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Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept aligns well with U.S. interests and Tokyo is well positioned to contribute to a regional rules-based order. China's economic centrality and influence pose a challenge to the realization of FOIP as most nations engage in hedging behavior and are vulnerable to Chinese coercion. Such dynamics can impact the extent to which allies and partners support cooperation with and access for the U.S. military. Notwithstanding the challenge from China, Japan's longstanding investment, presence, and reputation in the region bode well for FOIP. To complement Tokyo's efforts, Washington's approach to the Indo-Pacific should leverage a whole of government approach with robust economic engagement, the strength of allies and partners to include non-democratic states, and international institutions and law. Japan's FOIP concept warrants Washington's full support, as Tokyo's regional influence and economic engagement fill gaps in American foreign policy and uniquely position Japan to make headway towards the realization of FOIP.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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AY 2020-21

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Executive Summary

Title: Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) Concept: Prospects, Challenges, and U.S. Policy Implications

Author: Major Paul S. Smith, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: Japan's FOIP concept aligns well with U.S. interests, filling gaps in Washington's foreign policy and carrying the potential to buttress a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. China's economic centrality and influence pose a challenge to the realization of FOIP, but Japan is well-positioned to engage throughout the region, and Tokyo's FOIP efforts warrant America's full support.

Discussion: The incredibly vibrant and diverse Indo-Pacific region has become in a sense the primary venue of renewed great power competition between the U.S. and China. Competing visions for the region abound, as Beijing flexes its economic and military muscles while seeking to assert its dominance. Japan's FOIP concept lays out an inclusive vision for a stable and prosperous region undergirded by a rules-based order. Conversely, China's economic centrality and influence pose a challenge to the realization of FOIP as most nations engage in hedging behavior and are vulnerable to Chinese coercion. Such dynamics can impact the extent to which allies and partners support cooperation with and access for the U.S. military.

Conclusion: Notwithstanding the challenges posed by China, Japan's longstanding investment, presence, and reputation in the Indo-Pacific position Tokyo well to advance its FOIP concept. Tokyo's efforts align closely with Washington's and U.S.-Japan collaboration towards a rules-based FOIP should be prioritized. In charting the way forward in the Indo-Pacific, Washington should take a whole of government approach with robust economic engagement, leverage international institutions and law, and work closely with allies and partners. Japan's FOIP concept warrants Washington's full support, as Tokyo's regional influence and economic engagement fill gaps in American foreign policy and uniquely position Japan to make headway towards the realization of FOIP.

Preface

As a Northeast Asian Foreign Area Officer (FAO), my interests and professional experience have largely been bound up with Japan and the Indo-Pacific. Coming off a tour where I served as the III Marine Expeditionary Force Liaison Officer to the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), I was given the opportunity to be at the tactical forefront of many strategic-level initiatives throughout the region and saw firsthand the U.S.-Japan alliance in action. I have thus chosen the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) as the topic for my master's thesis, a concept first espoused by Japan but also shared by the U.S. and partners throughout the region. The importance of the Indo-Pacific region to U.S., Japanese, Chinese, and global interests needs no introduction. As renewed great power competition looms over the region, however, the prospects and challenges of the FOIP concept are of the utmost consequence.

This thesis would not have been possible without Dr. Bill Morgan's tremendous support and guidance. Likewise, I am indebted to my second reader Dr. Eric Shibuya and faculty advisers CDR Steve Kelley and Dr. Nate Packard. I am also the beneficiary of instruction from Dr. Andrew Scobell and Dr. Doug Streusand and their classes allowed me to explore China's strategy towards Southeast Asia and U.S. policy towards China. I would be remiss not to acknowledge the Naval Postgraduate School Department of National Security Affairs as well— instruction from Drs. David and Helen Anderson, Dr. Michael Glosny, Dr. Christopher Twomey, Dr. Robert Weiner, Dr. Michael Malley, and Dr. Naazneen Barma among others laid a firm foundation for my academic endeavors. Finally, I am grateful for the ever-constant love and support of my wife and son. They will probably never read this paper, but certainly felt the long hours of my absence to write it. Now back to focusing on my more important roles of being a husband and father.

Introduction

In recent years the importance of the Indo-Pacific region on the global stage has risen coinciding with the rapid rise of China and the United States' pivot or rebalance to Asia. As the primary venue of renewed great power competition, the Indo-Pacific region largely bears the weight of tense Sino-U.S. relations, with even the slightest tremors between the world's two greatest powers reverberating throughout the region and the world. A vibrant global economic hub, Asia holds the largest share of global gross domestic product (GDP) and the region will account for some 60% of economic growth over the next decade.¹ The stakes of power and influence in this region cannot be overstated. Indeed, pointing to the impending great power competition in the Pacific in the 21st century, in 2009 former prime minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew presciently declared in Washington, "if you do not hold your ground in the Pacific, you cannot be a world leader."² Yet the underlying factors which drive this dynamic region are as myriad and complex as the tremendous challenges to maintaining stability.

In this critical region and against this backdrop, Japan, which within the last century once dominated the region by force, now stands apart as a peaceful democracy, the world's third-largest economy, and Washington's most important ally on Beijing's periphery. Although now a middle-power, Tokyo is no idle bystander but has championed a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept that seeks to promote the region's stability and prosperity through upholding a rules-based international order.³ But what are the prospects of Japan's FOIP? And what are the

¹ Praneeth Yendamuri and Zara Ingilizian, "In 2020 Asia will have the world's largest GDP. Here's what that means," World Economic Forum, December 20, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/12/asia-economic-growth/>.

² Martin Jacques, "A Case for Containing China's Rise," Review of Aaron Friedberg's, "A Contest for Supremacy," *NY Times Sunday Book Review*, September 23, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/25/books/review/a-contest-for-supremacy-by-aaron-l-friedberg-book-review.html>.

³ Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Diplomatic Bluebook 2020: Japanese Diplomacy and International Situation in 2019. Tokyo, Japan, October 21, 2020. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100105301.pdf>, 8; Satake Tomohiko, Chapter

challenges to the realization of FOIP? Moreover, why should FOIP matter to the U.S. and how can Washington best collaborate with Tokyo in this arena?

Japan's FOIP concept aligns well with U.S. interests, filling gaps in Washington's foreign policy and carrying the potential to buttress a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. China's economic centrality and influence pose a challenge to the realization of FOIP, but Japan is well-positioned to engage throughout the region and Tokyo's FOIP efforts warrant America's full support.

Overview of FOIP

Japan's FOIP Vision

Though elements of Japan's FOIP vision have percolated in Tokyo's foreign policy since at least 2007, Prime Minister Abe officially unveiled FOIP at the August 2016 Tokyo International Conference of Africa's Development (TICAD).⁴ Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) provided the three pillars undergirding this vision: promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade; pursuit of economic prosperity; and commitment for peace and stability.⁵ In pursuit of FOIP, Japan has undertaken multiple projects, such as leading the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), investing in regional infrastructure and connectivity, and supporting maritime law enforcement in Southeast Asia.⁶

7, Initiatives for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, East Asian Strategic Review 2020 (Tokyo, Japan: National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), April 2020), 196, http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/east-asian/pdf/2020/east-asian_e2020_07.pdf.

⁴ Kei Koga, "Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Question: Countering China Or Shaping a New Regional Order?" International Affairs 96, no. 1 (01, 2020), 49, 57-58, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/2430176931?accountid=14746>.

⁵ Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Free and Open Indo-Pacific Basic Concept. Tokyo, Japan, 2020. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000430632.pdf>.

⁶ Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Japan's effort for a free and open Indo-Pacific. Tokyo, Japan, May 2020. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100056243.pdf>.

Japan's whole of government approach likewise entails Ministry of Defense (MOD) support in the form of extensive regional defense cooperation and counter-piracy operations to promote a favorable security environment and security of major sea lanes.⁷ Since 2009, the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) have continually supported counter-piracy efforts off the coast of Somalia with SDF destroyers providing safe escort for over 4,000 vessels and P-3C patrol aircraft contributing over 70% of the international community's warning and surveillance operations in the Gulf of Aden.⁸

Moreover, in 2019, JSDF conducted their first Indo-Pacific Deployment (IPD) with the flagship JS IZUMO and a contingent of the Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade.⁹ Over several months, this deployment included port calls to Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam, with a robust schedule of defense exchanges, community relations events, and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief seminars.¹⁰ A myriad of bilateral and multilateral naval drills with the U.S., Australian, Indian, French, and Southeast Asian Navies additionally strengthened regional security cooperation.¹¹

Japan also recognizes the importance of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in approaching the region. As the "convener of the region," ASEAN is a major player in shaping regional integration and the security landscape of Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific.¹² ASEAN hosts numerous venues to include the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East

⁷ Japan Ministry of Defense, "Achieving the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" Vision: Japan Ministry of Defense's Approach," Tokyo, Japan, July 2020, https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/pamphlets/pdf/indo_pacific/indo_pacific_e.pdf.

⁸ Defense of Japan 2020, 383-386.

