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Demystifying the Indo-Pacific Theater

GENERAL CQ BROWN, JR.

The Indo-Pacific Theater by-and-large, is a mystery to many. The focus of our nation and our Department of Defense (DOD) has long been oriented toward Europe, and more recently the Middle East, so that few Americans understand and appreciate the significance of the Indo-Pacific. For starters, 60 percent of the Earth's population, or an estimated 4.5 billion people, reside within the Indo-Pacific region. Additionally, the Indo-Pacific region is responsible for 44 percent of the world's trade, making its economic significance unparalleled. Five of the seven military treaties between the United States and our allies—Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, and Thailand—are within the Indo-Pacific region. Conversely, four of the five stipulated *National Defense Strategy (NDS)* challenges are also tied to the Indo-Pacific: including Russia, China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and violent extremist organizations. Many Americans are unaware of the complex history of Taiwan, the territorial disputes within the South China Sea, or even the location of many Pacific Island countries.

The Indo-Pacific region is unlike any other area of responsibility (AOR). It is unimaginably large. The Indo-Pacific Theater stretches from the coast of California to the western shore of India and from the Arctic to Antarctica. Said another way, from Hollywood to Bollywood and from polar bears to penguins. To expand upon this illustration using numbers: the Indo-Pacific AOR is roughly 52 percent of the Earth's surface, or 100 million square miles, and it is mostly water. For reference, the continental United States is slightly more than 3 million square miles, and Europe covers approximately 4.766 million square miles (including European Russia and Greenland). Thus, the vast expanse of the Indo-Pacific creates a significant logistical challenge. Depending on the mode of transportation, it can take the better part of a day to multiple weeks to reach many locations within the region, making pre-positioning, requirement anticipation, communication, and domain awareness critical to any civil or military operation.

In addition to the expanse, the Indo-Pacific is also home to some of the world's worst natural disasters. Typhoons, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes are commonplace within the region—each natural disaster putting a portion of the 4.5 billion residents at risk. The ability to overcome the spatial challenges of the region to provide relief when and where it is needed after a natural disaster has become a hallmark capability of our DOD. This noncombat-related capability is

respected by all nations, challenged by no nations, and often critical to developing alliances and partnerships.

Within the Indo-Pacific reside a number of dynamic and complex regional challenges with worldwide implications, including nuclear powers, disputed territories, ballistic missiles, and highly adaptive adversaries. Countering each of these challenges requires a whole-of-government approach in which the other three instruments of power understand that the military maintains a necessary level of readiness to backstop their combined efforts. Revisiting, in detail, the four *NDS* challenges in the Indo-Pacific validates this construct.

Challenges

The People's Republic of China (PRC), first and foremost, has steadily risen to a credible potential adversary in every facet of power. Beijing has incrementally developed China's combat capability, militarized the South China Sea, and inflicted a destabilizing effect within the region through coercion and intimidation tactics in an effort to establish a new normal. The PRC's actions are defining a modern-day colonialism in which its practices entrap and diminish national sovereignty. While nations have recently become more vocal about the nefarious activities executed by the PRC, a comprehensive and coordinated effort is lacking.

Second, Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) has significant focus on a more familiar foe, Russia. Russia is a shared threat between United States European Command (EUCOM), United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM), and United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM). Moscow's capabilities and willingness to employ those capabilities has maintained Russia as a relevant adversary. Similar to China, Russia is a nuclear power with diverse military capabilities that has sold military hardware and software to other nations—all while executing a complex information operations campaign to obscure their actions and true intentions. The recent combined activity between Russia and the PRC has raised concerns among many nations, making any narrative regarding regional security suspect.

The tension between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is the third identified *NDS* challenge within the Indo-Pacific region. Despite recent diplomatic efforts, the DPRK remains a viable threat. Pyongyang's continued efforts to develop offensive missile capability destabilizes the region as a whole as it holds American forces, allies, and partners at risk.

Finally, violent extremist organizations (VEO) seek to impose their views and radicalize people across the globe by attacking vulnerabilities. VEOs gain footholds in underdeveloped geographic areas and rapidly spread ideologies that are inflicting as much terror as possible. VEO activity within the Indo-Pacific region

may not be as publicized as in the Middle East or Africa, but the threat and results are very real. The Siege of Marawi (Philippines), the Easter Sunday attacks on multiple churches in Sri Lanka, and the ongoing struggle within Indonesia to uncover terrorist cells are just a few examples of the VEO activity within the Indo-Pacific.

I say all of that to reinforce my next point: “The Indo-Pacific is the Department of Defense’s priority theater.”¹ That sentiment is my belief and, for obvious reasons, my current focus, but those words are not mine. That phrase comes straight from the DOD Indo-Pacific Strategy Report published in June. The Indo-Pacific Strategy Report has expressed a vision to preserve a free-and-open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). All nations should be free of coercion in terms of security, values, and trade. In an effort to guarantee that freedom, INDOPACOM is committed to a safe, secure, and prosperous region benefiting all nations by promoting an Indo-Pacific that allows all nations to fly, sail, and operate in accordance with international laws. As described earlier, the Indo-Pacific is complex, diverse, and expansive. The realization of a FOIP vision is only possible by the willingness of free nations working together in coordination with American forces postured within the region.

Aligning with this belief, PACAF has developed a strategy concentrating on long-term strategic competition. There are three lines of effort that serve as the foundation of the PACAF strategy: (1) strengthening alliances and partnerships, (2) improving interoperability and lethality, and (3) developing operational concepts for great-power competition. These lines of effort vector PACAF’s actions to support a FOIP and reinforce my priorities for the command: to be ready, resilient, and postured for the future.

Strengthening Alliances and Partnerships

Strengthening alliances and partnerships is the first line of effort in PACAF for two reasons. Relationships provide the United States with a distinct asymmetric advantage over our adversaries and directly contributes to the collective ability to deter aggressive actions. By strengthening the United States’ relationships and developing new partnerships with nations in the Indo-Pacific region, we establish an environment in which we win before fighting. Next, should deterrence fail, the United States must be ready to fight and win. Critical to moving this idea from conceptual to reality is access. Alliances and partnerships provide the United States with many advantages. It is imperative for all military operations, from cooperation to conflict, that the United States have access to prepare, launch, execute, and recover to the airfields and ports within the region. Equally important is the collab-

orative capacity to operate in a synchronized manner with American joint forces and the forces of other nations willing to fight alongside American personnel.



(US Air Force photo by SSgt Mikaley Kline)

Figure 1. Strong relationships. Air Marshal Mel Hupfeld, chief, Royal Australian Air Force; Gen Philippe Lavigne, chief of staff, French Air Force; Gen Yoshinari Marumo, chief, Japan Air Self-Defense Force; and Gen David L. Goldfein, chief of staff, US Air Force participate in a multi-domain operations panel during the 2019 Pacific Air Chiefs Symposium (PACS) at Joint Base Pearl Harbor–Hickam, Hawaii, 5 December 2019. The theme of PACS 19, “A Collaborative Approach to Regional Security,” focused on building mutual understanding of varied regional perspectives through bilateral engagements and multinational panels and meetings.

It is my experience that the most effective way to strengthen alliances and recruit new partners is through presence and personal engagement. The United States recognizes and respects the different levels of interoperability that are possible from each opportunity to interact with foreign nations, ranging from coalition warfare to regional security initiatives to humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HADR). Combining personal engagement and presence with the capability and desired outcome of any nation is the genesis of fortified relationships within the region.

Analyzing the Indo-Pacific in terms of subregions facilitates a better understanding and empathetic approach to tailor our lens toward each nation. No two countries are alike, and applying a cookie-cutter approach to partnerships is generally unsuccessful. As a result, the AOR can be subdivided into four subregional objectives: Reorient Northeast Asia, Strengthen Southeast Asia, Secure Oceania, and Create Opportunities in South Asia.

Northeast Asia

Any discussion referencing Northeast Asia starts by recognizing the threats. Despite the recent relational thawing between the United States and the DPRK, Pyongyang remains the most immediate threat to peace within the AOR. Additionally, both China and Russia are located within Northeast Asia and are the focus of our long-term threat picture. Our alliances with Japan and South Korea provide balance to counter three of the five named *NDS* challenges within the Northeast Asia region.

Southeast Asia

Shifting the focus to Southeast Asia, there are similar threats as well as opportunities to expand American partnerships within the region. First, PACAF supports measures to strengthen the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), expand multilateralism, and improve the combined security capacity within the region. With Thailand, the United States' oldest Asian ally, we are still finding ways to enhance training opportunities, bolster interoperability, and increase mutually beneficial security agreements. In Indonesia, PACAF is expanding HADR training and establishing avenues to increase information sharing. Singapore supports a strong American presence and consistently pursues training opportunities with the United States to increase the city-state's overall military response capabilities. Malaysia has opened the aperture to strengthening ties with the United States through mutual areas of interest, including expanding collaboration, information sharing, and maritime-domain awareness. Finally, there are growing opportunities with Vietnam, which assumed the chair for ASEAN in 2020 and pursues US capabilities.

Oceania

Securing Oceania involves an area that spans from Antarctica to Micronesia, making the efforts executed today to enforce international norms in coordination with New Zealand, Australia, and Japan even more critical. The Antarctica Treaty is up for review in 2048. By preserving the "research" status of the Antarctic continent, we not only dissuade activities that are not research-related but also bolster our relationships with like-minded nations.

Securing Oceania goes beyond the climate-related challenges within the Antarctic. As a result, PACAF, in concert with the interagency departments, has made an effort to reaffirm US presence and commitment to the three states in the Compact of Free Association: the Marshall Islands, Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia. Reiterating the United States' desire to be a partner of choice and not

a partner of coercion is widening the aperture for stronger relationships with those nations.

South Asia

Creating South Asia opportunities is another area where PACAF is actively working to enhance our relationships. India, as one of our “Major Defense Partners,” provides opportunities for PACAF to actively expand our relationship by increasing training opportunities through our exercise program. In addition to the increase in training opportunities, India and the United States signed the Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018, facilitating greater information sharing between the two nations.

Improving Interoperability and Lethality

PACAF’s second line of effort is to focus on improving interoperability and lethality. Last year, PACAF Airmen led 29 of the robust 54 total exercises scheduled within the Indo-Pacific region to improve all aspects of military capability. These simulations covered flying training exercises, command post exercises, humanitarian assistance training, and joint exercises with an end goal of producing a better-prepared joint and coalition force. Additionally, the command scheduled and executed Airman-to-Airman talks, subject matter expert exchanges, and senior enlisted forums. Each of these personal engagements, regardless of topic or complexity, bolsters the foundation of our relationships with the participating nations. Simultaneously, these training avenues allow us to identify knowledge gaps, improve processes, and synchronize our efforts as a collective force. It is as simple as this: security for America and the region is inextricably linked to the number of nations we train with and the number of times we exercise together.

Developing Operational Concepts for Great-Power Competition

This leads us to PACAF’s third and final line of effort: developing operational concepts for great-power competition. As with any other time in our history, the challenges that we face today are unlike any other we have faced before. To hone the development of our operational concepts for today’s challenges, we have to understand what *great-power competition* means. The PACAF definition of *competitors* is a spectrum that establishes a nation as somewhere between *friends* and *adversaries*. The artificial spectrum places the United States on a playing field in which the competition plays out in a “gray zone,” or below the level of conflict. Conceptually, this has led PACAF to expedite efforts that challenge our status

quo. As we integrate fifth-generation weapons systems into the Air Force, we need to bring the Air Force into the fifth generation.

The vision of a fifth-generation Air Force is based on the actualization of concepts such as agile combat employment, revision of command-and-control models, and implementation of multi-domain operation proposals. PACAF's ability to posture and operate in a number of locations, proven through its prior preparation, enables us to be a more dynamic operating force. The cornerstone of our operating concept is agile combat employment, or ACE. ACE enables us to operate from locations with varying levels of capacity and support, ensuring Airmen are postured in a position of advantage to generate combat power. PACAF is taking measured steps to distance itself from the idea of big bases and War Reserve Materiel to pre-positioning essential items through regional base cluster positioning operations. Essentially, our operating concepts revolve around our coordinated ability to become lighter, leaner, and more agile to deter aggression or inject chaos should conflict arise.

Conclusion

The three lines of effort developed to implement the PACAF strategy were prepared with the challenges of the Indo-Pacific in mind. It is unrealistic to assume these challenges can be overcome without acknowledgment; more importantly, we cannot transform these challenges into opportunities if we are not aware of them.

Currently our forces within the "first island chain" are capable of being ranged by adversary threats. Not only do we have to be comfortable with that fact, we have to be prepared to fight in a contested and degraded environment with only the forces that we have in theater should the situation dictate. Additionally, our allies and partners are within that same first island chain. The United States has cultivated a relationship of trust, in which nations have sided with us from cooperation to conflict. Even if it were possible to fall back, retreating to a position of safety would break the fundamental trust of these relationships. There is a level of risk associated with that mind-set. PACAF is aware of the inherent risks of this approach and continues efforts to buy down risk across the doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (DOTMLPF-P) spectrum.

The *NDS* highlights the return to great-power competition and the threat to our national security within the Indo-Pacific region. The emerging threats, added to the complexity of an already challenging spatial and diverse environment, are creating a level of uncertainty for our future. The PACAF strategy is designed to capitalize on a collective framework that not only benefits the security of the regional nations where 60 percent of world's population resides but also every na-

tion that seeks to fly, sail, or operate within the Indo-Pacific region in accordance with international norms to support 44 percent of the world's trade. INDOPA-COM is advancing as a joint and coalition force with our allies and partners to compete and win. At the same time, we are reserving a seat at the international table for all nations to voice their concerns, increase understanding, and resolve differences with a goal of preserving a peaceful and prosperous region. 🌟

General CQ Brown, Jr.

General Brown (Master of Aeronautical Science degree, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University; BS civil engineering, Texas Tech University) is the commander, Pacific Air Forces; air component commander for US Indo-Pacific Command; and executive director, Pacific Air Combat Operations Staff, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. PACAF is responsible for Air Force activities spread over half the globe in a command that supports more than 46,000 Airmen serving principally in Japan, Korea, Hawaii, Alaska, and Guam.

General Brown was commissioned in 1984 as a distinguished graduate of the ROTC program at Texas Tech University. He has served in a variety of positions at the squadron and wing level, including an assignment to the US Air Force Weapons School as an F-16 instructor. His notable staff tours include aide-de-camp to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force; director, Secretary of the Air Force and Chief of Staff Executive Action Group; and deputy director, Operations Directorate, US Central Command. He also served as a National Defense Fellow at the Institute for Defense Analyses.

General Brown has commanded a fighter squadron, the US Air Force Weapons School, two fighter wings, and US Air Forces Central Command. Prior to his current assignment, he served as the deputy commander, US Central Command.

The general is a command pilot with more than 2,900 flying hours, including 130 combat hours.

Notes

1. US Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (Washington, DC: DOD, 2019), <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

New Zealand's Strategic Challenge

Responding to China's New Interventionist Foreign Policies*

MAIA BAKER

New Zealand and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have maintained a mutually beneficial rapport since the countries first established diplomatic relations in 1972. Access to Chinese markets has been essential to New Zealand's prosperity over the last half-century, while New Zealand played a key role in supporting China's economic opening to the rest of the world. Since Pres. Xi Jinping's accession to power in 2012, however, China's actions in New Zealand and around the world have drawn scrutiny from intelligence agencies, media, academicians, and politicians. Increasingly powerful, ambitious, and perhaps insecure, China now wields an array of coercive and subversive techniques to support its domestic and foreign policy objectives abroad. Although New Zealand's relationship with China will only grow in importance over the coming decades, Beijing's strategic aims and methods pose a multifaceted threat that must be addressed. Wellington should respond to this challenge by adopting a more mature and comprehensive approach to national security and the growing threat from China. This new approach should include three strategic lines of effort: safeguarding New Zealand's democratic institutions, preserving its economic base, and supporting regional stability within the South Pacific. This challenge can best be understood when placed within the context of China's strategic objectives and the strategic approach with which Beijing pursues them. In addressing the particular challenges that China poses to New Zealand, best practices can be drawn from other Western democratic states such as Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Ultimately, the challenge posed by China illustrates why small states need grand strategy and why the lack of a national security strategy is a key deficiency in New Zealand government policy.

The New Zealand–China Relationship

New Zealand and the PRC fostered their early relationship on a shared desire to address the spread of Soviet influence in the South Pacific. Since then, however, the relationship has primarily centered on trade rather than security matters.¹ As

*The views and opinions expressed or implied within this article are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of the New Zealand Army, the New Zealand Defence Force, or the Government of New Zealand.

a former British colony, New Zealand's economic wellbeing was heavily dependent on guaranteed access to British markets through the first half of the twentieth century. This ended with the United Kingdom's accession to the European Economic Community, which London announced in 1961 and implemented in 1973.² New Zealand responded by diversifying its export markets and establishing a free trade agreement (FTA) with Australia and trade deals with the United States, Japan, South Korea, and China. New Zealand and China established diplomatic relations in 1972, and since then a series of firsts has punctuated the relationship. New Zealand was the first state to support China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 1997, first to recognize China's market economy in 2004, and first to negotiate an FTA with China, which the two countries implemented in 2008.³ Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Murray McCully emphasized that New Zealand's economic resilience following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis resulted from its FTA with China.⁴ New Zealand's relationship with China has continued to grow over the last decade. In 2013, Wellington and Beijing commenced the first tripartite development project with a Pacific Island nation.⁵ In 2014, the two states announced that they would upgrade their relationship to a "comprehensive strategic partnership."⁶ In 2016, negotiations to upgrade the bilateral FTA commenced.⁷ Without a common language, culture, or set of political values, New Zealand's relationship with China is thus primarily motivated by trade, which has not only fueled economic growth but also helped New Zealand navigate the economic setbacks of 1973 and 2008.

