

A Changing Indo-Pacific Region

Growing Complexity for the Six Anchor Partners



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**A Changing Indo-Pacific Region:
Growing Complexity for the Six Anchor
Partners**

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A Working Paper of the 2019-2020 US Army War College Integrated Research Project
on the Indo-Pacific Region

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ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Indo-Pacific Working Papers are products of the on-going US Army War College (USAWC) study on US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) theater design. The project identifies and assesses the opportunities, challenges, paths to implementation and risks associated with the Army adopting four transformational roles in the USINDOPACOM Area of Responsibility (AoR) over the next decade. The 2020 USAWC report *An Army Transformed: USINDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design* argues that the Army should adopt the transformational roles of *grid*, *enabler*, *multi-domain warfighter*, and *capability and capacity generator* because of an “urgent [Joint Force] change imperative in the Indo-Pacific region.” That change imperative stems from the study’s principal finding that US Joint Forces are out of position “physically, conceptually, and in terms of deployed and anticipated capabilities” for hypercompetition with an aggressive People’s Republic of China (PRC) rival.

The project directors will release Indo-Pacific Working Papers as a series of Army War College analyses over the summer and fall of 2020. Papers in this series will offer specific recommendations to US senior leadership as to how the US Army, as part of the larger Joint Force, might operationalize the four transformational roles over the next ten years. Army embrace of the four transformational roles now and through the next decade is a necessary first step for US Joint Forces to thrive in persistent hypercompetition with China and, if necessary, prevail in armed hostilities in the event of escalation. Working Papers in this series are intended to elicit feedback and comment from a wide audience.

THE PRC IN TRANSITION

Between 1990 and 2016, approximately 749 million people in China rose out of poverty.¹ Since reform and opening began in 1979, China's economy has revolutionized how Chinese people live and how the world works.² For much of the past forty years, the United States has been an avid supporter and participant in China's economic growth. Many government and business leaders in the United States believed they shared a common goal with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership: to improve the quality of life for Chinese people while integrating China into a world Mao Zedong had walled off.³ However, US leaders are increasingly wary of China's zero-sum approach to achieving its long-term national interests.

Beginning with the 2008 financial crisis, and accelerating once Xi Jinping became the leader of the CCP, China began to leverage more forcefully its domestic and economic policy tools to achieve foreign policy objectives.⁴ Many of the CCP-led efforts have been described as gray zone tactics.⁵ These tactics often include the coercive and often unconventional use of some combination of economic, trade, diplomatic, development, or military tools. They are applied in ways that achieve China's objectives at the expense of other states' interests.

Most strikingly, leaders in Beijing began dredging coral reefs and fishing habitats to build military facilities on disputed features in the South China Sea.⁶ China also established the

¹ Data from the World Bank, accessed on 6/25/2020, poverty data from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.DDAY?locations=CN>; GDP data from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=CN>

² This paper uses China and the abbreviation PRC interchangeably to refer to the People's Republic of China.

³ Bill Clinton and Alan Greenspan, "Clinton and Greenspan on China PNTR, 2000," US-China Institute, May 18, 2000, <https://china.usc.edu/clinton-and-greenspan-china-pntr-2000>.

⁴ Elizabeth Economy, "China's New Revolution," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 3 (April 17, 2018): 60–74, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-04-17/chinas-new-revolution>.

⁵ Michael J Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence* (Washington, DC: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), pp 21-25, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/170505_GreenM_CounteringCoercionAsia_Web.pdf?OnoJXfWb4A5gw_n6G.8azgEd8zRIM4wq; Michael J Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2015), pp 60-66, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1303>.

⁶ Michael J. Green, Bonnie Glaser, and Zack Cooper, "Seeing the Forest through the SAMs on Woody Island," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, February 18, 2016, <https://amti.csis.org/seeing-the-forest-through-the-sams-on-woody-island/>.

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, originally “One Belt, One Road”) to build roads, ports, and commercial infrastructure across the Eurasian landmass. Enthusiasm for this investment is high across the region, even though many of the projects are of uncertain financial viability.⁷

Concurrent with the expansion of BRI, the CCP began more aggressively providing loans to developing countries, especially those on the Indian Ocean Rim. China made money if the debts were repaid. When debts could not be repaid, China has converted debt repayment into a long-term lease of strategic infrastructure as it did when it signed a 99-year lease of the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka.⁸

China has also shown willingness to curtail economic relationships to demonstrate displeasure with political actions. For example, Norway was subject to a multi-year curtailment of salmon exports to China following the 2010 award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo, a Chinese dissident held in a PRC prison. Norway did not resume sizable salmon exports to China until 2017.⁹ Additional episodes exist where China has curtailed exports of rare-earth minerals to Japan (these minerals are essential to modern electronics and battery manufacture), suspending imports of Philippines banana shipments, and closing South Korean-owned shopping malls in China. China’s gray zone actions appear designed to demonstrate how much more a country needs China than China needs that country.¹⁰

⁷ Tanner Greer, “One Belt, One Road, One Big Mistake,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed June 25, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/12/06/bri-china-belt-road-initiative-blunder/>.

⁸ Ankit Panda, “Sri Lanka Formally Hands Over Hambantota Port to Chinese Firms on 99-Year Lease,” *The Diplomat*, December 11, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/sri-lanka-formally-hands-over-hambantota-port-to-chinese-firms-on-99-year-lease/>.

⁹ Echo Huang and Isabella Steger, “Norway Wants China to Forget about the Human Rights Thing and Eat Salmon Instead,” *Quartz*, June 14, 2017, <https://qz.com/1000541/norway-wants-china-to-forget-about-the-human-rights-thing-and-eat-salmon-instead/>.