⁹ Japan Ministry of Defense, "Indo-Pacific Deployment 2019 (IPD19)," <https://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/en/exercises/IPD19.html>.

¹⁰ Japan Ministry of Defense, "Indo-Pacific Deployment 2019."

¹¹ Japan Ministry of Defense, "Indo-Pacific Deployment 2019."

¹² Jeffrey Ordaniel and Carl Baker, "ASEAN Centrality and the Evolving US Indo-Pacific Strategy," Pacific Forum, Issues & Insights Conference Report, Vol. 19, CR-4, March 2019, 2, https://pacforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/issuesinsights_Vol19CR4_USASEAN_0.pdf.

Asia Summit, thereby facilitating high-level diplomatic and security dialogues.¹³ Japan’s Ministry of Defense thus announced its “Vientiane Vision,” which acknowledges ASEAN’s centrality and enhances Japan’s enduring defense cooperation with ASEAN.¹⁴ Fully recognizing partner nation contributions to maintaining regional peace and stability, Tokyo likewise actively provides defense capacity building assistance throughout the region as depicted in Figure 1.¹⁵ Through such engagement, Tokyo highlights FOIP’s common ground with ASEAN under the ideals of “openness, transparency, inclusivity, and a rules-based framework.”¹⁶

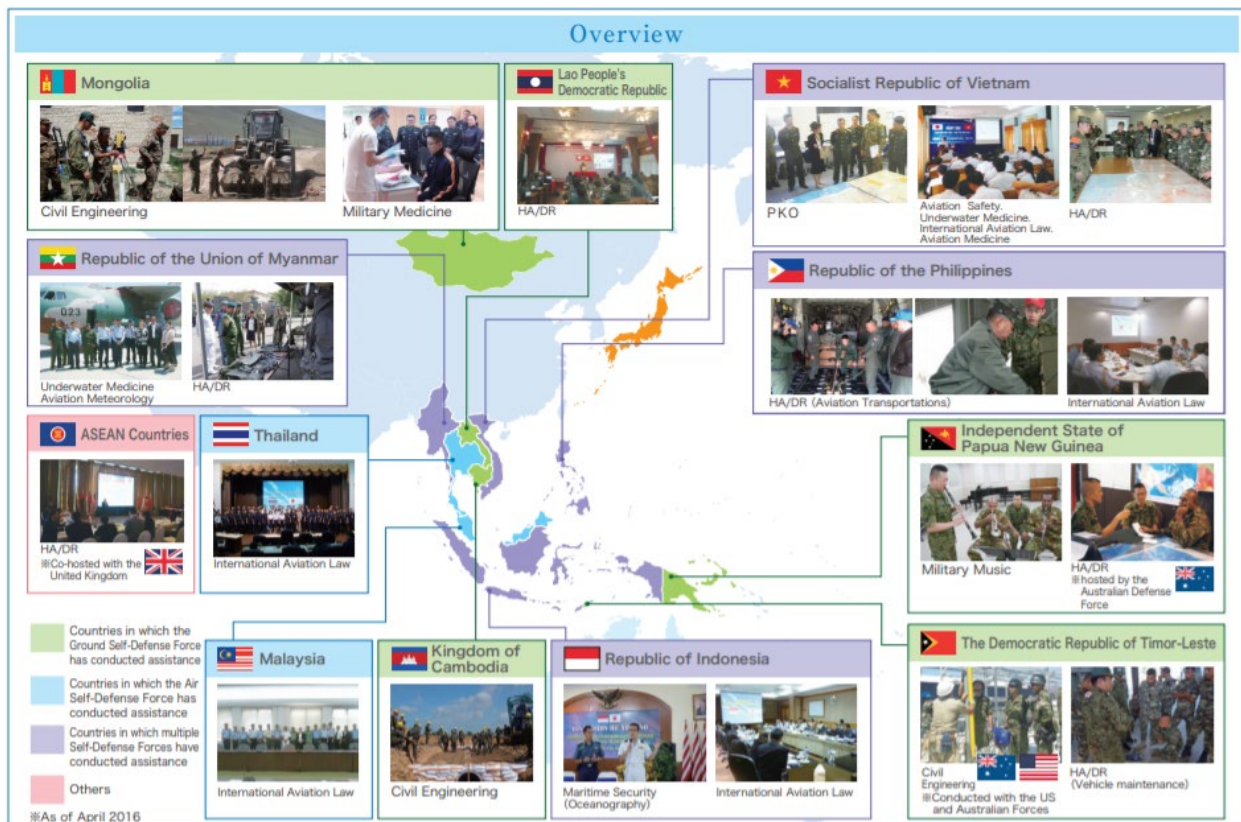


Figure 1: Japan Ministry of Defense Overview of Defense Capacity Building Assistance

¹³ Ordaniel and Baker, “ASEAN Centrality and the Evolving US Indo-Pacific Strategy,” 2.

¹⁴ Japan Ministry of Defense, “Updating the Vientiane Vision: Japan’s Defense Cooperation Initiative with ASEAN,” November 2019, https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/exc/admm/06/vv2_en.pdf.

¹⁵ Japan Ministry of Defense, “Japan’s Defense Capacity Building Assistance,” Tokyo, Japan, April 2016, https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11591426/www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/pamphlets/pdf/cap_build/pamphlet.pdf.

¹⁶ Japan Ministry of Defense, “Updating the Vientiane Vision.”

Though at least partly understood as a competitive response to China’s rapidly growing power and influence, in official publications Japan emphasizes that FOIP is an inclusive concept, open to cooperation with all and excluding none.¹⁷ Scholars describe the backdrop against which FOIP was birthed, noting that by 2010 China knocked Japan out of the world’s number two economy spot and was flexing its muscles in the East China Sea (ECS) and South China Sea (SCS) over maritime territorial claims, including the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands.¹⁸ Kei Koga, in a survey of Japanese academics, notes the FOIP concept’s ambiguity and seemingly contradictory inclusion of competitive and cooperative elements vis-à-vis China, while asserting that Tokyo is engaged in tactical hedging.¹⁹ Koga defines tactical hedging as an “ambiguous, temporal declaratory policy doctrine that helps an actor bide time.”²⁰ He views FOIP’s primary intent as gathering a regional order based upon the “existing rules-based international order.”²¹

The U.S. and the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific is of great importance to the U.S. as the region is directly linked to American prosperity. As highlighted by the U.S. Department of State’s (DOS) FOIP vision, with nearly \$2 trillion in two-way trade, the futures of America and the Indo-Pacific “are inextricably intertwined.”²² Indeed, the U.S. can ill-afford not to prioritize a region that is home to nearly 60% of the world’s population and over 40% of global GDP.²³ If Washington is not engaged in the region, the U.S. will not only have less access to key portions of the world economy but will

¹⁷ Koga, "Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Question," 50, 70; MOFA, Japan’s effort for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

¹⁸ Tomohiko, Initiatives for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, 197; Koga, "Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Question," 49.

¹⁹ Kei Koga, "Japan's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' Strategy: Tokyo's Tactical Hedging and the Implications for ASEAN." Contemporary Southeast Asia 41, no. 2 (08, 2019): 289, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/2276751667?accountid=14746>.

²⁰ Koga, “Japan’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” Strategy,” 289; Koga, "Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Question," 50, 71.

²¹ Koga, “Japan’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” Strategy,” 289; Koga, "Japan's 'Indo-Pacific' Question," 50, 71.

²² US Department of State, A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision (Washington, DC, November 4, 2019), 4, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>.DOS.

²³ Bruce Vaughn, The Trump Administration’s “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”: Issues for Congress, CRS Report for Congress R45396 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, October 2, 2018), 7, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45396>.

also cede influence to China.²⁴ Beijing has already inked the world's largest trade deal, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and will increasingly reshape international rules and norms to Chinese benefit.²⁵

Washington's current Indo-Pacific initiatives are largely a continuation of policies dating back to the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations. It was in 2000 that Condoleezza Rice, who served as President Bush's National Security Advisor, laid out a clear-eyed description of Beijing as a threat to the Asia-Pacific and "a strategic competitor, not the "strategic partner" the Clinton administration once called it."²⁶ Although the fateful events of September 11th, 2001 dramatically turned the focus of America's foreign policy to the Middle East, the Bush administration had at least identified the challenge posed by China and set in motion diplomatic and military efforts to respond to the impending threat to the Asia-Pacific region's stability.²⁷ Continuing in this vein, in 2011 President Obama announced the "pivot" to the Pacific, signaling a degree of closure to years of large-scale military operations in the Middle East and the intent to shift focus to the Asia-Pacific and cope with China's rise.²⁸ The "pivot" included efforts to prioritize security cooperation with allies and partners, engagement with multilateral institutions, and economic policy in the region.²⁹

²⁴ Robert Manning, "A Gaping Hole in US Indo-Pacific Strategy," The Hill, November 17, 2020, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/526212-a-gaping-hole-in-us-indo-pacific-strategy>.

²⁵ Manning, "A Gaping Hole in US Indo-Pacific Strategy."

