, <https://adbr.com.au/osint-chinese-a2ad/>.

³⁵⁵ See: New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), ‘Strategic Intentions: 2020-24’, New Zealand Government, Wellington, 2020, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/About-us-Corporate/MFAT-strategies-and-frameworks/MFAT-Strategic-Intentions-2020-2024.pdf>.

³⁵⁶ BBC News, ‘New Zealand Election: Jacinda Ardern’s Labour Party Scores Landslide Win’, *BBC*, October 17, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54519628>: “With all votes tallied, Ms Ardern’s centre-left Labour Party won 49.1%, bringing a projected 64 seats and a rare outright parliamentary majority.”

- *International conditions and connections that enable New Zealanders to prosper; and*
- *Global action on sustainability issues that matter to New Zealand. Protecting and advancing these interests is the purpose of New Zealand's diplomacy.*³⁵⁷

New Zealand has a small Defence Force (15,232 Active Service Personnel and 2,606 Reserve)³⁵⁸ and the current defence budget is NZD 4.29 billion (USD 2.7 billion). They are geared to the surveillance of New Zealand's territorial waters, but have taken part in stability and support operations in Timor-Leste, Afghanistan, the Solomon Islands, and Tonga, as well as in counter-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa.³⁵⁹ The strategy specifically refers to Australia as New Zealand's best friend and mentions the close links between their respective militaries. It further pledges that New Zealand will work closely with Australia to respond to a range of security events.

New Zealand is an active participant in ASEAN-centric security forums, including the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus).

Under the now majority Labour Party, the aspirations outlined in the 2020 Defence Budget are likely to be continued, allowing for the purchase of C130J Super Hercules aircraft to replace the old Hercules that have been in the inventory since the 1960s.³⁶⁰ This will provide a marked improvement to the NZAF's capabilities. As with all national budgets, the effects of COVID-19 have yet to be properly assessed. The current defence budget represents 1.5% of GDP and is unlikely to rise in the short-term.³⁶¹

KEY POINTS ON NZ

- New Zealand may have limited resources, but is a key ally of Australia and will provide strong support in future operations and in crises in the area;
- New Zealand tends to "punch above her weight" diplomatically and her new majority government should make future collaboration and cooperation smooth;
- New Zealand is an influential player in a number of international fora and can be counted on to work effectively with Australian policies and operations within this context.

CHINA V. TAIWAN

Underpinning an important aspect of strategic competition in the Pacific is China and Taiwan's bidding war for international recognition. Taiwan has never stopped global

³⁵⁷ New Zealand MFAT, 'Strategic Intentions: 2020-24', p.5.

³⁵⁸ As of September 2020.

³⁵⁹ New Zealand Government, 'Strategic Defence Policy Statement 2018', Ministry of Defence, Wellington, July 2018, <https://www.defence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/8958486b29/Strategic-Defence-Policy-Statement-2018.pdf>.

³⁶⁰ N Perry, 'New Zealand Military Buys 5 Lockheed Hercules Plans for \$1 Billion', *Defense News*, June 5, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/2020/06/05/new-zealand-military-buys-5-lockheed-hercules-planes-for-1-billion/>.

³⁶¹ World Bank, 'Military Expenditure (% of GDP)', <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS>.

‘independent’ economic and trade activity since the shift in international recognition to the CCP as the sole legitimate government of all of China.

Economic and political rivalry between Beijing and Taipei in the Pacific has gradually resolved in China’s favour. Until 2019 the Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Palau, Tuvalu, Nauru, and the Marshall Islands still recognised Taiwan as an ‘independent actor.’ Taipei fought hard to keep the loyalty of this group of island-states; however, in September 2019 the pull of Chinese development capital and the promise of major infrastructure projects won over the Solomon Islands and Kiribati, reducing the number of Pacific states loyal to Taiwan to four.³⁶² However, while this might appear to be a blow to Taiwan, international concerns regarding China’s handling of the COVID-19 Crisis, the Sino-American trade war, and the escalation of Sino-American strategic competition, have seen Taiwan become a useful foil against mainland China.

In March 2020, the Trump administration enacted the *Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act of 2019*.³⁶³ This Act effectively rewards countries that have strengthened or upgraded their relations with Taiwan. The move has deeply angered Xi Jinping, and the CCP since it undermines their One China Policy, the central foreign and domestic policy plank of the contemporary People’s Republic. A move that is sure to ignite further rhetorical barbs between Washington and Beijing as Sino-American tensions increase leading up to and following the November 2020 US Presidential Election. If these tensions survive and escalate into a Biden administration, the *TAIPEI Act* will be another pressure point the US government will actively use against the PRC.

Prior to the Solomon Islands Prime Minister announcing the country’s shift in allegiance from Taiwan to the PRC, a group of local MPs publicly announced their concerns over the shift in allegiance. They cast aspersions on the way Solomon Islander politicians, including Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, were courted by Chinese officials, resulting in a climate of improper conduct and possible corrupt dealings. Other concerns were expressed, including that China would export its style of politics to the Solomon Islands, leading to the eventual curtailing of civic freedoms. In an open letter by some of the country’s senior leadership, including Foreign Minister Jeremaiah Manele and former Prime Minister Rick Hou, the signatories wrote:

We state very clearly that we will not support any policy to change Solomon Islands diplomatic ties from Republic of China (Taiwan) to the People's Republic of China (PRC). We believe the long-term interests of our country—in terms of our development aspirations, as well as respect for democratic principles, human rights, rule of law, human dignity, and mutual respect—lie with Taiwan, not the PRC.³⁶⁴

³⁶² See: S Hoadley, ‘Two Pacific States Drop Taiwan for China’, *Ideasroom*, September 23, 2019 (updated September 25, 2018), <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/ideasroom/two-pacific-states-dump-taiwan-for-china>; “As documented by analysts at the Lowy Institute in Sydney, in the past decade China has initiated 265 projects worth US\$1.6 billion and has emerged as second only to Australia as a source of grants and loans to Pacific island countries. This trend may see China surge to the top soon.”

³⁶³ *Taiwan Allies International Protection and Enhancement Initiative (Taipei) Act of 2019*, Pub L No 116-135, 134 Stat 278 (2020), <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ135/PLAW-116publ135.pdf>.

³⁶⁴ Quoted in: Solomon Times, ‘Sixteen Government MPs Declare Support for Solomon Islands-Taiwan Relations’, *Solomon Times*, August 21, 2019, <https://www.solomontimes.com/news/sixteen-government-mps-declare-support-for-solomon-islandtaiwan-relations/9282>.

This letter demonstrated that while the Solomon Island political executive under the office of the Prime Minister may have largely been in favour of this shift, clearly other senior political figures were not. Furthermore, it is unlikely that in the heightened climate of international tensions between China and the United States, (Taiwan being cast by the CCP as a ‘renegade Chinese province’), that politics in Honiara will simply lockstep in behind Prime Minister Sogavare.

In Kiribati,³⁶⁵ the situation is more fraught. The country is battling a number of simultaneous existential problems. As the poorest Pacific state and arguably the most vulnerable to climate change it lacks both the money and the skills necessary to build seawalls to protect townships and villages from storm surges and flooding by seawater. Salination of available land has diminished the space for its limited agriculture, based on palm sugar. Many locals are being primed for an eventual abandonment of their homes and possible relocation to Fiji and elsewhere. What makes Kiribati so vulnerable is that the island state comprises some 32 atolls and one island. Salinity and land infertility affect the country’s current and future earnings. High population density with families having in excess of five children means that population is outstripping available natural and governmental resources. Another big source of income for the government of Kiribati is selling fishing licences primarily to Asian trawler fleets. However, as the size, efficiency and effectiveness of these trawler fleets increases, they denude the marine resources in surrounding waters, leaving less available for traditional fishermen. Ironically, the fewer fish caught, the fewer licences can be issued, and the less money available for Kiribati government expenditure. Furthermore, combine this to the slowness of aid delivery and the relatively disorganised way in which aid is distributed by various government-run organisations or private charities has led to local frustration and desperation. In this environment, it is easy to see how a foreign country promising more focussed aid delivery and ‘low cost’ but necessary infrastructure can seem appealing. However, whether China can meet the expectations of the people of Kiribati is yet to be seen, and it is unlikely that China will have enough of the right equipment at any one time to support Kiribati if humanitarian or disaster relief is necessary. Furthermore, the greater the distance a place is from the main area of Chinese maritime activity, the less able the PRC can move ships and heavy equipment in a timely and effective manner.

On the other end of the Sino-American strategic competition spectrum sits Palau. In early September 2020 the government of Palau invited the United States to build a military base, in order to resist growing Chinese influence on the archipelagic state. US Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper, described China’s interests in the Pacific as a “malign influence”, intent on destabilisation.³⁶⁶ The Palauan President, Tommy Remengesau Jr., wrote a letter to Mark Esper plainly stating, “*Palau’s request to the US military remains simple—build joint-use facilities, then come and use them regularly.*”³⁶⁷ Palau’s population is tiny (20,000 people) and the country has no defence force. Its ability to counter the might of the Chinese without external assistance is extremely limited. Palau has a ‘Compact of Free Association’ with the United States, under which the US is pledged to defend the island-chain.³⁶⁸ Remengesau’s main interest in building a US base is more economic than military. He is keen to increase

³⁶⁵ DW Documentary, ‘Kiribati: A Drowning Paradise in the South Pacific’, posted November 9, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZ0j6kr4ZJ0>.

³⁶⁶ Quoted in: B Carreon & B Doherty, ‘Pacific Nation of Palau Invites US to Build Military Base to Counter China’, *The Guardian*, September 4, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/04/pacific-nation-of-palau-invites-us-to-build-a-military-base-to-counter-china>.

³⁶⁷ Quoted in: Carreon & Doherty, ‘Pacific Nation of Palau.’

³⁶⁸ United States Department of the Interior, ‘Republic of Palau’, <https://www.doi.gov/oia/islands/palau>.

American investment in his country and permanently hosting an American force is good for business.³⁶⁹ The fact that Beijing decided to ban tourism to Palau, an industry that makes up to 40 per cent of the country's GDP, in order to pressure it to withdraw its recognition of Taiwan has made the Palauan government desperate for American support.³⁷⁰

FOREIGN AID AS POLITICAL INFLUENCE

The Pacific can be divided into a number of spheres of influence. These spheres of influence roughly correlate with the amount of foreign aid distributed to the Pacific region by donor states. For instance, a 2018 Lowy Institute study into foreign aid, as *ABC News* reports, clearly put Australia as the top donor to the Pacific region. According to *ABC News*, between 2011-17 Canberra distributed some AUD 8.7 billion in aid to the Pacific SIS far outstripping all other countries including the People's Republic of China, which came in second having donated approximately AUD 1.6 billion.³⁷¹ The amount of aid given to the Pacific by Australia has made the country indispensable to regional social and economic stability. As Graeme Dobell observed: "The acid eats at Australia's blithe assumption that its good intentions are automatically accepted. The hegemon isn't always benign—we have form as a selfish bully."³⁷²

Australia ties aid in a way that it circumvents local traditions, such as 'gift giving' to local dominance hierarchies, recognising the ongoing importance of patronage by village chiefs and elders and lecturing Pacific islanders on the importance of adopting modern political and economic standards and methods.

Australian governments have tolerated this criticism without overtly changing its own expectations that recipient states evolve their political processes. Indeed, Canberra is now more mindful that political change in the Pacific will be a slow process requiring both patience and persistence. However, the more pressing concerns of Pacific Islanders revolve around Australia's role in climate change. As a leading international exporter of coal, many Pacific Islands have been critical of the Australian government for continuing this industry, long known for contributing to rising sea levels that pose existential threats to many low-lying islands and atolls in the region. Indeed, regarding his observation of the 2019 Pacific Islands Forum former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd opined:

[T]he Pacific was not asking Australia to get rid of coal. It was simply asking Australia to endorse a statement by the UN Secretary-General that countries should be working to phase-out fossil fuels. ... The Pacific was also asking Australia to

³⁶⁹ U Heo & M Ye, 'US Military Deployment and Host-Nation Economic Growth', *Armed Forces and Society*, vol.45, no.2, 2017, pp.1-35.

³⁷⁰ V Beldi, 'China's "Tourist Ban" Leaves Palau Struggling to Fill Hotels and an Airline in Limbo', *ABC News*, August 26, 2018 (updated August 28, 2018), <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-26/china-tourist-ban-leaves-palau-tourism-in-peril/10160020>; Carreon & Doherty, 'Pacific Nation of Palau.'

³⁷¹ S Dziedzic, 'Which Country Gives the Most Aid to Pacific Island Nations? The Answer Might Surprise You', *ABC News*, August 9 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-09/aid-to-pacific-island-nations/10082702?nw=0>.

³⁷² G Dobell, 'Australia's Agenda for Integrating the South Pacific', *The Strategist*, December 11, 2017, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-agenda-for-integrating-the-south-pacific/>.

abandon an accounting trick that allows it to ‘carry over’ unused carbon credits from previous international commitment periods to fulfil our targets...³⁷³

Rudd’s concern was that any emerging split between Australia and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) would encourage PIF members to start looking to China as their primary donor and, as a consequence, diminish Australia’s leading regional role and influence.

The reality of this conflict, however, has to be moderated by the fact that China is currently in no position to step in to replace Australia as the region’s primary aid donor. The CCP’s driver in the Pacific is to dominate the South China Sea. Forays into the wider Pacific region are largely designed to unnerve US and allied governments and policymakers. It forms a useful, low-cost, high-impact distraction to keep American and allied interests off-guard in an area not central to CCP strategy.

The Lowy Institute’s Stewart Firth highlighted another potential weakness in the CCP creating a coherent Pacific Ocean strategy, arguing that anti-Chinese sentiment is high among many Pacific Islander communities, with newly arrived Chinese migrants subject to discrimination and racist attacks by locals. Firth writes:

During the Honiara riots in 2006, China was forced to charter aircraft to evacuate its citizens. Later that same year, riots in Tonga, in part anti-Chinese, led to a short-lived intervention by Australia and New Zealand. Further anti-Chinese agitation followed in parts of Papua New Guinea in 2009.

Although the era of major anti-Chinese riots in the Pacific appears to be over, anti-Chinese sentiments endure. Following a series of attacks on Chinese shopkeepers in Tonga in 2016, the Prime Minister ‘Akilisi Pohiva apologised to the Chinese community, yet a few months later he was warning that Chinese businesses paid no tax and would take over the country.’³⁷⁴

This issue may well prevent the CCP from entering the region in force, preferring instead to opportunistically exploit any weakness that avails in Australia’s or the West’s position. For instance, as *The EurAsian Times* reports, “Beijing...created the China-Pacific Island Countries anti-COVID-19 Cooperation Fund. The Fund, worth \$1.9 million, has provided Pacific island states with finances to purchase medical equipment from Chinese companies.”³⁷⁵ This diplomatic ‘charm offensive’ coming at a time of general global anxiety regarding the spread of COVID-19 may well have been viewed positively by the recipient states, but it pales to the Morrison government’s recommitment to Australia’s leading role in the South Pacific through its Pacific Step-up Program. Under this program, Canberra committed some AUD 1.4 billion in development assistance in 2019-20 and put together a AUD 2 billion financing scheme to fund Australian-led infrastructure projects in the

³⁷³ K Rudd, ‘Australia Destroys Its Own Reputation in the Pacific’, *East Asia Forum*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/09/09/australia-destroys-its-own-reputation-in-the-pacific/>.