¹⁰ For details of China curtailing exports of rare-earth minerals to Japan, see: Keith Bradsher, “China Bans rare-earth Exports to Japan Amid Tension,” *New York Times*, September 23, 2010, <https://www.cnbc.com/id/39318826>. For a detailed examination of the PRC-Philippines fruit import incident, see Michael J. Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence*. (Washington, DC: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), https://www.csis.org/analysis/countering-coercion-maritime-asia_p_111-112. An overview of China’s actions to penalize the South Korean firm, Lotte, that provided the golf course to South Korea at which it could base a missile-defense system, THAAD, is available at: Jethro Mullen and Han Sol, “One Company Is Bearing the Brunt of China’s Anger over U.S. Missile System,” *CNNMoney*, March 7, 2017, <https://money.cnn.com/2017/03/07/news/china-lotte-thaad-south-korea-tensions/index.html>.

China's predatory economics and political coercion are often combined with overt and over-the-horizon demonstrations of military and paramilitary capability to manipulate rival risk perceptions and create "risk confusion."¹¹ For example, Kathleen H. Hicks, Joseph Federici, and Connor Akiyama of the Center for Strategic and International Studies suggest, "The most prominent element of China's grey zone campaign is its effort to assert air and maritime claims, using a range of state-controlled and proxy forces."¹²

In all cases, China's gray zone actions seek to advance its interests. For example, China's militarization of the South China Sea enables it to sustain enduring presence of its various maritime forces for de-facto control of disputed features and waters while supporting implicit and explicit intimidation of neighboring states.¹³ It also frequently attempts to create or exploit divisions between the United States and its allies as was the case in closing South Korean businesses in China after South Korea agreed to host a US missile defense system.¹⁴

The international community has been slow to respond to China's actions, often because China uses unexpected tools to achieve its national objectives. The United States was slow to identify the challenge posed by China's objectives and to translate that understanding into effective responses.¹⁵

Over the past four years, however, the foreign and defense policy communities in Washington have largely acknowledged that previous US assumptions about China's goals and its trajectory were mistaken.¹⁶ China does not seek to participate as an equal in

¹¹ Nathan Freier, et al, "Outplayed Regaining Strategic Initiative in the Gray Zone," accessed August 18, 2020, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1013807.pdf>.

¹² Kathleen Hicks, et al, "China in the Grey Zone," accessed August 18, 2020, https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Strategic-Analysis-4_2019_rgb.pdf.

¹³ On China's maritime activities, see: Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, eds., *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations*, Studies in Chinese Maritime Development (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2019); for analysis of China's use of non-military assets to push national-level political objectives, see Gregory B. Poling, "China's Military Power Projection and U.S. National Interests," February 20, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-military-power-projection-and-us-national-interests>.

¹⁴ Ethan Meick and Nargiza Salidjanova, "China's Response to U.S.-South Korean Missile Defense System Deployment and its Implications". Accessed August 18, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Report_China's%20Response%20to%20THAAD%20Deployment%20and%20its%20Implications.pdf.

¹⁵ Toshi Yoshihara James Holmes, "Five Shades of Chinese Gray-Zone Strategy," Text, The National Interest (The Center for the National Interest, May 2, 2017), <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/five-shades-chinese-gray-zone-strategy-20450>.

¹⁶ Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, "The China Reckoning," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (April 2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-02-13/china-reckoning>.

the existing order. Instead, it seeks to lead a China-centric order where China's interests come first and other countries are left to fight for what little is left.

Evidence of this in recent months includes China's aggressive "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy and its conduct of information operations to spread false or misleading information about the origins of the novel coronavirus in a number of countries. These actions have led to a deterioration of PRC relations with the United States and many European states.¹⁷

The current US administration shows greater willingness to confront China over disagreements on issues—particularly economic issues. Both the United States and China have also shown an increase in overall risk-tolerance, though only modestly in their military activities.¹⁸ The United States has increased the number and publicity of naval and air operations it conducts to challenge China's excessive territorial and jurisdictional claims.¹⁹ Most notably, US vessels have increased conduct of Taiwan Strait transits and freedom of navigation (FON) operations in the South China Sea.

China has not shrunk from what it sees as US challenges to its sovereignty in the South China Sea. It consistently trails and harasses US and other navies' vessels operating in international waters in the South China Sea. It has a history of unsafe air operations throughout the East and South China Seas as well. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy also continues to develop its ability to conduct extended operations, including in the Indian Ocean, throughout the island nations of the Pacific, and to countries in east Africa.²⁰

¹⁷ Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "China's 'Wolf Warrior Diplomacy' Comes to Twitter," *Axios*, April 22, 2020, <https://www.axios.com/china-diplomacy-twitter-7a6b8287-f7f0-4dc1-be8a-0eb146b111bc.html>; Crawford, Alan, and Peter Martin. "China's Coronavirus Diplomacy Has Finally Pushed Europe Too Far." *Bloomberg.Com*, April 21, 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-21/china-s-coronavirus-diplomacy-has-finally-pushed-europe-too-far>.

¹⁸ See, for example, the United States Navy conduct of dual-carrier operations in the South China Sea: Sam LaGrone, "Two US Carriers Return to South China Sea After State Dept. Formally Rejects Chinese Claims," *USNI News*, July 17, 2020, <https://news.usni.org/2020/07/17/two-u-s-carriers-return-to-south-china-sea-after-state-dept-formally-rejects-chinese-claims>; and reports of the PLA Air Force's conduct of large-scale exercises in the South China Sea: Kristin, "South China Sea: Chinese Air Force Steps up Combat-Readiness Drills," *South China Morning Post*, August 4, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3096007/south-china-sea-chinese-air-force-steps-combat-readiness-drills>.