²⁶ Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* vol. 79, no. 1 (January/February 2000), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2000-01-01/campaign-2000-promoting-national-interest>; Benjamin M. Jensen and Eric Y. Shibuya, "The Military Rebalance as Retcon," in *Origins and Evolution of the US Rebalance Toward Asia: Diplomatic, Military, and Economic Dimensions*, ed. Hugo Meijer (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 92.

²⁷ Benjamin M. Jensen and Eric Y. Shibuya, "The Military Rebalance as Retcon," in *Origins and Evolution of the US Rebalance Toward Asia: Diplomatic, Military, and Economic Dimensions*, ed. Hugo Meijer (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 92-94.

²⁸ Mark E. Manyin, et al, *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's "Rebalancing" Toward Asia*, CRS Report for Congress R42448 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 28, 2012), 1-2, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=705063>.

²⁹ Manyin, *Pivot to the Pacific?*, 1-2.

The Trump administration's FOIP narrative built upon many aspects of Obama's "strategic rebalancing," while also more explicitly responding to the challenges posed by China.³⁰ The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) promulgated its Indo-Pacific Strategy Report in 2019, which directly confronted China, labeling it a revisionist power.³¹ Against the backdrop of aggressive Chinese territorial claims and militarization, repression of Xinjiang Muslims, and violation of international norms, The U.S. developed a strategy with four principles: (1) respect for sovereignty; (2) peaceful resolution of disputes; (3) free, fair, and reciprocal trade; and (4) adherence to international rules and norms.³² The subsequent DOS FOIP vision stated that the U.S. vision does not exclude any nation, nor ask countries to pick sides, though it warns against the repressive vision of revisionist powers and condemns Chinese domestic oppression and provocative maritime claims.³³

Regional Responses to FOIP

ASEAN and countries throughout the region have taken varied approaches to the Indo-Pacific concept, from cautious noncommitment to the development of supporting or competing visions. The scholar See Seng Tan explains the hedging behavior of most ASEAN states. He notes that despite the appeal of certain FOIP principles, countries in the region are loath to fully support the concept, determined not to take sides in U.S.-China great power politics.³⁴

As FOIP rhetoric from Washington and Tokyo gained steam, Indonesia spurred ASEAN to develop its concept for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, which stressed ASEAN centrality and

³⁰ Vaughn, *The Trump Administration's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific": Issues for Congress*, 3-6.

³¹ US Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region* (Washington, DC, June 1, 2019), 4, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

³² US Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*, 4-8.

³³ US Department of State, *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific*, 5-6, 21-23.

³⁴ See Seng Tan, "Consigned to Hedge: South-East Asia and America's 'free and Open Indo-Pacific' Strategy." *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (01, 2020), 131-132, 141, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/2430176541?accountid=14746>.

inclusiveness.³⁵ Hedging its bets, ASEAN aimed to benefit from and complement other regional initiatives such as FOIP and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).³⁶ Moreover, ASEAN viewed its concept as a means to compete with Washington's hardline FOIP strategy, by omitting verbiage on democracy and human rights to avoid alienating China or Myanmar.³⁷

Another American ally in the region, South Korea, also finds itself in a dilemma of hedging to avoid conflict with China, while quietly supporting FOIP initiatives. Seoul experienced a taste of Chinese economic coercion firsthand in 2017, as Beijing promptly banned South Korean products and tourism following the deployment of U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense missile defense systems to the Korean peninsula.³⁸ Later in 2017, Seoul launched its New Southern Policy (NSP), aiming to strengthen ties with ASEAN and India, and in 2019 released a joint factsheet with Washington to "promote cooperation between the New Southern Policy and the Indo-Pacific Strategy."³⁹ South Korea thus, cognizant of its much larger neighbor's power and economic leverage, exercises caution while discreetly supporting non-confrontational aspects of FOIP.⁴⁰ Seoul may be partially beholden to Beijing and Korean-Japanese relations are encumbered with historical baggage, but South Korea is an important player in the region that prudently supports many FOIP principles as espoused by Tokyo and Washington.⁴¹

³⁵ Koga, "Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" Strategy," 300-301.

³⁶ Tan, "Consigned to Hedge," 144, 148; Koga, "Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" Strategy," 300-301.

³⁷ Koga, "Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" Strategy," 301.

³⁸ Andrew Yeo, "South Korea and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy," CSIS, July 20, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/south-korea-and-free-and-open-indo-pacific-strategy>.

³⁹ U.S. Embassy in the Republic of Korea, "U.S. & ROK Issue a Joint Factsheet on their Regional Cooperation Efforts," November 2, 2019, <https://kr.usembassy.gov/110219-joint-fact-sheet-by-the-united-states-and-the-republic-of-korea-on-cooperation-between-the-new-southern-policy-and-the-indo-pacific-strategy/>; Yeo, "South Korea and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy."

⁴⁰ Yeo, "South Korea and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy."

⁴¹ Regarding Japanese-South Korean relations, considerable tensions remain as a result of Japan's brutal occupation of Korea from 1910-1945. Lingering disputes over the amount of compensation and sincerity of apologies on issues like comfort women and forced labor still hinder cooperation today. See for example: Sebastian Maslow and Paul

Quad-members India and Australia likewise play an important role in the Indo-Pacific region.⁴² Like most countries in the neighborhood, India has also been subject to Beijing's increasingly assertive expansionist tendencies.⁴³ New Delhi faces this encroachment on its land borders with China. Incidents such as the June 2020 Sino-Indian skirmish on the contested Himalayan border have pushed India to harden its stance towards China while increasing engagement with like-minded states in the greater Indo-Pacific region.⁴⁴ Rajesh Rajagopalan of Jawaharlal Nehru University suggests that India is engaged in "evasive balancing," by attempting to balance against China while simultaneously offering reassurances.⁴⁵ New Delhi engages cautiously with the Quad and deepens security cooperation with like-minded Southeast Asian states, but takes pains to avoid the perception of balancing behavior against China.⁴⁶ Though India openly disavows any intention of containing China and signals goodwill through participation in Beijing-dominated organizations such as the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa group of emerging economies and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Beijing is likely to remain suspicious of the world's most populous democracy on its border.⁴⁷

Australia was perhaps the first nation to espouse the "Indo-Pacific" and as early as 2013 incorporated the term into defense publications. In recent years many factors contributed to a steady rise in Sino-Australian tensions to include Chinese cyber-attacks and attempts to influence

O-Shea, "There Will Be No Winner in the Japan-South Korea Dispute," *The Diplomat*, August 20, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/there-will-be-no-winner-in-the-japan-south-korea-dispute/>.

⁴² Rajesh Rajagopalan, "Evasive Balancing: India's Unviable Indo-Pacific Strategy." *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (01, 2020), 76, 92-93, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/2430176800?accountid=14746>.

⁴³ Premesha Saha and Abhishek Mishra, "The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative: Towards a Coherent Indo-Pacific Policy for India," Observer Research Foundation, Occasional Paper No. 292, December 2020, 10, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/indo-pacific-oceans-initiative-towards-coherent-indo-pacific-policy-india/>.

⁴⁴ Saha and Mishra, "The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative," 10; Harsh V. Pant and Premesha Saha, "India, China, and the Indo-Pacific: New Delhi's recalibration is underway," Observer Research Foundation, January 5, 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-china-indo-pacific-new-delhi-recalibration-underway/>.

⁴⁵ Rajesh Rajagopalan, "Evasive Balancing: India's Unviable Indo-Pacific Strategy," *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (01, 2020), 76, 92-93, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/2430176800?accountid=14746>.

⁴⁶ Rajagopalan, "Evasive Balancing," 76, 92-93.

⁴⁷ Rajagopalan, "Evasive Balancing," 89-92.

Australian politics, clashes over trade, and confrontations over China’s SCS claims and the origin of the coronavirus.⁴⁸ Canberra has thus cautiously hardened its stance toward Beijing and sought greater cooperation in the region. As part of this approach, Australia signed a “reciprocal access agreement” with Japan in November 2020 to deepen military cooperation as both nations strive to uphold the principles of FOIP.⁴⁹ Canberra also actively engages as part of the Quad, however, there are pragmatic limits to Australia’s actions vis-à-vis China.⁵⁰ For example, to ostensibly avoid angering Beijing, even amidst US pressure Australia refuses to conduct freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) in the South China Sea.⁵¹ As Australia’s largest trading partner, Beijing accounts for nearly 50% of Australian exports and wields commensurate economic influence over Canberra.⁵² Indeed, even as Canberra inked the recent access agreement with Tokyo to strengthen military cooperation, in remarks aimed to assuage Beijing, Australian Prime Minister Morrison emphasized that the Australian-Japan pact should not alarm anyone in the region.⁵³ Predictably, Morrison’s words did little to assuage Beijing. Chinese state-owned media strongly condemned the pact as part of a geopolitical containment strategy that destabilizes the region, warning that Japan and Australia “will surely pay a corresponding price if China’s national interests are infringed upon and its security is threatened.”⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Bruce Vaughn, “Australia’s Strategic Posture: Issue for Congress,” CRS Report for Congress R46571 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, October 9, 2020), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46571>.