While Wellington's chief interest in China is with trade, Beijing's interests in New Zealand are somewhat more varied. With its many "firsts," New Zealand acted as China's advocate in the West. More recently, by joining the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and supporting the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), New Zealand has furthered China's broader economic aims in the South Pacific.⁸ New Zealand enjoys a disproportionate influence in international forums, as Wellington administers the foreign and defense policies of three other Pacific Island nations: Niue, Tokelau, and the Cook Islands. New Zealand's support can thus garner four votes in international forums such as the United Nations.⁹ New Zealand is a claimant state in Antarctica and administers the Ross Dependency, which is a large area of the continent and adjoining sea. Chinese officials, perhaps erroneously, believe that the Antarctic Treaty will expire in 2048. In anticipation of a polar land grab, Beijing seeks to stake China's claim in the continent, which offers vast natural resources, a base for tracking space-based military technologies, and other geostrategic advantages.¹⁰ New Zealand's airspace has relatively little traffic, making it a promising testing ground for space and near-space technologies.¹¹ Already, it appears that China has launched near-space dual-use equipment from

Chinese-owned New Zealand farmlands.¹² In addition, New Zealand is a valuable exporter of dairy products to China, supplying 24 percent of China's foreign milk imports and 80 percent of its butter.¹³ Finally, as a small and nonthreatening country, New Zealand serves as a sandbox environment for diplomatic and trade negotiations, allowing China to refine its process in a low-risk environment before engaging with larger economies.¹⁴

Although it has largely been one of mutual gain, New Zealand's relationship with China is not without risk. In a number of areas, the actions and policies of the PRC are at odds with New Zealand's values and interests. Beijing's actions in New Zealand, the South Pacific, and China's own "near abroad" all pose a challenge to New Zealand's long-term interests.¹⁵ Seeking to preserve its trade benefits, Wellington has traditionally tended to accommodate the PRC's foreign policy excesses. Indeed, the previous National government exercised a "no surprises" policy by which Wellington avoided public statements that China might view as a challenge to its core interests.¹⁶ This has changed somewhat under the current Labour government, which has voiced some limited criticism over China's actions in the South China Sea (SCS).¹⁷ Wellington has also introduced a number of policies that limit the scope for Chinese influence in New Zealand.¹⁸ Beijing has voiced China's dissent to these policies, and New Zealand's opposition party has called on the government to repair the relationship.¹⁹ One key shortfall of public discourse within New Zealand is that the PRC's actions are often taken in isolation, giving rise to skepticism about the veracity or relevance of various issues. This discussion can be better informed by situating the PRC's actions within a broader framework that incorporates China's overarching strategic objectives and Beijing's unique strategic approach. This will allow us to better understand the challenge posed by China and formulate an appropriate response.

China's Strategic Objectives

Temporally, China has structured its strategic objectives around two key dates: the centenary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2021 and the centenary of the founding of the PRC in 2049. The CCP adopted these "Two Centenaries" into its constitution in 2012, along with development benchmarks for what President Xi calls "the great dream of the Chinese nation's rejuvenation."²⁰ The Two Centenary goals largely center on China's domestic and social development, although they also address the nation's economic and military power. The CCP intends for China to be a "moderately prosperous society in all respects" by 2021, which in effect means doubling the 2010 per capita income figures.²¹ By 2049, China is likely to have reaped the benefits of its BRI and become the largest economic power in terms of gross domestic product. Military reform also features

in the Two Centenary goals, with three key benchmarks: to achieve mechanization, organizational reform, and increased informational capabilities by 2020; to have completed modernization by 2035; and to have “fully transformed into world-class forces” by 2049.²² By the second centenary, Xi envisages that “China has become a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence.”²³ These goals suggest that China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) will benchmark against the United States not only in terms of military capability but also in terms of force projection and global reach.

Geographically, one can best visualize China’s strategic aims as a set of concentric rings, at the heart of which is the continued survival and leadership of the CCP. The second strategic aim is the maintenance of internal stability, which the CCP pursues through state propaganda, the Social Credit program, repression of political dissidents, internal and international travel controls, and censorship of media and the Internet. Third is sovereign territorial integrity, which includes maintaining control over outer provinces such as Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, as well as the reintegration of Taiwan. Chinese leadership is particularly concerned that neighboring states will exploit disunity within these provinces as a pretext to violate China’s territorial integrity. Through troop and naval dispositions and the development of its antiaccess and area denial system, Beijing seeks to defend China’s borders against foreign aggression. The fourth ring encompasses China’s near abroad. This includes territorial claims in the South and East China Seas, diversifying trade routes, and areas of dispute with India. China ultimately seeks to exert regional influence and supplant the United States as the stabilizing power within East and Southeast Asia. In the final outer ring, China’s global strategic aims include the development of a robust global economic infrastructure, access to natural resources across the globe, development of a network of friendly nations and regional platforms, and control over the global narrative relating to China’s core interests.

China’s foreign policy objectives in the South Pacific align with its global strategic aims outlined above. Beijing is extending its diplomatic reach by providing aid and investment to Pacific Island nations. In part, this is a continuation of the competitive “checkbook diplomacy” that China and Taiwan have traditionally carried out in the region, exchanging aid for exclusive diplomatic recognition.²⁴ The South Pacific is also a source of important natural resources, including timber, minerals, fishing stocks, meat, dairy, and agricultural produce. Finally, the South Pacific appears likely to play a key role in China’s military development and geostrategic expansion.²⁵ Physical infrastructure such as the Port of Darwin and a proposed cruise terminal in Vanuatu may in the future support the projection of PLA Navy vessels into the Pacific. Pacific Island nations, including New Zealand,

also offer suitable locations from which to launch and/or track space and near-space military or dual-use technologies such as satellites, high-altitude balloons, and ballistic missiles.

China's Strategic Approach

Having developed a broad understanding of China's strategic objectives, it is important to understand the characteristics of Beijing's strategic approach. A strategic approach can be defined as a framework or set of guiding principles that govern the application of ways, means, and subordinate goals in the pursuit of overarching strategic objectives.²⁶ China's strategic approach can be determined from official statements, foreign policies, and unofficial but apparently state-sanctioned activities. Since Xi Jinping's accession to power, China's strategic approach has become more aspirational and aggressive, making greater use of the levers of national power.²⁷ The relative policy stability of China's one-party government means that Beijing can set long-term strategic objectives, such as the continuing cycle of five-year plans and Xi's Two Centenaries. Within this context, China's strategic approach in the current era features three main characteristics: the pursuit of competitive strategies, cooptation of private enterprise, and a high degree of three-dimensional integration. These characteristics, which are explained in more detail below, describe a strategic approach that is effective, if potentially self-defeating.

Beijing's foreign influence operations indicate that China is engaged everywhere in competitive strategies. Thomas G. Mahnken explains that long-term competitive strategies are pursued by identifying constraints and other factors that will affect a competitor's decision making and choosing actions that are designed to exploit those factors.²⁸ Although President Xi insists that China will "hold high the banner of peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit,"²⁹ China's diplomatic, trade, and informational practices are rather more competitive in character. Chinese officials emphasize the nation's historical commitment to continuing dialogue with other states, even during times of conflict. At the same time, China carries out belligerent actions such as cyberattacks and intellectual property theft against friendly nations. These apparent inconsistencies point to a nonlinear or opportunistic logic underlying Beijing's strategic approach. China is willing to employ competitive strategies against friendly states and trading partners, as demonstrated by Landbridge Group's acquisition of a 99-year lease on the Port of Darwin in 2016.

Landbridge Group is a Chinese-owned company that has extensive links to the CCP and PLA. It is headquartered in Shangdong Province, whose provincial government has named the company's owner one of the "top 10 individuals caring

about the development of national defense.”³⁰ Landbridge Group maintains an armed militia in Shangdong whose role is to provide logistics, emergency services, and combat readiness support to the PLA Navy.³¹ This is part of a broader effort within China to build closer links between business and the military—a practice introduced under Xi Jinping.³² Landbridge Group and other Chinese shipping companies have secured deepwater ports in key locations throughout the Indo-Pacific, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and Central America. These installations are configured to provide support to the PLA Navy and required to do so on demand.³³ Many of these ports appear to be commercially unviable but are geostrategically well positioned to support the PLA Navy’s power projection and control of key waterways.³⁴ Zhang Jie, a researcher at the elite Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, first articulated this approach in 2015 under the label “civilian first, later military.”³⁵ Understanding how Landbridge Group contributes to China’s military strategic objectives, it is useful to view the Port of Darwin through a strategic rather than commercial lens.

The Port of Darwin is strategically located on the northern coast of Australia and is a focal point for defense cooperation between Australia and the United States. Darwin is home to Australian Army and Air Force bases and serves as a forward staging base for military operations in the region. While Australia does not maintain a naval base in the area, Darwin functions as a center for multinational military and naval exercises, hosting up to 100 visiting Australian and foreign warships each year.³⁶ Since Pres. Barack Obama announced America’s “Pivot to the Pacific,” Darwin has been at the center of American–Australian military relations.³⁷ Since 2012, it has been the site of a semipermanent American military presence, with a contingent of US Marines basing themselves in the town for six months of every year. Thus, Darwin serves as the southern flank of America’s military presence in the South Pacific. When the sale to Landbridge Group was announced, American officials expressed concern that Australia did not consult the United States ahead of time.³⁸ This purchase fits one of the categories of competitive strategy outlined by Bradford A. Lee, that of “attacking the enemy’s strategy.”³⁹ Through the Port of Darwin purchase, China has challenged America’s force posture in the South Pacific, generated tension within the American–Australian military partnership, and gained a strategic foothold from which Landbridge Group may later support PLA Naval operations.

The Port of Darwin purchase also fits a second category of Lee’s competitive strategies, that of “attacking the adversary’s political system.”⁴⁰ The sale was enabled by bureaucratic shortfalls, a political rift between state and federal governments, and lower scrutiny over sales to private companies rather than state-owned enterprises. For a number of years, the Northern Territory state government had

unsuccessfully lobbied Australia's federal government for funds to upgrade the port, believing the capital investment would provide the region with much-needed economic stimulus.⁴¹ In 2015, the state government put the port up for sale in what is now widely considered as an ill-conceived cash grab. The sale raised numerous procedural concerns, including a lack of transparency by the state government, the Foreign Investment Review Board's failure to investigate the sale, and an only cursory review by mid-level bureaucrats within the Australian Defence Force.⁴² Senior Australian officials, including the federal treasurer and minister of defence, were informed of the sale only hours before it was announced.⁴³ The sale highlighted a number of bureaucratic shortfalls, which the Australian government has since moved to fix. However, it also fits a general pattern by which Beijing exploits weaknesses within political systems to pursue its goals. Elsewhere, China has cultivated weak or corrupt political leaders, engaged in "debt-trap diplomacy" in capital-starved developing states, and gained undue influence over regional platforms through vulnerable member states.⁴⁴

Landbridge Group's purchase of the Port of Darwin, along with similar acquisitions by other Chinese shipping companies, is one method by which Beijing employs private corporations to pursue China's strategic objectives. Another example of this is the employment of private fishing boats in the South and East China Seas, which the PRC has armed and mobilized to assert China's territorial claims in the region.⁴⁵ This practice can be incorporated into Edward Luttwak's two-dimensional strategic framework, by which strategy is conceptualized along vertical and horizontal dimensions.⁴⁶ Horizontal integration is the harmonious application of the levers of national power through a whole-of-government effort. China can add *corporate power*, or the cooptation of private enterprise, to its diplomatic, military, informational, and economic levers of national power. China employs corporate power within other states or disputed areas as an asymmetric means to gain access, apply political leverage, or undermine defenses. Efforts such as these differentiate China from other states, which may seek to develop key industries or outsource public functions to private contractors but do not wield private corporations as a lever of national power. *Vertical integration*, or *nesting*, is the alignment of objectives throughout the strategic hierarchy. This term was initially developed to describe military strategy, but it translates readily across all levers of national power. An example of effective vertical integration in the diplomatic domain is China's pursuit of PRC enterprise-to-foreign enterprise, party-to-party, and person-to-person relationships.⁴⁷

China's whole-of-government foreign policy efforts fall under three broad categories: hard power, soft power, and sharp power. We can respectively describe these three approaches as coercive, persuasive, and subversive in nature. *Hard*

power is the use of tangible military and economic capabilities to pursue goals through the use or threatened use of force. Hard power efforts may include military occupation, diplomatic isolation, and economic sanctions. *Soft power* is persuasive in nature and can range across all levers of national power. China seeks to extend soft power through legitimate activities such as peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, and trade partnerships. While hard and soft power are well understood, the term *sharp power* was coined to describe a third approach, which is inherently subversive.⁴⁸ It is used to undermine state institutions, politicians, academicians, and business leaders. As an example, Australian Member of Parliament (MP) Sam Dastyari was forced to resign in 2017 when it was revealed that Chinese corporations had paid money toward his travel expenses, legal bills, and other debts. Before he was outed, Dastyari had publically supported China's territorial claims in the SCS, contrary to his party's policy stance, and was implicated in a countersurveillance scandal involving a Chinese political donor.⁴⁹ In this case, Beijing employed sharp power techniques through China's corporate lever of national power to corrupt an Australian official and employ him as a mouthpiece for its own political messaging.

Beijing has demonstrated a remarkable willingness to apply deeper (i.e., more coercive) policies in response to perceived threats to China's core interests. After the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Chinese political dissident Liu Xiaobo, China immediately imposed a trade embargo on Norwegian salmon. The embargo remained in place for six years, costing Norway USD 1 billion in lost exports.⁵⁰ After relations were normalized in 2016, China chided the Norwegian government for undermining the two countries' "bilateral mutual trust."⁵¹ This incident reveals much about China's strategic approach. While the Norwegian parliament appoints the Norwegian Nobel Committee, the latter functions as an independent entity whose decisions do not reflect government policy.⁵² Nevertheless, China retaliated against Norwegian commerce to influence the Norwegian government and appears to have done so effectively. In imposing the trade embargo, China subordinated trade to internal stability, in keeping with the order of its strategic priorities. Given the enormity of the Chinese market, China's willingness to impose coercive economic measures is an effective deterrent. Other states are thus compelled to take note of Norway's misfortune and practice self-censorship over matters pertaining to China's core interests.

Building on Luttwak's two-dimensional strategic framework, we may visualize China's application of soft power, sharp power, and hard power methods of influence as points along a third dimension or axis. Whereas the strategic hierarchy forms the vertical *y axis*, and the levers of national power form the horizontal or *x axis*, methods of influence form the depth or *z axis* (fig. 1). Progression along the

z axis indicates the increasingly aggressive employment of the levers of national power from soft, to sharp, to hard power methods. As mentioned earlier, the *y axis* can also be broadened from Luttwak's military description to encompass a whole-of-government approach. Within the alternative framework offered here, the strategic hierarchy is capped with policy and national grand strategy. Below this are efforts to shape the strategic environment at the multinational level, for example through international law, regional platforms, or multinational organizations. Next are state-level interactions, then department-to-department (or business-to-business) interactions. The lowest level encompasses interpersonal and transactional engagements. China's strategic approach is inherently three-dimensional, in that it is characterized by the harmonious integration of efforts along the *x*, *y*, and *z axes*.

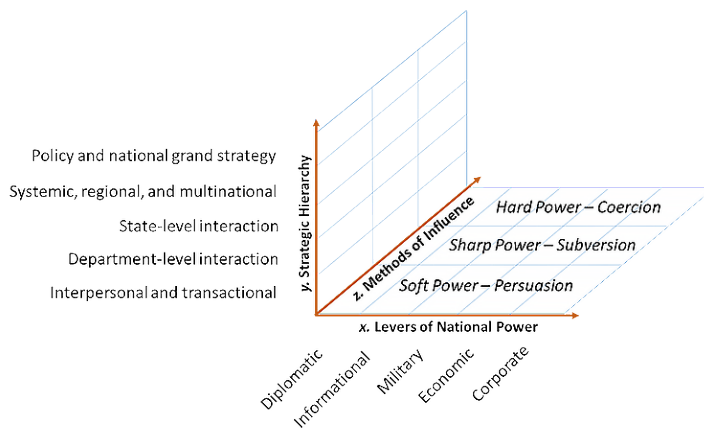


Figure 1. Representation of a three-dimensional strategic framework

The acquisition of the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka provides an example of how China's strategic approach is used to pursue its geostrategic aims under Xi's Two Centenaries. The construction of the port, which was completed in 2010, was a Chinese proposition, funded by a USD 2 billion Chinese development loan. The port was located in the home province of then Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksa, who pushed the project ahead, along with a number of Chinese-funded vanity projects, despite opposition from community groups.⁵³ Located in a remote area, the commercial port failed to turn a profit. Colombo granted a 99-year lease on the port to the state-owned China Merchants Group to avoid defaulting on Sri Lanka's loan repayments. Although China has not declared any ambitions to establish a permanent military presence at the Hambantota Port, it is apparent that the Hambantota Port offers geostrategic rather than commercial value, given its location relative to India, the Indian Ocean, and the Strait of Malacca.⁵⁴ In-

deed, shortly after the Hambantota Port acquisition, Chinese warships began making port calls at the Sri Lankan capital of Colombo. India has recognized this threat and made a USD 300 million bid to purchase a 40-year lease on the equally unprofitable Hambantota airport to preclude China from developing the port into a naval base.⁵⁵ In this example, we see China employ sharp power in a friendly state by using a debt-trap investment technique to gain control of dual-use infrastructure. China pursued this goal through engagement at the state, corporate, and person-to-person levels, leveraging a key weakness within Sri Lanka's political system, which was the corruptibility of President Rajapaksa. All this contributed to an outcome that will support China's military strategic aims for 2049.

New Zealand's Strategic Challenge

Successive New Zealand governments have insisted that although the two countries have different political values, Wellington and Beijing can work around these differences to cooperate on areas of mutual interest. In fact, anxious to preserve the economic benefits of free trade, Wellington has unwisely ignored differences over such fundamental matters as human rights, freedom of navigation, foreign influence operations, and debt-trap diplomacy. Beijing's strategic objectives and the sharp power techniques inherent in China's strategic approach challenge New Zealand's interests in a number of ways. First, Chinese influence operations threaten to erode New Zealand's democratic institutions. Second, China may come to threaten New Zealand's economic base through market manipulation, gaining undue influence over key infrastructure or employing trade retaliation for real or perceived challenges to China's strategic interests. Finally, China's policies in the South Pacific may contribute to regional instability and increasing polarity, while setting the conditions for the PLA Navy to project maritime power into the region. New Zealand should adopt a comprehensive cross-government approach to address vulnerabilities that are being exploited by Chinese efforts. Wellington should recognize and respond in a proportional manner to the PRC's employment of a range of sharp power techniques. This requires a multilevel approach consisting of three strategic lines of effort: safeguarding New Zealand's democratic institutions, preserving its economic base, and promoting stability within the South Pacific region. Looking further ahead, it is apparent that New Zealand will better position itself to identify, articulate, and respond to challenges such as those posed by China by adopting and publishing a national security strategy.