¹⁹ Gregory Poling et al., "Judgment Day: The South China Sea Tribunal Issues Its Ruling," *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, July 11, 2016, <https://amti.csis.org/arbitration-ruling-analysis/>.

²⁰ Lyle J. Goldstein, "China's Logistics Modernization Is Changing the Pacific Military Balance," *The National Interest* (The Center for the National Interest, February 17, 2019), <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/chinas-logistics-modernization-changing-pacific-military-balance-44612>.

The PLA Navy, Air Force, Chinese Coast Guard, and its maritime militia also all benefit from operational and logistics facilities made possible by China's man-made features in disputed features within the Spratly and Paracel islands.²¹

As difficult as it is for the United States and China to manage tension with each other, it may be even more challenging for regional states, especially those that are key security partners of the United States. China's position as a key economic partner makes it important for many countries' prosperity. China's increasing willingness to use economic engagement as leverage to achieve political outcomes aligned with Beijing's wishes exposes regional states to a difficult choice between prosperity and sovereignty. Most regional states navigate between these two competing interests. Continuing to do so will only become more difficult absent greater US leadership.

²¹ Greg Poling, "The Conventional Wisdom on China's Island Bases Is Dangerously Wrong," War on the Rocks, January 10, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/01/the-conventional-wisdom-on-chinas-island-bases-is-dangerously-wrong/>.

THE UNITED STATES AND ITS ANCHOR PARTNERS

Much as US attitudes about China have changed in recent years, Indo-Pacific states' views of China have also shifted. Those shifts, often similar to prevailing US views concerning sovereignty and security, are usually tempered by China's larger share of regional states' economies and by the fact that Indo-Pacific states are geographically closer to China than they are to the United States. This section briefly captures the current outlook of six anchor partners' relations with the United States, with China, and implications for US military interests.

The six anchor partners identified in previous work are: Australia, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan.²² That work noted of the anchor partners:

All six nations occupy strategic geography. All have a long-standing history of meaningful defense cooperation with the United States. Finally, all are deemed by USAWC researchers as likely to maintain or expand US military presence, engage in more detailed collaborative (mostly bilateral) military strategy development and planning with the United States, and/or develop and field complementary military capabilities and forces.²³

Each anchor partner is important to US efforts to maintain its influence and access in the region. At a strategic and operational level for the Army, each anchor partner is also important for its opportunity to contribute to an Army transforming to embrace the roles of grid and enabler as defined in *An Army Transformed*.²⁴

²² Previous Army War College work identifies six anchor partners as particularly important for four key considerations: "All have some formal security relationship with the United States...All six nations occupy strategic geography. All have a long-standing history of meaningful defense cooperation with the United States. [And], (f)inally, all are...likely to maintain or expand US military presence, engage in more detailed collaborative...military strategy development and planning..., and/or develop and field complementary military capabilities and forces." Nathan Freier et al., *An Army Transformed: USINDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design*. p 31-32. (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, 2020), <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/3731.pdf>.

²³ *An Army Transformed*, 32.

²⁴ *An Army Transformed*, 61-64.

AUSTRALIA

US Relationship

The United States and Australia have fought together in every major conflict since World War I. Formally allied since 1951, defense cooperation between the two countries is indicative of the degree of alignment in long-term strategic outlooks between the leadership and publics of the two countries. Both countries derive larger economic benefit from trade with each other and from trade throughout the world. As such, Australian and US interests align on issues such as free access to global commons—including maritime, air, cyber, and space.

Australia brings to the relationship strong capabilities across the range of military operations, though on a much smaller scale the United States. Australia's long-standing relationships with many Pacific Island nations are also an advantage for the United States whose attention is frequently pulled away from those countries to focus instead on regions (such as the Middle East) whose problems impact US interests more immediately.²⁵

PRC Relationship

Australia retains a strong economic relationship with China, particularly selling China extracted resources and agricultural products. As much as one-third of Australia's exports are to China, making China not just an important relationship for Australia's prosperity, but likely a vital one.

Australia's sense of China is changing, however. News reports of efforts by the Chinese Communist Party to influence Australian politicians through campaign contributions raised concerns throughout Australia of China's access and influence.²⁶ PRC efforts to acquire property near locations that are potentially sensitive for the US-Australia alliance similarly raised concerns across Australia.²⁷

²⁵ Visits to Palau by Secretary of State Pompeo in 2019 and Secretary of Defense Esper in 2020 offer a recent counter-narrative to trends the United States under-invests in relationships with Pacific Island nations.

²⁶ John Garnaut, "How China Interferes in Australia," August 8, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-03-09/how-china-interferes-australia>.

²⁷ Ben Smee and Christopher A. Walsh, "How the Sale of Darwin Port to the Chinese Sparked a Geopolitical Brawl," *The Guardian*, December 17, 2016, sec. Australia news, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/18/how-the-sale-of-darwin-port-to-the-chinese-sparked-a-geopolitical-brawl>.

Incidents like these have shifted Australians' views of China. In 2015, fifty seven percent of Australian respondents indicated a positive view of China. By 2019, that number fell to 36%.²⁸ Australia has also made changes to its campaign contribution laws and its oversight of foreign investment in and ownership of property or companies in Australia—largely over concerns of how China (the state) was leveraging investments by PRC citizens for state gain.²⁹

Military Implications

Opportunities: US-Australia defense cooperation will likely continue to strengthen. Key elements will remain a rotational presence of US Marines in Darwin; rotations of US Air Force units throughout several bases in Australia; Australian acquisition of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter; and continued Australian deployments alongside US forces for demanding missions around the world. An important marker for future US-Australia cooperation in the Pacific Island nations will be development of the Lombrum Port on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea as a combined facility for Papuan, Australian, and US forces in the region.