⁴⁹ Joel Gehrke, “Japan and Australia agree to ‘pivotal’ military access pact in deal sure to ruffle China’s feathers,” *Washington Examiner*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/defense-national-security/japan-and-australia-agree-to-pivotal-military-access-pact-in-deal-sure-to-ruffle-chinas-feathers>.

⁵⁰ Brendan Taylor, “Is Australia’s Indo-Pacific Strategy an Illusion?” *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (01, 2020), 95, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/2430175345?accountid=14746>.

⁵¹ Taylor, “Is Australia’s Indo-Pacific Strategy an Illusion,” 106.

⁵² Vaughn, “Australia’s Strategic Posture,” 22.

⁵³ Gehrke, “Japan and Australia agree to ‘pivotal’ military access pact.”

⁵⁴ “Japan-Australia agreement against China goes astray: Global Times editorial,” *Global Times*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1207181.shtml>; Da Zhigang, “Japan, Australia continue to pursue containment of China despite RCEP,” *Global Times*, November 18, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1207293.shtml>.

In a recent development for the Quad, all four nations participated in the November 2020 Malabar Naval exercise, representing a slight tilt towards a harder balancing posture. The longstanding U.S.-India naval drills have incorporated Japan since 2015, but New Delhi rejected an Australian request to join in 2017.⁵⁵ Whether that rejection was solely out of fear of provoking China or if India still harbored misgivings about Australia's abandonment of the first Quad in 2007, the 2020 drills were a significant milestone for the "Quad 2.0" and represented the first time the navies have trained together in more than a decade.⁵⁶ While India, Australia, and Japan all tread lightly in some regards to stay beneath the threshold of China's ire, Malabar showcased a renewed resolve of solidarity to support FOIP ideals.

Challenges to FOIP

The greatest challenge to the realization of FOIP is China's sheer economic power and resultant influence. While Japan seeks engagement with China, and Tokyo's brand of FOIP is an inclusive concept, Beijing naturally has its agenda to reshape the international order on Chinese terms and to serve Chinese interests.⁵⁷ Beijing portrays its rise as peaceful and mutually beneficial, promoting its concept of a Community of

⁵⁵ "Malabar 2020: Australia Will Join India, Japan and US in the Naval Exercise, Says Defence Ministry," Yahoo News India, October 19, 2020, <https://in.news.yahoo.com/malabar-2020-australia-join-india-130814340.html>.

⁵⁶ Sanjeev Miglani, "India won't include Australia in naval drills, fears China backlash," Reuters, May 30, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-navy-exercises/india-wont-include-australia-in-naval-drills-fears-china-backlash-idUSKBN18Q1VD>; Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, "It's Not China, It's You, India Seems to Tell Spurned Aussies," Foreign Policy, June 5, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/06/05/its-not-china-its-you-india-seems-to-tell-spurned-aussies-malabar-australia-navy/>; Mallory Shelbourne, "'The Quad' Kicks Off Malabar 2020 Exercise in Bay of Bengal," US Naval Institute News, November 3, 2020, <https://news.usni.org/2020/11/03/the-quad-kicks-off-malabar-2020-exercise-in-bay-of-bengal>.

⁵⁷ Evan Feigenbaum, "Reluctant Stakeholder: Why China's Highly Strategic Brand of Revisionism is more Challenging Than Washington Thinks," MacroPolo, April 27, 2018, <https://macropolo.org/reluctant-stakeholder-chinas-highly-strategic-brand-revisionism-challenging-washington-thinks/>; Nadege Roland, "Beijing's Vision for a Reshaped International Order," China Brief, Jamestown Foundation, February 26, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/beijings-vision-reshaped-international-order/>; Benjamin Tze Ern Ho, "Chinese Vision of a Rules-based Order: International Order with Chinese Characteristics," in *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, Indo-Pacific Perspectives*, December 2020, 13, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/JIPA/IndoPacificPerspectives/Ho.html?source=GovD>.

Common Destiny where a community of states can prosper and harmoniously coexist.⁵⁸

Yet regardless of the friendly rhetoric on the surface, Beijing has an agenda and like any country maintains an unwavering commitment to its core national interests. In China's case, these interests include maritime rights and territorial claims which are sharply contested throughout the region and conflict with international norms.⁵⁹

China will thus naturally challenge some aspects of FOIP in pursuit of national interests and regional dominance.⁶⁰ Though not directly stated, under the umbrella of national sovereignty, Beijing practically elevates its extensive territorial claims and maritime interests in the ECS and SCS to the same category as a core interest.⁶¹ Indeed, in 2018 President Xi proclaimed that Beijing would not “compromise ‘even one inch’ of any of its territorial and sovereignty claims,” while other party officials have likewise cited unshakable determination to protect all territorial claims and maritime rights.⁶² Given Beijing's expansive range of core interests which often clash with international law and the sovereignty of other states, China's

⁵⁸ Andrew Scobell, Bonny Lin, Howard J. Shatz, Michael Johnson, Larry Hanauer, Michael S. Chase, Astrid Stuth Cevallos, Ivan W. Rasmussen, Arthur Chan, Aarong Strong, Eric Warner, and Logan Ma, *At the Dawn of Belt and Road: China in the Developing World*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018, 27-28, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2273.html; Michael Swaine, “China's Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy,” in *China Leadership Monitor* No. 44, July 2014, 3-5, <https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/clm44ms.pdf>; Jonathan Stromseth, “Don't Make Us Choose: Southeast Asia in the throes of US-China rivalry,” The Brookings Institution, October 2019, 3, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/dont-make-us-choose-southeast-asia-in-the-throes-of-us-china-rivalry/>; Roland, “Beijing's Vision for a Reshaped International Order.”

⁵⁹ Swaine, “China's Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy,” 5-6.

⁶⁰ Kai He and Mingjiang Li, “Understanding the Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US-China Strategic Competition, Regional Actors, and Beyond,” *International Affairs* 96, no. 1 (01, 2020), 1-2, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/2430176644?accountid=14746>; Xiaodi Ye, “Explaining China's Hedging to the United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy,” *China Review* 20, no. 3 (08, 2020), 209, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/2439671148?accountid=14746>.

⁶¹ Andrew Scobell et al., “At the Dawn of Belt and Road: China in the Developing World” (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), xvi, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2273.html; Scobell et al., “China's Grand Strategy,” 12-13.

⁶² Scobell et al., “China's Grand Strategy,” 13; Michael Swaine, “China's Views and Commentary on Periphery Diplomacy,” in *China Leadership Monitor* No. 44, July 2014, 5-6, <https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/clm44ms.pdf>.

influence in the Indo-Pacific will be a challenge to the establishment of many elements of FOIP.⁶³

Although many nations in the region may be wary of China's intentions, the economy is the dominant factor, and Beijing's regional economic clout is unrivaled.⁶⁴ As summarized by the RAND Corporation in Figure 2, China wields greater economic influence across Indo-Pacific countries as compared to the U.S. on almost all metrics and with nearly all countries.⁶⁵ Surveys conducted by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) likewise reveal that Chinese economic influence dominates in Southeast Asia and respondents even gave China the edge over the U.S. in terms of political and strategic influence in the region.⁶⁶ While Washington holds some sway in terms of soft-power and military cooperation, partners largely place more value on economic concerns.⁶⁷

⁶³ Scobell et al, *At the Dawn of Belt and Road*, 27.

⁶⁴ Jacques, Case for countering china's rise;

⁶⁵ Bonny Lin, Michael S. Chase, Jonah Blank, Cortez A. Cooper III, Derek Grossman, Scott W. Harold, Jennifer D.P. Moroney, Lyle J. Morris, Logan Ma, Paul Orner, Alice Shih, and Soo Kim, "U.S. Versus Chinese Powers of Persuasion: Does the United States or China Have More Influence in the Indo-Pacific Region?" RAND Corporation, 2020, 4, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10137.html.

⁶⁶ Tomotaka Shoji, "'Belt and Road' vs. 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific': Competition over Regional Order and ASEAN's Responses," National Institute for Defense Studies, *Security & Strategy* Volume 1, January 2021, 23, <http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/security/pdf/2021/01/04.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Lin et al, "U.S. Versus Chinese Powers of Persuasion," 1.