Safeguarding New Zealand's Democratic Institutions

China's influence operations in New Zealand are not as overt or coercive as they have been in states such as Norway and Sri Lanka; however, they give cause for concern. These are documented by Anne-Marie Brady of Canterbury University and exhibit common features with influence operations elsewhere.⁵⁶ In outline, these include state influence over Chinese expatriate communities, Chinese-language media, tertiary academic institutions, and the New Zealand political system. The CCP established United Front organizations abroad to influence foreign governments and ethnic Chinese expatriate communities. United Front efforts have increased markedly since 2012 and play a key role in presenting the official Chinese narrative abroad.⁵⁷ By playing a coordinating function within New Zealand, Brady argues that the United Front extends CCP influence over Chinese community groups, suppresses anti-CCP Chinese groups, and mobilizes political support for pro-Chinese issues.⁵⁸ The role that the United Front plays in informing and coordinating Chinese communities, in conjunction with Xi Jinping's Social Credit system, offers significant potential for Chinese state influence within New Zealand. CCP-backed Chinese-language media in New Zealand has also increased significantly in step with United Front actions.⁵⁹

New Zealand's political system features a number of weaknesses that the PRC may exploit to exert undue influence. As noted above, United Front organizations play a key role in coordinating political support among Chinese expatriate communities. Access to the Chinese market brings enormous trade benefits, which means that business interests and Chinese interests can often be aligned. Government self-censorship over China's military actions in the SCS may thus be a result of political prudence, business pressure, Chinese pressure, or all the above. Jian Yang, a Chinese–New Zealander serving as an MP, failed to disclose to the public that he is a member of the CCP or that he studied and served with Chinese military intelligence for 15 years before emigrating.⁶⁰ Such are New Zealand's democratic protections that although he has been removed from several boards and committees, he continues to serve as an MP. Chinese interest groups and businesses, backed by the CCP, make significant political donations and offer directorships to retired politicians.⁶¹ New Zealand's campaign finance laws allow for anonymous donations from both domestic and foreign sources. During the last six years, more than 80 percent of the donations to New Zealand's two largest political parties were from anonymous sources.⁶²

Another arm of China's foreign influence apparatus is the network of Confucius Institutes, which have established partnerships with hundreds of universities around the world. Confucius Institutes have been established at New Zealand

universities in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch.⁶³ These organizations do not teach for-credit courses; rather their role is to teach Chinese language, culture, and history to tertiary students and the wider community. While these appear to be benign goals, commentators have raised concerns about the potential for Confucius Institutes to exert undue influence over academics or student bodies, noting that host universities receive funding from Beijing.⁶⁴ Liu Yunshan, China's Minister of Propaganda in 2010, emphasized the contribution that these organizations make to China's global propaganda efforts.⁶⁵ Some universities that host Confucius Institutes have been accused of self-censorship over issues that are sensitive to the CCP.⁶⁶ They present a CCP-approved version of Chinese history and culture, including core issues such as human rights, the suppression of Uighur populations, and sovereignty over Tibet and Taiwan. At a time when both the public and private sectors recognize a need to grow public awareness about Chinese culture, Confucius Institutes are performing a function that universities are not resourced to fulfill, albeit in a way that is intended to garner support for the CCP's party line.

China also targets tertiary institutions by sending PLA scientists and doctoral students to study areas of science and technology that have military or dual-use applications. This practice is described in China as "picking flowers in foreign lands to make honey in China."⁶⁷ These students are often directed to conceal their military background by providing false or misleading information on their visa applications. China has established close relationships with hundreds of universities based on collaborative research and Chinese funding. While New Zealand is not one of the top destinations for this, the issue came to light in 2018 when a Chinese doctoral student at the Auckland University of Technology was investigated for conducting research into 5G wireless technology that has military applications.⁶⁸ Several of New Zealand's universities have established partnerships with Chinese companies that are understood to have links with the PLA. New Zealand does have legislation in place that bans universities from developing technology with a military end use unless authorization is gained from the secretary of foreign affairs and trade.⁶⁹ However, collaborative research and technology transfer may play a partial, unobvious role in China's military modernization.

Australia, the United States, and Canada have taken action to prevent foreign influence over their democratic institutions. Australia instituted sweeping legislation in 2018 to protect against foreign influence operations.⁷⁰ While the legislation was drafted in response to concerns raised by Australian intelligence about Chinese actions in particular, the law addresses *foreign* rather than *Chinese* interference. The United States Congress introduced similar legislation in June 2018, with some notable differences. The Countering the Chinese Government and

Communist Party's Political Influence Operations Act recognizes China's use of sharp power and requires the US government to implement a number of measures to curtail Chinese influence operations.⁷¹ Unlike Australia, the American legislation targets China directly. However, the bill spells out a clear distinction between Chinese nationals and the state, and includes provisions to protect Chinese nationals in America from intimidation and surveillance by the Chinese government. Canada introduced legislation in 2018 to protect against foreign interference in national elections.⁷² This followed a report released by Canada's Communications Security Establishment, which found that the 2015 federal election had been targeted by low-level cyberattacks.⁷³ The legislation bans foreign entities from spending money to influence Canadian elections. Political advertisements are required to carry identifying taglines, and media platforms, including social media, are prohibited from accepting election advertisements from foreign entities.⁷⁴

Following these examples, New Zealand should implement a package of legislative reforms to protect against foreign political interference. This should include a new ministerial portfolio responsible for coordinating protective measures across a range of government departments and state-sector functions, including defense, foreign affairs and trade, customs and police, primary industries, education, internal affairs, and the intelligence community. Political donations from foreign and anonymous sources should be banned. Persons or organizations that engage in political lobbying on behalf of a foreign state should be required to register as foreign agents. The use of subversion or coercion to influence the political process should be proscribed under New Zealand's espionage legislation. Confucius Institutes and other informational apparatus that represent foreign governments should also be required to register as foreign agents, and the government should give consideration to removing them from publicly funded facilities such as university campuses. Media outlets, business forums, and community groups such as United Front organizations should likewise be required to declare any links to foreign governments and register as foreign agents if applicable. New Zealand should also take active measures to protect expatriate populations and foreign tertiary students from surveillance, influence, and coercion by their home states.⁷⁵ Finally, New Zealand should review its tertiary funding model, which has led underresourced universities to seek corporate partnerships and foreign funding to bolster their finances.

Preserving New Zealand's Economic Base

New Zealand continues to support China's economic programs through its support to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and BRI. This is a

logical continuation of New Zealand's policy of pursuing closer economic ties with China and promoting economic development throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Trade between the two countries tripled during the ten years following the implementation of the 2008 FTA. China is now New Zealand's largest export market and trading partner, and New Zealand achieved a NZ\$3.6 billion surplus in its trade with China for 2017.⁷⁶ While New Zealand should continue to benefit from its close economic ties with China, the government should also recognize the risks inherent in the trade relationship. In 2014, dairy prices in New Zealand fell by 60 percent as a result of China stockpiling milk powder.⁷⁷ A number of farms were driven out of business, resulting in an increase in rural land sales and attendant decrease in property prices. In the same year, Chinese investments in farmland increased markedly, making Chinese investors the largest foreign buyers of New Zealand real estate in 2014.⁷⁸ While it has not been established that China deliberately manipulated New Zealand's property market, this shows the extent to which New Zealand's economy is in thrall to Chinese market forces. This lends gravity to the threat posed by the PRC's use of corporate power and trade retaliation in pursuit of its national strategic objectives.

Among other states, the United Kingdom has begun to apply closer scrutiny to foreign investments, following concerns over China's penetration into British infrastructure. The United Kingdom's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has proposed legislation to limit foreign investment in critical infrastructure.⁷⁹ The National Security and Infrastructure Investment Review was published in October 2017, partly in response to concerns about a Chinese company's ownership of a 30 percent stake in the Hinkley Point nuclear power plant.⁸⁰ While it emphasizes the United Kingdom's commitment to open markets and the importance of foreign investment, the report states that "we need to be alert to the risk that having ownership or control of critical businesses or infrastructure could provide opportunities to undertake espionage, sabotage, or exert inappropriate leverage."⁸¹ The review proposes a range of short and long-term national security reforms. The proposed short-term legislation gives the government greater scope to examine and intervene in corporate mergers that involve military, dual-use, and high-technology sectors. Proposed long-term reforms would give the government greater scrutiny over transactions and foreign investment across a broader range of transactions that may potentially affect national security, or which fall within a set of essential economic functions.

Chinese investment and the BRI offer immense opportunities to develop new infrastructure and open up new trade links across Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific. However, some states have come to reject Chinese investment deals for a number of reasons. China's state communications company, Huawei, has been denied ac-

cess to 5G networks in a number of states, including New Zealand, due to concerns about the integrity of its systems.⁸² Larger infrastructure projects have cost more than expected, while China's practice of exporting labor rather than employing local contractors has limited the benefits to host nations.⁸³ Other investments such as ports and airports in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Australia have proved to be unprofitable. This has given rise to suspicions that these projects have been selected for their geostrategic, rather than commercial value.⁸⁴ Finally, commentators have leveled allegations that China has engaged in "debt-trap diplomacy" by offering huge investment loans to developing countries that are unable to meet their repayments.⁸⁵ In the last two years, a number of states including Malaysia, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sierra Leone have cancelled Chinese infrastructure projects linked to the BRI citing concerns over national debt, especially in the wake of China's takeover of the Hambantota Port.⁸⁶

China has repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to impose diplomatic and economic costs on states that challenge its core interests or its employment of competitive strategies. As noted above, in 2018 the New Zealand government blocked a bid by Huawei to develop the national 5G network, citing security concerns raised by the Government Communications Security Bureau.⁸⁷ While the government did not specify the nature of its security concerns, the PRC recently adopted legislation that requires telecommunications companies to support Chinese military intelligence on demand.⁸⁸ This is another application of Chinese corporate power and contributes to Xi Jinping's goal to achieve greater military-civilian integration. The PRC retaliated against the Huawei ban by targeting the New Zealand tourism industry. Tourism is New Zealand's largest export earner, while China is its second-largest international tourist market source after Australia.⁸⁹ The PRC delayed the announcement of the China-New Zealand Year of Tourism, which was to be launched in Wellington in February. CCP-backed media ran articles to dissuade Chinese citizens from traveling to New Zealand, while the Chinese Consulate issued a travel advisory warning for New Zealand. This is a tactic that China has also recently employed against Canada following the arrest of Huawei's chief financial officer.⁹⁰ Hong Kong Airlines have now announced that they will withdraw services from New Zealand, although it is not clear whether this was influenced by the Huawei ban, or was purely a commercial decision.⁹¹ In February 2019, an Air New Zealand flight was denied a landing permit and turned back while en-route to Shanghai because the flight documentation included a reference to Taiwan.⁹²

New Zealand's economic base and infrastructure should be protected against unfair trade practices, opportunism, takeover of critical infrastructure, and trade retaliation. These protections should include broader governmental powers to

monitor and intervene in foreign investment or corporate mergers with foreign companies. Industries that would warrant government oversight and intervention include those related to military, dual-use, and high-technology research and applications. This would also include critical infrastructure such as power-generation plants, utilities, ports and airports, railways, and communications infrastructure. Such transactions should be reviewed to determine the potential for espionage, sabotage, and inappropriate leverage. In doing so, it is important to remember that China has a long strategic planning horizon, grand aspirations for 2049, a growing stake in the South Pacific and Antarctica, and a policy of wielding corporate power in support of national strategic objectives. Chinese trade retaliation can be very effective in New Zealand, where it can be represented as a natural response to inept messaging and policy making by the government. The government can mitigate the impact of Chinese trade retaliation by taking deliberate steps such as promoting transparency and public discourse, further diversifying New Zealand's trading partners, and reducing the reliance on primary industries such as agriculture by providing greater incentives to invest in high-end goods and services.

Promoting Stability within the South Pacific Region

New Zealand works closely with Australia to promote stability within the South Pacific region through diplomatic engagement, economic aid, humanitarian aid and disaster relief, and peacekeeping operations. This is a pragmatic undertaking and a moral obligation on the two wealthiest states in the region. Regional instability can create conditions for increased migration, transnational crime, and humanitarian crises. China's strategic aims and its employment of competitive strategies in the South Pacific can frustrate the efforts of Australia and New Zealand. Based on its stance of noninterference in sovereign matters, Beijing is willing to work with any nation, as long as they do not criticize China's policies and actions relating to its core strategic interests. Australia and New Zealand have voiced concerns that China's "no strings attached" approach to engagement can exacerbate regional instability by supporting illegitimate regimes and fueling corrupt practices.⁹³ Following a military coup in Fiji in 2006, the Pacific Island Forum applied diplomatic pressure to isolate the new regime and encourage a peaceful transition to legitimate government. China undermined these efforts, not only willingly engaging with the military junta but also sponsoring an alternative regional platform that included Fiji and seven other Pacific Island nations but not Australia and New Zealand.⁹⁴

More recently, the PRC has increased its efforts to build influence in the South Pacific through infrastructure development loans. Pacific Island leaders, who are put off by New Zealand's and Australia's insistence on the promotion of democ-

racy, governance, and individual rights, increasingly see China as the preferred investment partner.⁹⁵ Beijing's investment in the South Pacific increased sharply over the last decade, and China is now the region's second-largest donor after Australia. However, Chinese development funds typically come in the form of loans rather than grants. According to the International Monetary Fund and Asian Development Bank, six Pacific Island states are at high risk of debt distress, with another four countries rated at a moderate risk.⁹⁶ Chinese investment in the region is thus a significant potential driver of instability, as isolated island nations take on significant levels of national debt that they are unlikely to be able to repay. A senior Australian politician has spoken out against China's infrastructure development projects in the Pacific, describing them as "useless buildings," "roads to nowhere," and "white elephants."⁹⁷ China's close relationship with Papua New Guinea (PNG) was on ostentatious display during the Asia-Pacific Economic Community (APEC) forum at Port Moresby in 2018.⁹⁸ President Xi has incorrectly labeled China as PNG's largest development partner, while Chinese aid and development loans dovetail with China's exploitation of PNG's natural resources. China accounts for the majority of PNG's timber exports, both legal and illegal, which has driven unsustainable logging practices and deforestation.⁹⁹

China's relationship with Vanuatu provides an example of how the PRC is pursuing its strategic objectives in the South Pacific. Vanuatu, which recognizes the PRC, was also the first state to support China's territorial claims in the SCS.¹⁰⁰ Vanuatu is rated as having a moderate risk of debt distress and has accepted hundreds of millions of dollars in Chinese development loans in recent years.¹⁰¹ The island nation has a population of 270,000 and foreign debt worth USD 440 million, nearly half of which is owed to China.¹⁰² Chinese development projects in Vanuatu have included government buildings, a convention center, a major sports stadium, an education facility, and an official residence for the Vanuatu president. China has provided military aid to the island nation, such as the donation of 14 military vehicles in 2017.¹⁰³ Beijing also funded the development of Vanuatu's Luganville wharf, which is now the largest in the South Pacific and rated to accept cruise liners.¹⁰⁴ The wharf's geostrategic location, large investment, low profitability, and potential military application all lend the project a striking resemblance to the Hambantota Port acquisition in Sri Lanka. Australian intelligence services announced that Chinese and Vanuatu officials have discussed the development of a PLA military base in Vanuatu, although both states deny this claim.¹⁰⁵ In Vanuatu, as it did in Sri Lanka, China appears to be employing debt-trap diplomacy and vanity projects to pursue its geostrategic ambitions.

New Zealand has taken some steps to play a leadership role in the South Pacific. In 2018, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade unveiled its Pacific Reset

strategy, which seeks to reestablish New Zealand's leadership position in the Pacific through an increased investment in foreign aid and diplomatic efforts.¹⁰⁶ Without naming China specifically, the minister acknowledges that external stakeholders with "deeper pockets than us" are building influence over Pacific Island states.¹⁰⁷ New Zealand maintains defense ties with a number of Pacific Island states, with whom it has undertaken peacekeeping operations, humanitarian aid and disaster relief operations, and security cooperation. New Zealand also accepts military officers from Pacific Island states on military career courses through its Mutual Assistance Program. New Zealand's efforts have been coordinated with Australia, which has unveiled a plan that involves greater diplomatic engagement, military support, aid, and investment loans.¹⁰⁸ More can be done to challenge China's employment of competitive strategies and sharp power techniques in the South Pacific. While New Zealand welcomes greater Chinese engagement in the region, Wellington has been reluctant to speak out against Chinese actions that are likely to drive instability, increase debt to unsustainable levels, and undermine sovereignty or effective governance.



(Photo courtesy of the New Zealand Defence Force)

Figure 2. International relationships. The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) and its international partners conduct a military assault against a rebel stronghold on the Rainbow Ski-field near St. Arnaud in the Tasman district during Exercise Southern Katipo. This exercise is a combined, joint, international training field exercise focused on developing, exercising, and evaluating the NZDF's independent capabilities and ability to project forces anywhere in the Southwest Pacific. The event provides the opportunity to ensure continual preparedness to operate independently or with the nation's coalition partners. Military personnel from Tonga, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Brunei, Malaysia, and Timor-Leste played an active part in the 2017 exercise alongside New Zealand, with small contingents from Australia, Canada, the United States, France, and Britain also taking part.

New Zealand should coordinate its messaging with Australia to challenge China's influence in the South Pacific. Wellington and Canberra provide the Pacific Island nations with alternatives to Chinese investment and military engagement, but these efforts are largely reactive in nature and operate at a disadvantage.¹⁰⁹ Neither country has the resources to out-compete China on its own terms, while the imperative to promote effective governance and sustainable growth saddles the two countries with constraints not felt by the PRC. This makes China the preferred investment partner for a growing body of Pacific Island nations. Deterred perhaps by fear of Chinese trade retaliation, both governments have been silent about the reasons for their renewed focus on the South Pacific.¹¹⁰ This reticence benefits China more than it does New Zealand and Australia, allowing the PRC to shape the regional narrative. By contrast, both states have been willing to voice their concerns about China's clear violations of international law in the SCS.¹¹¹ This has occurred through official policy statements as well as a relatively muted joint statement issued by the two prime ministers.¹¹² Countering China's narrative is the crucial missing component of New Zealand's Pacific Reset and Australia's "Step Up to the Pacific" campaigns. Wellington's reluctance to bear the economic costs of Chinese trade retaliation is understandable. However, the government can help shape the regional narrative through public discourse, issuing joint statements with Australia, and supporting statements in multinational platforms such as the Pacific Islands Forum, Association of South East Asian Nations, and the United Nations.

Toward a National Security Strategy

The challenges posed by China bring to light a key deficiency in New Zealand's governing process: the lack of a national grand strategy. While the common usage of the term has evolved over time,¹¹³ *national grand strategy* may be defined as a process by which states interpret the strategic environment, articulate national policy objectives, and employ the levers of national power to achieve them. Alan Stolberg examines the process by which states develop and articulate grand strategy through national security strategy documents.¹¹⁴ Stolberg's survey focuses on medium and great powers, including Australia, Brazil, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These states each employ processes to formulate and articulate grand strategy with varying degrees of comprehension. Strategy documents produced by incumbent or emerging superpowers, such as the United States and China, can have far-reaching effects not only on the internal processes of government but also on the ways in which allies, partners, and competitors conceptualize the global order.

The utility of national grand strategy for small states is less well understood but seemingly significant. Since the close of the Second World War, small states have negotiated the challenges presented by the changing international system with varying degrees of success. Many of these were forced to bandwagon with, or were even subsumed by, aggressive regional powers, while others were more successful. Singapore, Finland, and Israel each maintained their sovereignty, grew in material wealth, and gained a degree of regional influence, despite the persistent looming threat posed by ambivalent neighboring powers, regional hegemony, or hostile coalitions.¹¹⁵ All three of these small states pursued pragmatic diplomatic arrangements with regional powers, while preserving their independence and maintaining important ties with the West. They complemented these diplomatic efforts by cultivating and deploying their cultural (informational), economic, and military sources of national power. These examples highlight the value of a deliberate and strategic approach to statecraft. By producing a national security strategy document, New Zealand can institutionalize a process for formulating and enacting national grand strategy. This would bolster Wellington's ability to respond in a proactive and comprehensive fashion to the challenges inherent in China's new interventionist foreign policies.