Australia's force structure, command and control architecture, and its domestic network of remote and austere bases provides an existing template for the US Army to examine and learn from to rapidly develop an expeditionary, distributed, and enabler-focused mission as envisioned by the grid and enabling roles. As one senior Australian Defense Force officer noted in 2019, "domestic [humanitarian assistance/disaster relief] response for the [Australian Defense Force] is expeditionary."

Challenges: Even as Australia re-commits to military modernization and close ties with US defense objectives, it will be important for the United States to listen to Australia's statements of its own limitations regarding defense and military activities, given its force is much smaller than that of the United States.

Additionally, Australia's economic linkages with China will make it difficult for Australia to fundamentally shift its economic position in the short- to-medium term without sizable

²⁸ "Global Indicators Database," *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project* (blog), accessed June 25, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/database/>.

²⁹ Jonathan Pearlman, "Australia Bans Foreign Donations to Political Parties after China Controversy," *The Telegraph*, December 5, 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/12/05/australia-bans-foreign-donations-political-parties-china-controversy/>.

economic and domestic political consequences. It has, however, made clear that it will not accept impingement upon its sovereignty or national security for economic gain.³⁰

JAPAN

US Relationship

The United States-Japan relationship is built on decades of cooperation dating to the early years of the Cold War. Anchored in a mutual defense treaty, Japan hosts more than fifty thousand US military personnel and their dependents.³¹ US-Japan trade exceeded \$300 billion in 2019, with Japanese investment in the United States supporting 860,000 jobs in the United States.³² Over the past decade, strategic perspectives among foreign policy decision makers in both countries have converged on an impression that China is increasingly a threat to common strategic interests. Concern in Tokyo and Washington over China's actions is reflected in declining positive attitudes toward China in public polling of both countries as well.³³

Even as strategic views are converging, difficult issues remain in the US-Japan relationship. Okinawa Prefecture is an archipelago of small islands in southern Japan that hosts a concentration of US forces. Those forces are in the midst of a multi-decade relocation effort to a less-densely populated portion of Okinawa Island. Construction necessary to complete the relocation is taking longer than planned, in large part due to a series of political and legal challenges raised by local opposition to continued US military presence in Okinawa.

The Trump administration's transactional approach to trade negotiations has strained Japanese goodwill toward the United States. Tariffs on Japanese goods entering the US market have pushed Japanese producers to seek other markets even as it has replicated recent US negotiating tactics with other countries in Asia, notably South Korea.

³⁰ The Treasury, "Foreign Investment Reforms" (Australian Government, June 2020), https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/p2020-87595_0.pdf.

³¹ United States Forces Japan, "About USFJ," accessed June 25, 2020, <https://www.usfj.mil/About-USFJ/>.

³² "Japan," United States Trade Representative, accessed June 25, 2020, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/japan-korea-apec/japan>; "US Relations With Japan," *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed June 25, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-japan/>.

³³ See polling data from Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project. "Global Indicators Database." Accessed June 25, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/database/>.

PRC Relationship

Recent trends have pushed leadership in Japan to look with concern at China's deployment of economic and military might to achieve its objectives, especially in gray zone efforts. Though not as specific as the US National Defense Strategy, Japan's strategic documents point clearly to concerns about how China chooses to exercise its growing power. For example, Japan's National Defense Programming Guidelines highlight concerns about the changing regional balance of power and the expanding role of space, cyber and electromagnetic spectrum in conflict.³⁴

Against this backdrop of growing strategic concern about China's approach to pursuing its interests were intermittent efforts from the Prime Minister's office to strengthen Sino-Japanese diplomatic and economic engagement. This effort suggests, at a minimum, a desire by now former Prime Minister Abe to build for Japan options to secure and expand economic access for its firms. Such efforts will be important for Japan should US intransigence on trade continue. Whoever Japan selects as its next prime minister will have to navigate these issues, possibly with less maneuver space than had Prime Minister Abe.

Concerns about intellectual property theft, security of Japanese citizens, political risk for Japanese firms in China (akin to South Korean firms punished by China for South Korean defense policy), and pressure from China hard-liners within his own political party will all likely work to create an upper bound for the next Japanese Prime Minister on expanding Sino-Japanese cooperation.³⁵

Military Implications

Opportunities: Japan will likely remain among the United States' strongest defense relationships. Additionally, Japan's outreach to other Indo-Pacific countries to create a stronger coalition of like-minded countries could be an asset for a multi-national effort to establish (or re-establish) a set of norms in the Indo-Pacific region that are favorable to US interests.

³⁴ "National Defense Program Guidelines for FY2019 and Beyond," December 18, 2019, https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2019/pdf/20181218_e.pdf.

³⁵ Tomoyuki Tachikawa, "Hong Kong Law Leaves Japan in a Bind as It Juggles US Alliance and China Ties," The Japan Times, July 1, 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/07/01/national/politics-diplomacy/hong-kong-japan-us-china/>.

As it relates to US efforts to establish and enable an operational grid in the Indo-Pacific, Japan is a critical partner. As a practical matter, an enabled grid in the Indo-Pacific will be most effective if it includes a diverse and distributed set of operating locations in Japan from which US and Japanese decision makers can generate novel Joint and Combined solutions to the region's numerous military demands. Military demands could span peacetime, deterrence, and beyond.