³⁷⁴ S Firth, ‘Instability in the Pacific Islands: A Status Report’, Lowy Institute, June 2018, p.8, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/documents/Firth_Instability%20in%20the%20Pacific%20Islands_A%20status%20report_WEB.pdf.

³⁷⁵ EurAsian Times Desk, ‘Chinese Military Base in the Pacific Near Australia Could be a Nightmare for the US & Allies’, *The EurAsian Times*, April 26, 2020, <https://eurasianimes.com/chinese-military-base-in-pacific-near-australia/>. In the article, ‘Cooperation Fund’ is hyperlinked to the following source: A Powles, ‘COVID-19 and Geopolitics in the Pacific’, *East Asia Forum*, April 4, 2020, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/04/04/covid-19-and-geopolitics-in-the-pacific/>.

Pacific.³⁷⁶ China's economic encroachments in the Pacific are primarily to continue its pursuit of isolating Taiwan from its few remaining supporters in the region. It also has an interest in securing vitally important fisheries for Chinese commercial trawlers. Stationing PLAN surveillance outposts to monitor American and allied naval traffic might be an ambition for the CCP, but so far, China has been denied permission to build a spy-base in East Timor in 2011,³⁷⁷ and a military base in Vanuatu in 2018.³⁷⁸ These failures do not mean that China has given up on establishing some form of basing arrangement in the Pacific. Perhaps it is only waiting for the right moment to reposition itself in an unexpected way.

EXISTENTIAL CHALLENGE OF BOUGAINVILLE?

The Bougainville Civil War 1988-97 weakened the government of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and devastated the island and people of Bougainville. After the civil war Port Moresby granted the island autonomous status within PNG, with the promise of a 'non-binding' referendum on independence in November 2019. Correspondent for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Patrick Elligett, observed:

Polls opened on November 23 and closed on December 7. Around 85 per cent of eligible voters cast more than 181,000 ballots and there were 246 polling teams spread across the Bougainville islands, Australia, PNG and the Solomons. Overseeing the vote was the chairman of the Bougainville Referendum Commission (BRC), former Irish prime minister Bertie Ahern, who has said the referendum "should be celebrated" and who was cheered when he announced the result on December 11.³⁷⁹

The problem posed by Bougainville independence is that it has created a precedent allowing other disaffected groups among the Pacific SIS's to seek similar claims of independence, potentially proliferating a number of smaller and less economically and politically stable microstates. There are active independence movements in a few South Pacific nations:

- Free Papua Movement in West Papua (Indonesia)
- New Ireland in Papua New Guinea
- Malaita Province, the Solomon Islands
- Banaba Island, Kiribati
- Espiritu Santo Island in Vanuatu

³⁷⁶ J Wall, 'The Importance of Australia's Pacific Step-Up in the Post-Virus Environment', *The Strategist*, April 24, 2020, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-importance-of-australias-pacific-step-up-in-the-post-virus-environment/>.

³⁷⁷ P Dorling, 'Chinese Bid to Set Up East Timor Spy Base', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 10, 2011, <https://www.smh.com.au/technology/chinese-bid-to-set-up-east-timor-spy-base-20110509-1efwo.html>.

³⁷⁸ BBC News, 'Vanuatu Denies It Will Host China Military Base', *BBC*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-43707975>.

³⁷⁹ P Elligett, 'From "Treasure Island" to World's Newest Nation? What is Happening in Bougainville?', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 11, 2019, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/oceania/from-treasure-island-to-world-s-newest-nation-what-is-happening-in-bougainville-20191127-p53eph.html>.

- Kanak nationalists (various groups New Caledonia)—a second referendum was held on October 4, 2020 when the majority for remaining loyal to the French Republic was 53.3%. A third referendum has to be held before the end of 2022.³⁸⁰
- Haloes people in Guam (various separatist groups)
- Chuuk people in the Federated States of Micronesia
- Hawaiian nationalists (various groups)
- Tahitians (Polynesians), various movements, Tahiti
- Easter Island (against Chile)
- Wallis and Futuna, nationalists on both islands seeking independence for themselves against France and from each other.
- In neighbouring New Zealand—in the Cook Islands; Maori ethno-nationalists; and New Munster Province (South Islander secessionists)

While these groups are far from enjoying any degree of international legitimacy, given the right set of circumstances, and support from a country seeking to exploit these internal fissures, it is conceivable that violent flare-ups, popular referenda and state break-up in each are possible, opening the way for newly formed Pacific microstates orientating their nascent economic and security arrangements to non-traditional extraterritorial countries. What makes this scenario imaginable is that every Pacific SIS has deep, systemic problems of poverty, underdevelopment, dealing with climate change, tribal and racial issues and maladministration. Under these circumstances, actively undermining the national government in order for secessionist groups to declare their independence might seem the lesser evil than remaining in an unsatisfactory union. However, size does matter. The smaller the island-state, the smaller its population, the less able it will be to feed itself, defend its territory and create the necessary social, political, and physical infrastructure to successfully ‘go it alone’. Were China to be the hypothetical country determined to profit from Pacific SIS break-up, the costs it would have to bear to support such microstates would be enormous while the economic and strategic return on investment, apart from propaganda value, marginal.

The Pacific Ocean is a diverse region. The many small island states that comprise it suffer from multiple chronic issues from institutional weakness, poor management, overpopulation and land and marine resource depletion. Urbanisation has undermined traditional ways of life and has contributed to social tensions and conflict as many Pacific Islands struggle with transitioning to modernity. This poses ongoing management problems for leading aid distributor, Australia as it copes with regional criticism for its climate change policies and support for the coal industry and the complexities involved with distributing aid in ways that are both meaningful and useful to Pacific Islanders. The fragility of Pacific Island populations and infrastructure to the increasing severity of storms and flooding caused by

³⁸⁰ J Sartre & B Doherty, ‘New Caledonia Rejects Independence From France for Second Time’, *The Guardian*, October 5, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/04/new-caledonia-rejects-independence-from-france-for-second-time>.

climate change will continue to pose the region's most immediate security threat in coming years, a problem the Pacific region shares with the IOR. However, the permanent presence of US and French naval assets in the Pacific will mitigate some of the strain placed on Australian humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

Like the IOR, the arrival of COVID-19 has destroyed lucrative island tourist industries which will make it all the harder for regional governments to keep their populations safe and their economies viable. As unemployment peaks due to the closure of hotels and resorts, this will provide opportunity for transnational criminal groups to increase the scale of their operations among the islands as people recently laid off work and desperate to hold on to established standards of living embrace the black economy, worsening the general policing and counter-narcotic environment.

As for China, it will continue to find ways in which to further its economic and strategic interests in the Pacific. Recent setbacks should not be seen as permanent as the CCP has a long-term view of its position in the world, advantaged by the nature of politics in China where CCP members are not required to worry about short-term political cycles as Western political parties do. Contemporary China's presence in the Pacific is small³⁸¹ and relatively easy to contain for now. But the Pacific is a dynamic region. The internal politics of the island-states is fragile and can swing from stability to instability at relatively short notice. In places such as East Timor and Papua New Guinea where foreign mining and oil and gas companies exploit these countries' natural wealth, problems between governments, corporates and tribal groups can occur, paving the way for new internal fissures. It is these fissures that can over time be used by the CCP to create new opportunities to further their interests in the Pacific.

Small Island-States of the Indo-Pacific

PACIFIC OCEAN

Name	Population	Land Size	Politics	Religion	Military	GDP	Culture
Palau (Compact of Free Assoc with US)	17,907	458.4 sq km	Presidential Republic under COFA	Christian	Elements of the US Pacific Command	USD 272 million	Micronesian-Malay-Asian-Melanesian
Federated States of Micronesia (Compact of Free Assoc with US)	112,640	702 sq km	Administered by US Dept. of Interior	Christian	Elements of the US Pacific Command	N/A	Micronesian-Polynesian

³⁸¹ Not inclusive of the South and East China Seas since they are both in close geographical proximity to the Chinese mainland.

Mariana Islands (incl. Guam)	56,882	477 sq km	US Territory	Christian	Elements of the US Pacific Command	USD 1.3 billion	Asian-Micronesian-American
Papua New Guinea	6,672,429	452,860 sq km	Parliamentary Democracy	Christian	2,557	USD 24.47 billion	Melanesian-Papuan-Micronesian-Polynesian
Solomon Islands	622,469	27,986 sq km	Parliamentary Democracy	Christian	1,153 Solomon Islands Police Force	USD 1.146 billion	Melanesian-Polynesian-Micronesian
Vanuatu	272,264	12,189 sq km	Parliamentary Republic	Christian	300	USD 685 million	Melanesian
New Caledonia (French Special Collectivity)	284,060	18,575 sq km	Parliamentary Democracy	Christian	1,750 Subsidiary of the French Armed Forces	USD 2.682 billion	Melanesian-French-Polynesian-Asian
Lord Howe Island	347	14.55 sq km	Australian External Territory	Christian	QLD/NSW based elements of the ADF	N/A	Australian
Norfolk Island	1,748	34.6 sq km	Australian External Territory	Christian	QLD/NSW based elements of the ADF	N/A	Australian
Fiji	909,389	18,274 sq km	Parliamentary Republic	Christian	3,500	USD 8.048 billion	Melanesian-Polynesian-Indian
Wallis & Futuna (French Special Collectivity)	15,613	142 sq km	Parliamentary Democracy	Christian	Elements of Armed Forces in French Polynesia	USD 60 million	Polynesian
Tuvalu	10,869	26 sq km	Parliamentary Democracy	Christian	80 Tuvalu Police Force	USD 37 million	Polynesian-Micronesian
Nauru	11,100	21 sq km	Parliamentary Republic	Christian	100 Nauru Police	USD 150.8 million	Micronesian-Melanesian-Polynesian
Kiribati	98,900	811 sq km	Presidential Republic	Christian	300 Kiribati Police	USD 203 million	Micronesian
Marshall Islands (Compact of Free Assoc with US)	72,191	181 sq km	Presidential Republic under COFA	Christian	Elements of the US Pacific Command	USD 175 million	Micronesian-Japanese
Wake Atoll (US)	150	7.4 sq km	USAF under the US Dept. of Interior	N/A	Elements of the US Pacific Command	N/A	American
Midway Atoll (US)	40	66.3 sq km	US Dept of the Interior	N/A/	Elements of the US Pacific Command	N/A	American
Johnson Atoll (US)	Uninhabited	2.67 sq km	US Dept of Fisheries & Wildlife	N/A	Elements of the US Pacific Command	N/A	N/A
Hawaii (US)	1,415,872	6,423 sq km	US State	Christian	Elements of the US Pacific Command	USD 73.2 billion	Polynesian-American-Asian
Fakaofu Tokelau (NZ)	483	3 sq km	Dependency of NZ	Christian	NZDF	N/A	Polynesian
American Samoa (US)	54,343	199 sq km	Presidential Democracy Self Governing	Christian	Elements of the US	USD 711 million	Polynesian-Asian

			Territory of the US		Pacific Command		
Niue (NZ)	1,624	261.5 sq km	Parliamentary Democracy in Free Assoc with NZ	Christian	NZDF	USD 10.1 million	Polynesian
Cook Islands (NZ)	9,838	236 sq km	Parliamentary Democracy in Free Assoc with NZ	Christian	NZDF	USD 244.1 million	Polynesian
Tonga	105,501	717 sq km	Constitutional Monarchy	Christian	450	USD 526 million	Polynesian
Chatham Islands (NZ)	663	966 sq km	New Zealand Territory	Christian	NZDF	N/A	Polynesian
French Polynesia incl. Tahiti, Marquesas & Gambier Islands (French Special Collectivity)	282,703	3,827 sq km	Parliamentary Democracy	Christian	1,180 Armed Forces in French Polynesia		Polynesian-European-Asian
Pitcairn Islands (Overseas Territory of the UK)	67	47 sq km	Parliamentary Democracy	Christian	UK Armed Forces	N/A	Euro-Polynesian
Easter Island (Territory of Chile)	7,750	63.2 sq km	Province of Valparaíso Region (Chile)	Christian	Chilean Armed Forces	N/A	Euro-Polynesian
Galapagos Islands (Territory of Ecuador)	25,000	8,010 sq km	Provincial Government of Ecuador	Christian	Ecuadorian Armed Forces	N/A	Euro-Native American
Aleutians (US)	8,162	17,666 sq km	Under the jurisdiction of the US State of Alaska	Christian	Elements of the US Pacific Command	N/A	Euro-Aleut
Sakhalin Island (Russia)	497,973	76,400 sq km	Under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation	Christian	Russian Armed Forces	N/A	Russian-Korean-Nivkh-Orok
Kurile Islands	19,434	10,503 sq km	Under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation	Christian	Russian Armed Forces	N/A	Russian-Korean-Nivkh-Orok
Diomed Islands	135	737,700 sq km	Under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation	Christian	Russian Armed Forces	N/A	Russian
Commander Islands	613	1,844 sq km	Under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation	Christian	Russian Armed Forces	N/A	Russian-Aleut

Table 2. Information for this table was compiled from the following sources: *WorldABC/The CIA World Factbook*, <https://apps.apple.com/au/app/worldabc-the-cia-world-factbook/id412637620>; *EveryCulture*, <https://www.everyculture.com/>; *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com>

THE EAST AFRICAN LITTORAL

The Horn of Africa subregion has been an area of enduring interest to China. This subregion consists of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti. In the past, this entire African subregion was for much of its history under the cultural influence and political dominion of the largest state, Ethiopia. The Ethiopian-Eritrean war of 1998-2000 broke Ethiopia's hold over Eritrea (leading to Eritrea's independence) and with it, the loss of Ethiopia's access to the Red Sea.

Nonetheless, today Ethiopia is the undisputed regional power in the Horn of Africa. The Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa is Africa's diplomatic capital, hosting the headquarters of the African Union and the United Nations in Africa.

Since the election of Abiy Ahmed in 2018 Ethiopia has mended relations with Eritrea, but predating this Ethiopia had developed strong military ties to the United States. Ethiopia has and continues to assist the US in its war against Islamic extremism in neighbouring Somalia.