China's Influence Is Economic, While America's Is Diplomacy and Defense

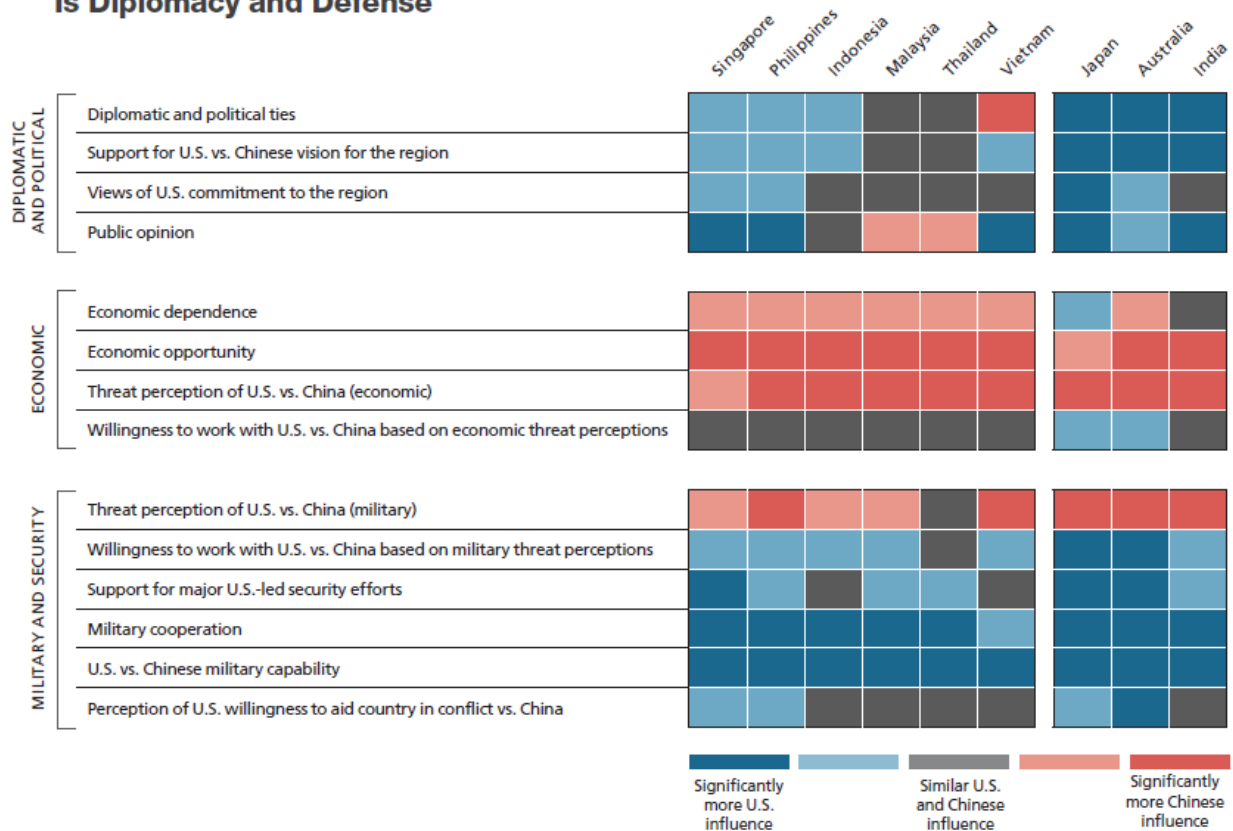


Figure 2: Comparison of U.S. and Chinese Influence in the Indo-Pacific Region

China additionally bolstered its economic influence by concluding the RCEP trade deal in November 2020, which partly serves as a Chinese-led alternative to the CPTPP.⁶⁸ Contrary to the CPTPP, RCEP aims to establish international norms to Beijing’s liking, with notable omissions on standards for intellectual property, labor, and state-owned enterprises (SOE).⁶⁹ As such, RCEP gives China significant sway over how to write the rules for trade in the region. Beijing thus unreservedly utilizes SOEs to achieve geopolitical ends and engages in intellectual-

⁶⁸Peter A. Petri and Michael Plummer, “RCEP: A new trade agreement that will shape global economics and politics,” The Brookings Institution, November 16, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/11/16/rcep-a-new-trade-agreement-that-will-shape-global-economics-and-politics/>; Yung, “A Pivot of Their Own,” 57.

⁶⁹ Peter A. Petri and Michael Plummer, “RCEP: A new trade agreement that will shape global economics and politics,” The Brookings Institution, November 16, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/11/16/rcep-a-new-trade-agreement-that-will-shape-global-economics-and-politics/>.

property theft, disregarding international norms in a no-holds-barred pursuit of national rejuvenation.⁷⁰

China's economic clout and corresponding influence likewise enable Beijing to exert considerable leverage and coercion when it suits Chinese interests. As a gauge of economic influence with ASEAN states, for example, China's current bilateral trade with ASEAN equates to \$591 billion compared to \$272 billion for U.S.-ASEAN trade.⁷¹ Similarly Chinese represent the largest proportion of tourists to ASEAN countries, with over 25 million tourists in 2017 compared to 4 million from America.⁷² Thus tourism also allows Beijing to throw its weight around at will, as Hanoi painfully experienced when 2014 SCS tensions led to China sharply cutting off tourism to Vietnam and the associated economic inflow.⁷³

Moreover, economic power has enabled many of China's military gains in the region.⁷⁴ This is evidenced by China's economic coercion to fortify their territorial claims in the SCS, where Manila has not leveraged the 2016 United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) ruling against Beijing.⁷⁵ Acquiescing to Chinese influence, the Duterte administration ostensibly surrendered its SCS claims and largely

⁷⁰ Jeffrey Cimmino, Ash Jain, and Matthew Kroenig, "Countering China's challenge to the free world: A report for the Free World Commission," Atlantic Council, 1, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/countering-chinas-challenge-to-the-free-world-a-report-for-the-free-world-commission/>; Andrew Scobell et al., "China's Grand Strategy: Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Competition" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2020), 18, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2798.html.

⁷¹ Stromseth, "Don't Make us Choose," 9.

⁷² Stromseth, "Don't Make us Choose," 10.

⁷³ Stromseth, "Don't Make us Choose," 10.

⁷⁴ Travis Reese, "Beating Them at Their Own Game: The Economic Dimension of Competing with China" in War on the Rocks, August 9, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/beating-them-at-their-own-game-the-economic-dimension-of-competing-with-china/>.

⁷⁵ Stephen Burgess, "Confronting China's Maritime Expansion in the South China Sea: A Collective Action Problem," Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs (JIPA), Fall 2020, August 31, 2020, 120, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2331176/confronting-chinas-maritime-expansion-in-the-south-china-sea-a-collective-actio/>.

sought to bandwagon with Beijing in pursuit of Chinese beneficence.⁷⁶ With the graphical depiction in Figure 3, Jonathan Stromseth of the Thornton China Center explains that China’s “capacity to exercise influence and leverage through economic interdependencies” already far exceeds that of the U.S.⁷⁷



Source: “Asia Power Index,” The Lowy Institute, 2019, <https://power.loyyinstitute.org/>.

Figure 3: Current Economic Relationships

On the whole, given China’s regional ambitions and considerable economic influence, any regional strategy or concept cannot discount nor exclude Beijing. Indeed, as the Chinese Communist Party rejects international norms in pursuit of national interests, Beijing’s vision of reclaiming China’s former glory as the Middle Kingdom and effectively relegating its neighbors to tributary status is a destabilizing challenge to a rules-based FOIP order.⁷⁸

Prospects for FOIP

Opportunities abound in the Indo-Pacific region as Tokyo, Washington, and others seek to advance some form of FOIP. As Rory Medcalf highlights, although it seems that no two

⁷⁶ Michael Rowand, “Duterte Will Fight Anyone but Beijing,” *Foreign Policy*, October 19, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/10/19/duterte-philippines-china-interests/>.

⁷⁷ Stromseth, “Don’t Make us Choose,” 12-13.

⁷⁸ Yun Sun, “China’s Preferred World Order: What Does China Want?” *PACNET* No. 62, Pacific Forum CSIS, September 21, 2015, <http://csis.org/files/publication/Pac1562.pdf>; Stromseth, “Don’t Make Us Choose,” 3.

countries can even agree on what exactly FOIP should look like, differing visions can be an asset rather than a liability.⁷⁹ And while Japan only holds middle-power status in China's neighborhood, Tokyo has emerged as a regional leader on several fronts, as evidenced by Prime Minister Abe's leadership on trade as Tokyo stepped up to fill the void left by Washington to complete the CPTPP.⁸⁰ Continuing to build off of such regional efforts, Tokyo will promote FOIP through increased defense cooperation and exchanges, economic integration and multilateral trade frameworks, and infrastructure development and finance, while deepening ties with ASEAN.⁸¹

As for Japan, recognizing ASEAN's importance to regional affairs, Tokyo has modified its FOIP approach over the years based on feedback and concerns from ASEAN states. For example, when some ASEAN members worried that the phrase 'strategy' would irk China, Tokyo eliminated the term 'strategy' from its FOIP lexicon, rebranding FOIP as a 'concept.'⁸² Furthermore, to appease the region's non-democratic states, Japan dropped mention of human rights in FOIP.⁸³ Tokyo has also simultaneously worked with ASEAN as a whole and via bilateral means to further its FOIP initiatives.⁸⁴ Scholar Kei Koga points out that Japan faces the challenge of straddling rival visions for the region, yet Tokyo has adeptly engaged via bilateral diplomatic channels to quietly garner support for its FOIP vision from Cambodia, Vietnam, and

⁷⁹ Rory Medcalf, "Indo-Pacific Visions: Giving Solidarity a Chance," *Asia Policy* 14, no. 3 (07, 2019), 80-81, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/2275866323?accountid=14746>.