Japan is committed to development of transformed “cross-domain” capabilities across its military components³⁶ and a more distributed responsive ground force that better coordinates with its Maritime and Air Self Defense Forces.³⁷ Further, there is interest from US and Japanese defense and analyst communities in a more robust partnership between Japan and the United States to co-develop effective countervailing military solutions to an increasingly aggressive China. In combination, these factors make Japan a pivotal partner in any future US theater strategy.³⁸

Challenges: Japan's constitutional limitations on military forces and their purpose will remain a challenge to deepening US-Japan defense cooperation. These limitations, while real, are not likely to constrain bilateral cooperation on defense of Japan. Even as the United States and the US-Japan alliance is generally supported in Japan, popular attitudes are also broadly supportive of constitutional limitations on Japan's Self Defense Forces and their missions. Ensuring US approaches and engagement with Japan avoid shifting public attitudes against the alliance or US military presence in Japan will require continued careful attention. This challenge is acute in Okinawa where the US military presence is a charged political issue. Similarly, Japan-South Korea relations on security issues remain stunted because of an impasse over how to address Japan's actions in

³⁶ “Medium Term Defense Program (FY 2019 - FY 2023)” (Ministry of Defense of Japan, December 18, 2018), p 2, https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2019/pdf/chuki_seibi31-35_e.pdf.

³⁷ “Medium Term Defense Program (FY 2019 - FY 2023)” (Ministry of Defense of Japan, December 18, 2018), p 1, https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2019/pdf/chuki_seibi31-35_e.pdf.

³⁸ This insight emerged from multiple engagements with US and allied stakeholders between 2018 and 2020. See also, for example, Tim Kelly, “U.S in talks with Japan about Marine force overhaul, says commander,” Reuters, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-defence-japan/u-s-in-talks-with-japan-about-marine-force-overhaul-says-commander-idUKKCN24O2EC>, Elizabeth Shim, “U.S., Japan to build network of missile-intercepting satellites, report says,” UPI, https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2020/08/19/US-Japan-to-build-network-of-missile-intercepting-satellites-report-says/8591597846222/, and Richard Armitage and Zach Cooper, “Japan and the U.S. should co-develop an anti-ship cruise missile,” The Japan Times, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/02/12/commentary/japan-commentary/japan-u-s-co-develop-anti-ship-cruise-missile-system/>.

Korea during World War II. This situation limits opportunities for trilateral exercises and rapid information sharing across the United States' strongest allies in Northeast Asia.

PHILIPPINES

US Relationship

The United States is well regarded by most Filipinos.³⁹ Broad-based good will does not always translate into policy-positions favorable to the United States. US-Philippines relations currently are under more strain than at any time since the United States departed Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Base in 1991-1992 following failed host-nation support negotiations.

In February 2020, the government of the Philippines informed the United States of its intent to terminate the US-Philippines Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), though as of June 2020, termination was suspended for six months.⁴⁰ Termination of the VFA does not directly impact the underlying mutual defense treaty, but would make execution of training and exercise that underpin the military aspects of the alliance more difficult.

In September 2020, President Duterte pardoned U.S. Marine, Lance Corporal James Pemberton, for the 2014 murder of a Filipina woman. According to the New York Times, President Duterte's spokesperson stated that President Duterte had issued the pardon, "in the interest of an 'independent foreign policy where he is a friend to everyone, an enemy to none.'"⁴¹ The pardon was seen as a signal that Duterte sought improved relations with the United States.⁴² Contributing to that view, President Duterte issued the pardon on the same

³⁹ Jeremiah Cha, "Asia-Pacific Nations Regard the US More Favorably than China, but Trump Gets Negative Marks," *Pew Research Center* (blog), February 25, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/02/25/people-in-asia-pacific-regard-the-u-s-more-favorably-than-china-but-trump-gets-negative-marks/>.

⁴⁰ Sofia Tomacruz, "VFA Termination Suspended Due to Pandemic, Geopolitics – Locsin," *Rappler*, June 3, 2020, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/262747-locsin-reasons-vfa-termination>.

⁴¹ Jason Gutierrez, "Duterte Pardons U.S. Marine Who Killed Transgender Woman," *The New York Times*, September 7, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/07/world/asia/duterte-pardon-marine-transgender.html>.

⁴² "Duterte Grants Pemberton Absolute Pardon," *The Manila Times*, September 7, 2020, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/09/07/second-headline/duterte-grants-pemberton-absolute-pardon/765903/>.

day he presented the outgoing U.S. Ambassador, Seung Kim, with the Philippines' highest honor for a foreigner.⁴³

PRC Relationship

The Philippines, like many countries, is trying to preserve its sovereignty while maintaining the economic benefits of a strong economic relationship with China. This is demonstrated in President Duterte's efforts to court Chinese investment in the Philippines, even as China establishes an increasingly invasive presence in Philippine waters.⁴⁴

Views in the Philippines of China are generally negative and trending lower.⁴⁵ However, there is concern among analysts that it may take only a handful of strategic relationships in the Philippines for Beijing to successfully influence decisions and risk calculus in Manila. The consequence may be policies from the Philippines that are advantageous to Beijing.⁴⁶

Military Implications

Opportunities: Over the next several years, opportunities in the US-Philippines relationship are likely to be transactional and require agility in both policy and operations. President Duterte's views of the United States are not likely to change, but the United States may be able to respond to specific needs in the Philippines, creating goodwill and decision space to seize future opportunities.

The US approach should focus on helping the Philippines solve its unique national security challenges first. Near- to mid-term US-Philippines cooperation should focus on enhancing the suite of capabilities that the Philippines needs now to address its most pressing security and sovereignty challenges. These are often the same capabilities US forces would want to "plug into" in the event of increased tension or hostilities with China. Relevant capabilities include coastal surveillance, maritime domain awareness, information and intelligence fusion, and increased rotary-wing aviation and maintenance capabilities. Developing such capabilities with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)

⁴³ Paterno R. Esmaguél, II, "In Plot Twist, Outgoing US Ambassador Gets in Duterte's Good Graces," Rappler, September 8, 2020, <https://rappler.com/newsbreak/inside-track/outgoing-us-ambassador-sung-kim-duterte-good-graces>.