China's interest in Ethiopia began in 1970 when Ethiopia recognised the People's Republic, but it was not until the 2000s when Chinese investment and trade came to the fore. Between 2000 and 2014 the CCP extended Ethiopia some USD 12 billion in financing, largely tied to infrastructure projects run by Chinese firms. This was the cause of some concern. For a nation with a population of 102 million where unemployment levels are still high, there was significant push-back against the arrival of large numbers of Chinese workers, the government in Addis Ababa negotiating hard to secure as many local jobs as possible in these Chinese projects. But the irresistible African rush to secure multibillion-dollar Chinese loans and development assistance saw many unhappy compromises struck whereby Chinese interests often superseded those of Africans. By 2017 around 250,000 Chinese workers resided in Africa, with Ethiopia being one of the main recipients of this foreign work force.³⁸² However, Chinese financing has benefited many African states including Ethiopia in that it brought modernity to local infrastructure, infrastructure that would be used by Chinese companies to extract African resources to fuel Chinese industries as well as export to African markets affordable Chinese modern technologies and other goods, lifting technical literacy across the African continent. So successful has this Chinese strategy been that many have suggested that China 'owns Africa'³⁸³ in a way not too dissimilar to former European empires.³⁸⁴ By 2018 Ethiopia was showing signs of debt distress, the PRC slowing the amount of financing available to the country. The Abiy government has opened negotiations to restructure its Chinese loan repayment burden.

But along the East African littoral Chinese developments in transport corridors is gaining international interest. Just as Chinese activities in Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Maldives have caused concern in Washington and allied capitals for their vastness in scale and speed of construction, those in East Africa are no less significant. As part of the multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative, USD 3.4 billion have been invested in the Addis Ababa-Djibouti rail line while another USD 25 billion is being invested in the LAPSSET Corridor linking South Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda which not only includes rail lines, but also a multi-laned highway, fibre optic cables, airports, an oil refinery and a 32-berth port in Lamu, Kenya.³⁸⁵ For American observers and from some quarters in Europe, opening up East Africa in this way for commercial use is considered the first step toward establishing a military presence. The logic being that once a country has established primacy in commerce, those interests will at some point need to be defended. It follows an established

³⁸² R Bhatia, 'The Race to be Africa's Best Partner', Gateway House, Indian Council on Global Relations, April 26, 2018, <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/chinese-investments-in-africa/>.

³⁸³ W Shepard, 'What China Is Really Up To In Africa', *Forbes*, October 3, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/wadeshepard/2019/10/03/what-china-is-really-up-to-in-africa/#3578b8835930>.

³⁸⁴ N Van Mead, 'China in Africa: Win-Win Development, or a New Colonialism?', *The Guardian*, July 31, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/jul/31/china-in-africa-win-win-development-or-a-new-colonialism>.

³⁸⁵ W Kabukuru, 'A Megaproject Rises in East Africa', *Africa Renewal*, August–November 2016, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/august-2016/megaproject-rises-east-africa>.

pattern of behaviour shown by European imperialism during the 17th-19th Centuries.³⁸⁶ However, Chinese investment shares few real parallels with the old European empires. It does share some closer similarity to Britain's 'indirect empire' in Latin America³⁸⁷ during the late 19th Century where the British exercised economic dominance but possessed no permanent military presence—constrained as they were by the Monroe Doctrine.

CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA

The 1823 Monroe Doctrine was the cornerstone of American international policy at a time when the US was in the early days of pushing into its 'western frontier'. It called for the non-interference of the US in the affairs of European powers. That the US would not interfere with existing European territories and dependencies in the Americas. That the Western Hemisphere, namely, all of the Americas would be closed to future colonisation. And finally, any attempt by a power to oppress or control a country in the Americas would be considered an act of war against the US.

The Monroe Doctrine has effectively kept US hegemony over the Americas into the early 21st Century. However, by the mid-2000s, relations had changed with the entry of China as a new economic force, challenging the US in its traditional domain. The countries of Latin America warmly welcomed Chinese businesses and engagement, and saw the Asian behemoth as a welcome partner in combatting chronic underdevelopment and poverty. It was believed that the US had become complacent in its relations with Latin America, effectively seeing the entire continent as the primary source of its problems with illicit narcotics and illegal immigration.³⁸⁸ This negative stereotype has been exacerbated under the Trump administration.

Relations with Mexico took a turn for the worse when newly elected President Trump tried to strong-arm Mexican president Peña Nieto for paying for Trump's anti-immigrant wall along the US-Mexican border. However, in an ironic twist, the election of Lopez Obrador to the Mexican presidency in 2018 saw an improvement in US-Mexican relations, as observed by *Politico*'s Sabrina Rodriguez:

López Obrador, a lifelong populist and face of Mexico's left, actually has a lot in common with Trump. They've built a relationship based on their respect for each other's nationalist, authoritarian tendencies and their ability to stay out of each other's way on domestic issues.

López Obrador's first trip abroad since becoming president of Mexico in December 2018, has been the target of widespread criticism in Mexico and among Democrats because of a perception that it benefits Trump politically and its timing as coronavirus cases continue to rise alarmingly in both countries... For Trump, "Mexico is a

³⁸⁶ O Antwi-Boateng, 'New World Order Neo-Colonialism: A Contextual Comparison of Contemporary China and European Colonization in Africa', *Journal of Pan-African Studies*, vol.10, no.2, 2017, pp.177-195.

³⁸⁷ J Gallagher & R Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *Economic History Review*, vol.6, no.1, 1953, pp.1-15.

³⁸⁸ For more on how the US sees Latin America, see: FB Pike, *The United States and Latin America: Myths and Stereotypes of Civilisation and Nature*, University of Texas Press, Austin Texas, 1992; HJ Wiarda, *American Foreign Policy Towards Latin America in the 80s and 90s: Issues and Controversies from Reagan to Bush*, New York University Press, New York, 1992.

political prop. He uses Mexico and Mexicans as a punching bag and I don't see why he won't continue to do that for the next four months," said Mark Feierstein, who served as the Obama administration's top national security adviser on Latin America. López Obrador has sent the signal to Trump that "you can bully Mexico, you can threaten Mexico, you can call Mexicans rapists and the Mexican president will be happy to get on a plane to meet with you anyway."³⁸⁹

While US relations with Mexico are clouded by complexity on inter-American trade, drugs and immigration, it has provided enough scope for China to become an economic force in that country, now Mexico's second largest trading partner (in terms of being a market for Mexican exports).³⁹⁰

China's footprint among the Latin American states facing the Pacific has grown. In Central America, while the US still hold sway as the region's primary trading partner, the PRC has taken the number two spot in both Guatemala and Cost Rica. This trend is further evidenced among South America's western littoral states where China is rated as Colombia's second largest trading partner, Ecuador's third largest while in Peru and Chile, the PRC has taken the number one spot in both countries. What is obvious from this trend is that while the US can still claim dominance as Latin America's principal partner, this position is no longer unchallenged. However, in the places where the People's Republic is making economic headway, it is not without its problems. Local concerns abound regarding the nature of Chinese industrial development such as its threat to biodiversity, overfishing and deforestation. Other unwelcomed aspects of the Chinese economic presence deals with its labour and commercial practices which is generating some local resistance.³⁹¹

China's economic footprint in Latin America has not as yet translated to a strategic footprint in the classical military sense except for the non-Pacific country of Venezuela where it supports Russian and Iranian efforts at buttressing the Maduro dictatorship. Between 2007-17, the CCP has been said to have loaned Caracas in excess of USD 60 billion at that time accounting for some 40 percent of total Chinese loans to Latin America.³⁹² However, it does affect the 'Pacific' Latin American country of Colombia³⁹³ and security along its eastern border with Venezuela, an area long known as a major hotbed of activity for narco-terrorist group the FARC.³⁹⁴ Maduro's political repression and economic mismanagement has driven many economically destitute Venezuelans out of the country and into refugee camps in neighbouring Colombia, causing an immigration crisis for Bogotá potentially destabilising Colombia's own economic capacity to cope with the influx. Here, China financing a highly

³⁸⁹ S Rodriguez, 'Why Mexico's President is Buddies with Trump Despite Years of Insults', *Politico*, July 7, 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/07/mexico-president-andres-manuel-lopez-obrador-friends-trump-350974>.

³⁹⁰ T Spoon, 'China-Mexico Relations Are Creating Mutual Opportunities', *Tecma*, <https://www.tecma.com/china-mexico-relations/>; WITS, 'Mexico Trade', <https://wits.worldbank.org/countrysnapshot/en/mex>.

³⁹¹ T Piccone, 'China and Latin America: A Pragmatic Embrace', *Brookings*, July 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/china-and-latin-america-a-pragmatic-embrace/>.

³⁹² C Guevara, 'China's Support for the Maduro Regime: Enduring or Fleeting', *New Atlanticist*, January 13, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/chinas-support-for-the-maduro-regime-enduring-or-fleeting/>.

³⁹³ Colombia is a bi-coastal country with its western part having a coast along the Pacific while its northern coast lies along the Caribbean Sea.

³⁹⁴ Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, an insurgency that began in 1964 and was brought to an end in 2016.

corrupt and oppressive regime has had the security effect of undermining the internal stability of a neighbouring state. Ironically one where it is the country's second largest trading partner.

Going against the trend set by most Latin American states in terms of being open to CCP trade and investment is landlocked Paraguay. This country of 7 million people has had relations with Taiwan since 1964 and has not sought to change relations in favour of the PRC. This has been the cause of some consternation among other pro-PRC states in Latin America, however, in July of 2020, Paraguay commemorated its 63rd anniversary of bilateral relations with Taipei.³⁹⁵ This has led to some commenting that Paraguay has deliberately positioned itself as a pawn in the US-PRC economic competition in Latin America, perhaps holding out for a better deal from Beijing. What cannot be said however is that Paraguay has no enduring interests in the Indo-Pacific region because of its land-locked status. Paraguay's involvement in a new Latin American bi-oceanic transport corridor linking the Atlantic and Pacific coasts will only consolidate existing Paraguayan trade and political ties to the Indo-Pacific, especially as more Chinese pressure is placed on Taiwan and those few states still recognising its autonomy from the mainland.

POLAR COMPETITION

In the North Pacific lies the Bering Sea. This narrow maritime passage between the Russian Federation and the US state of Alaska is growing in geopolitical importance as international competition for access to Arctic oil and gas intensifies. Global warming has altered the region's climate, diminishing its permanent ice cap to the point where the Arctic may be ice-free by around 2050. This new geography will allow countries with the capacity to exploit this region's marine and undersea resources, long buried under massive icesheets. Also, an ice-free Arctic will permit new shipping routes between the Americas to Europe and Russia. While Russia, with the longest Arctic coastline has rapidly established itself as an early leader in this economic and strategic competition, going so far as planting a flag at the bottom of the geographic centre of the Arctic Sea to demonstrate Russian regional dominance.³⁹⁶

Meanwhile, Canada's strategic priority as an Indo-Pacific country is to secure its own Arctic interests along its own northern approaches. Canada has the second longest Arctic coastline and sees Moscow's activities, including its redeployment of military forces along its Arctic littoral as threatening. The Trump administration's failed 2019 diplomatic overture to Denmark to purchase Greenland, to secure the US' own stake in the Arctic, demonstrates that the scramble for the Arctic is becoming more intense.³⁹⁷

But in a surprising twist to this competition, the People's Republic of China has declared that it too has an interest in the Arctic, in 2018 Beijing released its Arctic policy describing itself as a 'near Arctic state'. Writing for *Defence News*, Swee Koh argued:

³⁹⁵ CT Cheng, 'Paraguay Reiterates "Permanent Support" for Taiwan in Global Organizations', *Taiwan News*, July 13, 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3965677>.

³⁹⁶ CJ Chivers, 'Russians Plant Flag on the Arctic Seabed', *The New York Times*, August 3, 2007, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/03/world/europe/03arctic.html>.

³⁹⁷ P Dallison & S Cammarata, 'US Makes Greenland Return After Trump's Failed Attempt to Buy It', *Politico*, June 10, 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/us-makes-greenland-return-after-trump-attempt-to-buy-it-us-consulate/>.

China also believes that, in line with international legal treaties—especially the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Spitsbergen Treaty—it enjoys such rights as scientific research, freedom of navigation, and overflight, fishery, cable-laying and resource development in the Arctic high seas.³⁹⁸

Koh continues:

Russia envisaged a network of port terminals and logistics centers along the route, which would therefore require massive investments beyond what Moscow's limited coffers can offer. In this respect, China's Belt and Road Initiative becomes an attractive proposition when it comes to the promise of major funding for infrastructure development, with Russian President Vladimir Putin seeking the inclusion of the NSR [Northern Sea Route] as part of China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road under the "Polar Silk Road" notion.³⁹⁹

However, in recent months Sino-Russian relations have had a turn for the worse. The Chinese-Indian melee in the Ladakh Line of Actual Control (LAC) saw the Kremlin, key arms supplier to both the PRC and India give priority to India over China.⁴⁰⁰ How this will affect other aspects of Sino-Russian cooperation including in the economic domain is uncertain. Russia's ambitions in remaining a relevant world power is to avoid being cast as China's junior partner. In recent years, much has been said of the closeness of relations between Moscow and Beijing, both often forming an effective diplomatic bloc to stymie American strategic interests. However, Russia fears China's unconstrained economic growth. It also fears that over time, demographic realities such as Russia's sparse and declining population in Siberia coupled to a growing Chinese population and economic interests in this part of Russia's Far East, will eventually see Moscow's loss of sovereignty of this territory to China.

In the Southern Ocean, the other polar geopolitical prize is Antarctica. Currently the continent's vast distance from the world's denser populations and areas of strategic contention has seen it remain a place largely at peace, reserved for international scientific exploration. Global warming is having an effect in Antarctica, but it is warming more slowly than the Greenland and Arctic icesheets. Exploitation of Southern Ocean resources is limited to Japanese whaling⁴⁰¹ and international fishing fleets. Under the 1961 Antarctic Treaty System there are seven claimant states, including Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Chile,⁴⁰² France, and Norway, but just as the CCP entered the scramble for the Arctic, in 2014 Chinese

³⁹⁸ SLC Koh, 'China's Strategic Interest in the Arctic Goes Beyond Economics', *Defence News*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/05/11/chinas-strategic-interest-in-the-arctic-goes-beyond-economics/>.

³⁹⁹ Ibid. In the article 'seeking the inclusion' is hyperlinked to the following source: The Barents Observer, 'Putin Steps Up Talks with Beijing Over Arctic Shipping', *The Moscow Times*, April 30, 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/04/30/putin-steps-up-talks-with-beijing-over-arctic-shipping-a65436>.

⁴⁰⁰ E Tamkin, 'Why India and Russian Are Going to Stay Friends', *Foreign Policy*, July 8, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/08/russia-india-relations/>.

⁴⁰¹ A long-term and only significant problem between anti-whaling Australia and pro-whaling Japan.

⁴⁰² For more information on this from a Chilean perspective, see: D Rogers, A Foxall & M Henderson, 'Chile and the Southern Hemisphere: Antarctica in Transition', AthenaLab (Santiago, Chile) and The Henry Jackson Society (London, UK), 2020, <https://athenalab.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Chile-and-southern-hemisphere-Antarctic-in-transition-ENG.pdf>. For the Treaty, see: *The Antarctic Treaty*, opened for signature December 1, 1959, 402 UNTS 71 (entered into force June 23, 1961), <https://treaties.un.org/pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=0800000280136dbc>.

premier Xi Jinping outlined his country's ambition to become a polar 'great power.'⁴⁰³ For now, at least, it seems that China's interests in the Antarctic remain in keeping with those of the ATS signatory states, reserving the continent for peaceful scientific exploration. Considering the continent's hostile environment for human habitation, this is unlikely to change in the near-term.