Although individual ministries and departments periodically release strategic white papers, New Zealand does not produce and publish a national security strategy document. National security policy is developed within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, although this is not released to the public and appears to be a reactive process of identifying and mitigating specific threats.¹¹⁶

Stolberg identifies three primary reasons why a national security strategy document plays a valuable role in the national pursuit of foreign policy objectives: resourcing, coordination, and communication.¹¹⁷ Resourcing ensures that strategic aims are prioritized and funded accordingly. Coordination ensures that a whole-of-government approach is adopted, with an appropriate degree of vertical and horizontal integration. Communication is essential for government departments and the public to understand the government's national aspirations, the challenges it perceives, and the approach it will take to overcome these challenges. This aspect of national strategy is sorely lacking in New Zealand, as successive governments have been reluctant to articulate the challenges a resurgent China poses to sovereignty, stability, and prosperity. For example, without a national security strategy document, the limited actions taken by the current government, and China's disproportionate response, were devoid of context and consequently prone to become mischaracterized in public discourse.¹¹⁸

Based on a reading of bipartisan government policies over the last two decades, Carol Abraham argues that New Zealand pursues the "twin outcomes of a high

standard of living in a secure, globally interdependent economy and an international role as a trusted partner and interlocutor.”¹¹⁹ This description provides a starting point from which overarching policy objectives might be determined. Like China, New Zealand should formulate a strategic approach that best fits its values, interests, and geostrategic situation. New Zealand’s small size, liberal democratic system of government, and heavy reliance on international trade all have a significant influence on how Wellington pursues the nation’s strategic objectives. As a small state, New Zealand benefits from global institutions and the international rule of law. These serve to regulate the actions of larger powers and thus protect New Zealand’s sovereignty and interests abroad.

New Zealand has the potential to play more of a leadership role within the international community. As a wealthy and stable democracy, New Zealand has the resources and mandate to make a positive contribution to global peace and stability and has done so continually for several decades now. Additionally, as a relatively nonaligned state, New Zealand can build on its reputation for pursuing an independent and values-driven foreign policy. As the global system enters another era of great-power competition, New Zealand can play a role in preserving the sovereignty and independence of Pacific Island nations, while serving as an example for other small states around the world. Mahnken argues that “small states are able to impose diplomatic and political costs upon their adversaries . . . by bringing together like-minded states to oppose coercion. More importantly, they will need to undertake methods to mitigate the costs that others can impose upon them.”¹²⁰ New Zealand’s ability to rally other small states around the rules-based international order and resist the growing systemic pressure to bandwagon with or balance against aggressive superpowers may become a significant source of national power.

Conclusion

Although New Zealand has enjoyed substantial benefits from its close economic ties with China, the relationship is not without risk. China’s multifaceted interventionist actions are challenging the rules-based international order upon which New Zealand relies for its security, prosperity, and independence. Beijing’s strategic approach, which is characterized by competition, three-dimensional integration, and the cooptation of private enterprise, has become increasingly aggressive since the accession of Xi Jinping. This poses a number of challenges that successive New Zealand governments have been reluctant to address. China’s use of sharp power threatens to erode New Zealand’s democratic institutions. Beijing’s use of corporate power and its willingness to employ trade retaliation pose a threat to New Zealand’s prosperity and independence. Within the South Pacific,

China's employment of competitive strategies in pursuit of influence, resources, and military access are likely to exacerbate the drivers of regional instability. Meanwhile, government self-censorship gives China freedom to maneuver and allows Beijing to control the regional narrative. Wellington should adopt a comprehensive, cross-government defense of New Zealand's sovereignty and values against the threat posed by China's increasingly aggressive and interventionist foreign policies. This new approach should bring together multiple elements of statecraft to protect New Zealand's democratic institutions, preserve its economic base, and support regional stability. New Zealand is not alone in facing up to this challenge, and a number of best practices can be drawn from other Western democracies such as Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. This challenge demonstrates why small states need grand strategy. By formulating a national security strategy, New Zealand can build public awareness of the challenges it faces, articulate its goals, understand the character of its strategic approach, and make better use of its levers of national power. 🌐

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The China Coast Guard

Shifting from Civilian to Military Control in the Era of Regional Uncertainty

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Abstract

As part of the restructuring of state organizations announced in March 2018, it is known that the China Coast Guard (CCG), previously controlled by the State Oceanic Administration, is coming under the administration of the People's Armed Police (PAP) from the Central Military Commission (CMC). As a paradigmatic shift from a joint civilian–military control (State Council–CMC) to a purely military one, the reorganization of the CCG, only five years from the latest reshuffling, seems to reveal an the party's increasing control over the military as outlined in the September 2017 CCP Central Committee and also the intention by the Chinese central government to provide the CCG with more flexibility and authority to act decisively in disputed waters in the East and South China Seas if needed. This article inquiries into the causes, logic, and likely regional consequences of such a decision. Amid the upgrading of insular features in the Spratlys, the deployment of bombers in the Paracels, and overall modernization of China's naval capabilities, the article also explores plausible developments in which the PAP-led CCG, irregular maritime militias, and People's Liberation Army Navy forces might coordinate more effectively efforts to safeguard self-proclaimed rights in littoral and blue-water areas in dispute.

Introduction

During the last eight years, East China Sea (ECS) and South China Sea (SCS) waters have been the setting of increased Chinese civil and naval activity that have altered the balance of power among Northeast Asian and Southeast Asian states, trying to cope with a more robust projection of Chinese maritime power. For China, possessing maritime power, as Michael McDevitt points out, includes a large coast guard, a world-class merchant marine and fishing fleet, shipbuilding capacity, and an ability to harvest from the sea marine resources.¹ And while since at least 2014 the world has witnessed a People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) projecting its presence around the globe (reaching the Mediterranean, the Horn of Africa, Latin America, and the South Pacific), the protection of sovereignty rights and ocean spaces close to the mainland and at its near seas through law

enforcement should be considered as one of the main elements of China's maritime power for years to come. As China maintains territorial disputes in the maritime realm over sovereignty in the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu) in the ECS, in the Paracels, Spratlys, and Scarborough Shoal in the SCS, and jurisdictional rights over maritime sectors in both seas, ocean management system, including law enforcement at sea, has become of paramount importance for China.

As a response to this need to safeguard economic interests at sea and protect self-proclaimed sovereignty rights in both the ECS and the SCS under what Beijing perceives to be a current hostile regional environment, China has engaged since 2013 in extensive reforms of its overall ocean management system. In March 2013, Beijing announced its plans to further centralize and reform China's maritime law enforcement agencies by merging several authorities from ministries into a renewed State Ocean Administration/National Oceanic Administration (SOA) under the Ministry of Land and Resources. Broadly speaking, the decision was taken to improve national legislation as well as to better protect and use maritime resources and territory.

However, only five years later, several internal causes—including uncertainty over clear assignation of responsibilities, the extent of involvement of the China Coast Guard (CCG) in law enforcement operations, as well as external ones—mainly regional responses to civilian and naval Chinese activities in both seas, eventually led to profound changes in China's ocean management system. In March 2018, the central government decided to put the CCG under the administration of the People's Armed Police (PAP) under the direct command of the Central Military Commission (CMC). By revealing thus an increasing Communist Party of China (CPC) control over the military as outlined during the September 2017 Central Committee, such a new reshuffle also demonstrates the intention by the Chinese central government to provide the CCG with more flexibility and authority to act decisively in disputed waters in the East and South China Seas at a time when regional and nonregional actors continue to challenge China's activities at sea.

The article first analyzes the context, causes and prevailing problems framing the 2013 initial ocean management system reform in China when the upgraded SOA and its CCG as a centralized law enforcement body emerged. Second, the economic logic of the reform, a logic that has prevailed after a second reorganization in 2018, is also analyzed at three levels, namely as a decision responding to short-term economic strategies, as part of a long-term oceanic strategy, and as a manifestation of legal and security policies envisioned for the last three decades to protect maritime interests and rights. The third section then reviews relevant causes and events that ultimately led to the 2018 second reorganization of the

CCG, including the increasingly manifest role of maritime militias whose activities have clearly overlapped those of the CCG and the more dominant role of the CPC and the military since the beginning of the second term of Pres. Xi Jinping. The fourth section focuses attention on the geopolitical dimension of the reforms and the regional implications of China's assertive behavior, including ongoing responses and security arrangements by the United States, Japan, India, and Australia with partners and allies in Southeast Asia. A general conclusion explores potential scenarios of a new, invigorated ocean management system that nonetheless may be responsible for more instability in the SCS and the ECS.

The Reformed SOA

Two important events were paramount in shaping the need for a reformed SOA and a more active role of the CCG as an integral part of China's current oceanic strategy. The first was Japan's nationalization of three islands in the Senkaku/Diaoyu group in the ECS in 2012 after Tokyo Metropolitan Government Governor Shintaro Ishihara started a campaign to purchase these islands from a private individual owning the property deed. The second was the standoff between China and the Philippines in Scarborough Shoal in the SCS in 2012 following the Philippine Coast Guard's arrest of several Chinese fishermen working in the area. This incident is particularly relevant as China Maritime Surveillance (CMS) and Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC) ships reportedly orchestrated the standoff.² It was mainly this incident that later triggered Philippine legal action in initiating arbitral proceedings at the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague in early 2013.

There were relevant reasons for implementing the ocean management system reform. First, there existed a need to speed economic development profiting from the coastal areas and further develop the marine economy. Second, there was a desire to create a higher level, stronger agency that integrates resource management and offers systematic services to the development of marine economy and to safeguard rights and interests at sea. And third, there was an imperative to reduce implementation costs of marine-related legislation.

Above all, the reform recognized the existence of severe bureaucratic problems. Before 2012 there were around 17 agencies and ministries involved in maritime management in China, which brought overlapping legal and jurisdictional functions and conflicts that impeded coordination. The deliberations on reform in 2012–2013 were the result of a rather long debate originated more than a decade before. In 1998, there was a debate on whether to set up a National Oceanic Administration Council.³ In 2003 came another proposal by the Chinese Society of Oceanography to create a modern law enforcement agency. Eventually, nine

years later, on 4 March 2012, Admiral Luo Yuan proposed in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference the creation of a coast guard to confront maritime disputes.⁴ The same year the Leading Small Group on Maritime Rights (中央海洋权益工作领导小组) was established.

Until 2012, China's main agencies and official bodies involved in marine management were the Ministry of Land and Resources, the Ministry of Agriculture, the provincial governments, the General Administration of Customs, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Transport, the State Oceanic Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the National Tourism Administration, several state-owned oil companies, and the PLAN. Among them, however, the main five law enforcement agencies, four of them involved in the later overall restructuring, were the following: (1) the Chinese Coast Guard Administration, under the Ministry of Public Security; (2) the Customs Anti-Smuggling Bureau, under the General Administration of Customs; (3) the China Marine Surveillance, under the State Oceanic Administration; (4) the Fishery Law Enforcement Command, under the Ministry of Agriculture; and (5) the Maritime Safety Administration, under the Ministry of Transport.

On 14 March 2013, during the first Plenary Session of the 12th National People Congress, the "Transformation Plan of the Agencies and Functions of the State Council" (国务院机构改革和职能转变方案) was discussed and adopted.⁵ Article 5 defined the restructuring of the new SOA, carrying out law enforcement activities under a new CCG under the dual authority of the Ministry of Land and Resources and the Ministry of Public Security. Because of the Transformation Plan, four agencies, namely a Maritime Border Police, the General Administration of Customs, the China Marine Surveillance, and the Fishing Regulation Administration, moved under the authority of a new SOA, while the Ministry of Transport assumed authority over the Maritime Safety Administration.⁶ The new coast guard thus emerged from the above four agencies.

As the main maritime law enforcement agency, the CCG territorial areas were later defined, emulating the PLAN fleets' areas of responsibility along China's littorals. Three divisions for the CCG were created: the North Sea Branch, the East Sea Branch, and the South Sea Branch, as well as 11 CCG commands and flotillas in coastal provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities under the Central Government (Tianjin and Shanghai.)⁷ The highest consultative organ of the SOA was the State Oceanic Commission (国家海洋委员会), whose main functions were to formulate development strategies and to coordinate relevant oceanic matters and decisions to be assumed by the SOA. Unfortunately, there is no substantial public information on the State Oceanic Commission.

The Economic Logic of the SOA/CCG Reform

For China, the 2013 reorganization of the SOA, and later the 2018 second reshuffle, follows an economic logic that, as mentioned above, has paid more attention to the defense and economic development of those marine areas susceptible to state control. In these areas, particularly in the SCS and the ECS, law enforcement has been deemed essential for economic development and economic security at several levels.

First, a better control of the coastal regions through a more effective CCG had in mind an overall economic strategy enshrined in China's 13th Five-Year Plan (FYP) 2016–2020.⁸ The reorganization of the law enforcement agencies has the overall objective of fostering and protecting the marine economy as well as safeguarding China's maritime rights and interests with the goal of turning China into what has been stated as a strong maritime country. As Ryan Martinson posits, such a maritime transformation meant an increase in the importance of the ocean in a state's grand strategy.⁹ A stronger SOA is thought to enable China to reach objectives specified in the 13th FYP. In line with the overall goals of building what Beijing calls a moderately prosperous society, the CPC has bet for a medium-high rate of growth for the next years, a better coordinated development between inland and coastal regions, and an overall improvement in the quality of the environment and ecosystems, including marine ones, among other goals.¹⁰ Chapter 41 of the 13th FYP, entitled "Widen Space for the Blue Economy," states, "We will . . . safeguard China's maritime rights and interests, building China into a strong maritime country. . . . We will . . . support Hainan in using South China Sea resources to develop a distinctive marine economy."¹¹ As stated in the document, a new CCG should ultimately be instrumental in better safeguarding maritime rights and interests. The FYP further states,

"We will effectively safeguard China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests. We will strengthen the capabilities of maritime law enforcement organizations, deepen historical and legal research on maritime issues, coordinate the use of different measures to safeguard and expand China's maritime rights and interests, see that maritime torts are properly handled, and ensure navigational freedom and maritime safety within waters under China's jurisdiction. We will take an active part in the establishment and protection of the international and regional maritime order, improve dialogue and cooperation mechanisms with neighboring countries regarding maritime issues, and promote pragmatic maritime cooperation. We will further improve mechanisms for coordinating marine affairs, strengthen the top-level design of maritime strategies, and formulate a basic maritime law."¹²

Second, the reorganization of the SOA and the law enforcement functions through the CCG should be viewed as part of Beijing's long-term oceanic strategy to ultimately develop China into a strong marine economy and a maritime world power, using the CCG for the civilian mandate of marine safety and security, playing a similar role of those assigned to the PLAN—defense and China's off-shore interests. During the plenary session of the 8th National Congress of the CPC on 8 November 2012, Pres. Hu Jintao highlighted the overall goals involving relevant maritime policies: "We should enhance our capacity for exploiting marine resources, develop the marine economy, protect the marine ecological environment, resolutely safeguard China's maritime rights and interests, and build China into a maritime power."¹³

Third, the reform of the SOA and its CCG in the 2013 Transformation Plan was perceived as part of a series of legislations and security policy measures to better secure coastal territory through military and civilian law enforcement. Both the 2013 White Paper on Defense and the 2015 White Paper on Military Strategy included directives for the armed forces to protect its maritime border areas:

"To safeguard border, coastal and territorial air security, and protect national maritime rights and interests... ..China will resolutely take all necessary measures to safeguard its national sovereignty and territorial integrity."¹⁴

"It is thus a long-standing task for China to safeguard its maritime rights and interests."¹⁵

From a legal perspective, relevant legislation to protect marine areas has already been passed since at least the early 1990s, including the following: the 1992 Law of the People's Republic of China on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone, covering the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands; the 1992 Maritime Law of the People's Republic of China; the 1996 Declaration on the Baselines of the Territorial Sea, including the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea; the 1998 Law on Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf; the 2009 Marine Islands Protection Law and its program approved in 2012; the 2011 Approved Regulations for the Use and Development of Marine Habited Islands; the 2012 Declaration of the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Baselines of the Diaoyu Island and its affiliated islands; and the 2016 Approved Regulations for the Use and Development of Marine Non-Habited Islands.¹⁶

An Armed CCG: The Militarization of the Agency

One of the main questions related to the second CCG 2018 reform is whether after 2013 it served better than its envisioned purpose. It was believed that a strong civilian CCG would serve to mitigate conflict at sea or avoid direct military

confrontation with other states in the SCS and ECS. And yet, in the five years of the SOA's existence, events in those two maritime regions seem to have called not only for a unified CCG for law enforcement but also for a fully armed CCG with stronger and more direct links with the military.

Both in the ECS and the SCS, Chinese fishermen, maritime militia, and CCG activities increased since the SOA reform, revealing a rather clear pattern of assertiveness. In 2014, reports indicated that Chinese boats fishing illegally in Japanese waters reached a peak, when the Japanese coast guard ordered Chinese vessels to leave the area around the Senkaku Islands on 208 occasions.¹⁷ The number of incidents involving Chinese fishermen and coast guard vessels entering Japanese-claimed waters has continued to rise since 2015 and dramatically so by mid-2016.¹⁸



(US Coast Guard photo by Coast Guard Cutter *Morgenthau*)

Figure 1. South China Sea. The US Coast Guard Cutter *Morgenthau* and China Coast Guard vessel 2102 steam alongside each other during the transfer of the fishing vessel *Yin Yuan*, 3 June 2014. The *Morgenthau* crew was patrolling in support of Operation North Pacific Guard, the US Coast Guard's component of a multilateral fisheries law enforcement operation designed to detect and deter illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing activity.

Roughly at the same time, China started what has become known as the most extensive land reclamation in the SCS, seven islands and reefs,¹⁹ while in spring 2014, the Chinese state-owned China National Offshore Oil Corporation moved its *Hai Yang Shi You 981* oil platform to waters near the disputed Paracel Islands in the SCS, resulting in Hanoi attempting to prevent the platform from establish-

ing a fixed position. Moreover, amid the PCA's ruling of 12 June 2016 in favor of the Philippines, the Chinese government seemed to have ordered stronger civilian and naval presence in both the SCS and the ECS. Between 5–9 August that year, reports indicated that CCG ships, including the CCG 35102 and about 230 fishing vessels, sailed near the Senkaku area, while by 17 August, around 300 fishing vessels and 28 patrol ships reportedly reached the outside of the territorial waters of Senkaku Islands.²⁰ By October 2016, the number of Chinese incursions in the ECS Senkaku area had surpassed 30 ships.

Coinciding with President Xi's reelection, pertinent changes were prepared for the 13th National People's Congress in early March 2018 that involved not only a dramatic change in China's oceanic management system but also revealed Xi's tighter grip as the leader of the CPC over the state institutions in charge of protecting maritime areas. During the Congress, the State Council Institutional Reform Plan (深化党和国家机构改革方案) was unveiled, with extensive restructuring plans of the central government, leaving the State Council with only 26 ministries and commissions. Among these proposals were the dissolution of the fledgling five-year-old SOA, moving its responsibilities to other ministries and agencies, including a change of command in the CCG from a civilian SOA to the Central Military Commission (CMC). Following these changes, the main current institutions with authority over ocean activities are as follows:

1. A brand new Ministry of Natural Resources (after the dissolution of the Ministry of Land and Resources), in charge of oversight of the development and conservation of marine resources, surveying, and geological exploration of the seabed;
2. The Ministry of Ecology and Environment, which will assume the functions of marine environment protection, a task until 2018 delegated to the SOA. Additionally, some responsibilities for the enforcement of environmental laws for oceans were assigned to this ministry from the CCG;²¹
3. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, which oversees aquaculture and wild capture fisheries;
4. The Ministry of Transport, in charge of administration of China's fishing fleet and inspection and supervision of fishing vessels; and,
5. A new CCG under the authority of the People's Armed Police (PAP).