⁴⁴ "The Long Patrol: Staredown at Thitu Island Enters Its Sixteenth Month," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, March 5, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/the-long-patrol-staredown-at-thitu-island-enters-its-sixteenth-month/>.

⁴⁵ Pew Research Center Global Attitudes Project, "Global Indicators Database" accessed June 25, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/database/>

⁴⁶ Conversations with academics and non-governmental organization representatives, February 2020.

also would benefit the United States. Benefits would include: demonstrating greater alliance capability; a more credible deterrent capability; and—with close relations between Manila and Washington—the potential to dynamically operate a grid infrastructure with enabling elements for training, exercises, and (if needed) operations.

When the United States has a strong partnership with the Philippines, it is better positioned to pursue a wide range of options for competition, deterrence, and (if needed) conflict. Without the Philippines, available options are more limited.

Challenges: Of all the anchor partners, the relationship with the Philippines is currently the most contested. The United States seeks to maintain its longstanding alliance, to stand by the Filipino people, and sustain access to important geography. China seeks to erode support for the United States and convince the Philippines that aligning—much less allying—with the United States is not worth the costs. Any misstep by US military members will likely be magnified by political conditions in the Philippines and could set back US interests with this important ally.

Overcoming this strategic level challenge while continuing to engage with the AFP in ways that advance US Interests under the Mutual Defense Treaty will be complicated for at least the next several years. Efforts to restore or replace the VFA and sustain progress at the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement locations will also remain demanding challenges for the United States, including the State Department and others in the US Interagency.

A lapse in the VFA would be damaging, though not necessarily fatal, to the Mutual Defense Treaty. Instead, it would greatly increase the amount and complexity of work that precedes each US military training or exercise in the Philippines. The absence of a VFA may reduce the feasibility of large-scale military exercises such as Balikatan. It would make the day-to-day partnering that has long been a key element of the US-Philippines military relationship much more difficult to maintain. Finally, it would reduce the credibility of a combined US-Philippines effort to deter aggression against Philippines territory.

SINGAPORE

US Relationship

The United States and Singapore have been diplomatically close since Singapore was founded over fifty years ago. Singapore's standing as one of the world's most advanced and prosperous societies is a testament to its ability to identify prudent policies and take necessary risks. Singapore's founding prime minister was a regular visitor to Washington where, "[h]is theme was the indispensable US contribution to the defense and growth of a peaceful world."⁴⁷ This theme was not designed to flatter Americans, but rather to remind us of how important US efforts are to the security and prosperity of so many other countries.

This close diplomatic relationship has continued as Singapore remains a clear-eyed and candid partner for the United States. US-Singapore ties now include large bilateral trade and investment efforts, close cooperation on issues to strengthen a rules-based order, and a continued willingness by Singapore's leaders to remind Washington of what America means to Southeast Asia.⁴⁸ Existing US military access in Singapore is excellent, including rotational presence of up to four US Navy frigates, and the presence of a logistics coordination element important for assisting US Navy operations throughout Southeast and South Asia.

As a city-state, however, Singapore lacks strategic depth. Its resilience stems from adroit maneuver by its policymakers as they adapt to Singapore's circumstances. This often places Singapore in the position of having to placate two or more difficult partners at the same time.⁴⁹

PRC Relationship

Geographic proximity, cultural and language affinity, and a generally pragmatic outlook have all contributed to Singapore's long-standing economic and diplomatic engagement with China. The result is that Singapore's strategic analysts and political leadership are

⁴⁷ Henry A. Kissinger, "Kissinger: The World Will Miss Lee Kuan Yew," *Washington Post*, March 23, 2015, sec. Opinions, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-world-will-miss-lee-kuan-yew/2015/03/23/80867914-d172-11e4-8fce-3941fc548f1c_story.html.

⁴⁸ Hsien Loong Lee, "The Endangered Asian Century," *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 4 (June 11, 2020): 52–64, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2020-06-04/lee-hsien-loong-endangered-asian-century>.

⁴⁹ Hsien Loong Lee, "The Endangered Asian Century," *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 4 (June 11, 2020): 52–64, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2020-06-04/lee-hsien-loong-endangered-asian-century>

keenly aware of China's preferences and objectives. Singapore's policymakers have made no secret of their opposition to unilateral PRC efforts to re-shape access to and operations within the South China Sea. While strategically significant to the United States, and strategically important to China, Japan, and Korea, unfettered commercial shipping in the waters of South and Southeast Asia is economically vital for Singapore's position as a transshipment and commercial hub. Without it, much of Singapore's economic potential will dry up. Thus, Singapore must carefully calibrate policy choices to preserve its economic position—much of which is dependent on China's economy.

Military Implications

Opportunities: The US-Singapore relationship remains strong which is manifest in the high degree of bilateral cooperation on defense issues. Growth in this relationship will likely be seen in actions such as increased training for Singapore forces at US facilities in the region, such as in Guam, and in continued information exchanges on such issues as maritime domain awareness. As a small state with little opportunity to disperse internally, Singapore may find benefit in distributing its defense forces in ways that resemble the grid and enabler roles. At present, Singapore does this in practice through fighter squadron presence in the United States and Australia for training purposes.

Challenges: US military planners' objectives of increasing US forward presence can easily overwhelm the physical and political space available in Singapore. Seeking too much access—or doing so too quickly—could jeopardize present and future military access in Singapore. Singapore will remain a geographically, politically, and culturally important state for the present and future trajectory of Asia. However, its size limits its military efficacy during a conflict. Retaining current levels of cooperation, and leveraging it strategically, can enhance US capability and presence throughout Southeast Asia.