For Australia, however, as the country with the largest claim to Antarctic territory, periodic unilateral or collaborative military training in the southern polar environment could prove a useful adjunct to future Antarctic contingencies and for possible deployment to the Arctic should alliance commitments necessitate an Australian presence there.

⁴⁰³ AM Brady, 'China's Undeclared Foreign Policy at the Poles', *The Interpreter*, May 30, 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/china-undeclared-foreign-policy-poles>.

10 | COVID-19: STRATEGIC ASSESSMENTS AND IMPLICATIONS

David James Olney

At the time of writing, our world is still in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since February of this year panic has risen, then fallen slightly, and is now on the rise again. The global media chatter incessantly about a second wave, while epidemiologists speak calmly about the fact that we are still in an early phase of the first wave. As the pandemic is global, it is difficult to assess its implications in specific regional terms, so key themes will be given preference over geographical proximity in this section of our report. What happens next, and where we go from there, is open to emotional speculation and/or educated assessment. In short, no one knows what happens next and everyone is responsible for doing their part to minimise the on-going impact of COVID-19 on our species. Whether the world will return to nearly normal in one years' time, or whether we will struggle to create a new normal in a few years' time, or whether our species will lose track of time as it is devastated by a mutated form of COVID-19, is yet to play-out. In order to avoid wish-fulfillment, or apocalyptic vision, this section will consider what we can learn from the strategic implications of COVID-19 so far, what strategic steps states can take to mitigate what might be coming, and what it means to be strategic in the face of the genuinely dangerous and unknown.

Since February 2020, the world has witnessed more intensive and collaborative medical and scientific research than at any point in recorded history. Academic researchers are working together rather than competing with each other over grant opportunities, pharmaceutical companies are doing scientific research before they have done their market research, and the pace at which peer-reviewed periodicals are getting new information out to other experts has increased exponentially. The common threat of COVID-19 has motivated (and temporarily normalised) a level of common purpose that the world has not seen since Britain and its Empire stood alone against Nazi Germany during the early, dark days of World War II. Fascism was a threat to whether and how people lived during World War II, and COVID-19 is currently a threat to how and whether we live in 2020. Democracies shone brightly during World War II, because, once they realised it was a question of adapt or be destroyed, they were very good at moving talent and resources to where they were needed, and we have to hope that we can once again rise to such high standards of courage, creativity, and commitment. The biggest advantage we have in 2020 is that we know that the 'Greatest

Generation'⁴⁰⁴ overcame existential threat, and all we need do is live up to the legacy they forged for us with their youth and their blood.

What we know about COVID-19 is that, at present, it disproportionately affects older people and those people with significant co-morbidities. Whether, in the face of the virus, it is worse to be a very healthy seventy-five-year-old, or an obese twenty-year-old with high-blood-pressure, and type 2 diabetes, is a grim question for the medical statisticians to assess as more data becomes available. In either case, the quality and availability of health care is going to be critical for individuals in the short term, and for the effective functioning of societies and states in the longer term. Health care costs have become progressively higher for all societies, with the burden now too high for many people to personally bear, and the expectation for states to comprehensively fund health care to maintain Societal Security will require a rethink of economic Conventional Wisdom.

Australia has the medical personnel to provide an appropriate level of care, but does not have the manufacturing base to produce the necessary drugs and medical equipment if the global supply chain is shattered. At the very least, Australia requires a significant stockpile of drugs and medical equipment, and, preferably, the ongoing Sovereign Capability to make what we need as and when we need it. If neither of these options become politically acceptable, then Australia should at least have multiple suppliers (from different countries) for each drug and piece of medical equipment, so the risk of future international lockdowns and disruptions to transport can be distributed and mitigated. Creating a multi-aligned regional network for medical production and distribution would be a significant strategic move for Australia, because it would provide a good way to enhance trust between states and to support small states, who find it difficult to make, or gain access to, highly sought after drugs and equipment.

From a defence perspective, COVID-19 has already thrown up some interesting instances with strategic implications. Early in the pandemic a United States aircraft carrier anchored at Guam, the USS Theodore Roosevelt, suffered a major outbreak of COVID-19, in response to which the captain of the ship, Captain Brett Crozier, publicly acknowledged the diminished operational readiness of his crew and vessel. Early as it was in the pandemic, such a situation, and public acknowledgement of the situation, was probably not surprising. COVID-19 certainly has the ability to dramatically reduce the operational readiness of any and all aspects of defence forces across the world, but how much of a crisis COVID-19 can cause defence forces whose personnel are generally younger and healthier than most populations, will have to be continually assessed.

At present, we should expect younger and healthier defence personnel to recover from COVID-19 more quickly than the general population, particularly in OECD countries with older populations who suffer higher levels of co-morbidities. If, however, recent reporting of brain-fog, excessive tiredness, and ongoing organ dysfunction occurring for months after the initial period of COVID-19 infection continue, then we will have to assume that disruptions to operational readiness may increase over time, as the cumulative effects of adverse health outcomes expand to disrupt individual units and entire formations. In addition, we should assume that re-supply of Defence equipment from overseas can and will be interrupted, requiring states like Australia to consolidate a Sovereign Capability for defence production higher than would have been expected before the pandemic. An increased capability to

⁴⁰⁴ T Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation*, Audiobook Edition, 2001.

produce high quality and high-tech defence equipment would serve Australia well, as advanced manufacturing capabilities could be re-tasked as needed, if international trade and transport breakdown entirely later in the pandemic.

In terms of kinetic operations, during July 2020, Indian and Chinese forces skirmished over their disputed border in Ladakh, and the encounter can best be described as a medieval melee, with reports of PLA soldiers wielding iron clubs bristling with spikes.⁴⁰⁵ Whether this was just another eruption of tension on the Sino-Indian border, or a deliberate probe by the PLA to test the readiness of the Indian military, is not known. As China went into hard lock-down very early in the pandemic, long before India did anything similar, it is reasonable to assume that the PLA was probing to see if COVID-19 would provide a strategic opportunity for forces who had a few weeks advantage in terms of medical advice and public health activities. It should be remembered that the Spanish Flu raged its way across the Western Front in 1918, and that even though it devastated individual units, it did not markedly reduce the intensity of the combat during the final months of the conflict. COVID-19 has most definitely caused a social and economic crisis, and may well provide a strategic opportunity for states who are willing to use the crisis as a cover for provocative action.

Over the last few months, Defence personnel have been tasked with supporting public health operations across the world, drawing defence capabilities away from their conventional roles toward maintaining Societal Security. This is a good use of capabilities, assuming that no competitor state takes advantage of COVID-19 to probe and seize opportunities, and if intentional exposure to the public does not reduce operational readiness to a dangerously low level.

If health crises, public emergencies, and natural disasters all over the world are going to take up more of states' real and financial resources, then decisions are going to have to be made about reallocating resources toward increasingly non-military threats, or developing multi-role defence forces that can surge in whatever direction is required. While some states are likely to reduce their defence budgets in favour of emergency response capabilities, and other states may choose to pull resources from across their budgets, so that they can maintain their defence spending while also increasing their emergency response capabilities, another option is to work toward establishing multi-role defence forces. Columbia and Chile have already taken several steps in this direction, working to ensure that a significant proportion of their defence personnel have both a war-fighting role and a public emergency role. Critics may well argue that such multi-role policies will reduce the warfighting capability of defence forces, but, unless near-peer conflict is likely, for many states having more highly capable and disciplined personnel (who can be surged to immediately respond to a crisis) is the best of the available options. For Australia, which has utilised ADF personnel as part of its response to bushfires, floods, and COVID-19 during the last year, it is a question of either continuing to over-rely on a small part of the ADF to support civilian operations, or to train and equip more of the ADF to take on the difficult roles that society struggles to fill during crises. In the COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 worlds, high unemployment is going to be a major problem, and a career in defence is likely to be more appealing to under-employed young people if they can see an immediate social value beyond warfighting.

⁴⁰⁵ J Wu & SL Myers, 'Battle in the Himalayas: China and India Are Locked in a Tense, Deadly Struggle for Advantage on Their Disputed Mountain Border', *The New York Times*, July 18, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/18/world/asia/china-india-border-conflict.html>.

For the COVID-19 pandemic to be overcome in a year's time will require at least one effective and widely available vaccine, and for the virus not to mutate sufficiently so that said vaccine loses its efficacy. As more data becomes available, it seems possible that we will have an effective COVID-19 vaccine by this time next year. However, based on how quickly coronaviruses tend to mutate, and how regularly the influenza vaccine must be updated, it is probable that any vaccine will only provide a limited window of coverage. Assuming the best-case scenario, by late 2021 humanity will be trying to work out how to immunise the entire population of the planet while dealing with the aftermath of the economic crisis. The cost of a global immunisation program will most likely be a smaller hurdle than the logistics and ethics of needing to jab every person, willing or not, on Earth.

If things are back to normal by late 2021, then we can expect economic austerity to have been implemented across most of the world, which will retard any economic recovery even more than it did after the Global Financial Crisis.⁴⁰⁶ Nearly fifty years of Neo-Liberal economics during good times and Reactionary Keynesianism after crashes has left the global economy in a fragile and poorly managed state.⁴⁰⁷ It is time to overcome the bipolar approach of our economic Conventional Wisdom, else the world will still be in an economic recession/depression when immediate action is required to mitigate the next, inevitable global crisis.

If it is going to take at least a few years to overcome the pandemic, then we have a lot more social and economic upheaval in front of us. Until now, democracies have largely relied on good will to get their citizens to behave in an appropriate way, and authoritarian states have relied on their normal threats of harsh punishment. As time passes, what is becoming clear though, is that on-going fear and uncertainty are adversely affecting the behaviour of populations in democracies. It is now normal to hear of people in democracies refusing to wear a mask, not staying at home when they are meant to be self-isolating, and not maintaining physical distancing when out in public. Though these behaviours are disappointing, they are not at all surprising, as people do what they have been habituated to do, and, within democracies, the majority of people have not been habituated to maintaining high public-hygiene standards while experiencing heightened levels of fear and anxiety.

People in authoritarian states have spent their entire lives being habituated to following (or very carefully flouting) directions, less they suffer harsh and arbitrary punishments for not being compliant. Democracies neither want to behave in this way, nor will democratic citizens respond well to this sort of treatment. As COVID-19 is going to be a part of our lives for the next few years, then democracies need to ensure that their citizens learn how to maintain high public-hygiene standards while feeling anxious and afraid. The habits of good public-hygiene will have to be normalised through example, explanation, repetition, and the social pressure to conform to the group we care about. Richard Thaler and Cass R Sunstein have written about getting people to do the right thing in their book, *Nudge*,⁴⁰⁸ in which they make a powerful argument for putting the best option right in front of people, so it is the easiest thing to do. Their research confirms that punitive measures make for poor pedagogical outcomes, and that good behaviour needs to be the easiest choice. Democratic societies are

⁴⁰⁶ M Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea*, Audible Studios, Audiobook Edition, 2014.

⁴⁰⁷ ZD Carter, *The Price of Peace: Money, Democracy, and the Life of John Maynard Keynes*, Random House Audio, Audiobook Edition, 2020.

⁴⁰⁸ RH Thaler & CR Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, Gildan Media, Audiobook Edition, 2009.

no longer used to being told what to do and, instead, need to be treated with respect as they are taught what to do.

It is salient to remember that the Greatest Generation learned a lot of hard lessons during the Great Depression, before they overcame existential threat and created the peace we still enjoy. Important lessons can, indeed, be learned during extreme times, but learning such lessons will take more time and repetition as long as the fear and anxiety of an existential threat are at the front of people's minds

During World War II, hierarchical institutions did not start placing cognitively adaptable personnel in positions of authority, or taking creative and risky decisions, until it was clear that they were failing, and the future was bleak. Read any of Damien Lewis's books about the creation and exploits of British Special Operations forces during World War II⁴⁰⁹ and you will see that they were perceived as desperate measures for desperate times. Despite the remarkable successes of the British SAS and SOE during the war, both organisations were disbanded within months of the end of World War II. Historically, hierarchical institutions managed by cognitively conservative individuals, who have been successfully trained and promoted within the orthodoxy of a cohesive Strategic Culture, struggle to embrace the need for radical transformation except when failure has become the most likely outcome.

For example, in Baghdad, in 2004, it was the likelihood of impending failure that convinced the United States military to afford Stan McChrystal, a cognitively adaptable thinker and commander, the opportunity to dramatically alter how Special Operations forces undertook their mission to counter the insurgency in Iraq. Like during World War II, cognitive adaptability and creativity⁴¹⁰ were not countenanced until military Conventional Wisdom had shown itself to be inadequate to the challenge. After McChrystal's retirement from the United States Army, his ideas were adapted from the world of Special Operations and enthusiastically embraced by the corporate world,⁴¹¹ within which the shocks and failures of the GFC motivated a genuine need and appetite for transformation. Despite the modern world's obsession with the idea of innovation, consequential change more often than not comes after staring directly into the face of failure.

If COVID-19 begins to mutate in a way that increases the mortality of the infection, or in a way that makes developing a vaccine improbable, then all bets are off concerning how Humanity will respond to an increasingly dire situation. However, what we do know from historical experience is that Humans have overcome existential threats when they have recognised and transcended the limitations of cognitively conservative leaders and hierarchical institutions. The Greatest Generation showed us what is possible, and medical researchers have shown us that commitment, courage, and creativity are still alive and well in 2020. What we need to do now is to put more cognitively adaptable people into significant positions, and to free our hierarchical institutions to take creative risks and opportunities, so that we can live up to our past and our potential.

⁴⁰⁹ For details, see: D Lewis, 'Military', http://damienlewis.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=35&Itemid=65.

⁴¹⁰ M Danahy, 'The Future of Strategic Military Leadership—TEDxWestPoint', posted February 24, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=207hZ1ZiWeM>.

⁴¹¹ C Fussell & C Goodyear, *One Mission: How Leaders Build a Team of Teams*, Macmillan, Kindle Edition, 2017.

11 | INSIGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS FROM THE OCTOBER 2019/FEBRUARY 2020 CANBERRA RESEARCH TRIPS

David James Olney

In late October 2019 and late February 2020 Dr. John Bruni and Mr. David Olney from SAGE International Australia undertook a wide-ranging series of research interviews with Diplomats from across (and with interests in) the Indo-Pacific region who were posted to Canberra. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insights into how different states define and perceive the region, how they envision the future of the region, how they would prefer to participate in the region, what regional problems concern them, and how they relate to regional and global powers. The aim of this section of our report is to collate these observations, expand on these insights, and explore how Australia can most effectively partner with other states to make the most of the available opportunities in the Indo-Pacific.