⁸⁰ Mireya Solis, "The Underappreciated Power," *Foreign Affairs*, New York, Vol. 99, Iss. 6 (Nov/Dec 2020), 3, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/underappreciated-power/docview/2452329990/se-2?accountid=14746>.

⁸¹ "CSIS: 'Japan's Leadership Role in Multipolar Indo-Pacific'," *Targeted News Service*, Oct 24, 2020, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/2453900893?accountid=14746>; Tomohiko, Initiatives for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, 215.

⁸² Kei Koga, "Next Priorities for Japan's FOIP Vision: The Quad, ASEAN, and Institutional Linkages in the Indo-Pacific," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, *Indo-Pacific Perspective*, December 7, 2020, 22, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Dec/06/2002546904/-1/-1/1/KOGA.PDF>; Koga, "Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" Strategy," 300-304.

⁸³ Koga, "Next Priorities for Japan's FOIP Vision," 22; Koga, "Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" Strategy," 300-304.

⁸⁴ Koga, "Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" Strategy," 300-304.

Thailand.⁸⁵ In another example of Japan’s bilateral engagement, Tokyo has supported Manila to build the Philippines’ coast guard capacity, even if not overtly under the name of FOIP.⁸⁶

In pursuit of FOIP Japan’s role in regional trade and infrastructure development is also noteworthy. For decades Japan—not China—has been the leader in infrastructure investment in Southeast Asia and Tokyo still maintains the overall edge over China in terms of dollars (\$367 vs. \$255 billion) and total projects (240 vs. 210).⁸⁷ Going forward as Beijing’s \$1 trillion Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) gains steam Japan may not be able to match the dollar amounts put forth by China, however, Japan’s regional investment and economic influence remain significant.⁸⁸ Indeed, in 2015 Tokyo launched the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure which provides over \$100 billion in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB).⁸⁹ Notable projects under this “Partnership” include funding for India’s Delhi Metro and a large-scale bridge in Mongolia’s capital.⁹⁰ Moreover, as seen in Figure 4, Vietnam receives over half of Japan’s Southeast Asia investments to the tune of \$209 billion, with nearly \$60 billion for the landmark high-speed rail project linking Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Koga, "Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" Strategy," 303-305.

⁸⁶ Koga, "Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" Strategy," 303-305.

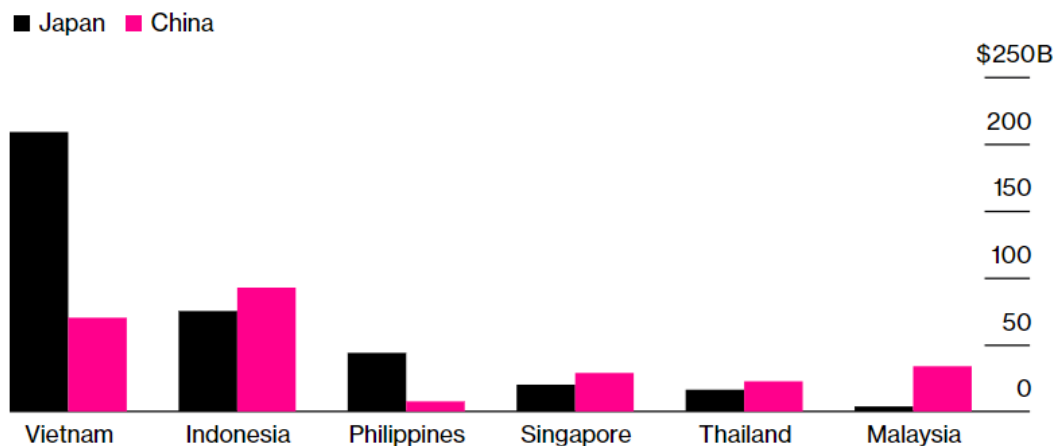
⁸⁷ Michelle Jamrisko, "China No Match for Japan in Southeast Asia Infrastructure Race," Bloomberg, June 22, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-06-23/china-no-match-for-japan-in-southeast-asiainfrastructure-race>; David Shambaugh, "Where Great Powers Meet: America & China in Southeast Asia" (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 172; Tobias Harris, "'Quality Infrastructure': Japan's Robust Challenge to China's Belt and Road," War on the Rocks, April 9, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/04/quality-infrastructure-japans-robust-challenge-to-chinas-belt-and-road/>; Stromseth, "Don't Make Us Choose," 9.

⁸⁸ Solis, "The Underappreciated Power," 3.

⁸⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Summary of "Partnership for Quality Infrastructure,"" May 21, 2015, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000081298.pdf>.

⁹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Summary of "Partnership for Quality Infrastructure.""

⁹¹ Stromseth, "Don't Make Us Choose," 9; Jamrisko, "China No Match for Japan in Southeast Asia Infrastructure Race."



Source: Fitch Solutions (data provided 18 June 2019)

Figure 4: The Value of Chinese and Japanese Infrastructure Projects in Southeast Asia

In championing “quality infrastructure,” Tokyo offers transparency, long-term sustainability, and local job creation along with the transfer of skills and technology—a compelling package that implicitly critiques the standards often associated with BRI.⁹² Though Japan also strikes an inclusive tone, emphasizing the need for both “quality” and “quantity” and has even cooperated with China on some third country BRI projects since 2017.⁹³ China’s rapidly increasing economic influence in the region is undeniable, as evidenced by Beijing becoming ASEAN’s largest trading partner in 2009 and the nearly 900% growth of Sino-ASEAN trade since 2001.⁹⁴ Yet on the whole Tokyo continues to put forth a substantial and attractive alternative to Chinese investment. Of note, such investment can help mitigate China’s “economic cabbage strategy,” whereby Beijing’s investments might secure key regional

⁹² Courtney Weatherby, "Analysis from the East-West Center no. 145 October 2020," Asia - Pacific Issues no. 145 (10, 2020), 1, 4, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/analysis-east-west-center-no-145-october-2020/docview/2455888659/se-2?accountid=14746>; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Summary of “Partnership for Quality Infrastructure.””

⁹³ Harris, ““Quality Infrastructure”: Japan’s Robust Challenge to China’s Belt and Road”; Weatherby, “Analysis from the East-West Center,” 4.

⁹⁴ Shambaugh, “Where Great Powers Meet,” 166.

infrastructure with geopolitical and security implications.⁹⁵ Tokyo also demonstrated its regional leadership abilities as former Prime Minister Abe chaired the 2019 Group of 20 and secured international endorsement for “Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment.”⁹⁶ Thus Japan’s infrastructure development initiatives can at least modestly reduce the region’s economic dependency on the Middle Kingdom while also challenging Beijing to raise its infrastructure investment standards.

Japan’s reputation within Southeast Asia is likewise a notable strength that complements U.S. influence in the region. Renowned China scholar David Shambaugh describes Southeast Asia as the current epicenter of U.S.-China competition, where the prevailing narrative, even if empirically questionable, is a dominant China and a declining America.⁹⁷ Shambaugh’s depiction in Figure 5 highlights the strength of Beijing’s influence, which is largely underwritten by its economic might and proximity in the region.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Richard Javad Heydarian, “Japan’s Growing Centrality to Regional Maritime Security,” Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, October 7, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/japans-growing-centrality-to-regional-maritime-security/>.

⁹⁶ Matthew P. Goodman, “Assessing Abe’s Economic Statecraft,” CSIS, August 31, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/assessing-abes-economic-statecraft>.

⁹⁷ David Shambaugh, “The Future of U.S.-China Relations in Southeast Asia,” Stimson Center, Webinar facilitated by Yun Sun, <https://www.stimson.org/event/the-future-of-u-s-china-relations-in-southeast-asia/>.

⁹⁸ Shambaugh, “The Future of U.S.-China Relations in Southeast Asia.”

Spectrum of ASEAN States' Relations to USA & PRC

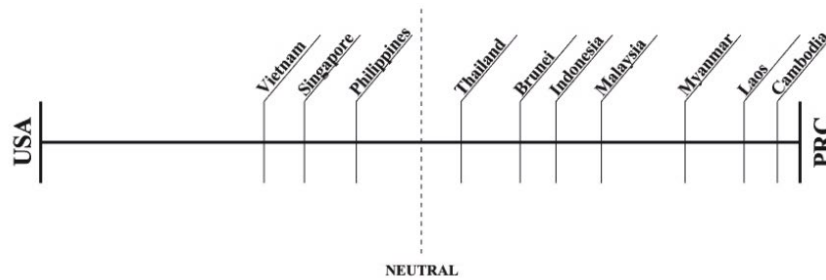


Figure 5

Yet whereas Washington tends to frame competition with Beijing as a zero-sum game, countries in the region do not want to pick sides and certainly cannot openly challenge China without the risk of severe economic blowback.⁹⁹ Japan too must hedge against the reality of China's rise in its backyard. Tokyo's inclusive spin on FOIP thus carries greater regional appeal.