SOUTH KOREA

US Relationship

The US-South Korea relationship was cemented during the 1951-1953 Korean War. Since then, US forces have been stationed in South Korea to bolster its defenses and to work with South Korea to deter a second North Korean invasion of the South. Since 1953, the United States has been a partner on South Korea's journey to become one of the world's leading economic and cultural powers.

Resulting from its prosperity, South Korea fields a modern and highly capable military as a deterrent and, if needed, defensive capability against North Korea. This strong force is bolstered by the presence of US forces stationed in South Korea and the extended US nuclear deterrent South Korea enjoys as a US ally.

Political shifts in Washington and Seoul over the past 15 years have resulted in several rounds of discussions about the future of US forces in South Korea—with the conversation, at times, initiated in either Seoul or Washington. At present, the United States is completing a consolidation of most of its ground forces in South Korea to a single large base south of Seoul. The consolidation will enable the United States to return a number of land parcels to South Korea, including highly desirable acreage in downtown Seoul.

Even as the relocation was ongoing, episodes of high tension between South and North Korea spiked. These episodes heightened South Korean's concerns over North Korea's volatility and the vulnerability of South Koreans to possible acts of North Korean aggression. Seoul's northern suburbs are within range of North Korean artillery, and downtown proper is only a 1-2 hour drive from the demilitarized border with North Korea.

North Korea's provocations, in the form of continued nuclear tests and missile launches, caused many in South Korea to reassess the importance of the mutual defense treaty with the United States and the relative value of continued US military presence on the Korean peninsula.

Like the Trump Administration's transactional trade negotiation tactics with Japan, its approach to South Korea frayed relations with Seoul. While it was renegotiating a (recently signed) trade deal with South Korea, it was also in the midst of demanding South Korea bear a greater share of the cost for US forces in Korea, even as North Korea made nuclear threats against Seoul.

PRC Relationship

South Korea's relationship with China is long and complicated. Many South Koreans share the historical outlook of a time when the Korean state extended far into what is present-day China. They also recall (through education, not personal experience) times when China imposed a feudal vassal relationship on Korea. The historical motifs do not, generally, cloud South Korean willingness to engage in practical decision making about market access and trade with China's large and growing market.

The South Korea-China economic relationship has been strong and growing for much of the past twenty years. China served as a convenient source of low-cost production and manufacturing for South Korean firms whose global ambitions out-grew the available labor in South Korea. China-South Korea trade exceeded \$200 billion each of the past nine years.⁵⁰ However, China's reputation throughout South Korea has been significantly damaged in recent years, at least in part because of China's actions against South Korean firms following deployment in South Korea of missile defense systems to defend it from a threatened North Korean attack.⁵¹

Military Implications

Opportunities: The level of military cooperation and integration between US and South Korean forces remains among the closest of any US ally in the world. Building on the interoperability developed over more than sixty years remains a clear opportunity for both countries. This will almost certainly include refining and advancing that interoperability as the transition of wartime operational control, from US to South Korean leadership, moves ahead. Additional areas to utilize that interoperability may include considerations of combined activities beyond the Korean peninsula in regions of the world where the United States and South Korea share similar defense and security interests.

South Koreans are also increasingly willing to consider the possibility that China's intentions toward South Korea—like its actions in South and Southeast Asia—may have an unfavorable impact on South Korea over the long term.⁵² Resultantly, there are some pockets within South Korean defense policy and military circles willing to consider ways in which the United States and South Korea can cooperate to deter PRC aggression. At present, however, those views do not meaningfully extend into South Korean political circles.

Building on previous work, this study reaffirms the opportunity presented by a strong US-Korea alliance undergirded by US military presence in South Korea:

⁵⁰ UN Comtrade Database. "UN Comtrade: International Trade Statistics." Accessed June 25, 2020. <https://comtrade.un.org/data/>.

⁵¹ Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project. "Global Indicators Database." Accessed June 25, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/database/>; Cynthia Kim, and Adam Jourdan. "Ghost Stores, Lost Billions as Korea Inc's China Woes Grow." *Reuters*, September 12, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-southkorea-china/ghost-stores-lost-billions-as-korea-incs-china-woes-grow-idUSKCN1BN33V>.

⁵² Discussions with South Korean officials, military officers, and policy analysts, April 2019.

Over time, South Korea—like Japan—will provide the United States with a potential operational strongpoint with options for a widely distributed Joint Force enabling grid. South Korea provides for US presence on the Asian mainland and it is within the PRC's anti-access/area-denial umbrella. South Korea has enormous potential for influencing outcomes both on the Asian mainland and in the wider Indo-Pacific.⁵³

Challenges: Despite long-standing high levels of support for the alliance in both countries, a recurring challenge is ensuring the political leaders in both countries remain focused on the enormous benefits the US-South Korea alliance provides both countries, rather than short-term political difficulties that alliance management can create. This challenge will likely remain. Additional, military-specific challenges are also present in the alliance: successful conclusion of the transition of operational control, maintaining readiness to confront a nuclear-armed North Korea, and navigating the political, economic, and military facets of China's growing power and influence—especially as those manifest differently in Seoul and Washington.

For the next decade, the greatest challenge to US-South Korea defense cooperation will likely be South Korean negative attitudes toward Japan stemming from Japan's exploitation of Koreans—especially Korean women—during World War II and a mutual inability to bring meaningful closure to the issue. The United States retains treaty commitments to defend both countries from armed attack. Given the degree to which current US plans for supporting South Korea rely on utilizing Japan as a consolidation and embarkation point, rising tensions between the two countries will complicate US planning efforts vis-a-vis both the North Korea and PRC threats.

Overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities will require clear dialogue with many levels of leadership in both countries, spanning beyond purely military-to-military talks.