A central part of this restructure came in the realm of maritime security. Between 2013 and 2018, the tasks of patrolling and law enforcement in the ECS and the SCS comprised three levels: (1) a military blue-water PLAN force, (2) the civilian “white hull” CCG, and (3) when necessary, a “low profile” green fleet-Chinese militia organized within the PAP.

To downgrade the level of escalation between China and its neighbors’ law enforcement agencies—both in the ECS in the Senkakus and in the SCS in the Spratlys and Scarborough Shoal—Beijing had until now privileged the presence of its white-hull CCG as a civilian force. However, at the same time, when deemed necessary, Chinese provincial authorities have ordered the presence of its maritime militia, considered an integral part of a three-pronged trident, to harass or thwart external actors’ operations, such as freedom of navigation operations (FONOP) by the US Navy in the SCS since 2015.²² This means that even though the CCG is supposed to be the supporting soft power in safeguarding maritime areas, leaving the PLAN presence mainly as a hard support for the CCG to contain possible escalation, in fact there remains in the middle an irregular military force, the maritime militia, in charge of taking escalatory measures not suitable for either the PLAN units or CCG regular law enforcement.

It is important to underline that the CCG, alike the maritime militia, had been considered as a purely civilian force under civilian command for patrolling maritime zones under self-recognized national jurisdiction (territorial sea, contiguous zone, and exclusive economic zone.) Albeit a civilian force, however, since 2013 the CCG’s law enforcement capabilities have been upgrading. For example, in December 2015, the CCG 31239 ship and two more entered the waters near the Senkaku Islands, reportedly armed with weapons.²³ Later, in February 2016, the CCG 31241, 2102, and 2305 ships were also spotted near the Senkaku Islands. Thus, even before being placed under military command in 2018, the CCG fire-power has developed steadily. Both CCG and “fishermen” maritime militia’s incursions have continued. Currently, the CCG force is comprised of more than 200 vessels, including the massive 12,000-ton CCG 3901 spotted in the SCS in 2016 and the CCG 2901 operating in the ECS since 2015,²⁴ making this law enforcement fleet the largest in the world.

As has become evident, the scope of CCG law enforcement ships activities, including the potential of use of force when necessary, have increased. However, like the maritime militia, command and control of the CCG was not under the military and rules of engagement seemed to be rather confused for a civilian force—even under a unified SOA. It is amid the growing importance of the CCG and the maritime militia, both with different chains of commands, that the March 2018 reorganization of functions was framed. Based on the March 2018 Plan, during the session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, a resolution was finally passed on 22 June 22 specifying the authority and responsibilities of the reshuffled CCG. Among them are the following: (1) cracking down on illegal activities at sea, (2) safeguarding security and order of maritime operations, (3) protecting the marine environment and ecosystems, (4) regulating the fishing industry, and (5) coordinating and training local governments' maritime law enforcement.²⁵ Now, the distinction has been solved between civilian and military command during law enforcement operations in disputed areas largely considered as core interests.

More importantly, with the dissolution of the SOA, the CCG has been effectively transferred to the CPC under the authority of the PAP—under the direct command of the CMC, along with the PLA and the militia.²⁶ This decision means that the CPC and its Secretary General Xi Jinping may be the ultimate decision maker, as chairman of the CMC, of any action in both maritime areas. The transfer of the CCG from the defunct SOA to the PAP came into force 1 July 2018.

The Geopolitical Dimension

Before the 2018 restructuring, the consequences of the reorganization of China's institutions in charge of ocean affairs, mainly the SOA and its CCG, became manifest as explained above in more aggressive law enforcement activities in the ECS and the SCS. In response, several regional and nonregional actors have reacted to quickly cope with such an assertive China. The regional geopolitical dimension of the 2013 reorganization, the subsequent activities in both maritime areas (mainly the massive construction of artificial installation at the Spratlys under the protection of CCG and PLAN forces), and the new 2018 CCG reorganization involve a regional geopolitical dimension with extensive repercussions for several regional and extraregional stakeholders.

First, there is a growing presence of US naval forces in the region in the form of FONOPs and through deeper naval cooperation between Washington and its allies in the region. The United States has been challenging what it considers China's excessive maritime claims,²⁷ and by July 2018 had conducted a total of 11 FONOPs in the SCS off the Paracels, the Spratlys, and Scarborough Shoal (see table 1).

Table 1. Obama, Trump Administrations' FONOP, South China Sea

Date	USS ship	Area (S:Spratlys, P:Paracels)
21 May 2015	<i>P-8A Poseidon</i>	(Overflight) Fiery Cross (S)
18 July 2015	<i>P-8A Poseidon</i>	(Overflight) Spratlys
27 October 2015	<i>Lassen</i>	Subi, Mischief (S)
29 January 2016	<i>Curtis Wilbur</i>	Triton (P)
10 May 2016	<i>William P. Lawrence</i>	Fiery Cross (S)
21 October 2016	<i>Decatur</i>	Triton, Woody (P)
February 2017	<i>Carl Vinson strike group</i>	South China Sea
24 May 2017	<i>Dewey</i>	Mischief (S)
2 July 2017	<i>Stethem</i>	Triton (P)
10 August 2017	<i>John S. McCain</i>	Mischief (S)
10 October 2017	<i>Chafee</i>	Paracels
21 January 2018	<i>Hopper</i>	Scarborough Shoal
23 March 2018	<i>Mustin</i>	Mischief (S)
27 May 2018	<i>Antietam, Higgins</i>	Tree, Woody, Lincoln, Triton (P)
30 Sep 2018	<i>Decatur</i>	Spratlys
26 Nov 2018	<i>Chancellorsville</i>	Paracels
7 Jan 2019	<i>McCampbell</i>	Paracels
11 Feb 2019	<i>Spruance, Preble</i>	Mischief (S)
6 May 2019	<i>Preble, Chung Hoon</i>	Gave, Johnson (S)

Source: Eleanor Freund and Andrew Facini, "Freedom of Navigation in the South China Sea: A Practical Guide," *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School*, June 2017, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/freedom-navigation-south-china-sea-practical-guide>²⁸ and author's compilations.

Moreover, to bolster interoperability in the Indo-Pacific, the US, Indian, and Japanese navies already participate on a permanent basis since 2015 in the upgraded Malabar Exercise in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific. Washington has also been pressing Australia, Japan, and India to participate in FONOPs in the SCS amid the recently revived "Quad"—so far to no avail.²⁹ Similarly, the US–Taiwan overall relationship has entered into a new phase of cooperation since the beginning of the Trump administration, when the US president approached the Tsai Ing-wen government in early December 2017; recently the US Congress eventually resolved differences over the National Defense Authorization Act for 2019 which included provisions for supporting Taiwan's defense and cooperation between the militaries of both countries.³⁰

Second, Tokyo has received reassurances from Washington over the US–Japan security alliance in the ECS, while at the same time, there are clear cooperation schemes in place between Japan and the Philippines, India, and Malaysia in the SCS. As a direct claimant in the Senkaku Islands dispute, Tokyo has obtained since 2012 clear assurances that the Senkaku area falls under the 1960 Security

Treaty area as agreed in the 1972 Okinawa Reversion Treaty and is therefore subject to collective defense by the United States in case of potential hostilities by China.³¹ This is particularly important for Japan, as Chinese fishermen, fishermen-disguised maritime militia, CCG, PLA vessels, and even submarines³² have entered the area on a seemingly permanent basis.

In reaction to these consistent incursions of Chinese fishing boats, CCG vessels, and naval ships, Japan has increased its military budget and accelerated procurement programs over the past few years. In December 2015, Tokyo confirmed Japan was setting up antiship and anti-aircraft missile batteries on 200 islands in the ECS and increasing the number of military personnel on these islands to around 10,000 over the next five years.³³ In April 2016, 10 newly built 1,500-ton patrol ships and two helicopter-equipped patrol vessels were also deployed to patrol the Senkakus with a personnel of 606 coast guard personnel assigned exclusively to the area.³⁴ Also, the Japanese Ministry of Defense budget requested for the fiscal year 2017 included around 1.6 billion USD (180 billion yen) for the purchase of stealth fighters, V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft, and Chinook twin-rotor helicopter to patrol the islands.³⁵ The helicopter carrier JS *Izumo* (DDH-183) held its first overseas voyage in 2017, and public information reveals that the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) plans to convert its two *Izumo*-class warships into aircraft carriers, supporting F-35 Lightning fighters.³⁶ For 2018 the Japanese Coast Guard is further deploying jets in a “24-hour patrol system” to monitor the islands,³⁷ and the number is likely to increase as only four days after the CCG reorganization in force on 1 July 2018 CCG ships were reportedly intruding into the Senkaku territorial waters.³⁸

Regarding its partners with vested interests in the SCS, Japan has encouraged cooperation and hardware transfer deals, particularly with the Philippines. After the July 2016 PCA ruling in favor of Manila, Tokyo increased cooperation in the procurement of patrol vessels. In October 2016, Japan extended a 157 million USD loan for the purchase of two Philippine patrol vessels as the first part of a 204 million USD loan for the total purchase of 10 vessels.³⁹ More recently, in March 2018, Japan transferred three secondhand TC-90 utility aircraft to the Philippine Navy to boost surveillance activities.⁴⁰ With India, the alignment of interests in preserving open sea lines of communication in the region has led to the aforementioned trilateral naval Malabar Exercise with the United States (Australia has been politely excluded by India from the exercise) as well as common support for the 2016 PCA ruling against China.⁴¹ Moreover, as part of the JMSDF decision to promote a free-and-open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), the *Izumo*-class helicopter carriers *Izumo* and *Kaga* were sent to the SCS and the Indian Ocean in 2017 and 2018, respectively.⁴² Malaysia and Indonesia also share a desire

for a free-and-open SCS, thus enabling Japan to advance shared agendas in the region vis-à-vis Beijing. Since November 2016, the Malaysian maritime enforcement agency acquired two decommissioned patrol boats from Japan.⁴³ Later, during the visit of Malaysian prime minister Mahathir bin Mohamad to Tokyo on June 2018 and amid Kuala Lumpur's current detachment from China and rapprochement toward Japan, Prime Minister Abe pledge further cooperation for regional peace and stability, including in the area of maritime safety by keeping a SCS free and open based on the rule of law.⁴⁴ As part of Tokyo's effort to promote its FOIP strategy, Japan pledge to provide 23 million USD to aid Indonesia for development of fishery facilities in remote islands, including Natuna, whose exclusive economic zone overlaps with the Chinese U-shaped line.⁴⁵

Third, the Chinese civil and naval presence in the SCS has led India and even Australia to assume greater roles in balancing Beijing's power against its Southeast Asian neighbors (Vietnam and the Philippines in particular) on both the security and diplomatic fronts. In 2017, as part of Delhi's current Act East Policy and hoping to become an arms exporter, India started talks with Vietnam for the sale of Akash short-range surface-to-air missiles, and in 2016, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government announced a 500 million USD credit line to Vietnam to buy patrol boats.⁴⁶ During Modi's March 2018 visit to Hanoi, the two countries bolstered this bilateral cooperation with further agreements on nuclear energy, trade, and investment—and particularly in the areas of defense and security.⁴⁷ Providing support to the Philippines in the aftermath of the 2016 PCA ruling against China, India concurred with Vietnam that the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea should be the legal reference to implement international legal obligations and peacefully settle territorial disputes in the SCS.⁴⁸ Similarly, Australia has deepened its security cooperation with the Philippines. In line with Canberra's *2017 Foreign Paper*, which highlighted the need to keep an uninterrupted trade route for the flow of Australian goods,⁴⁹ Australia has pursued deeper strategic security arrangements with Manila. In 2015, the Philippine Navy acquired five ships from Australia, and in March 2016, Australia delivered three heavy landing craft to the Philippine Navy.⁵⁰ Additionally, Australian Navy ships regularly visit Philippine ports in the SCS, which has provoked sharp reactions from the PLAN since late 2017.⁵¹ Reports indicate that in April 2018 three Australian warships were challenged in the SCS on a patrol mission after leaving port in Subic Bay, Philippines.⁵²

Conclusions: China's Maritime Law Enforcement in the Coming Years

In 2013, amid the first reorganization of the civilian maritime agencies, there was some optimism that even though China's maritime security policy seemed very assertive by then and unlikely to change in the following years, using CCG would help demilitarize the conflicts in the ECS and the SCS, as well as avoid direct military confrontation with claimant states.⁵³ However, as shown throughout this article, the level of escalation and potential conflict—either by civilian, quasi-civilian or naval in nature—in the ECS and SCS hotspots in the Senkakus, Paracels, Spratlys, and Scarborough Shoal steadily grown since 2015. A fully armed CCG is largely in charge of patrolling waters outside the exclusive economic zone and territorial waters off the Senkakus, around artificial installations recently built in the SCS, and at Scarborough Shoal—blocking economic activities of Philippine fishermen. This improved CCG fleet, as recognized by other countries such as the United States and Japan,⁵⁴ will afford China the capability to continue patrols in areas claimed in both maritime areas in conflict, helping the PLAN to strengthen what has been called the “strategic triangle” area connecting Woody Island in the Paracels, artificial installations in the Spratlys, and Scarborough Shoal off the Philippines.⁵⁵

Moreover, partly as a reaction of the regular FONOPs conducted by the US Navy, as a response of being uninvited to the 2018 RIMPAC Exercise and amid a more visible presence of other countries' navies in the region, an increasingly modernized PLAN force put on its latest show of force. In 2018 it staged naval live-fire drills and formation maneuvers in the SCS between 24 March and 11 April⁵⁶ and again 5–7 July, while in mid-July in the ECS it staged a six-day live-fire exercise to test combat strength against Taiwan.⁵⁷ Now, the CCG, maritime militia and PLAN units, all three under the direct command of the CMC, seem much better coordinated to face threats in those maritime areas contested by other countries and that are deemed essential for China's long-term development strategy. In late June 2018, President Xi reportedly told US Secretary of Defense James Mattis that China will not yield “even one inch” of territory in the SCS.⁵⁸

Unfortunately, the future of both maritime regions' stability remains murky as the full effects of the latest maritime agencies' reform are yet to be known. In the SCS, even though in November 2017 China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations states started negotiations on the details of the long-awaited Code of Conduct (CoC) and by August 2018 a single draft was put forward with an agreement to finalize it within three years starting from 2019, it is unclear whether China will accept any compromise to the document that would weaken regular law

enforcement activities by the CCG, its maritime militia, or the PLAN. It is also unclear whether the current Xi administration will engage in land reclamation in Scarborough Shoal like in the Spratlys, despite public commitments not to do it.

As the CCG and maritime militia have been the advance forces in the Paracels and Spratlys, it is rather logical they will play a leading role in the eventual upgrading of Chinese posts at Scarborough Shoal in the future. It goes without saying, of course, that any action China pursues in the SCS seen as hindering freedom of navigation and damaging the ecosystem would surely be met at several levels of opposition from stakeholders. It remains to be seen, thus, to what extent the CCG—and maritime militias—activities will harmonize with a future CoC in the prevention and management of incidents at sea, a possible area of negotiation that, as Ian Storey believes, will likely be included in the future.⁵⁹ Overall, political will in Beijing to de-escalate tensions in the SCS, rather than the upgrading of the CCG, is likely to be crucial for the stability of the region.

In the ECS, an upgraded CCG presence is most likely to continue posing a risk to stability and has been the cause, together with the North Korean threat, for the current rise in arms spending in Japan and increase in human resources at the Japan Coast Guard. Massive incursions of “fishing boats” guarded by CCG and PLAN vessels, like the one reported in August 2016, are likely to repeat. Moreover, as events in the Senkakus and the SCS are somehow related and Chinese behavior and responses in one scenario have repercussions in the other region, it is likely that the overall SCS dispute will have a direct impact in the ECS. As China demands the United States and Japan refrain from further involvement in the SCS dispute and downplays calls for a FOIP, Beijing’s assertiveness is likely to exacerbate tensions with Tokyo in the Senkakus in the form of an increase in the number of sea and air incursions around the islands. This in turn may trigger further escalation from Japan, either in the form of a possible participation of JMSDF in FONOPs along with the US, French, British, or Australian forces in the SCS or by shifting defense in the Senkakus from the Japanese Coast Guard to the JMSDF.

A final note: as relevant as the 2013 and 2018 reforms are, and as ominous as its regional implications are for the future, China’s ruling party and government continue to bet on peace and development to achieve the status of a truly maritime power and a fully developed nation by about 2049. Long-term economic maritime strategies, such as that envisioned for the Silk Route Initiative, only advance through regional cooperation, and that is why Southeast and Northeast Asian neighbors should expect a less confrontational China. It should be in the supreme interest of China to guarantee the freedom of passage and overflight in those areas, and it should be in the interest of all parties involved to de-escalate tensions in those disputed territories. Probably this will give perspective to those

calling for a more aggressive response against China's actions and will shape policy making in Beijing among those inclining to ignore years of diplomacy dealing with an increasingly turbulent maritime Asia. ✪

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Nontraditional Security Dilemmas on the Belt and Road*

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Abstract

Nontraditional security (NTS) cooperation has been seen as a ready focus for multilateral dialogue, soft-power enhancement, and positive military diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific. Some actors have responded to NTS threats by embracing various approaches including “military operations other than war” (MOOTW), as well as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) interventions. These responses are also testing grounds for military capacity, indicating power projection and forward deployment abilities. NTS operational capacities can become part of a spiraling security dilemma that undercuts the claimed benefits for military diplomacy and cooperative security approaches. Growing Chinese and Japanese NTS capacities and are now part of a wider Indo-Pacific dynamic along the Maritime Silk Road (MSR). China’s need to provide for NTS along the Belt and Road includes the expanded use of private security companies, “paramilitary” maritime deployments, and PLA units. NTS threats, including the calibrated use of armed force, are now important components within Chinese defense and foreign policy. Japan sees these capacities as part of its wider contribution toward “proactive peace” and security through development in the Indo-Pacific region, but Tokyo is also aware of its role in boosting Japan’s soft power. NTS dilemmas intensify during acquisition of dual-use assets and when traditional security competition already exists, e.g., threat perceptions of Chinese military assertiveness. Carefully managed, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents an invitation for security cooperation. However, it also risks new forms of military competition and increasing securitization of developmental and environmental issues, a well-known problem for NTS as a conceptual and operational category.