While America's reliability seems to be in question, public opinion polls in South and Southeast Asia reveal that trust in Japan is at its highest levels ever.¹⁰⁰ Surveys of major Southeast Asian states including Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia indicate that Tokyo is viewed most favorably across the board, while views of Washington and Beijing widely vary.¹⁰¹ Hiroyuki Suzuki accurately assesses that Japan is well-positioned to play a critical role in the Indo-Pacific, given its multilayered relationships throughout the region, while

⁹⁹ Solis, "The Underappreciated Power," 123; Lin et al, "U.S. Versus Chinese Powers of Persuasion."

¹⁰⁰ Richard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, "The U.S.-Japan Alliance in 2020: An Equal Alliance with a Global Agenda," CSIS, December 2020, 2, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-japan-alliance-2020>.

¹⁰¹ Patrick M. Cronin, et al., *Contested Spaces: A Renewed Approach to Southeast Asia* (Washington, D.C.: CNAS, March 2019), 5, [https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/CNAS+Report_Contested+Spaces_Asia_Final+\(2\).pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/CNAS+Report_Contested+Spaces_Asia_Final+(2).pdf).

Kei Koga suggests that Japan can “bridge the gap” between competing visions for the region.¹⁰² As Rory Medcalf concludes, notwithstanding all the differences and nuance between various Indo-Pacific visions, there exists considerable common esteem for international rules and norms, ASEAN centrality, and the rejection of coercion as a means to settle disputes or upend the status quo.¹⁰³

Unlike the U.S., Japan is also well-suited to engage even the non-democratic states in the region. This is especially important considering the consensus-based nature of ASEAN and that states such as Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar are sometimes outliers. The strength of Chinese influence over Cambodia for example was manifested in 2012 when Phnom Penh took the unprecedented action of blocking ASEAN’s joint communique due to verbiage that challenged Beijing’s stance in the SCS.¹⁰⁴ Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi’s recent Southeast Asian trip that included a substantial visit to Phnom Penh highlights the role that Tokyo plays in this space.¹⁰⁵ With Beijing’s growing influence in mind, Tokyo has maintained strong relations with Cambodia. While Cambodia is often viewed as a Chinese client state, Japan’s soft-power appeal is significant.¹⁰⁶ Tokyo continues to support infrastructure development in the country and remains Phnom Penh’s largest traditional donor, having provided roughly \$3 billion in official

¹⁰² Koga, "Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" Strategy," 72-73; "CSIS: 'Japan's Leadership Role in Multipolar Indo-Pacific'."

¹⁰³ Medcalf, "Indo-Pacific Visions," 93.

¹⁰⁴ Ernest Z. Bower, “China Reveals Its Hand on ASEAN in Phnom Penh,” CSIS, July 20, 2012, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-reveals-its-hand-asean-phnom-penh>; Shaun Turton, “Beijing-friendly Cambodia and Laos pushed out to ASEAN’s fringe,” Nikkei Asia, November 13, 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Beijing-friendly-Cambodia-and-Laos-pushed-out-to-ASEAN-s-fringe2>.

¹⁰⁵ Sao Phal Niseiy, “Japan Seeks to Offset Chinese Influence in Cambodia,” The Diplomat, August 27, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/japan-seeks-to-offset-chinese-influence-in-cambodia/>.

¹⁰⁶ Niseiy, “Japan Seeks to Offset Chinese Influence in Cambodia.”

development assistance over the past two decades.¹⁰⁷ In return, Phnom Penh has thus far voiced support for Japan's FOIP concept.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, while Cambodian relations with the U.S. and the West generally remain tenuous over human rights and democracy issues, Tokyo's relationship with Phnom Penh is all the more important.¹⁰⁹

Finally, despite Beijing's overwhelming economic influence, several factors may hinder China's geopolitical aims, thereby leaving an opening for Japan and like-minded states to achieve a semblance of FOIP. Beijing shows no signs of slowing down its pursuit of national rejuvenation and attainment of regional hegemony, yet there are some cracks under the surface and growing external pushback. For example, since 2007, China's debt has rocketed eightfold now upwards of 300% of GDP and Beijing will soon begin to reap the byproducts of its draconian one-child policy in the form of an aging population and shrinking workforce.¹¹⁰ Moreover, negative views of China are reportedly at a three-decade high comparable to the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre era.¹¹¹ The international community took notice of Beijing's aggressive expansionism in the region and systemic repression at home, as nearly a dozen countries have paused or canceled BRI projects, sixteen nations including eight of the world's ten biggest economies restricted or outright banned Huawei 5G products, and the European Union named China a "systemic rival."¹¹² This current state can be attributed both to Beijing forcefully overplaying its hand in the neighborhood on territorial disputes among other matters

¹⁰⁷ Sao Phal Niseiy, "Japan Provides Cambodia with \$6.3 million for COVID-19 Response," *Cambodianess*, June 13, 2020, <https://cambodianess.com/article/japan-provides-cambodia-with-63-million-for-covid-19-response>; Niseiy, "Japan Seeks to Offset Chinese Influence in Cambodia."

¹⁰⁸ Niseiy, "Japan Seeks to Offset Chinese Influence in Cambodia."

¹⁰⁹ Niseiy, "Japan Seeks to Offset Chinese Influence in Cambodia."

¹¹⁰ Michael Beckley and Hal Brands, "Into the danger zone: The coming crisis in US-China relations," *American Enterprise Institute*, January 4, 2021, 2, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/into-the-danger-zone-the-coming-crisis-in-us-china-relations/>.

¹¹¹ Beckley and Brands, "Into the danger zone: The coming crisis in US-China relations," 2.

¹¹² Beckley and Brands, "Into the danger zone: The coming crisis in US-China relations," 2; Jonathan E. Hillman, "The Imperial Overreach of China's Belt and Road Initiative," *Wall Street Journal*, October 1, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-imperial-overreach-of-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-11601558851>.

and the Trump administration’s recognition of the “China Challenge” and forthright critique of Beijing’s aggressive behavior.¹¹³ Thus notwithstanding Beijing’s formidable array of national power and seemingly unstoppable momentum in the region, a Chinese-dominated tributary realm is not inevitable; and if Tokyo, Washington, and allies and partners join to play their cards well, an Indo-Pacific that looks more like FOIP than unlike it is realistically attainable.

U.S. Policy Assessment & Recommendations

In charting the way forward in the Indo-Pacific, Washington needs to take a whole of government approach, work closely with allies and partners, and leverage international institutions and law.¹¹⁴ The whole of government approach must especially include increased economic engagement, where U.S. commitments have thus far been insufficient to credibly compete with the breadth of China’s economic influence. Moreover, Washington should increase engagement through multilateral institutions and the use of international law, as absent U.S. influence, Beijing will naturally bend these arenas to bolster Chinese legitimacy and interests. It is clear that China seeks to establish a Sino-centric hierarchy and hegemony in Asia—and as John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt assert, the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific hinges upon U.S. engagement.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ US Department of State, *The Elements of the China Challenge* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of State, November 2012), <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20-02832-Elements-of-China-Challenge-508.pdf>.

¹¹⁴ Roger O’Rourke, *U.S.-China Strategic Competition in South and East China Seas: Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS Report for Congress R42784 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, October 27, 2020), 22, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R42784>; Roger Cliff, *A New U.S. Strategy for the Indo-Pacific* (Seattle, WA: The National Bureau of Asian Research, June 2020), 108, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/a-new-u-s-strategy-for-the-indo-pacific/>.

¹¹⁵ John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, Jul, 2016, 81, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/magazines/case-offshore-balancing-superior-u-s-grand/docview/1801887242/se-2?accountid=14746>; Eric Heginbotham and Richard J. Samuels, “Active Denial: Redesigning Japan’s Response to China’s Military Challenge,” *International Security*, vol. 42, no. 04, May 2018, 167, <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/118651>.

Allies & Partners

To advance FOIP principles, Washington must prioritize relations with allies and partners, to include non-democratic states in the Indo-Pacific. A growing chorus of academics and policy advisors broadly agree on the importance of allies and partners to successful foreign and security policy—and note the substantial relative advantage that Washington has over Beijing in this regard.¹¹⁶ As it stands, the Trump administration’s “America First” foreign policy naturally made traditional allies and partners question America’s reliability, inducing undue friction and creating an opportunity for Beijing to exploit the seams between the U.S. and like-minded partners.¹¹⁷ The deterioration of Washington’s reputation within the international community is corroborated in Southeast Asia by ISEAS surveys, as well as globally in the Gallup Poll of International Respect for U.S. Leadership.¹¹⁸ One step to restoring relationships is to show up; the appointment of ambassadors to vacant posts and appropriate-level attendance at ASEAN meetings and other regional venues should be prioritized.¹¹⁹ Moreover, as Washington increases diplomatic engagement for mutually beneficial aims, partners should not

¹¹⁶ Andrew Erickson, “How Biden Should Support the U.S.-Japan Alliance,” 1945, January 20, 2021, <https://www.19fortyfive.com/2021/01/how-president-biden-should-support-the-u-s-japan-alliance/>; John Schaus, “Moving Beyond China, China, China in the Indo-Pacific,” CSIS, February 12, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/moving-beyond-china-china-china-indo-pacific/>; Jeffrey Cimmino, Ash Jain, and Matthew Kroenig, “Countering China’s challenge to the free world: A report for the Free World Commission,” Atlantic Council, 1, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/countering-chinas-challenge-to-the-free-world-a-report-for-the-free-world-commission/>.