TAIWAN

US Relationship

The United States has no defense treaty with Taiwan. Instead, US policy toward Taiwan is based on the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act. This law establishes a US obligation to support Taiwan's efforts to secure defensive capabilities, and predicates future US-PRC relations on peaceful resolution of the dispute between Beijing and Taiwan over which authority is

⁵³ Nathan Freier, et al, *An Army Transformed* p. 82

sovereign over the twenty-three million person democracy.⁵⁴ Taiwan retains strong trade relationships with numerous countries around the world, but does so in most cases from a diplomatically vulnerable position of being either not recognized, or as being recognized as a province of China.⁵⁵

PRC Relationship

Beijing asserts that Taiwan is a breakaway province that must ultimately be re-unified with the mainland. There are no formal diplomatic relations between Taipei and Beijing. For decades, the PLA's primary mission has been to develop the capability to retake Taiwan by force, if necessary.⁵⁶ The risk of military confrontation has generally remained in the background. For much of the past thirty years, China has actively courted Taiwan businesses to establish production facilities in China. As a result, Taiwan's economy currently depends deeply upon access to China for the export of Taiwan's own products.

Recently, tensions have increased as Beijing has tightened its control over regions that, formerly, had greater autonomy, such as Hong Kong. Simultaneous efforts from Beijing to isolate Taiwan such by excluding it from the World Health Organization since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, have served largely to galvanize support within Taiwan for its own approach to self-governance. This was underscored with President Tsai Ing-Wen won a major victory in her re-election campaign in 2020.⁵⁷ These trends between Beijing and Taipei, combined with increased US engagement with Taiwan, are indicators that cross-strait tensions will remain high in coming years.

Military Implications

Opportunities: Recent shifts in US willingness to engage directly with Taiwan on both the political and the military level suggest openings for greater US-Taiwan connectivity in

⁵⁴ "22 US Code § 3301 - Congressional Findings and Declaration of Policy," Pub. L. No. 96-8, S2, 22 USC 3301 (1979), <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/22/3301>.

⁵⁵ Chris Horton, "Taiwan's Status Is a Geopolitical Absurdity," *The Atlantic*, July 8, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/07/taiwans-status-geopolitical-absurdity/593371/>.

⁵⁶ Department of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019", p iii, (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 2, 2019), https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/02/2002127082/-1/-1/1/2019_CHINA_MILITARY_POWER_REPORT.pdf.

⁵⁷ Emily Feng, "Rebuking China, Taiwan Votes To Reelect President Tsai Ing-Wen," *NPR.org*, January 11, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/11/795573457/rebuking-china-taiwan-votes-to-reelect-president-tsai-ing-wen>.

coming years. Such efforts should be carefully calibrated within each capital. As of this writing, the US Congress has drafted legislation indicating a preference for US Navy hospital ships to make port-calls in Taiwan during deployments to the Pacific. Additionally, the US Secretary of Health and Human Services recently visited Taiwan to discuss COVID-19 responses and gain insights from Taiwan's successful containment approach.⁵⁸

These acts do not highlight specific military benefits, but do indicate the degree to which the dynamic is shifting regarding Taiwan. Given China's more aggressive stance toward provinces such as Xinjiang and Hong Kong, leaders in Taiwan may want to increase engagement and acquisition of low-cost, high-impact capabilities to better deter PRC aggression. The United States would benefit from such closer engagement by leveraging experience in Taiwan to rapidly learn lessons of how to improve defensive capabilities at relatively low cost. Engaging in discussions with Taiwan military and civilian leaders on where and how to establish grid locations and considerations of when and for what to activate them with enabling capabilities would strengthen US posture for competition or contingencies across East Asia.

Challenges: The greatest challenge regarding Taiwan remains the risk of a military attack by mainland China. Should China launch an attack against Taiwan, it is unlikely that Taiwan would receive support from countries other than the United States. Even US military intervention, while conventionally accepted within foreign policy circles, is far from certain. What is nearly certain is that US support to Taiwan would not likely include the type of strong coalition activity common in US military operations since at least 1990. China's seat on the UN Security Council would preclude a resolution there—and it could instead push for a resolution authorizing its own coalition effort to reclaim what it sees as a rebel province.

US forces do not currently operate in or from Taiwan. That is unlikely to change over the coming decade. More important for the US military would be any potential regional reactions to US support (or lack of support) to Taiwan. Many regional states consider Taiwan a de-facto, if not de jure, ally of the United States. A lackluster US response to PRC aggression would likely be seen by regional partners as a lack of US will to support their risk-taking vis-à-vis China.

⁵⁸ CBS News, "HHS Secretary Alex Azar making highest-level visit to Taiwan by U.S. official in decades", accessed August 19, 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/hhs-secretary-alex-azar-making-highest-level-visit-to-taiwan-by-u-s-official-in-decades/>.

CONCLUSION

Without renewed US leadership—and investment—the regional dynamic in the Indo-Pacific region will move away from US interests. At present, US access and influence for defense purposes is good enough for the peacetime employment of its forces. Most anchor partners are, however, at least considering steps that hedge against the prospect of an unreliable US partner the region. Continued movement in this direction would damage U.S. security interests in the region.

Uneven US statements and actions regarding the Indo-Pacific region over the past ten years are fueling voices within regional states predisposed to second-guess the benefits of closer cooperation with the United States. China is steadily increasing pressure on regional states to show deference to Beijing's preferences. Thus, the costs for opposing China are increasing even as the future benefits of greater cooperation with Washington are increasingly in doubt.

US policymakers should expect continued hedging by regional states, including anchor partners, absent renewed investment by the United States in the objectives prioritized by its allies and partners. Defense relationships remain strong, particularly as anchor partners look to the United States to bolster efforts to maintain their sovereignty against an expansionist China. Defense relationships and peacetime access alone will be insufficient to advance US interests against a rival that seeks to push the United States out of the region.