As the interviews that provide the basis for this section were undertaken in accordance with the Chatham House Rule, perspectives and observations discussed will not be attributed to any particular individual or institution. The Chatham House Rule states that, “When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.”⁴¹² Consequently, perspectives and observations that are discussed in this chapter are those that emerged repeatedly during the research interviews, and the order in which they are discussed does not indicate the number of times that any of them were discussed, but, instead, reflects where they best fit in a comprehensive and cohesive argument.

The issues discussed in this section include: how is the Indo-Pacific defined, how do small and medium states get what they need and want, the relevance of multi-alignment, the G7+ association of states, the role of social capital, increasing inclusion, which comprehensive strategies are likely to shape the region’s future, continuity between words and deeds, communications, resistance to change, Smart Power, Smart Power and the Australian Defence Force, the strategic value of education, agriculture and natural resource management, and cyber security.

⁴¹² Chatham House, ‘Chatham House Rule’, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/chatham-house-rule>.

Defining the boundaries of the Indo-Pacific is not an easy task. In geographical terms, it could be argued that there are reasonably clear boundaries to the region, but that these boundaries may have to be extended as far as the Antarctic and Arctic as the scramble for resources draws states into fresh competition in frigid environments. From a historical perspective, it could be argued that over centuries major powers have competed with each other over different portions of the region, defining territory in terms that suited their political aims. From a political perspective, the Indo-Pacific is a new and contested concept that has frequently been used in a deliberately ambiguous and/or flexible manner, in order to provide states with the most advantageous hedging strategies. What characterises discussion of the Indo-Pacific concept since 2010 is that it is a very large geographical region, in which it is hoped that there will be free and open trade, increasing rule of law demonstrated through adherence to the international rules based order, in which tensions should ideally be ameliorated through dialogue within and between regional and global multi-lateral institutions.⁴¹³

Which great power will have the most influence in the region, willingly bear the cost of enhancing security, actively pivot resources toward the economic and general development needs of the region, and most effectively gain the support of small and medium states is, of course, contested. The states within the region both need and want increased physical development, such as direct aid, new infrastructure, and economic investment, along with enhanced behavioural frameworks, such as regional multi-lateral bodies, trade agreements, and treaties. Acemoglu and Robinson's work on the benefits of inclusive institutions and effective rule of law⁴¹⁴ provide a good conceptual foundation from which to assess what enhanced political, legal, and ethical aspects of behavioural frameworks could look and function like in the Indo-Pacific.

As a consequence of the ambiguous and flexible nature of the Indo-Pacific concept, Australia finds itself in the situation of having both enough real and diplomatic resources at its disposal to shape aspects of the Indo-Pacific vision in accordance with some of its own aspirations and interests, as well as having to assess and respond to major power competition in the region. Every medium and small state in the region is having to decide how many comprehensive strategies it needs, or wants, to engage with, what level of resources it will invest in each of them, and how it will balance these activities with continuing to maintain its own interests, while working to attain its own aspirational goals. In discussions of very large strategies concerned with very large regions, it is easy to under-appreciate how medium and small states find ways to achieve their preferred relationships and outcomes beneath and within these overarching strategies. Ambiguity does not just provide flexibility for major powers: it also provides medium and small states with room to manoeuvre, if they have the motivation and dexterity to do so.

⁴¹³ M Auslin, 'Security in the Indo-Pacific Commons: Toward a Regional Strategy', AEI Paper & Studies, 2010; M Green, 'Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy as Grand Strategy', *We Are Tomodachi*, no.29, 2018, pp.28-29; R Medcalf, 'In Defence of the Indo-Pacific: Australia's New Strategic Map', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol.68, no.4, 2014, pp.470-483; R Medcalf, 'Reimagining Asia: From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific', in G Rozman & JC Liow (eds), *International Relations and Asia's Southern Tier*, Springer, Singapore, 2018, pp.9-28; A Palit & S Sano, 'The United States' Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy: Challenges for India and Japan', *Institute of South Asian Studies*, no.524, 2018, pp.1-6; S Thankachan, 'Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy": Reality Before the Rhetoric?', *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*, vol.13, no.2, 2017, pp.84-91.

⁴¹⁴ D Acemoglu & JA Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*, Random House, Audiobook Edition, 2012; D Acemoglu & JA Robinson, *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty*, Penguin Audio, Audiobook Edition, 2019.

During the research interviews it became evident that most medium and small states in the region have a sophisticated sense of what they would like to achieve, along with a flexible perspective on how to achieve it, and that they look for points of alignment with states and comprehensive strategies where possible, but, if at all possible, without surrendering their independent preferences. They will partner with another state to achieve a shared goal, but, if possible, not at the expense of also being able to partner with other states to achieve other goals. A strategy very reminiscent of Prof. Purnendra Jain's observation of India's "strategic autonomy" position. Old alliances still provide a degree of stability, but, as Ian Bremmer argues, states will choose to work with new partners who have a shared goal and more motivation and resources to achieve it.⁴¹⁵ Consequently, many states in the region are likely to pivot away from traditional partners to extend their network and achieve new goals, and Australia could choose to be one of the states that they pivot toward. An idea to which we will return to later.

Each small and medium state has its own way of explaining and justifying how it partners with different states at the same time, to meet its immediate needs and progress its long-term goals. Across the spectrum of areas of national interest, including natural resource management, economic development, Human Security, Societal Security, and regional political interconnectedness, each state may have a different partner that it works with to achieve its goals in each area. This may seem messy and chaotic at first glance, particularly if a state was very obviously in one camp during the Cold War, or under the influence of one powerful state prior to decolonisation, but having multiple partnerships to achieve different ends is not unusual in historical terms. What is more unusual is a state like Australia, which has had very long-term partnerships with powerful states that have contributed to comprehensive prosperity and security over an extended period of time.

Australia was positioned squarely within the British Empire until World War II, and has been firmly situated within the United States' orbit since then, so Australia's partnerships have been, more often than not, consistent and clearly defined. Australia's experience of balancing interests and partners began to evolve as Japan became a major trading partner during the Cold War, and the pace of change has increased since China became Australia's major trading partner. One need only look at the mainstream Australian media over the previous five years to see how unfamiliar Australia is with having to balance different major power partners in critical areas of national interest. Australia is accustomed to the United States being its major security partner, but is having to become accustomed to how we maintain this relationship while also maintaining an effective economic relationship with China. So much of the media coverage of this issue is concerned with reducing tension, or finding the most comfortable balance, neither of which is necessarily possible. The United States and China are competitors who possess divergent views of how the world should develop over the short and medium term, and Australia needs to be partnered with both states to maintain its security and prosperity. This situation may be paradoxical, and friction is inevitable, but Australia has no choice other than to become as adept as it can at managing its own particular slice of Durable Disorder.

Paradoxical partnerships might be a relatively new thing for Australia, but they have been the norm for many small and medium states across the Indo-Pacific for decades. As the level of competition between the United States and China shows no sign of abating, and is likely to increase as a consequence of the economic turmoil unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic,

⁴¹⁵ I Bremmer, *Every Nation for Itself: Winners and Losers in a G-Zero World*, Penguin, Kindle Edition, 2012.

most states need a cohesive way of articulating and managing different partnerships while dealing with their paradoxical consequences. India's transition from a policy of non-alignment to a policy of multi-alignment during Prime Minister Modi's administration⁴¹⁶ provides a good example of a way to manage this reality.

As a non-aligned state India had to be particularly cautious about which states it partnered with in what areas, which reduced its ability to consistently achieve its preferred outcomes. Non-alignment was meant to provide a guarantee of independence, but, in reality, limited India's ability to create and take opportunities to the extent one might expect from a regional power. India's recent multi-alignment approach means that it works to establish the most beneficial partnership it can in an area of national interest, and balances this decision with the partnerships it makes to achieve other goals in different areas of national interest. Through its multi-alignment policy, India aims to achieve an overall balance between attaining its preferred outcomes and maintaining its preferred partnerships with as many states as are willing and beneficial. There may be points of tension between India's partners over different issues, but these issues ideally exist outside of the specific terms of each partnership. India's version of multi-alignment is particular to its own experiences and aims, but its emphasis on accepting other states exceptionalism and working toward peaceful coexistence are representative of how many states are seeking to balance the paradox of partners who are in competition with each other. In an era of Durable Disorder, having more partners to potentially work with means that a state is more likely to be able to quickly create a collaborative response to a current problem with a state that it is already accustomed to partnering with. Under the common threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, more states will need each other's support, so having a wide-ranging set of partners to work with is valuable now and into the future. Even if socialisation between states begins on a small scale and at a low level, building and maintaining trust has high value during disruptive and destructive circumstances.

The G7+ association (with its 20 current member states) provides a salient example of how states can come together with new partners to address their shared concerns. The G7+ association is made up of states that have been (or still are) affected by violence, who are striving to overcome their fragility by sharing ideas, experiences, and expertise with each other on the path toward stability and development.⁴¹⁷ Member states do not participate in the G7+ instead of being involved with other states and organisations: they participate in addition to all of the other relationships that they are engaged in, making it a clear example of the normalisation of multi-alignment. Through the G7+ association, member states have created a platform through which to strengthen their combined voices on the international stage.

⁴¹⁶ PS Raghavan, 'The Making of India's Foreign Policy: From Non-Alignment to Multi-Alignment', *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, vol.12, no.4, 2017, pp.326-341; T Wojciewski, 'India's Vision of World Order: Multi-Alignment, Exceptionalism and Peaceful Co-Existence', *Global Affairs*, vol.3, no. 2, 2017, pp.111-123.

⁴¹⁷ H Da Costa, 'G7+ and the New Deal: Country-Led and Country-Owned Initiatives: A Perspective from Timor-Leste', *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, vol.7, no.2, 2012, pp.96-102; G7+ Foundation, 'Breaking the Mould of Business as Usual, the g7+ is Changing the Approach to Development in Conflict Affected and Fragile Countries', <http://www.g7plusfoundation.org/#history>; D Garrasi, 'New Models of Development Cooperation: The G7+ and Fragile-to-Fragile Cooperation', United Nations University, 2015, https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:3320/unu_cpr_g7_plus.pdf; E Pires, 'Building Peaceful States Against All Odds: The G7+ Leads the Way', USAID Frontiers in Development, June 11, 2012, <https://blog.usaid.gov/2012/06/building-peaceful-states-against-all-odds-the-g7-leads-the-way/>; J Pospisil, 'Unsharing Sovereignty: G7+ and the Politics of International Statebuilding', *International Affairs*, vol.93, no.6, 2017, pp.1417-1434; V Wyeth, 'Knights in Fragile Armor: The Rise of the "G7+"', *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, vol.18, no.1, 2012, pp.7-12.

Rather than remaining as individuals, who can only make a case about their particular experiences and preferences, the member states have developed a comprehensive communication strategy, so that the issues that affect them can be articulated and understood across different regions and within diverse organisations. In order to have the data that international organisations require to cohesively explain issues and facilitate development, member states of the association have created the G7+ Foundation. “The g7+ Foundation helps build research and analytical capacity, and supports the g7+ Secretariat in advocating the voice of the g7+ membership.”⁴¹⁸ The G7+ Foundation describes its purpose being “practical research about us, by us, for us.”⁴¹⁹ The significance of small and fragile states being able to contribute to comprehensive studies and reports for themselves, and for the rest of the international community, should not be under-estimated. Even if, as is so often said, knowledge is power, in this case knowledge is a means by which to reduce powerlessness and increase inclusion.

As the G7+ Foundation progressively undertakes more research about its members’ experiences, member states will gain a cohesive and consistent body of literature to employ when making representations to regional organisations, global organisations, regional powers, and great powers. Consequently, a more comprehensive and representative dialogue about Human Security, Societal Security, and development will emerge over time, enriching debates concerned with creating visions and choosing between strategies. For a country like Australia, working out what developing states need and why they want it will become more efficient, because more of the data will already be available in a form that facilitates rapid and consequential engagement. The risk of being accused of talking at, not with, the developing world, or not listening to them, will be reduced as the G7+ Foundation makes more clear and cohesive insights available to facilitate partnerships across the international community.

During the research interviews it became apparent how strong a commitment the vast majority of small and medium states have to multilateralism. Their commitments are consistently characterised by a desire for increased socialisation, mutual recognition, mutual understanding, and mutual aid and development. From a Social Capital perspective,⁴²⁰ states are focused on bridging rather than bonding Social Capital, which they demonstrate by accommodating cultural and political differences within partnerships as they pursue shared goals. While bonding Social Capital is concerned with reinforcing ties between broadly similar societies with shared experiences, bridging Social Capital is concerned with confidently engaging with difference in pursuit of mutual understanding to elucidate common ground and purpose. In the language of India’s multi-alignment policy, they have high acceptance of exceptionalism, and a shared commitment to peaceful coexistence.

Ideally, the vast majority of small and medium states want to be meaningfully engaged in a combination of local regional organisations, broader regional organisations, and global organisations, while simultaneously building and maintaining multi-aligned partnerships within a networked international community. The real limits to achieving such a high level of connectedness tend to be the availability of resources, which frequently have to be directed

⁴¹⁸ G7+ Foundation, ‘Breaking the Mould of Business as Usual.’

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ DP Aldrich & MA Meyer, ‘Social Capital and Community Resilience’, *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol.59, no.2, 2015, pp.254-269; F Fukuyama, ‘Social Capital and Development: The Coming Agenda’, *SAIS Review*, vol.22, no.1, 2002, pp.23-37; R Putnam, ‘Social Capital: Measurement and Consequences’, *Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, vol.2, no.1, 2001, pp.41-51.

toward nation building before they can be reallocated toward increasing international connectedness, and the availability and willingness of regional and great powers to build partnerships within multi-aligned and omnidirectional networks. At the very least, and with the moderate resources it has available, Australia should continue to do as much as it can to facilitate the effective functioning of organisations at all levels, as well as contributing to the development of a multi-aligned environment in which cross-cutting ties and collaborative action become normalised, dynamic forces for stability and development.

For multi-aligned partnerships and networks to deliver on their potential, it is important that partner states do more than just accept each other's exceptionalism. Having shared aspirational goals is important, but agreeing on a common minimal working standard is vital. It is very easy for developed countries to assume that international best practice should be the default standard for states who wish to work together, but this requires a level of resources and experience that can easily prove to be exclusionary for small and fragile states. Consequently, a clear distinction should be drawn between aspirational behaviour, best practice, accustomed behaviour, and a minimal working standard of behaviour, which can underpin collaborative action. This is not to say that the minimal working standard of behaviour should be allowed to be so low that it does not meet political, legal, and ethical standards within behavioural frameworks, but that it should always be remembered that broad and timely inclusivity provides the most expedient path toward aspirational ideals. Rushing toward currently unattainable high standards risks excluding small and fragile states, who will then find it even harder to achieve their preferred level of interconnectedness and interdependent development, if they fall further behind the international community's behavioural norms.