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Introduction: Where Security Cooperation and Military Competition Meet

Many have seen NTS cooperation as a ready focus for multilateral and multi-level dialogue, soft-power enhancement, and positive military diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific region.¹ Actors have responded to NTS threats militarily by embracing approaches such as MOOTW, HADR interventions, as well as post-disaster recovery and stabilization operations. Indeed, military forces have a long history of emergency relief, logistical support, initial reconstruction roles, and even nation building, usually after the end of a military conflict or multilateral interventions, e.g., experiences at the end of World War II, reconstruction roles in the former Yugoslavia, the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq.² However, recent NTS operations are also a testing ground for showcasing military capacity, including intelligence and logistic operations that support power projection and forward deployment abilities. Chinese, Japanese and Indian doctrines and operations have increasingly featured NTS elements over the last two decades, e.g., via antipiracy operations, UN support operations, and international HADR deployments in reaction to natural disasters. In part, the desire by such states to be seen as “net security providers” rather than security threats has driven this trend.³ Actors also use such operations as an avenue for low-risk bilateral and multilateral cooperation, serving as confidence and trust building measures.⁴ In turn, observations of HADR and MOOTW operations also provide competing states with information on the strengths and weakness of the state engaging in these activities, a form of “secret reconnaissance,” which was of particular concern to China in its antipiracy deployments from 2008 on.⁵

In general, NTS concerns go beyond the defense of the state to a wider assessment of risks to the population as a whole and their extraterritorial national interests.⁶ Such transnational security threats provide motives for great power cooperation but also generate divergent, even clashing, views of how such issues should be resolved.⁷ Wider NTS challenges, such as resource depletion and climate change, have driven decades of diplomacy via the United Nations (UN) and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, while transnational organized crime, illicit goods, and money laundering have increasingly engaged global and regional organizations, e.g., via the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and related groups such the ASEAN Defense Minister’s Meeting (ADMM) and ASEAN Defense Minister’s Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus).⁸ Likewise, across the Indo-Pacific, diverse groupings use HADR operations as a focus of, or means toward, maritime cooperation. Such cooperation is a central component of the ASEAN

Regional Forum (ARF) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) agendas.⁹ This collaboration is a priority area for the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Action Plan for 2017–2021 (being developed via the organization’s “Cluster Group” on Disaster Risk Management) and the France–Australia–NZ (FRANZ) maritime cooperation agreements. Disaster relief is also a component in numerous multilateral naval exercises such as the MILAN and KOMODO exercises. In so far as NTS issues are seen as *soft* security issues, policy makers often treat them as “low-hanging fruit” where cooperation can readily be used as confidence and trust-building measures (CTBM) among the parties involved.¹⁰

However, NTS operational capacities can also become part of a spiraling security dilemma that undercuts the claimed benefits for military diplomacy and cooperative security approaches.¹¹ Cycles of capacity building have already been observed in Chinese and Japanese NTS operations and are now part of a wider Indian Ocean dynamic along the MSR. This can be seen in China’s participation in antipiracy operations in the Indian Ocean and off the coast of Somalia, an early indication of Beijing’s ability to maintain small naval task forces operating at a long distance from their bases, though their rules of engagement were rather limited and conservative.¹² Though often relatively small (usually two combatants and a supply ship), China, between 2008 and 2018, sent a total of 30 task forces as part of wider antipiracy operations, escorted over 5,900 ships in the western Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden by 2017 and sent vessels to evacuate Chinese and other foreign nationals from the conflicts in Libya and Yemen.¹³ These operations are pretexted on humanitarian grounds, protecting sea lines of communication (SLOC) and cargo shipping, which now includes sizable numbers of Chinese cargoes and China’s growing merchant marine fleet. Though such operations do provide shared regional security and economic benefits, one can also view these operations as “impure public goods” in that they differentially serve other ends such as power projection and enhanced diplomatic influence.¹⁴ Moreover, these trends have created considerable concern from Indian and Australian observers, who see this as a wider pattern of maritime power projection, especially when combined with threat perceptions based on the so-called “String of Pearls” and MSR investments, which give the People’s Republic of China (PRC) increased access to ports and fueling points across the Indian Ocean.¹⁵

Japan, too, has deployed limited maritime forces beyond East Asia into the wider Indo-Pacific, though usually as part of multilateral or UN-mandated operations. This included sending ships into the Persian Gulf for controversial minesweeping roles in 1991, with further supply missions into the Indian Ocean through 2001–2010 in support of US operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as support for regional coast guard training and other initiatives via its dialogue

with ASEAN. This was an extension of Japan's "normalization" via cautious multilateral and humanitarian support roles, e.g., medical teams in Cambodia (1992–1993); disaster and relief teams to Indonesia, Thailand, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Thailand (2004–2005); reconstruction and engineering teams in Iraq and East Timor; as well as early disaster relief teams in western India (2001), Pakistan (2005) and New Zealand (2011), among others.¹⁶ In the wider context of Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF) modernization, this can be seen as a form of "proactive pacifism" that allows for overseas operations that actively support global peace. Thereafter, Japan gradually engaged an extended pattern of defense mobilization in relation to "gray areas," ranging from antipiracy operations to air and naval deployments in the East China Sea, checking China's claims to the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands and adjacent exclusive economic zones (EEZ).¹⁷

In this context, Japan from 2011 has maintained a logistics base with a port and airfield in Djibouti, backed up by a small number of ground troops. Japan's national defense guidelines from 2018 noted that beyond antipiracy efforts, the JSDF facility will help Japan cooperate in the long-term quest for "regional security."¹⁸ China opened its own logistics base in Djibouti in 2017, while the United States, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain also have bases in the county, with Saudi Arabia signing agreements for the possible future development of a facility.¹⁹ In some measure, these early Japanese and Chinese efforts could be seen as mutual shadowing and matching of extended deployment capacities, at least in the Indian Ocean, followed by a more direct form of strategic confrontation in the East China Sea.²⁰



(US Air Force photo by SrA Gabrielle Spalding)

Figure 1. Japanese-led field training exercise. US Army 1LT Nicholas Sereday, executive officer for Charlie Company 2-113th Infantry assigned to Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, gives a concept of operations brief to Japanese and US military forces during a bilateral field training exercise in Djibouti, Africa, 2 October 2019. The exercise was part of a Japanese-led noncombatant evacuation operation exercise, which also included African coalition partners.

NTS is not an uncontested category. Indeed, it is defined by what it is not, i.e., it is not traditional security, with its focus on interstate conflict, direct national defense, or waging conventional wars. A long list of “other” issues then get dropped into this NTS category, especially if they are transnational in character, originate from nonmilitary actors/factors, and are not easily dealt with by the direct application of military force, e.g., climate change risks, environmental and natural disasters, flows of illicit goods, undocumented migration, transnational criminal networks, and food and water security.²¹ Debates have continued since the 1990s (following on from the Copenhagen School’s work) on how these issues have been framed by national narratives and social discourses that prioritize specific nonmilitary challenges as “threats.”²² Likewise, such securitizations may mask competing rather than cooperative extensions of governance beyond state borders, using “risk” to mobilize domestic and regional responses.²³

Resource scarcity is an area where these mechanisms can be easily seen, e.g., the extension of concern over fisheries depletion in Southeast Asia has moved from national monitoring of EEZs toward a wider conceptualization of fisheries management across the South China Sea and the Coral Triangle. This can be seen as a legitimate extension of scientific approaches, allowing a shift toward sustainable use of shared fisheries, especially for offshore fish species that move across EEZs and open sea boundaries.²⁴ If successful, this approach could act as one CTBM to expand trust among regional states, a methodology explored via groups such as ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP). However, such trends could also intensify territorial claims via securitized monitoring of transnational fisheries under national resource rubrics and threat perceptions, e.g., as found in Indonesian, Vietnamese, and Chinese responses to “illegal” fishing in recent years.²⁵

Further, adopting an NTS agenda will not always lead to automatic cooperation in dealing with harder traditional security issues pretexted on issues of sovereignty and territorial control. This can be seen in ASEAN contexts, where NTS responses have been a way of enhancing regional security cooperation but have only slowly moved from CTBMs toward preventive diplomacy, with little ability to address China’s territorial claims or reduce tensions between the United States and China.²⁶ In this context, ASEAN has made serious progress in regional coordination for disaster risks governance since the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) in 2008 and the creation of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA). However, other NTS responses are more problematic, e.g., the problems of Southeast Asian air pollution (the Haze) driven by forest fires in Indonesia, have induced

serious attention from ASEAN mechanisms²⁷ since 1997, but the process remains controversial and incomplete.²⁸

Japanese and Chinese NTS agendas are often used as part of wider soft-power responses designed to enhance national prestige and expand international influence in the Indo-Pacific. In turn, this may help legitimate Chinese interests and presence along the MSR, as well as providing one platform for focused Japanese activism in the Indo-Pacific under the so-called “Abe Doctrine.”²⁹ Indeed, Chinese responses to NTS threats can be seen as a corollary of Beijing’s expanding global interests along the BRI and its numerous corridors. In the Indo-Pacific, the expansion of Chinese interests, presence, and comprehensive capacities has led to tensions with other states (especially Japan and India) and concern expressed in regional organizations such as ASEAN, the IONS, and the IORA. China is a dialogue partner to IORA and only became an observer to IONS from 2015 onward. There is no simple remedy for these problems during a period of geopolitical tension, driven mainly by clashing US, Chinese, Indian, and Japanese strategic preoccupations. However, a strong commitment to transparent, “permissive” operations directed toward shared and agreed problems may reduce trends toward competitive power projection as a form of strategic preemption (see further below).

The next section of this article will explore NTS operations in the context of Japanese and Chinese soft-power agendas. This will be followed by a brief analysis of Chinese responses to NTS threats as part of Beijing’s expanding global interests, channeled through its expanding BRI agreements. The BRI opens up geo-economic corridors where China’s security concerns are intensified, even if these do not directly engage the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) itself. Beijing still mainly relies on local armed forces to protect Chinese investments, backed up in part by small amounts of military aid and a limited number of naval exercises and more regular Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) peace missions.³⁰ However, there are now increased pressures to acquire the “capacity to respond,” whether through upgraded military assets, expanded coast guards, special police units, militias, or private security corporations (PSC). The final section of this article will explore partial remedies to these problems. Such solutions rest on two approaches: where joint military capabilities are required they should function through UN, regional, or multilateral institutions, and where force is not required, there should be a rapid shift toward demilitarization, with civilian agencies taking up governance roles. When worked in conjunction, these two approaches can reduce the likelihood of NTS dilemmas being sustained, thereby undercutting the negative construction of shared NTS problems as interstate threats.

Japanese and Chinese NTS Responses as Soft-Power Enhancers

Both Japan and China use NTS responses, humanitarian missions, emergency aid, and developmental funding in support of national soft power, encouraging positive and friendly responses by partner nations and reducing past and present threat perceptions.³¹ Although, soft-power gains need not be seen as a part of a zero-sum game, competitive approaches to soft power are more likely when there already exist unresolved territorial disputes and where military modernization or existing power differentials have complicated security dilemmas. This is the case with the expansion of China's military capacities and the rise of its comprehensive national power, now projected more widely onto the Indo-Pacific stage via the security footprint of the BRI (see further below).³² Direct military competition by the PRC with the US and India in their respective spheres of influence in the Pacific and Indian Oceans has intensified this security dilemma, as have concerns over the geopolitical impact of China's comprehensive growth in national power, now closing in on US primacy as the second overall superpower in the Indo-Pacific.³³

Over the last three decades, Japanese foreign policy and security trends have emerged as a wider pattern of multilateral cooperation that can be summarized as "soft power through development." This was an extension of Japan's twenty-first-century focus on economic influence and civilian power, combined with limited but robust self-defense capacities. Tokyo updated this focus with Japan's Revised Aid Cooperation concept (February 2015) of "good" development as the best proactive contribution to peace, utilizing soft power, aid, and trade along with some hard-power capacities.³⁴ This approach combined shared "universal" values and actively promoted international peace and stability at the regional and global levels. Although linked to the rubric of a "free-and-open Indo-Pacific" from 2016, this was far less assertive than the US interpretation of the concept,³⁵ focusing instead on cooperative mechanisms with diverse partners. Japan's governance focus enhanced strategic development cooperation for economic growth, promoted human security, and sought to build strategic partnerships with small or island states with "particular" vulnerabilities, operating across 18 subareas.³⁶

This agenda included strong commitments on disaster relief and climate change, whereby Japan would provide assistance in disaster risk reduction and environmental/climate change management for small island developing states (SIDS). This links to Japan's ongoing role as a major developmental aid donor, circa fourth in the world overall in 2017 with increases of around 3 percent for official development assistance in 2019 over 2018.³⁷ Overall around 10 billion USD annually has been channeled into aid flows with a focus on poverty reduction and infrastructure development. Japan is also a major supporter of the Asian Development Bank

(ADB), as both a founding member and major shareholder in that organization (as of late 2018 Japan and the United States each held 15.6 percent of total shares).

Beyond financial aid, Japan's *Official Development Assistance Charter* (revised in 2004) and its updated *Development Cooperation Charter* (2015) support JSDF noncombat roles for disaster relief and coast guard operations, as well as cooperation with ASEAN on naval patrols and protection of sea lanes.³⁸ It was recognized that there was a clear link between security and the ability to sustain socioeconomic development:

In natural disasters and other emergencies, Japan will provide prompt assistance taking into account longer-term recovery and reconstruction. In view of the fact that threats to stability and security can hamper socio-economic development, Japan will also provide assistance to enhance capacities in developing countries such as: the capacity of law enforcement authorities including capabilities to ensure maritime safety; the capacity of security authorities including capabilities to combat terrorism and transnational organized crime including drug trafficking and trafficking in persons; and the capacity of developing countries in relation to global commons such as seas, outer space, and cyberspace.³⁹

Japan has long been active in global human security and sustainable development networks, with these agenda now part of soft power positioned within the idea of *proactive pacifism*, i.e., the idea of making a sustainable “proactive contribution to peace.” Development is thus seen as a way to aid global security, as a means to reduce transnational terrorism, and as a tactic for improving environmental outcomes and health security. This aid is not just focused on Asia. Japan has also pledged circa 30 billion USD (private and public) to help stabilize key zones across Africa through 2013–2019, allowing improved resource access and also serving as part of soft competition with the PRC.⁴⁰ This was based in part on the Yokohama Action Plan of 2013–2017, with targeted agriculture and health programs to Kenya, Morocco, Malawi, Kenya, Ghana, Zambia, and elsewhere.⁴¹ Japan has developed a regional plan for development within Africa, with subregional plans engaging a human security focus since 2015.⁴² More recently, Japan has partnered with India in an Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, seen by some as an unofficial counter to China's BRI operations in Africa and the Indian Ocean.⁴³

Of course, Japan's recent policies go beyond soft power and NTS responses into a more robust posture via the so-called Abe Doctrine and the use of the concepts of *dynamic defense* and *gray-zone engagements*.⁴⁴ Dynamic deterrence allows for counterstrike based on an integrated air warning and an improved defense control system within Japan, as well as some further southward positioning of JSDF assets. Beyond this, the policy supports selective deployments of Japanese forces overseas and permits overseas combat in defense of a friendly country or forces being at-

tacked.⁴⁵ Likewise, Japan's national defense guidelines from 2010 on allow stronger deterrence in dealing with diffuse threats that are less than armed attacks. Gray zones include "a broad range of contingencies that fall between peace and war—for example, disputes over territory, sovereignty or economic interests. Grey-zone contingencies typically involve a government decision to show a military presence or to attempt to change the status quo using physical means."⁴⁶ This situation can be applied to the tensions over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, where deployments of naval and air patrols occur on a regular basis, signaling rising military tensions between Japan and China, even if neither intends to escalate this situation into a direct military clash. With overlapping air defense identification zones and important resources such as the Chunxiao gas field at stake, it is not surprising that both countries have sought to stake a strong presence. From 2010 to 2015, the number of scrambles by JSDF interceptors against Chinese aircraft rose rapidly.⁴⁷ By 2016, the total Japanese interceptor scrambles peaked at 1,168, while in 2018 Japanese aircraft scrambled 999 times in response to Chinese and Russian aircraft, indicating a situation that was not war but certainly not peace either.⁴⁸ Bearing in mind that overall Japan is ranked around 9th–10th globally in its diverse military capabilities, this is a serious deployment of hard power that needs to be assessed in the wider strategic balance of the Indo-Pacific.⁴⁹

Gradual revisions of the *interpretation* of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution have allowed Japan a more active role across the Indo-Pacific region, including potential deployment of naval missile defense systems and advanced attack submarines, use of military satellites (after adoption of the Basic Space Law from 2008), enhanced cyber security, and stronger maritime cooperation with Indonesia and India.⁵⁰ However, it seems unlikely that Prime Minister Shinzō Abe will be able to actually revise the text (versus the interpretation) of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution by 2020. Doing so would need two-thirds support in parliament, a referendum, and stronger political support publicly: as of 2017, 46 percent of Japanese surveyed were against this, and through 2018–2019 there was limited support from coalition partners and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) for these revised policies.⁵¹ Here there is some trade-off between soft power and more assertive strategies. Even though Japan can be seen as gaining soft power globally, rising from seventh in global ranks in 2016 to around fifth in 2018 in the Portland Soft Power surveys, this was still limited by negative perceptions in China and South Korea, with Abe's doctrine eroding soft-power influence due to displays of military capability. Japan's rating with the *Soft Power 30* is largely based on cultural and technical factors, combined with extensive diplomatic, development, and aid programs, plus regional leadership on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (now

re-labeled the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) after the United States withdrew from the original agreement.⁵²

China, too, has long been aware of the growing reality of NTS threats and more recently has been willing to enter into international agreements to help collectively manage them.⁵³ Drug control, for example, has been a long-term focus of modern China, which saw itself as a victim of ruthless exploitation of the opium trade from the nineteenth century onward, with continued twenty-first-century flows from Myanmar and Afghanistan presenting current challenges.⁵⁴ These concerns have continued to shape the PRC's NTS relations with Southeast Asia. China entered into cooperative mechanisms to cope with transnational organized crime (from 2000) and signed the *Joint Declaration on Cooperation in the Field of Non-traditional Security Issues* with ASEAN in 2002, recognizing that a wide range of transborder issues needed pan-Asian cooperation, especially with neighboring states and groupings such as ASEAN, the ARF, and the SCO.⁵⁵ This has been folded into a combined military and diplomacy approach as part of China's emerging "new security concept" from 2002 onward:

The complex relationship between nontraditional security and China's national security and foreign policy is reflected in Jiang Zeming's words during the 16th National Congress of the CCP in 2002. He stressed that traditional and non-traditional security threats, especially terrorism, are interwoven and are having disruptive effects over the stable international environment that China needs for its own development. Consequently, the solution was to make the NSC operational through multilateral dialogues, such as the UN and other international organizations. . . . In summary, non-traditional security issues were not seen as threats to China's existence, but to the external environment it needed to develop. Consistently, the response advocated by the Chinese leaders is diplomatic in nature even if it has a limited military component. These were the very early stages of the securitization process.⁵⁶

Subsequently, NTS issues and protecting Chinese interests abroad have been given growing prominence in China's defense white papers and, since 2006, led to a strong emphasis on MOOTW as a crucial part of PLA missions, training, logistics, and research, including expanded peacekeeping operations.⁵⁷ It is important not to read this trend as "military operations short of war" along a spectrum using different levels of force but rather as a spectrum of diplomatic engagement that ranges from peacekeeping through to public dissemination of information. This can be broadly described as the public diplomacy of China combined with the "political work" within the PLA and other state agencies.⁵⁸ The PLA began to evolve conceptual, doctrinal, educational, and operational bases for the response to domestic and international emergencies, developed first with the Academy of

Military Science (AMS), the National Defense University (NDU), the Army Command College (ACC), and other PLA teaching centers and within the Emergency Office of General Staff Development (GSD).⁵⁹ In parallel, the PLA and police units became more involved in “on-call peace arrangements” with the UN, eventually deploying over 30,000 personnel to 24 UN missions through 1997–2018, as well as creating a Peacekeeping Center in the Ministry of National Defense.⁶⁰ From late 2017, China registered 8,000 troops for the peacekeeping standby force of the UN, with 800 being made available for rapid deployment via the UN “Vanguard Brigade.”⁶¹

Diverse conceptualizations of MOOTW operations include different aspects of “deterrence, counter-terrorism, riot suppression, mass event management, border blockade, disaster rescue and relief, nuclear, biological and chemical rescue and relief, air and sea security, air and sea control, protection of maritime strategic communication lines, international peace-keeping, and overseas rescue and relief.”⁶² It is important to note what is excluded from MOOTW operations as well. The US military discontinued the term in 2006 but originally had 18 types of operations, including items not found in Chinese thinking such as “arms control and disarmament, enforcement of sanctions, enforcing exclusion zones, support for insurgencies, counterinsurgency, strikes and raids.”⁶³ Overall, China’s MOOTW principles are closely aligned to the noninterventionist stance of PRC’s foreign policy principles, with restrictions on intervention, enforcement, or targeted strikes against other countries. However, as Chinese interests via trade and geopolitical competition have moved from a regional to a global agenda, China’s security policies have had to move well beyond the framework of territorial defense and sovereignty claims. Rather, the PLA’s “new” mandated missions have a wide brief in protecting Chinese interests on the global stage, even if largely pursued by cooperative rather than by coercive means.⁶⁴ Although formally aligned with UN goals, such operations have a primary focus on China’s expanding economic and geopolitical interests.⁶⁵

These humanitarian operations have earned Beijing some credibility as an international actor able to respond to emergencies overseas. Thus, China has been engaged in seeking the protection or withdrawal of Chinese nationals during crises (natural and political) in the Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Lebanon, Chad, Thailand, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Sudan, the Gulf of Aden, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Libya (where over 36,000 Chinese citizens evacuated), Yemen, Japan, and Mali.⁶⁶ At first these were small, nonmilitary operations but, from 2011 on, began to include PLA support groups, aircraft, and PLA Navy (PLAN) ships, especially for major crises.⁶⁷ These figures reflect the growing number of Chinese people going overseas, including government officials, business persons,

contractors, tourists, students, engineers, workers, and potentially even farmers (as part of China's food security agenda).⁶⁸ China has about 30–40,000 businesses operating globally, and over 100 million Chinese travel abroad annually, sometimes to fragile or conflict-prone states.⁶⁹ This provides a direct and serious rationale for China's widening engagement in regional and global security processes. The situation has prompted the creation of a Department of External Security and a Small Group for Coordination on External Emergencies and created the demand for increased risk assessment capacities. This expanded circle of interests and capabilities have become embedded in the "holistic national security" (HNS) concept that was endorsed by Pres. Xi Jinping and the Central National Security Commission from 2015 on.⁷⁰

Support for MOOTW, sea-lane security, antipiracy, and peacekeeping operations was the rationale for the creation of a logistic support base and supply port at Djibouti in 2015. This support was also used to justify the building of infrastructure (including airstrips) on some of the islands in the South China Sea and for future improved access to Gwadar and nearby Jiwani in Pakistan; Bagamoyo, Tanzania; and other ports across the Indo-Pacific.⁷¹ Likewise, the Chinese have been involved in responding to international emergencies and disasters, e.g., in October 2005, the China International Search and Rescue Team arrived at the earthquake struck Balakot area in Pakistan, bringing with them a team of 49 earthquake experts, PLA engineers, and PAP (People's Armed Police) medical workers.⁷² In 2014, medical teams deployed to Haiti and to several West African countries fighting Ebola.⁷³ Since 2013, China has been involved in HADR operations in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, sending international rescue teams, medical teams, and a DNA testing group to the tsunami-hit countries, including deployment of its hospital ship *Daishan Dao* (also known as *Peace Ark*). From March 2014, China also deployed almost 20 PLAN and Coast Guard ships as well as air assets to search for the missing Malaysian Airline Flight 370, working with some 26 countries, including India.⁷⁴

China has historically been subject to major natural disasters, including floods and earthquakes that affect densely populated areas, leading to major reforms of its disaster risk reduction (DDR) strategies since 2008 and a willingness to cooperate internationally with the Sendai Framework (for disaster risk reduction). China also has ongoing trilateral dialogues with Japan and South Korea on these and related environmental issues (the Tripartite Environmental Ministers Meeting, TEMM, operating from 1999 on), agreements with ASEAN on disaster management cooperation (from 2014), plus limited "small-team" medical cooperation with the United States from 2013.⁷⁵

The PRC understands well the soft-power benefits and public diplomacy aspects of HADR responses:

It is common for MOOTW to come under public scrutiny. Positive media coverage about PLA MOOTW, thus, not only boosts morale but also inspires personnel to carry out their tasks well. Prompt dissemination and exchange of information is recommended to enhance troops' capacity; while timely news conferences are encouraged to promote situational awareness among the public, with comprehensive media coverage also employed to showcase PLA work style.⁷⁶

Overall, China's increased engagement in UN operations has been seen as supporting "system stability" in a world it describes as fraught by risk, hot spots, and increasing tension with the United States.⁷⁷ At the same time Beijing has rejected efforts to restrict China's access and use of the East and South China seas and responded to criticism of its BRI by seeking to address excessive debt, energy, and environmental issues that concern states such as Australia, India, and Japan (the "green development" agenda and BRI 2.0).⁷⁸ Another controversial area will be how far China needs to mobilize extra forms of security for its BRI economic corridors.

The Expanding Security Needs of the Belt and Road

China's increased need to provide for NTS along the Belt and Road includes the expanded use of PSCs, paramilitary maritime deployments of coast guard and other marine units, and the PLA's mandated new missions to protect Chinese interests and citizens beyond national borders. Indeed, the PRC is transforming operations toward a stronger and comprehensive maritime focus:

Today, modern China is at the turning point of becoming a truly maritime-capable nation in terms of the emerging capacities of the PLA Navy (PLAN), its development as a leading shipbuilder, its growing merchant marine, its interest in seabed mining for resources, and its huge fishing fleet (the world's largest for distance fishing). China is developing a comprehensive approach to its evolving maritime strategy, including a focus on oceanic resource management as well as security and legal issues. Several agencies other than PLAN are involved in this process including the Maritime Safety Administration (MSA), the Coast Guard of the Border Control Department, the China Maritime Police, the China Marine Surveillance (CMS), Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC), and Maritime Anti-smuggling Bureau.⁷⁹

Overall, China is increasingly engaged in the West and South Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and most recently the Arctic, now added as an "Ice Road" to the BRI.⁸⁰ Along the diverse corridors of the BRI, NTS threats and their manage-

ment are now important components within Chinese defense and foreign policy. Such operations have allowed China to build up its operational capacity to support peacekeeping and other roles in Africa and the Indian Ocean. In operations in Africa (including South Sudan, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of Congo), China has sent not only engineers and medical teams but well-armed and trained soldiers, with these units being given similar training to PLA special forces.⁸¹ These factors have led to an increasingly securitized approach that embraces the calibrated use of force combined with a civil-military responsiveness:

The fact that the PLA became the main protagonist of this process after an initial civilian response, from showing the flag in support of China's international standing, to more concrete actions to defend the country's interests and citizens abroad, shows how powerful the process of securitization has been. Ultimately, this process not only led to growing military activities abroad and the creation of the relevant institutional-legal framework, but it also caused a broader reconsideration about the use of force in foreign policy.⁸²

The United States, India, Australia, and Japan have observed these trends with concern. NTS dilemmas are likely to intensify over acquisition of dual-use assets, e.g., landing-craft, helicopters, helicopter-carriers, heavy-lift transport aircraft, mobile hospitals, expanded intelligence gathering via new satellites, and, in the future, transnational social monitoring via digital data and artificial intelligences.⁸³ Such dilemmas are most intense when traditional security competition already exists, e.g., threat perceptions of Chinese military modernization, expanded fields of operation in the Indian Ocean and parts of Africa, and an assertiveness in relation to Japanese and US challenges.⁸⁴ Access to the PLAN's logistic base at Djibouti and port-fueling agreements elsewhere in the Indian Ocean have long been seen as presaging a wider power projection capacity as China modernizes its naval forces—or even as the ground work of a future network of dual-use bases.⁸⁵

Massive investment into the MSR and the BRI, initially over 1.3 billion USD to be committed by various Chinese national and multilateral banks such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), demonstrates an increase in Chinese economic interests and activity across Eurasia, Southeast Asia, the South Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. These projects often cross, or are adjacent to, areas of recent or present instability, e.g., the New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor passes just north of Afghanistan and needs improved security in nearby Tajikistan, while the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor engages infrastructure projects in areas disputed by India and Pakistan and crosses through troubled Baluchistan in western Pakistan. Beijing has some 50 BRI and AIIB projects underway in the Middle East, including a comprehensive strategic partnership with Egypt and a strong presence in the Suez Canal Economic Zone. If the situa-

tion in Syria stabilizes, China may also consider further reconstruction aid and investment there beyond the 2 billion USD already pledged.⁸⁶

Although Beijing mainly relies on host countries' military and policing capabilities, China has been willing to provide some targeted nonlethal military aid and joint training opportunities. China provides small levels of military aid to wider Central Asia: circa 73 million USD to Afghanistan in 2016 (in the context of a dialogue on counterterrorism), and smaller amounts for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, mainly uniforms, accommodation, and training.⁸⁷ Beyond the biannual peace missions run via the SCO and exercises with Russia, China has also engaged in more targeted exercises, including the Silk Road Cooperation Joint Counter Terrorism Training for Special Operation Units (held in Sri Lanka in 2015), the Explore-2016 Joint Anti-Terrorism Training of Special Forces with Saudi Arabia, and the China-ASEAN Maritime Exercise-2018, plus a range of recent exercises with Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the European Union.⁸⁸ China is also a major exporter of weapons (5.2 percent of the global share), though well below the level of exports sustained by the United States and Russia (36 percent and 21 percent respectively). Through 2014–2018, China sold weapons to 53 countries, many of which are in the developing world and the Middle East, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Algeria, Thailand, Myanmar, and Turkmenistan.⁸⁹ China has sought to build its own network of military-to-military cooperation, as noted in the 2019 Defense White Paper:

Since 2012, China has held over 100 joint exercises and training with more than 30 countries. These engagements have covered traditional and nontraditional security fields, in locations extending from China's periphery to the far seas, and the participating forces have expanded from land forces to multiple branches including the army, navy and air force. Cooperation and exchanges in personnel training have intensified. Since 2012, the PLA has sent over 1,700 military personnel to study in more than 50 countries. Over 20 Chinese military educational institutions have established and maintained inter-collegiate exchanges with their counterparts from more than 40 countries. Meanwhile, more than 10,000 foreign military personnel from over 130 countries have studied in Chinese military universities and colleges.⁹⁰

Beyond this, China has also expanded the role of PSCs, which are yet to develop the legal structure to allow for Chinese to operate in armed private security roles overseas.⁹¹ In 2014, Chinese firms probably spent up to 8 billion USD on overseas security, engaging numerous security providers, including the Chinese Overseas Security Group, China Security and Protection Group, Control Risks, Beijing Dewe Security Services, Hua Xin Zhong An, and the Frontier Services group. These operated along various parts of the BRI, usually working with local compa-

nies and training staff.⁹² These groups have been involved in evacuations of Chinese workers (from Samarra, Iraq, 2014, from Juba, South Sudan, 2016) and even train for hostage rescue situations. However, there are certain risks in these trends:

Despite their nominally private status, Chinese private security companies tend to operate with the tacit support and encouragement of the Chinese government and are often staffed by former PLA officers with close, if indirect, ties to the Chinese authorities. This makes them complex, quasi-governmental international actors whose behavior is unregulated, since existing legal frameworks—both at the domestic and international level—do not clearly specify who is responsible for policing their operations.⁹³

Overall, these trends suggest a heightened role for China in providing direct and indirect means to enhance security along the BRI, operating at an almost global level. To avoid parallel threat perceptions, China might in theory evolve into a net security provider of shared “public goods” rather than a “security problem” at the regional and global levels. Although this may be achievable with targeted partners such as Russia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, and other Central Asian states, these enhanced operations have also generated enhanced threat perceptions. As such, they are part of an emerging security dilemma operating across NTS threats, focused not on the threats themselves but the means used to contain and control them. We can see this most clearly when we turn back to the limits of Chinese and Japanese cooperation in these areas.

China and Japan as NTS Partners and Competitors

Japan, via its historical expansion into mainland Asia in the early and mid-twentieth century and its place as the primary US ally in Asia in the twenty-first century, finds itself positioned as a strategic competitor with China. This adversarial relationship seems to be deepening despite strong trade flows (China was Japan’s second-largest trading partner in 2018) and past cycles of diplomacy aimed at improving relations. From this point of view, infrastructure development is becoming another area of geopolitical rivalry between Japan and China, with both countries using direct investment and different multilateral paths (the AIIB and ADB) to “enhance political leverage” and “diffuse specific ideals for development.”⁹⁴ Likewise, both countries have sought to provide security support roles for UN missions and selective provision of security services in the Indo-Pacific (see above). Both countries have been actively involved in antipiracy operations in the Indian Ocean and have opened support bases in Djibouti, alongside other countries.⁹⁵ These Japanese and Chinese maritime efforts can be seen as mutual shadowing

and soft power competition, rather than adversarial challenges across gray zones as found in the East China Sea.⁹⁶

For both countries, NTS challenges have been areas where humanitarian cooperation has been seen as a way of improving international relationships. Japan and China have both been subject to major natural disasters and have experienced serious earthquakes that have led to mutual patterns of emergency relief, plus an active exchange of scientific information through government agencies (the China Earthquake Administration and the Japan Meteorological Agency) and several universities.⁹⁷ For example, China's 2008 Wenchuan earthquake disaster led to large-scale government, NGO, and public responses from Japan:

Many people in China were touched by the fact that the support was obviously sincere and had been provided without delay. Given the historical distrust and animosity between China and Japan, the dedication and professionalism of the Japanese rescue and medical teams made a particularly positive impression. The story of Japanese help has become a significant factor in the improvement of the image of Japan in China. According to a survey taken shortly after the Wenchuan earthquake, 83.6% of Chinese liked Japan, a remarkable 73.6% increase compared to the previous survey.⁹⁸

Overall, environmental security has been seen as a useful area for cooperation and dialogue between China and Japan, even acting as a kind of "shock absorber" during periods of cyclic tension between the two states.⁹⁹

However, strategic and tactical tensions have also been experienced in the midst of complex humanitarian disasters as well. Perhaps the clearest case of tensions over HADR can be seen during the response to the March 2011 Fukushima disaster, which stretched Japanese and US humanitarian response mechanisms. Russia and China closely observed these mechanisms, "possibly allowing them to identify SDF skills and capabilities to balance against."¹⁰⁰ China did send a 15-member rescue team to the affected area and offered immediate material aid such as fuel, tents, and blankets, alongside aid mobilized by China's Red Cross.¹⁰¹ However, Japan declined further aid such as deployment of the PLAN *Peace Ark* hospital ship and special Chinese robots designed to operate in nuclear incidents. Two other important factors were engaged in relation to the Fukushima crisis. First, Japan was disturbed by close surveillance of its operations by Russia and China.¹⁰² Second, Japanese officials used the shortcomings experienced during the disaster to argue for the subsequent acquisition of dual-use mobile assets including Osprey aircraft and amphibious vessels, which raised concerns in China:

Because systems like airlift assets and amphibious ships can be used during both MOOTW and combat operations, Chinese officials and commentators have

criticized Japan's post-3/11 acquisitions as evidence of Tokyo's aggressive intentions. A Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson condemned Japan's 2013 decision to acquire RQ-4 reconnaissance aircraft (Global Hawk UAVs) and amphibious ships, arguing that Tokyo's actions "us[ed] the pretext of safeguarding Japan's own national security and regional peace for its military expansion." In recent years, China has stepped up its own development of remotely piloted reconnaissance aircraft and has continued to modernize its fleet of amphibious warfare ships, suggesting it is balancing against Japan's military expansion.¹⁰³

China has since expanded its own development of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and modernized its amphibious warship capacities, suggesting ongoing balancing against Japan's military capacities. Recently this has included the PRC's commissioning of five Type-071 large landing ships and the building of a new Type-075 amphibious assault vessel, while UAVs, such as the SULA30 reconnaissance and Sea Cavalry SD-40 drones, are being developed and increasingly acquired for surveillance, reconnaissance, and limited strike roles.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, by 2018, China had become an active supplier of unmanned combat aerial vehicles, delivering 153 vehicles to 13 states, mainly developing and Middle Eastern countries.¹⁰⁵ One again, these patterns suggest cycles of cooperation and suspicion following periods of NTS cooperation, largely focused on demonstrated capacities, observed gaps, or acquisitions to fill such gaps.

Conclusion: Inclusive Multilayered Security Rather than Preemption

The well-known problem for NTS is that it reconstructs the field of possible *threats*, thereby expanding potentially inappropriate solutions derived from conflict experiences and military operations to developmental and environmental problems.¹⁰⁶ One noted example of this was the shift of Plan Colombia from its wider developmental, crop-substitution and policing origins (as originally planned in the late 1990s) toward a "war on drugs" model that ended up escalating regional violence, leading to an intensified "irrational war" model that Colombia would take decades to moderate.¹⁰⁷ Excluding the South China Sea and the East China Sea, where direct territorial claims are in conflict, competition in the Indian Ocean is indirect, concerned with the ongoing presence of naval forces, access to ports, and the relative power projection and soft-power influence of India, Japan, China, the United States, and to a lesser degree other states (Australia and Indonesia). In such a setting, "even the most-benign military deployments can amplify mistrust and arms racing, suggesting that capabilities—rather than intentions—play a more significant role in driving competition between rivals."¹⁰⁸

Solutions to these problems are simple in theory but complex in application, resting on two approaches: where force is required, this should function through UN mandates or multilateral institutions; and where force is not required, there should be a shift toward demilitarization of responses—even when viewed as security issues.¹⁰⁹ For example, a response to high levels of piracy requires armed, seagoing vessels to deter, destroy, or capture raiding pirates, often moving beyond EEZs into open seas. Over the last two decades, this has forced the creation of mixed international flotillas, engaging NATO, the European Union (EU), and Indo-Pacific navies, as well as regional frameworks such as the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against ships in Asia (ReCAAP). Through such frameworks, US, Japanese, Indian, Australian, and Chinese naval forces (ReCAAP now has 20 member states) have become shared responders to pirate attacks, and do provide improved SLOC security, while the UN, the African Union, and the EU have worked on reducing the land-based causes of piracy.