While small and medium states are working to balance their desire for positive outcomes and effective partnerships, they are also having to assess the opportunities and opportunity costs of engaging with the comprehensive strategies that have been put forward to develop the Indo-Pacific. At present, there are three comprehensive strategies in contention to shape the vision and future of the Indo-Pacific region: the Belt and Road Initiative, the Blue Dot Network, and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The first two of these are global in scope, so any development within the Indo-Pacific has to be contextualised in relation to the broader global aims of the strategy. Of the three, only the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy is conceptualised for and within the Indo-Pacific as a discrete region. These three comprehensive strategies combine approaches toward physical development and behavioural frameworks in different ways, and if medium and small states can manage to pick and choose between them, then there is a very good chance of achieving broadly defined and stable development across the region. Whether increasing physical development and behavioural frameworks can and should be undertaken simultaneously is a large part of what differentiates these three comprehensive strategies.

In regards to the Belt and Road initiative, it is important to remember that Beijing initially called the project One Belt, One Road, as if there was only one vision and one choice for potential partner states. China rebranded One Belt, One Road when sufficient critics of the strategy began to describe it as being more of an ultimatum rather than an inclusive vision for a shared transregional future.⁴²¹ The Belt and Road Initiative extends far beyond the Indo-Pacific, and in doing so it aims to cohesively connect parts of the region to the rest of the

⁴²¹ JE Hillman, 'China's Belt and Road Is Full of Holes', Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), September 4, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-belt-and-road-full-holes>.

world. The primary focus of the Belt and Road Initiative is to build global infrastructure and increase global economic activity as quickly as possible, providing a streamlined hub and spoke model to move natural resources toward China and Chinese goods out to the world—at a similar pace on a massive scale. So far, the Belt and Road Initiative has been focused on developing physical infrastructure,⁴²² which makes more activity possible, rather than on the political, legal, and ethical behavioural frameworks that provide the foundations for inclusive global institutions and rule of law. As physical development is occurring without concurrent enhancement of behavioural frameworks, it is unclear how future tensions and issues between Belt and Road Initiative partners will be addressed, other than through growing Chinese economic and/or military pressure. It is nice to imagine that trading partners will find equilibrium, creating a congenial and cohesive interdependent community, but there is no reason to assume that this will be the case while economic competition is so intense and states have markedly different capacities to resist influence and negotiate terms with each other. At best, the Belt and Road Initiative represents a Chinese centred hub and spoke model, which neither encourages, nor supports, an omnidirectional trade network, or inclusive behavioural frameworks to increase rule of law. The Belt and Road Initiative can provide the physical development that small and medium states need right now, to secure and enhance levels of Human Security, but it does not appear to offer any clear path to increasing Societal Security via local and regional inclusive institutions and rule of law.

The Blue Dot Network is the newest of the comprehensive strategies, first revealed by the United States and allies in October 2019, and it is still very much a conceptual work in progress. Its name comes from a famous photo of Earth from space, in which Earth is a small, beautiful blue dot hanging in the vast darkness of space. It aims to link as much of the world together as possible, with a clear focus on the Indo-Pacific, and tends toward expanding and enhancing behavioural frameworks more than physical development.⁴²³ After the tumultuous years of pre-emptive intervention and military action since 9/11, the available Blue Dot Network literature from the United States government reads like a reassertion of the international rules based order, with a greater emphasis on partnership than leadership.⁴²⁴ As Robert Kagan argues in his recent book, *The Jungle Grows Back*,⁴²⁵ the United States needs to recognise that the world does not stay as it was. A more inclusive and just international order requires consistent effort, as previous gains are fragile in the face of recent and current disruptive and destructive forces. For the Blue Dot network to succeed, it will be necessary for the United States to drive the process, and for numerous partner states to take responsibility for enhancing the behavioural frameworks that could develop a genuinely interconnected and inclusive omnidirectional network. It appears that it will take longer to fund physical development under the Blue Dot Network than under the Belt and Road Initiative, but there will be a transparent and accountable standard of behaviour across all projects. As much as speed is of the essence to enhance Human Security and Societal Security across the globe, consistency and accountability are more significant in the long run, as they provide legitimate means for addressing differences and disagreements, which enhance long-term interstate and intra-regional trust.

⁴²² LK Cheng, 'Three Questions on China's Belt and Road Initiative', *China Economic Review*, no.40, 2016, pp.309-312.

⁴²³ J Rogers, 'US Answers China's Belt and Road with Blue Dot', *Global Finance*, December 6, 2019, <https://www.gfmag.com/magazine/december-2019/us-answers-chinas-belt-and-road-blue-dot>.

⁴²⁴ United States Department of State, 'Blue Dot Network', <https://www.state.gov/blue-dot-network/>.

⁴²⁵ R Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World*, Random House Audio, Audiobook Edition, 2018.

As the world's population has been hunkered down behind its respective national borders during the COVID-19 pandemic, the familiarity and trust that normally comes from social and economic interaction has been steadily eroded by fear and uncertainty. When people could travel nearly anywhere to meet nearly anyone, rich cultural exposure and experience provided good opportunities for socialisation and for building trust. Now that these informal interactions have been dramatically curtailed, states will have to make a more deliberate effort to build and maintain relationships between each other and their populations, which will make inclusive institutions and rule of law even more valuable. As the world reopens under precarious economic circumstances, the emphasis that the Blue Dot Network places on increasing transparency and accountability will be very important. States will benefit from being able to interact in clearly defined and understood ways, which reduce reasons for mistrust and misunderstanding, under conditions that will be characterised by greater competition and strategic tension.

Increasing regional accountability, transparency, rule of law, and trust are central to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific comprehensive strategy, which has been developed by the Abe administration in Japan—and supported by President Trump's administration in the United States.⁴²⁶ Its development and aims have been very clearly summarised and analysed by Ryo Sahashi in his paper, 'The Indo-Pacific in Japan's Foreign Policy'.⁴²⁷ The Free and Open Indo-Pacific comprehensive strategy provides a conceptual framework for how states in the region can work together within a shared behavioural framework to enhance inclusive institutions, rule of law, and economic outcomes.⁴²⁸ It allows for economic goals and security issues to be addressed separately, with the focus on building a genuinely inclusive and responsive region. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific comprehensive strategy provides the broadest and clearest definition of the Indo-Pacific, extending from Africa to the Americas and encompassing the complete arc of Asia. As the most expansive and inclusive definition of the Indo-Pacific, Japan's comprehensive strategy offers the greatest potential for as many states as possible to partner together to develop the region, based on shared political, legal, and ethical standards. As the Free and Open Indo-Pacific comprehensive strategy imagines a similar international rules based order to the Blue Dot Network, but at an already articulated pace and on an immediately manageable scale, it looks like the best fit for many medium and small Indo-Pacific states, unless they do not want to meet the behavioural standards, or want rapid investment and development—that only the Belt and Road Initiative can currently provide.

In comparison to these three comprehensive strategies, Australia's vision for the Indo-Pacific is similar to the Blue Dot Network and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific in terms of wishing to enhance the international rules based order,⁴²⁹ but is much smaller in geographical scope. Australia's conception of the Indo-Pacific is very much defined in historical terms, only extending as far as Australia has traditionally been involved with neighbours and allies. At this reduced geographical scale Australia could have chosen to define its vision in terms of national interest rather than regional development, but doing so would not have fit with Australia's Middle Power rhetoric.

⁴²⁶ Palit & Sano, 'The United States' Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy', pp.1-6.

⁴²⁷ R Sahashi, 'The Indo-Pacific in Japan's Foreign Policy', Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2019, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/FINAL_Working%20Paper_Ryo%20Sahashi.pdf.

⁴²⁸ Green, 'Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy', pp.28-29.

⁴²⁹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'The Indo-Pacific: Australia's Perspective', 29 April, 2019, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/speeches/Pages/the-indo-pacific-australias-perspective>.

Balancing national interest and regional development is not easy, but there are good examples of Australia's allies consistently doing these two things at the same time. Both France and the United Kingdom have long term interests across the Indo-Pacific, and have successfully managed to balance national interests and regional development. While France is extending its efforts beyond Francophone Africa and French Polynesia to build defence industry relationships with India and Australia, the United Kingdom is beginning to engage in the region through its brand new post-Brexit foreign policy. France has successfully balanced its defence, diplomatic, and economic resources across the Indian and Pacific oceans for decades, and the United Kingdom is in the process of opening/re-opening diplomatic missions across the Pacific, so that it can increase its engagement with, and economic activity within, the region.

As Australia has such partners, who have consistently refined how they balance their national interests and contributions to regional development, it is only reasonable to assume that Australia will also continue to calibrate how it allocates limited resources as it redefines its role in the region. Consequently, the debate within Australia around possible strategic visions, such as John Blaxland's Grand Compact,⁴³⁰ should be robust and comprehensive, as none of the issues are simple and there are nowhere near enough resources to do everything at once. It is vital that the Australian population understand what factors influence how and why the Federal Government allocates resources between national interests and regional development, and that they understand that priorities and policies are likely to require regular adjustment under conditions of Durable Disorder, so that they can appropriately engage in the democratic process. For Australia's neighbours and international partners, it is important to ensure that its beliefs and priorities are clearly articulated, and that Australia's actions are comprehensible, as trust can easily be diminished by inconsistencies and overt gaps between statements and deeds. Middle Power rhetoric may make Australia's aspirations clear, but it also opens Australia up to criticism for not achieving its stated aims.

Unfortunately, at present, East African and Latin American states fall outside of Australia's vision for the Indo-Pacific, while they are inside of the geographical and political boundaries as defined within all three comprehensive strategies. As many of these countries have similar security concerns to Australia, large agricultural sectors, untapped natural resources, and wish to have a generation of their young people educated to a world standard level, they see Australia as a possible preferred partner in the region. As Australia's rhetoric is that of a Middle Power, and its vision for the region is based more on contributing to regional behavioural frameworks, rather than on funding massive physical development projects, questions have been asked about why Australia's statements about the region are broad and inclusive, while its actions are seen as being narrowly defined. For example, Brendan Taylor has asked probing questions about whether there is an unhelpful gap between Australia's rhetoric and reality in relation to its Indo-Pacific vision, and has argued that there is, indeed, a deficit between what Australia says and what it then achieves in the region.⁴³¹

Through the research interviews it became clear that many small and medium states within the geographic boundaries of the Indo-Pacific, but outside of the area encompassed by Australia's vision, would like the opportunity to partner with Australia in the areas of

⁴³⁰ K Lawson, 'ANU Security Expert Calls for Grand Compact with Pacific Nations', *The Canberra Times*, February 21, 2020, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6641383/anu-security-expert-calls-for-grand-compact-with-pacific-nations/#gsc.tab=0>.

⁴³¹ B Taylor, 'Is Australia's Indo-Pacific Strategy an Illusion?', *International Affairs*, vol.96, no.1, 2020, pp.95-109.

agriculture, natural resource management, education, and security. They struggle to understand why, since Australia speaks about the Indo-Pacific in a similar open and inclusive manner to the United States and Japan, it does not then seek to achieve similar levels of engagement, even if this engagement cannot be matched with financial and physical resources. If, as is evident, Australia's aim is to enhance the regional rules based order, then it may be necessary for it to reconsider what it aims to achieve and who it will partner with in as inclusive and clearly defined terms as possible.

Communications is an undisputedly important component of any effective strategy or vision, as it provides the broadest and most immediate path to facilitate buy-in. Beijing renamed One Belt, One Road, because, even though the name suited the China-centred hub and spoke model it envisioned, it was not a vision that inspired the level of interconnectedness and interdependence that China wishes to represent. The Blue Dot Network focuses on partnership rather than leadership, because collaborative interconnectedness is a persuasive reason to wait and see when development funds will become available. Japan's inclusiveness and emphasis on the rules-based order means that there is minimal ambiguity for any state considering how to engage with the Free and Open Indo-Pacific comprehensive strategy. The major benefit of presenting clear and cohesive messaging, which aligns closely with related action, is that it makes it easier for potential partner states to accurately calculate risk, as the higher the level of perceived inconsistency and concomitant vulnerability, the greater the likelihood that change will be resisted, or rejected out of hand.

In her book, *Wired to Resist*, Britt Andreatta argues that for most of human history change has been seen, first and foremost, as a threat to whatever people have right now.⁴³² Ideally, change should be both wanted and chosen, to increase the likelihood of successful transformation, but in many historical situations the change that was being offered was not wanted, and the change that was wanted was not available to choose. Across the Indo-Pacific there is a remarkably broad range of economic development, access to technology, opportunity for educational attainment, and political engagement. Consequently, every state in the region has a different appetite for change, as well as a different way of assessing risk based on the states' particular Strategic Culture, so strategies and visions should offer a variety of entry and exit points, and a number of ways to participate. If small and medium states can choose between the variety and degree of change they prefer, so that they can manage both societal and practical risks, then the range of outcomes is likely to be broadly positive. If states are offered one-size-fits-all options, then they may well choose the change that is offered without being committed to it (in order to avoid exclusion), which could both reduce trust and waste limited resources across the region.

At present, one of the most consistent issues that small and medium states across the Indo-Pacific are working to manage is determining how to balance the opportunities and risks that comprehensive strategies offer. A majority of small and medium states need economic investment and development, which the Belt and Road Initiative can provide, as well as wanting to be a part of an even more collaborative and inclusive rules based international order, which the Blue Dot Network and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific comprehensive strategies are committed to providing. They need and want aspects of all of the opportunities that the three comprehensive strategies might afford them, and have to determine how to manage the risk that immediate physical development is possible, but without the mediating

⁴³² B Andreatta, *Wired to Resist: The Brain Science of Why Change Fails and a New Model for Driving Success*, Britt Andreatta, Audiobook Edition, 2020.

umbrella of an enhanced behavioural framework, and that an enhanced behavioural framework might reduce the opportunity for immediate physical development. The intractable difficulties arise when states evaluate the risks associated with physical development not being directly attached to enhanced behavioural frameworks, which increases uncertainty relating to procedural and resolution mechanisms. As much as states need investment and physical development, they want to know that any problems that eventuate can be resolved through inclusive and accountable mechanisms. Consequently, states will choose as much physical development as they need to increase Human Security, while also committing to behavioural frameworks that will increase their levels of Societal Security. Together, this should lead to positive outcomes, as all of the relevant areas have been individually addressed, but, in reality, it increases levels of risk, because the level of great power competition in the region means that all of the relevant areas cannot be integrated into a cohesive package, which would mitigate risk for those who can least afford it.

At the very least, change has to be acceptable from a Strategic Culture perspective, so that a state's administration will get behind it, as well as being acceptable at a societal level, so that it will have a reasonable level of buy-in from the general population. If change can be shown to be beneficial at the levels of both Human Security and Societal Security, then successful development and increased levels of trust are far more likely. Potential change is more acceptable when its primary aims are clearly concerned with improving physical circumstances. If potential change is perceived to be a threat to cultural norms, or traditional identity, then physical improvements are likely to be rejected in favour of cultural cohesion. Australia, like all countries proposing a vision or strategy, should be careful to ensure that proposals involve manageable levels of practical risk and low levels of cultural risk for potential partner states.

As a rapid adopter of technology, with high levels of educational attainment and high levels of political engagement, Australia has more ways to buffer the consequences of change than many states. It is easy to believe that this pattern of change has facilitated Australia's prosperity, but the obverse is the case: Australia's prosperity buffers it from many of the effects of change. Whether in the form of wool, wheat, iron ore, or other minerals, Australia has always had resources that fluctuate in value, but never lose their value entirely. Consequently, Australia can take risks knowing that, at the very least, it has substantial economic foundations to fall back on. Australia can use technology, education, and its inclusive democratic institutions to chart a course through change, and it is important that it understands how and to what extent potential partners can, or cannot, successfully buffer the effects of the change that the implementation of Australia's regional vision could instigate. It is unwise to expect that inclusive institutions and effective rule of law will spontaneously flourish across the region as a consequence of any particular strategy or vision, and it is important to remember that socialisation with inclusive institutions and effective rule of law provides the most salient case for their expansion.

In order to help demonstrate that change can be successfully managed, Australia should seek to develop as broad a set of Smart Power policies as possible. In the era of affordable and largely unrestricted air travel, cultural exposure and experiences provided the foundations for familiarity and trust, which enabled Soft Power strategies to bridge gaps between societies and states. In the era of COVID-19, in which incidental exposure to difference has been massively reduced, trust building is going to have to be more deliberate and will depend on creating deeper shared experiences and aspirations. Joseph Nye has described the sort of

policies and experiences that will be required as Smart Power.⁴³³ While Soft Power can be characterised by discrete exposure to and experience of another culture, with the aim of developing familiarity and fondness for what has been experienced, Smart Power is concerned with developing credibility and trust, which can become the basis for long-term relationships. While Soft Power is concerned with having an enjoyable experience, Smart Power is concerned with developing genuine care for the people and places that were central to what was experienced. Historically, transmitting Australia's popular culture and perspective across the region was a suitable form of Soft Power policy, but in the COVID-19 world Australia needs to be facilitating omnidirectional transmission of popular culture and perspectives across the region. New Zealand has already committed itself to this sort of Smart Power policy through extra scope and funding for its Pacific broadcasting expansion.⁴³⁴

There are a variety of ways in which the Australian Federal Government can expand its Smart Power policies across the region. The Australian Defence Force has already played a significant role in building Smart Power relationships over decades, across the Indo-Pacific region. From operations in East Timor (now Timor-Leste, 1999 and 2006), the RAMSI mission in the Solomon Islands (2003-17), assistance rendered after the Boxing Day Tsunami (2004), and through multiple assistance and training missions since, the ADF has provided a practical demonstration of Australia's commitment to the region. At a state-to-state level, the ADF has shown how continuity can be maintained between policy and action, and, at a human level, ADF personnel have shown that respect and collaborative effort can make difficult situations and hard work easier. When Australia's Landing Helicopter Docks (LHDs) were commissioned in 2014, the ADF gained a remarkably flexible platform that the Australian Federal Government can incorporate into a wide variety of Smart Power policies and operations. The LHDs can be used for training with existing allies, to train with future partners, to assist with regional development, and to provide emergency assistance across the Indo-Pacific. Under the current heightened tensions between China and the United States, it is prudent for Australia to increase Defence spending and activities that enhance deterrence, as was announced by the Australian Federal Government in July 2020, but not at the expense of Smart Power operations that maintain stability and expand trust between states across the region. As the ADF pivots to focus primarily on Australia's immediate region, amphibious capabilities will become progressively more important, and there may come a time when Australia would benefit from possessing more than two Landing Helicopter Docks.

Building and incorporating additional LHDs into the ADF would require substantial commitment, resources, effort, and time. If, or until, the Australian Federal Government considers taking such a decision, as many ADF personnel as possible should be provided with the training for and experience of working on an LHD.⁴³⁵ Even though deterrence

⁴³³ J Nye, *The Future of Power: Its Changing Nature and Use in the Twenty-First Century*, Gildan Media, Audiobook Edition, 2011.

⁴³⁴ W Peters, 'New Zealand Announces \$10m Pacific Broadcasting Expansion, Support for Pacific Journalism', press release, September 4, 2018, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-zealand-announces-10m-pacific-broadcasting-expansion-support-pacific-journalism>.

⁴³⁵ It has to be remembered that what makes Australia's LHDs such flexible tools for the ADF is that this capability would in a non-hostile environment, or at least in a strategic environment where near-peer hot war is unlikely such as the South Pacific (up to the western American littoral), much of the central and southern parts of the Indian Ocean (up to the eastern African littoral) and the southern littorals of Southeast Asia, would primarily act in support of humanitarian and disaster relief operations. These vessels would act in the role of 'naval diplomacy' adding to the soft power heft of the Australian government generating goodwill wherever they fly the Australian flag. See: S Bateman, A Bergin & H Channer, *Terms of Engagement: Australia's*

related activities are going to take up much of the ADF's time and resources, increasing trust and interdependent partnerships across the Indo-Pacific would substantially increase Australia's Smart Power position in the region. All investments in ADF equipment and training should ideally balance Australia's need for deterrence and partnership building, so that Australia can have continuity between its Defence posture and its policies for regional engagement.

In terms of Smart Power policies, Australia's education sector could provide a short term means by which to build deeper, reciprocal relationships with more states and societies. Over the last twenty years international education has become a very significant sector within the Australian economy, but its economic significance has not been matched by a strategic approach to education. For example, Chinese students have received world class education in Australia, but this has not assisted Canberra to build a balanced relationship with Beijing. Instead, Australia has had to take action to reduce undue foreign influence on Australian university campuses, and to protect Australian academic independence and intellectual property.⁴³⁶ Beijing appears to view education and Australia's role as an education provider as nothing more than a commodity, which Australia should be desperate to sell, rather than as a valuable means by which to build deeper understanding and a reciprocal partnership.

Education, like natural resources, is a volatile sector of the Australian economy, because it depends too heavily on a very small number of large, fickle customers. International education needs to diversify to meet as many market needs as possible, which will require an increase in quality and creativity to offset the cost of doing business in a heterogeneous environment. Whether the dollar value of international education after COVID-19 will ever be as high for Australia as it was before the pandemic could be debated at length, but what is certain is that education has more than a dollar value. Education has both strategic value and a role to play as part of Smart Power policies. Taking a strategic approach to what Australian educational institutions provide, so that we can meet potential partner states' needs, would require additional Federal Government investment and produce moderate, sustainable returns, but this would be balanced by the strategic benefits of effective Smart Power policy. Many small and medium states are already investing as much as they can afford in educating their young people, and they are doing this with the long-term aim of building deep understanding and life-long connections between people and societies.

During the research interviews it became evident that, for many small and medium states, the experience of building understanding and care with the host society is almost as important as the education that their young people receive. Moving toward a strategic, care and partnership based international education model would require increased commitment and resources from both government and educational institutions, and it should be remembered that the alternative is a return to the economically fragile and strategically deleterious model that was looking unsustainable even before COVID-19 crashed into the Australian education sector. Australian universities will require time to become comfortable with a strategic approach to international education policy, as balancing academic freedom and political utility will always be difficult and controversial, but having students from more partner countries, along with clearer areas of interest and expertise, will benefit the sector over time. The Federal Government will need to ensure that partner states and educational institutions know that Australia is in for the long-haul, and that education is too strategically important to

Regional Defence Diplomacy, ASPI, July 2013, https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/import/Strategy_Terms_of_Engagement.pdf?UzwjHXQVheg4QaargMUtPkU4_yuge9Y.

⁴³⁶ C Hamilton, *Silent Invasion*, Hardie Grant Books, Kindle Edition, 2018.

simply be treated like a commodity. If Australia developed something like a strategic international education policy, then the trust and care that grows out of it could provide the Smart Power basis for building partnerships in other sectors that have benefited from, or could benefit from, receiving an education in Australia.

In terms of relevant areas of expertise, Australia has world-class knowledge and experience in agriculture and natural resource management that many small and medium states would appreciate. Many small and medium states suffer from low levels of food and water security, and do not currently possess sufficient knowledge to manage their natural resources in the sustainable manner they would prefer. Australia is in an ideal position to utilise its education sector to assist states to increase their levels of Human Security and Environmental Security.⁴³⁷ As many states still have most of their population living in rural areas, and do not possess the technology or infrastructure to facilitate high intensity agriculture, Australia's knowledge and experience will have to be applied flexibly and creatively with partner states to meet their particular needs. Consequently, Australia could gain even more experience in partnership building, which would underpin long-term trust. As all states will need to find more sustainable and less resource intensive ways to produce food and sustain their environments, Australia should aim to be part of the entire region's solutions to these problems.

There is a concern within Australia, in both the agricultural and natural resource management sectors, that a transfer of knowledge from here to other countries will lead to the creation of near-term economic competitors. This may be true in a small number of cases, but, in the majority of cases, a transfer of knowledge will do more for Australia's Smart Power position than it will take away from its economic competitiveness.⁴³⁸ Australia is accustomed to choosing the hi-tech solution, which employs the smallest number of people, but this is not the case for many states in the Indo-Pacific. More often than not, states in the region want to balance an increase in productivity with an increase in employment, and want to do both things via affordable and manageable technology. Australia no longer has the manufacturing sector to produce the mid-tech equipment that many of its potential partners want, but it does have the experience and educational sector to ensure that small and medium states can develop the knowledge they want to increase food and water security, and sustainably manage their environments. If Australia can provide the educational resources, and other states can manufacture and provide the mid-tech equipment, then multi-state partnerships can do a great deal to enhance regional productivity, sustainability, and Smart Power relationships across the region.

Even though many economic sectors only require mid-tech solutions, communication, education, and electronic commerce require uniformly high-quality solutions. If COVID-19 continues to limit face-to-face activities for an extended period of time, then all states will need enhanced information and communication technology. Under these circumstances, and in an era of Durable Disorder, cyber security will become critically important to every state, immaterial of their previous reliance on technological solutions to shrink time and space. As Australia has used technology to minimise time and distance throughout its development, Australia is well positioned to partner with other states to create a safe and constructive cyber environment. Whether to deliver education, share popular culture and perspectives, or

⁴³⁷ J Rockström, et al., 'Sustainable Intensification of Agriculture for Human Prosperity and Global Sustainability', *Ambio*, vol.46, no.1, 2017, pp.4-17.

⁴³⁸ For example, it may create the idea of Australia being a key, proactive 'leader' and influencer in the Indo-Pacific as opposed to a more passive, and haphazardly reactive 'Middle Power.'

facilitate reliable electronic commerce across the region, a secure cyber environment is central to the future of the Indo-Pacific.

Helping to create a secure cyber environment provides Australia with another way to enhance its Smart Power position across the region. As online education and electronic commerce are indisputably important tools for managing the implications of the current pandemic, and whatever pandemic happens next, it should be relatively uncontroversial for Australia to build partnerships with states to improve technology and cyber security in these areas. As familiarity and technical ability improve, states across the region should be able to share criminal intelligence to reduce cyber-crime, as well as commercial network intelligence to strengthen the network at all locations for the benefit of all. Historical intelligence sharing arrangements like the Five Eyes are vital, but new ways should be found to increase intelligence sharing and security. Cyber security provides a way to build trust and experience with new partners, beginning with small and uncontroversial areas and extending as far as partners are willing to build. As the Blue Dot Network and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific comprehensive strategies are committed to enhancing the international rules-based order, cyber security provides an ideal way for countries across the region to contribute to this inclusive end.

If we include all of the states that fit within the broadest conception of the Indo-Pacific, as we should to develop the most inclusive and collaborative regional assemblage possible, the sheer diversity of geography, history, culture, economic development, and political institutions is breathtaking. At first glance the region appears heterogeneous to the point of incoherence, but nothing could be further from the truth. Every state in the region wants to provide itself with as much Human Security and Societal Security as possible, and there is broad agreement between states that working together within a matrix of multilateralism and multi-alignment provides the best way to do this. All small and medium states are determining how to balance individual needs and wants against regional opportunities and risks, while trying to avoid the pitfalls of great power competition and exclusion. For potential preferred partners in change, like Australia, continuity between words and actions is vital, as the future of the region depends on the quality of the Smart Power policies and partnerships that states can create. Australia is well positioned to both contribute to and thrive within an enhanced Indo-Pacific, if it recognises and acts on its strategic values and resources.

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Appendix



Figure 1— Indian Ocean Map

Source: Shutterstock Images, <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-vector/indian-ocean-political-map-countries-borders-659813653>

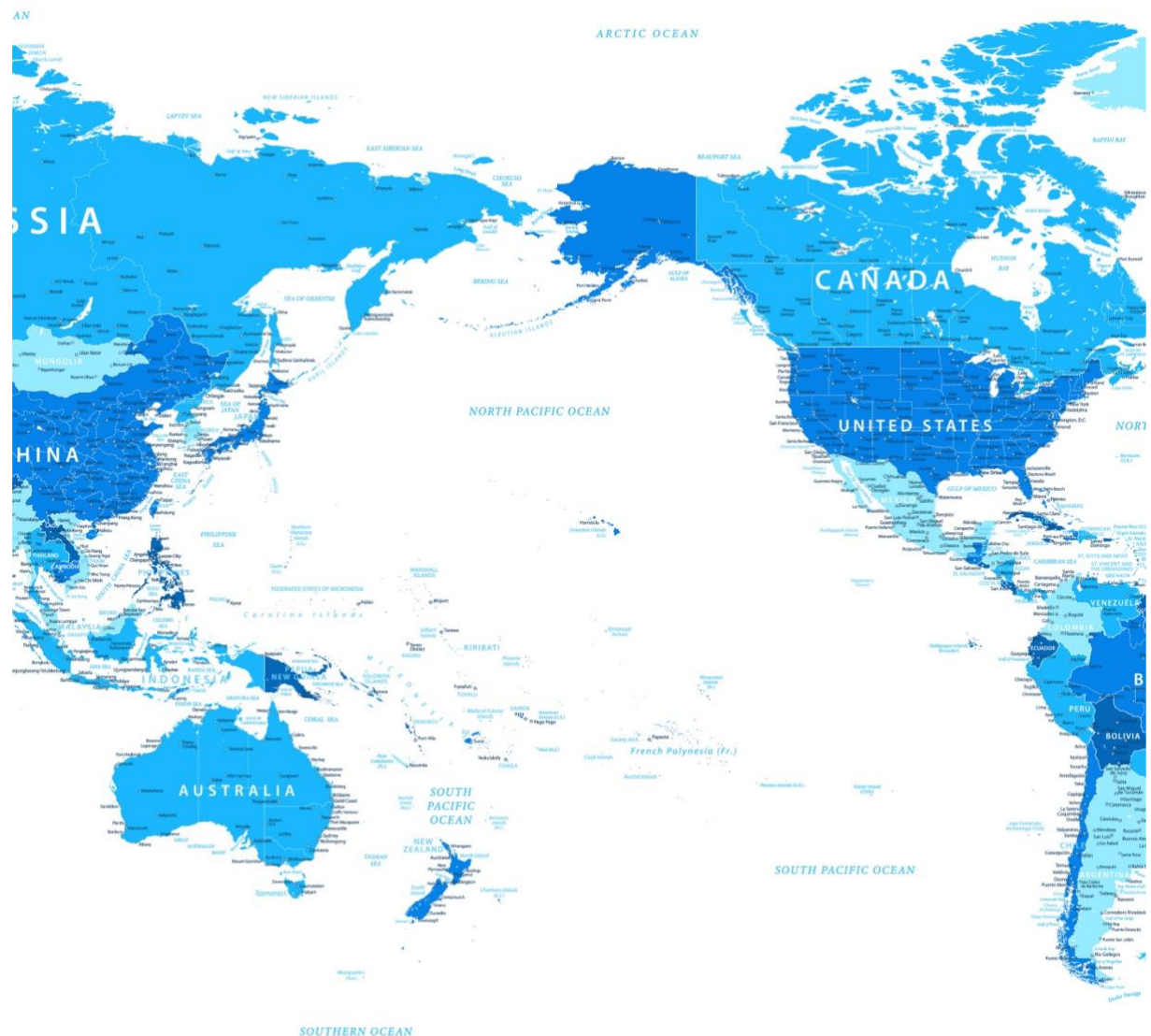


Figure 2—Pacific Ocean Map

Source: Shutterstock Images, <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-vector/world-map-pacific-china-asia-centered-1728398803>