However, individual, uncoordinated task forces operating in remote oceans can equally be seen as power-projection demonstrations rather than net security providers. Even when designed to protect regional shipping, such operations still run the risk of being seen to wave the flag of national capacities. Instead, military forces should clearly distinguish and announce SLOC patrol operations versus other kinds of military exercises. Likewise, care needs to be taken to reduce reactive and competitive factors coming into play when framing MOOTW and HADR operations, with clear public diplomacy shaped to reduce cycles of follow-on competition.¹¹⁰ Where possible, such operations should avoid deployment into sensitive regions and be used to build wider people-to-people relations, e.g., via the coordinated deployment of multinational civilian responders.¹¹¹

Where major military force is not needed, there is a need to rapidly demilitarize operations after the initial period of emergency deployment. In part, this can be done by the handover of tasks to other government agencies as well as UN, civilian, NGO, and aid groups (30,000 civil society groups are now registered or liaising with the UN at different levels).¹¹² It also requires an improved flow from emergency and disaster response to aid, reconstruction, and then developmental phases.¹¹³ Only the early part of these tasks can be undertaken by HADR or MOOTW responses, though cooperation is also run through multilateral frameworks such as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and AHA, with global preventive measures being developed through the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (from 2015). Demilitarization requires a widening of cooperation beyond the involved militaries to other agencies and a deepening toward cooperation among

nonstate actors, NGOs, civil society, and volunteer groups—thus, enhancing people-to-people engagement.¹¹⁴ In most cases, the aim should be to first demilitarize and where possible desecuritize responses as they come under effective international and then national management. Beyond this, sustained and appropriate economic aid and investment may be needed to help sustain struggling states or regions, depending on the size and type of ongoing NTS crises they face.¹¹⁵

Traditionally, NTS and humanitarian operations were seen as areas where cooperation was more likely than competition, and soft power viewed as easy to accrue through constructive use of military assets. However, given the complex geopolitical and geo-economic contexts of the Indo-Pacific and divided reactions to the BRI, these assumptions need further investigation.¹¹⁶ India, Australia, the United States, and, to some degree, Japan have remained highly critical of the lack of transparency and multilateral accountability found in many BRI projects. Beyond specific concerns such as environmental standards and levels of debt for poor and small countries, there is also concern about the geopolitical leverage China gains by leading a project that might transform at least three continents.¹¹⁷ In such a setting, even logical provisions against NTS threats along BRI corridors become two-edged swords, strengthening a web of security relationships in which China is the senior partner. Given the rising geopolitical tensions between the major powers of the Indo-Pacific, it is time for a calibrated review of the use of military diplomacy and HADR operation among competing states. ✪

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Assessing Republic of Singapore Air Force's Defensive Air Operations Capabilities

Confronting Challenges in Unconventional Scenarios

ANANT MISHRA

During the post–Cold War era, we have witnessed numerous reforms in international security architecture, which, with time, diminished any possibility of a full-scale military confrontation between two or more states. That being said, transborder territorial aggression continues to persist as possible conflict zones across the globe; unconventional threats to domestic and international security such as transnational organized crime, radical militant fundamentalism, violent nonstate actors, natural and man-made calamities, along with international health epidemics have further complicated the challenges faced by military establishments around the globe. To strengthen combat effectiveness, aviation assets are quickly being deployed in operations other than traditional war, such as (but not limited to) humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) efforts and counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and peacekeeping initiatives.

As a consequence of the evolution in military strategies and tactics, there was a phenomenal increase in the cost of fighter aircraft that aggressively expanded the use of airpower. In an effort to fulfill necessities during peacekeeping operations, numerous air forces, including the United States and Royal Air Force, were forced to postpone their mobilization of fleet and concomitant squadrons of fighter aircraft over the years to acquire and deploy armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) during combat operations in Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Afghanistan.¹

Since its first peacekeeping mission to Cambodia in 1993, the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) has, with time, learned and subsequently strengthened the use of aerial assets to match their partners and allies while contributing significant forces to counterterrorism operations, assisting in HADR efforts, and participating in joint counterpiracy operations. Consequently, the success of such operations and Singapore's continued efforts to expand the use of air assets have phenomenally increased the dependence on the RSAF to maintain peace and security.

This article highlights the evolution of airpower due to rampant changes in the international security environment and advances in technology to make a case for further investment in the RSAF and its airpower policy to defend Singapore. The

article further highlights the progressive expansion of airpower that strengthened Singapore for countless years, while portraying the challenges faced by Singapore—particularly its territorial vulnerabilities and threats to its strategic objectives. The primary operational objective and focus for the RSAF should be to defend Singapore from enemies foreign and domestic rather than extending its resources and overutilization of vital assets in complex environments outside war. Policy makers must focus their attention on formulating an effective policy to secure strategic objectives of an island nation such as Singapore during the duality of war and peace, while restructuring the RSAF's standard operating procedure to fulfill the needs during war and peace without hindering its ability to secure a quick and a firm victory in the former.

Systematic Evolution in Air Capabilities

In the words of one of the oldest air forces in the world, the British Royal Air Force, airpower is the fusion of tactics and strategy demonstrated through airpower in an effort to alter the course of scenarios involving multiple actors and forcing them to alter their plan of action. Separating the numerous intangible characteristics of airpower, we limit the segments of its capability to speed, altitude, and elevation. Swiftly outmaneuvering opposing ground forces and overpowering topographic challenges that could significantly compromise movement of the ground forces, military leadership, by deploying air assets, could further maintain fire superiority without losing tempo and agility, while focusing their firepower on the opposing force's *center of mass* in an effort to deliver a significant blow to the enemy's assets and neutralize them at the onset of battle.² When it comes to potentiates of airpower, it is capable of catering to all needs and strategic interests of a state and can be segregated into major segments such as air dominance/superiority; demonstration of force; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities; and first aggressor abilities.³ As a military asset, strategic and tactical commanders can employ airpower for both aggressive and defensive campaigns.

The pinnacle of offensive modern air warfare was inarguably attained during the Cold War, when massive squadrons of long- and short-range strategic/tactical bombers, medium and multirole fighter aircraft, and long-range cruise and ballistic missile systems catered to the demands of the erstwhile hegemon: the Soviet Union and the United States. With the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, the United States, a sole global power supported by its NATO allies, actively engaged in a few conventional air skirmishes in the Middle East (particularly Iraq) and in Kosovo. Interestingly, NATO and US air forces actively engaged in more unconventional warfare rather than traditional war. The United States and its al-

lies' engagements in Somalia, Bosnia, and in Libya, followed by their HADR operations (particularly in response to the Asian tsunami, earthquake in Nepal, and nuclear disaster in Japan), are prime examples. Considering the shortcomings of air assets to firmly seize and hold territory, they were significantly employed to support ground forces in terms of ISR, and precision strikes. One such example can be seen in the use of air assets that played a major role in US-backed efforts to defeat Islamic State forces.

The evolution in aerial engagement and tactical deployment during the early 1990s and throughout Washington's global war on terrorism, supplemented by the rapid advances in technology and production cost inefficiency, has significantly reduced global and regional powers' reliance on traditional aerial assets due to the rising costs in maintaining a large fleet. This has resulted in many lesser powers relying further on developing and employing UAVs for many missions, including ISR. This was evident from Washington's decision to reduce the procurement of over 700 F-22 multi-domain fighter aircrafts to almost 187, while significantly increasing production of armed UAVs for combat purposes.⁴ Insignificant in quantity and cost inefficient in operation, Washington did not deploy its prestigious squadrons of stealth bombers and F-22 advanced multirole aircrafts during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan nor in the low-risk airspace of Libya.⁵ Instead, Washington deployed armed MQ-9 Reaper UAVs to support International Security Assistance Force allies on the battlefields of Yemen and Afghanistan today and deployed RQ-7 Shadows and RQ-4 Global Hawk for humanitarian ISR missions. In an effort to strengthen ground forces' engagement capabilities in effectively countering the Islamic State at the onset of Operation Inherent Resolve, Washington deployed squadrons of armed and unarmed UAVs to gather critical real-time surveillance on enemy forces during which the UAVs' performance was outstanding, convincing the United States to separately dedicate finances from its budget toward further development and deployment of such assets.⁶

Defending Singaporean Skies

Since its establishment as the Unified Singapore Air Defence Command in early 1968, armed with a squadron of eight Cessna 172K, most of the air force's acquisitions were based on immediate demand to maintain squadron strength instead of procuring air assets based on future operational scenarios. Learning lessons from Japanese aerial superiority in the Pacific during World War II, Singaporean leaders realized the importance of a strong and reliable air force that could not only effectively counter opposing enemy airpower but also defend territorial boundaries when and if challenged. Operationally expanding under the new name of the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF), the island's air arm

initiated acquisition of air assets for basic air defenses in the early 1970s, strengthening such capabilities in the late 1980s and devising state-of-the-art training and recruitment of air force personnel only by the 1990s.⁷ Subsequently, the RSAF continues to make major progress in transforming this once nascent air force into a fourth-generation fighting force.

However, the RSAF mission to defend Singaporean airspace and the nation's territorial integrity has not deviated since its establishment, despite the rampant evolution in combat environments that occurred in the international security domain and frequent technological developments that have opened the doors for economies to cooperate in unconventional situations outside war. Without altering its mission, such advancements have enabled the RSAF to maintain a professional organizational architecture and logical operational mechanism in all domains.

The RSAF gained its first international experience through a UN mission, deploying four Eurocopter AS332 Super Puma utility helicopters along with a contingent of 65 troops to assist the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, with a mandate to assist in election monitoring. Subsequently, the RSAF boosted its international cooperation initiatives by participating in a series of peacekeeping missions and contributing over a dozen air assets to UN missions active in Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire, Timor-Leste, and in the Persian Gulf. Additionally, the RSAF participated in numerous HADR operations, particularly in post-disaster operations in Thailand and Indonesia, search-and-rescue operations of Indonesia AirAsia Flight 8501, and counterpiracy operations in the Indian Ocean.⁸ Singapore received global appreciation for its efforts, further strengthening its image as a global contributor to the UN and a responsible ally at the global podium and securing its national territorial boundaries and strategic assets as a responsible state.

In light of the expanded role of air assets during unconventional operations and the Singapore's aforementioned faithful cooperation, are policy makers and military leaders ready to formulate a dedicated unconventional policy and invest RSAF assets in an effort to maintain global peace and security? Or should they focus their attention on strengthening/formulating conventional airpower in an effort to defend the nation's strategic assets and territorial integrity? Irrespective of the air capabilities, the decision to delegate air assets and resources to HADR efforts would seem to be obvious, particularly taking Singapore's past into account. It is more important, however, for military leaders and policy makers to formulate a strategy that allows Singapore to deploy air assets in peacekeeping operations without compromising its ability to fight a conventional war, keeping in mind Indo-Pacific regional instability and Singapore's strategic assets.



(Photo courtesy of Singapore Ministry of Defence)

Figure 1. Exercise Forging Sabre. Singapore's Senior Minister of State for Defence Heng Chee How receives a brief on the capabilities of the command post at Exercise Forging Sabre 2019, hosted at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho. Conducted 30 September to 10 October 2019, the exercise involved around 600 personnel from the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), including the Singapore Army's Commandos, and assets from the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) such as the F-15SG and F-16C/D multirole fighter aircraft, AH-64D Apache helicopters, Heron 1 unmanned aerial vehicles, and the inaugural participation of the A330 MRTT multirole tanker transport in an overseas exercise.

Regional Instability and Singapore's Strategic Objectives

Although Southeast Asia has prospered since the end of World War II, enjoying relative secured and peaceful environment, there are numerous international issues that have the potential to possibly alter this chartered course of peace and tranquility. Unlike European states that are committed to the need for peace and security, the fragile security and fractured peace in Southeast Asia with underlying differences could result in regional instability.

Over the years, Asian defense expenditures have increased exponentially—a grave concern, particularly expressed by peacekeeping institutions such as the UN and liberal think tanks in the Indo-Pacific.⁹ Most recently, South Korea has been keenly expanding its multirole fighter acquisition policy, and Japan reiterated its commitment to expand its Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II training program in the light of developing situations in the region. Within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, member nations such as Indonesia and Malaysia are keen to expand KAI KF-X combat aircraft development program, a joint South

Korean and Indonesian venture, in an effort to formulate squadrons of this multirole fighter aircraft to further enhance their air superiority. Although some of the air assets negotiations/acquisitions orchestrated by regional economic groupings are genuinely focused on defending territorial integrity, should the relationships among these nations fall out, such modernizations could quickly turn into hoarding of air assets in an effort to secure military superiority.

Limiting the discussion to the South Pacific, rampant economic growth and the dire need to replenish natural resources to quench rising energy demands have created various disagreements among regional powers regarding resources and external boundaries with their economically and militarily inferior neighbors. One such example is the contestations of regional economies in the South China Sea. The Philippines and Australia recently announced acquisition of KAI T-50 Golden Eagle and Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II multirole fighter aircraft in an effort to further strengthen their air capabilities to counter any aggression in the Indian Ocean or the South China Sea. Other powers, like Indonesia, which have no claims in the South China Sea, are strengthening their defensive capabilities by acquiring AH-64 Apache twin turbo-shaft attack helicopters in an effort to defend their economic zones.

Singapore, due to its geostrategic location, size, and geography, will remain threatened from external forces due to its extensive dependence on global trade and dearth of natural resources. Learning lessons from past diplomatic and trade relationships, seemingly healthy bilateral and multilateral relations can quickly and dramatically turn sour.

RSAF: Learning the Right Lessons

With Singapore deploying its air assets to peacekeeping operations all across the globe, the focus for military and political leadership should be on strengthening RSAF maneuvering capabilities irrespective of its operational domain, which is possible through equipping the RSAF with adequate capabilities without compromising its current strength. This would enable the RSAF to maintain its operational mechanism during HADR operations, it would further assist air commanders in cost-effective maintenance of such air assets even when they are not in rigorous use. Military leadership should also focus on acquisition of air assets that have multiple uses, such as multi-domain air transport fixed-wing aircrafts, transport helicopters, and ISR UAVs, which are not only vital in combat scenarios but are also critical in HADR operations. Acquisition policies on aforementioned lines would further retain RSAF organizational and operational focus on national security, enabling the service to respond to HADR challenges and national security threats simultaneously.

Conclusion

In light of the fluid global insecurity of the post–Cold War era, the evolution in military tactics have potentially altered the course of airpower and opened new doors for air forces to operate in new unconventional and conventional combat environments. Particularly for an island nation such as Singapore, air assets play a critical role in the nation's overall development. As the roles played by traditional air forces in HADR and unconventional military operations continue to expand, the RSAF too needs to adapt its operational mechanism without compromising its ability to fulfill Singapore's strategic objectives. With Singapore relying on its airpower for defense, the RSAF must amend flexible operational mechanisms, enabling it to participate in global peacekeeping missions without compromising its national security and maintaining a firm equilibrium in its acquisition policies to effectively counter both conventional and unconventional threats without compromising operational continuity. ★

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BOOK REVIEW

China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations edited by Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2019, ISBN: 978-1-59114-693-3.

China's increasingly assertive—many would say aggressive—actions in the South China and East China Seas have captured the attention of the media and policy and academic communities. The most disconcerting aspect of those activities is that they have principally involved Chinese paranaul forces, with which the United States and its allies in the region have had little success confronting. This is an understudied topic and an urgent issue that must be addressed. Andrew S. Erickson and Ryan D. Martinson are faculty members of the China Maritime Studies Institute at the Naval War College and are experts on the Chinese navy and China's maritime activities. They are thus uniquely qualified and well-positioned to organize a conference of experts to discuss issues related to this topic. *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations* is an outcome of such a conference.

Through the writings of 23 authors, this five-part edited volume presents this central thesis: China's maritime operations in the South China and East China Seas, which prominently feature paranaul forces, have confounded the United States and its allies in the region. In particular, America's allies are unable to successfully defend against Chinese paranaul forces.

One can draw many implications from this thesis. However, as indicated by the recommendations offered in the final section of the book, the authors agree on one in particular: China's operations in the "gray zone" must be confronted, and the United States must be willing to adopt a tougher stance against Chinese operations, including the use of US naval forces, if necessary. On this point, Michael Mazarr's analysis on how to deter Chinese actions deserves careful reading, because he outlines the deterrence possibilities and limitations for the United States and its allies. To support the volume's central thesis, the authors utilize the writings of Chinese naval and coast guard officers, government regulations, statements by senior Chinese officials, and real-life examples to explore the topic from the perspectives of history, strategy, doctrine, operations, and paranaul assets.

The product of this effort is a real contribution to our understanding of China's gray zone operations. In particular, the edited volume provides an excellent assessment of China's paranaul capabilities. In this respect, the chapters in Parts 2 and 3 of the volume are strongly recommended for their clear and in-depth treatment of the history, organization, operations, and assets of the China Coast Guard and the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia. In this manner, the authors are able to provide sound assessments of China's policy, institutional, and material advantages and limitations in conducting gray zone operations.

However, *China's Maritime Gray Zone Operations* is not without limitations. As is the case with all edited volumes, especially those derived from conferences, there are variations in the quality of the chapters. In this vein, three chapters require greater scrutiny. The chapters by Katsuya Yamamoto and Tomohisa Takei have unfortunately acquired a propagandistic tone, which might have been unavoidable given the authors' affiliations with the Japanese navy. By contrast, Adam Liff's analysis of Japanese responses to Chinese gray zone operations is far more measured, rigorous, and objective. In addition, it is unclear to this reviewer how Takei's analysis of the three types of operations (peacetime, gray zone, and war) "in terms of time and intensity" (p. 245) adds to our understanding of China's gray zone operations.

The third chapter in question is Bernard Moreland's comparative case study of Vietnam's and the Philippines' responses to Chinese gray zone operations. After studying his analysis, this reviewer is left wondering whether it would have been better to compare the Philippines' responses with Japanese responses. These two countries have more in common with each other than with Vietnam. The most important shared characteristic is that they are both US allies. In addition, comparing the Philippines' responses with those of Japan would allow a more comprehensive assessment of the maritime situations in East Asia. Moreover, such a comparison will show that US

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support for its allies in the region has been inconsistent, which will result in a more sophisticated conclusion than the one drawn by the author.

This assessment of the three aforementioned chapters leads to perhaps the volume's most glaring weakness. Aside from the two articles by former and present Japanese naval officers, the book does not present the perspectives of US allies and partners other than Japan. The volume's contributions would have been enhanced by the perspectives of naval officers or relevant government officials representing the Philippines and Taiwan.

Despite these weaknesses, this is a book that should be recommended to both specialists and nonspecialists. The latter, in particular, should appreciate the lack of jargon and the chapters' clarity of presentation.

As mentioned earlier, this book is a real contribution to our understanding of China's gray zone operations. This reviewer hopes that it will motivate more analysts to study this topic with the aim of contributing to better-informed US policies for addressing the challenges presented by the Chinese parnaval forces.

Dr. John W. Tai



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