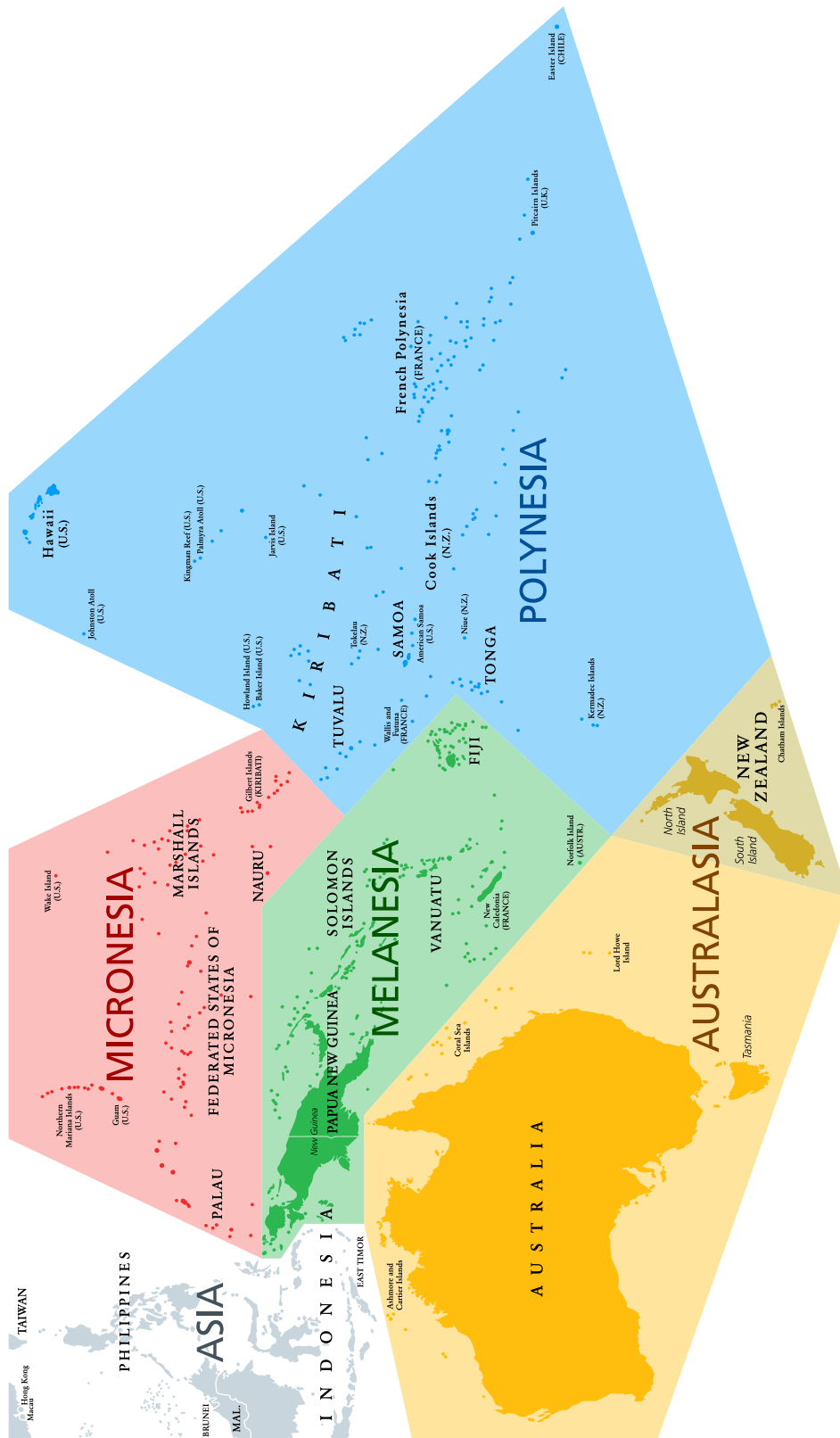


Figure 3—Oceania Map

Source: Shutterstock Images, <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-vector/regions-oceania-political-map-colored-geographic-1724734174>



Figure 4—Arctic Map with sea routes

Source: Shutterstock Images, <https://www.shutterstock.com/image-vector/arctic-ocean-sea-routes-map-northwest-437372302>

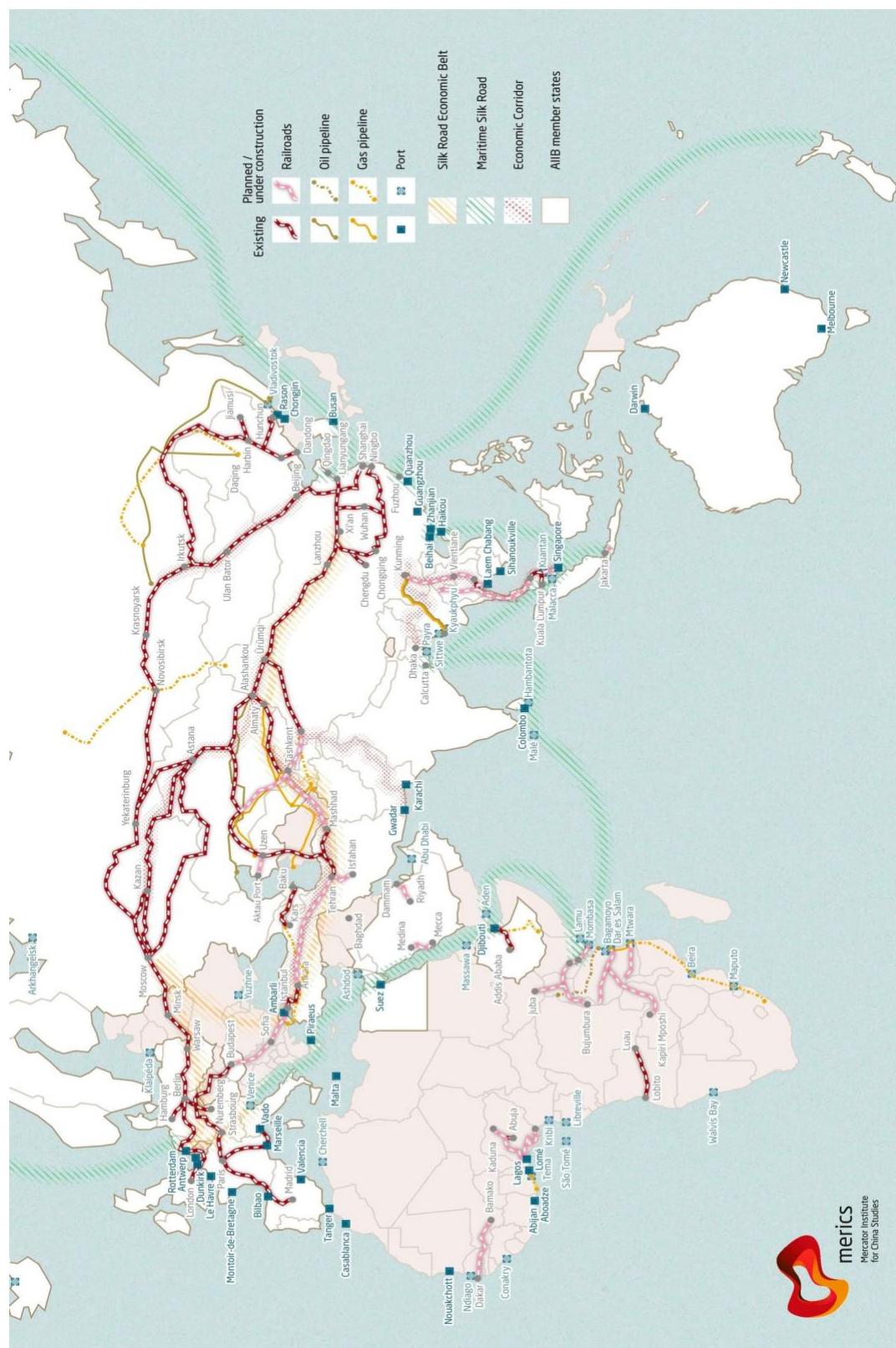


Figure 5—The PRC's extensive BRI Network plans

Source: <http://www.rangoonpoint.com/documents/belt-and-road-initiative-military-bases.html>

Source: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/layout/set/print/content/download/532754/9176250/version/3/file/France+and+Security+in+the+Indo-Pacific+-+2019.pdf>

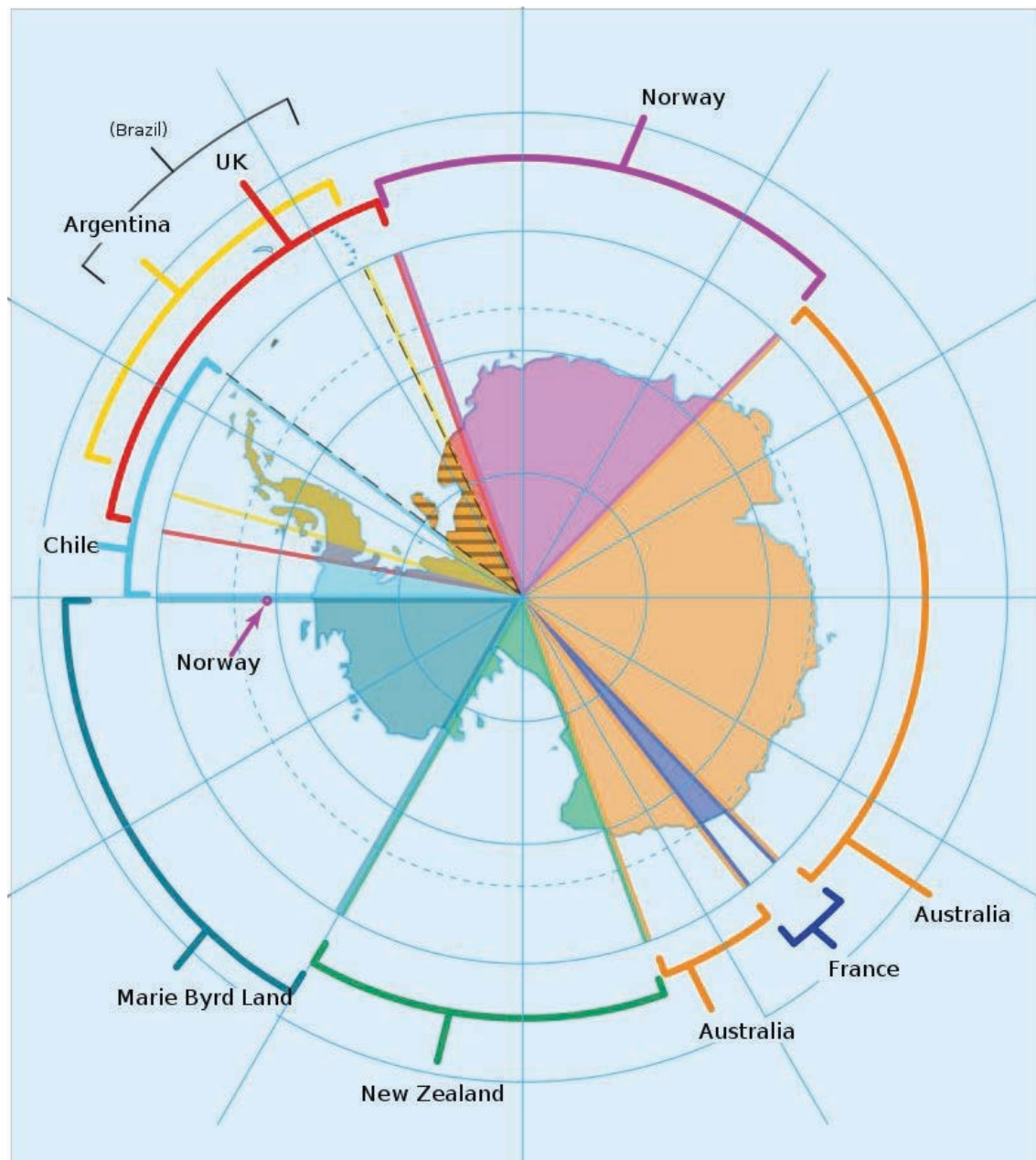


Figure 7—Map of Antarctic claims

Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Antarctica,_territorial_claims_including_Brazil.svg

About the Authors

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Is the Founder and CEO of SAGE International Australia (SIA), South Australia's only privately operated, not-for-profit, online geopolitical think tank. Dr. Bruni is widely experienced in the fields of politics, security and international affairs, having worked as a lecturer in security studies at the Centre for Asian Studies, University of Adelaide, as a Senatorial Advisor in Law and Foreign Policy and as a military analyst at the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies & Research (ECSSR), Abu Dhabi UAE. Upon his return to Australia John worked as a Defence Consultant to Seraphim Security & blue-chip logistics firm, AirRoad, and was also on the Board of Directors of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence & Security Studies - Australia (RUSIDSS-A), an institution he was involved with for well over two decades. Dr. Bruni's initial area of expertise is in defence acquisition, having authored a book on this topic: 'On Weapons Decisions' (ISBN 0 7334 19054) in 2002. As a researcher and analyst John worked for IHS Jane's Sentinel and continues to work for Jane's Intelligence Review (2002-20). Dr. Bruni is Non-Resident Fellow for Trends Research and Advisory, Abu Dhabi, UAE. John has written extensively on contemporary international relations and security. He has conducted seminars, podcasts and workshops on interagency co-operation; terrorism; asymmetric warfare; cyber security, maritime security, change management, geospatial intelligence and strategy. John is a long-time media commentator for both the South Australian and Australian media on topics including terrorism, defence and Australia's international relations.

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Established in 2008 and founded by Dr. John Bruni in Adelaide, South Australia, SAGE International Australia (SIA) provides Strategic Advice and Geopolitical Estimates (SAGE) to Australian and international clients from the public and private sector. The SIA team is drawn from across Australia, the UK and US and has cultural and organisational experience in Australia, the UK, the UAE, Ethiopia, India, and Japan.

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