¹¹⁷ Lindsey Ford, “The Trump Administration and the ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific,’” The Brookings Institution, May 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-trump-administration-and-the-free-and-open-indo-pacific/>; Kori Schake, Jim Mattis, Jim Ellis, and Joe Felter, “Defense in Depth: Why U.S. Security Depends on Alliances—Now More Than Ever,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 23, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-11-23/defense-depth>.

¹¹⁸ Anthony H. Cordesman, “The Biden Transition and U.S. Competition with China and Russia: The Crisis-Driven Need to Change U.S. Strategy,” CSIS, January 6, 2021, 167, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/biden-transition-and-us-competition-china-and-russia-crisis-driven-need-change-us-strategy>; Stromseth, “Don’t Make Us Choose,” 16.

¹¹⁹ Malcom Cook and Ian Storey, “The Impending Biden Presidency and Southeast Asia,” ISEAS Perspective, Issue No. 143, December 16, 2020, 4, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ISEAS_Perspective_2020_143.pdf; Shambaugh, “The Future of U.S.-China Relations in Southeast Asia.”

be put in the impossible situation of picking sides in a zero-sum game of great power competition.¹²⁰

The Biden administration, in a pivot from Trump’s “America First” style, made initial steps in the right direction toward esteeming allies and partners. This is evidenced by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken speaking with nineteen of his foreign counterparts and all Asian U.S. treaty allies in the Biden administration’s first two days.¹²¹ Likewise, the appointment of Kurt Campbell, an architect of Obama’s “pivot to Asia,” as the White House coordinator for the Indo-Pacific will raise the region’s priority within Washington and bodes well for strengthening partnerships and alliances.¹²² Furthermore, the Biden administration’s newly released Interim National Security Strategic Guidance makes constant mention of allies and partners, calling them “America’s greatest strategic asset” and vowing to “revitalize America’s unmatched network of alliances and partnerships.”¹²³

Nonetheless, there is a danger that the Biden administration may go too far on an idealistic crusade for democracy when a more pragmatic approach is warranted. The new national security guidance claims that “democracy is essential to meeting all the challenges of our changing world” and that “we must join with like-minded allies and partners to revitalize democracy the world over.”¹²⁴ Yet such an approach risks marginalizing constructive relations with non-democratic states that are vital partners in balancing against China such as Vietnam. Dr. Roger Cliff’s work for The National Bureau of Asian Research, a tremendously helpful volume in its own right, similarly overemphasizes democracy promotion and engagement with

¹²⁰ Stromseth, “Don’t Make Us Choose,” 2.

¹²¹ Schaus, “Moving Beyond China, China, China.”

¹²² Michael J. Green, “Biden Makes His First Bold Move on Asia With Key White House Appointment,” Foreign Policy, January 13, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/13/kurt-campbell-biden-asia-china-appointment/>.

¹²³ The White House, Interim National Security Guidance (Washington, DC, March 2021), 3-4, 6, 10, 19-20, 23, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

¹²⁴ The White House, Interim National Security Guidance, 3, 6, 19.

democratic partners above the potential benefits of engagement with non-democratic states in the Indo-Pacific.¹²⁵

While certainly America should maintain its moral compass and stand for human rights throughout the world, to broadly diagnose that spreading democracy throughout Asia is in the best interest of the United States may be an idealistic bridge too far. Speaking from an Asian perspective, Lee Kuan Yew further cautions that America's brand of "supremacy of the individual and free, unfettered expression" is not universal, although Singapore is considered a democracy in some regards.¹²⁶ Yet even if the universality of liberty and freedom can be affirmed, Washington's recent experience in the Middle East serves as a grave reminder that attempting to force democracy on a nation is often an ill-advised and calamitous undertaking. Neglecting to engage with the region's non-democratic states would be a missed opportunity, not least of all for the simple fact that these states are more likely to fall into Beijing's camp in the absence of engagement from the U.S. and its allies.

While Washington should not turn a blind eye to human rights issues, when faced with geopolitics and Beijing's influence, a realistic approach cannot write off engagement with non-democratic states. As David Shambaugh astutely points out, there is not a firm correlation between regime type and a state's relationship vis-à-vis the U.S. and China; Vietnam is the closest to China in terms of regime type, yet Hanoi is quite wary of Beijing, whereas the Philippines under President Duterte displayed that even a democratic ally can swing towards Beijing's camp.¹²⁷ Congressional barriers may inhibit U.S. engagement with non-democratic Southeast Asia states, but Washington should work to overcome these self-imposed restrictions

¹²⁵ Cliff, *A New U.S. Strategy for the Indo-Pacific*, 114-132.

¹²⁶ Graham Allison and Robert Blackwill, "Interview: Lee Kuan Yew on the Future of U.S.-China Relations," *The Atlantic*, March 5, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/03/interview-lee-kuan-yew-on-the-future-of-us-china-relations/273657/>.

¹²⁷ Shambaugh, "The Future of U.S.-China Relations in Southeast Asia."

where feasible, while simultaneously collaborating with Japan to leverage Tokyo's strengths in this area.¹²⁸

Therefore, it makes sense that Washington ought to throw its weight behind Tokyo and support Japan's FOIP efforts, as Tokyo adeptly engages the neighborhood's democracies and non-democratic states alike. Here Japan takes a pragmatic approach: accepting the difficulty of compelling another state to change its domestic policies, Tokyo treads lightly on human rights issues and prioritizes maintaining influence and access with non-democracies.¹²⁹ Moreover, recognizing that all of its neighbors have a contribution to make, Tokyo seeks all of the partners it can find to help curb Chinese regional influence.¹³⁰

Finally, Washington should also employ the strength of its robust network of allies and partners in the economic domain. Indeed, this strength is often touted from a defense and security perspective, as former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dunford expressed that "allies and partners are our strategic center of gravity."¹³¹ Yet it would be a grave mistake to not fully leverage allies and partners in the economic realm. If played correctly, increased economic engagement from the U.S. and like-minded states can help reinforce the footing of Indo-Pacific nations to better withstand Chinese economic coercion. While the Trump administration made progress on this front, the overall tone of transactional foreign policy and the wielding of tariffs and tough trade deals with longstanding friends partly undercut these

¹²⁸ Shambaugh, "The Future of U.S.-China Relations in Southeast Asia."

¹²⁹ Brad Glosserman, "A Japanese Perspective," The Asan Forum, National Commentaries, August 31, 2020, <http://www.theasanforum.org/a-japanese-perspective-12/>.

¹³⁰ Glosserman, "A Japanese Perspective."

¹³¹ General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr, "Allies and Partners Are Our Strategic Center of Gravity," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 87 (4th Quarter 2017), 4, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Publications/Article/1325218/from-the-chairman-allies-and-partners-are-our-strategic-center-of-gravity/>.

efforts.¹³² On a positive note, the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation recently concluded Memorandums of Understanding with counterparts in Japan and Australia which led to a jointly financed \$1 billion energy project in Papua New Guinea.¹³³ This was a modest albeit important step for Washington and the U.S. should prioritize the expansion of similar cooperative initiatives in the economic domain.

Whole of Government Approach and Economic Engagement

To best support FOIP, Washington needs a whole of government approach, especially including robust economic engagement. At the risk of omitting a detailed analysis of any instrument of national power, this paper will not offer in-depth military recommendations. The American military footprint in the region is a tremendous asset and the breadth of security cooperation activities across the Indo-Pacific is invaluable, but military might alone is woefully inadequate to advance FOIP. As Dr. Andrew Scobell and others assert, U.S. foreign policy has become over-militarized, often at the expense of less robust economic and diplomatic efforts.¹³⁴ Thus for the scope of this paper, a broad military recommendation will suffice: Washington should maintain its forward-deployed posture in Japan and the Indo-Pacific while continually increasing regional security cooperation and supporting capability development for key allies and partners to include Vietnam and the Philippines. While the military should prioritize the Indo-Pacific region in line with the threats identified in the 2017 National Security Strategy and 2018 National Defense Strategy, if necessary, the overall military budget may need to flex to

¹³² John Schaus, "Moving Beyond "China, China, China" in the Indo-Pacific," CSIS Transition46 Series, February 12, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/moving-beyond-china-china-china-indo-pacific>.

¹³³ Stromseth, "Don't Make us Choose," 8.

¹³⁴ Andrew Scobell (Bren Chair in Non-Western Strategic Thought at Marine Corps University's Krulak Center), interview with author, February 23, 2021; Nathan Packard and Benjamin Jensen, "Washington Needs A Bold Rethink of its China Strategy," War on the Rocks, June 9, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/washington-needs-a-bold-rethink-of-its-china-strategy/>.

facilitate better-resourced diplomatic and economic instruments of power.¹³⁵ More detailed recommendations on the too-often neglected economic front follow, covering trade, investment, and aid.

While Beijing's economic influence continues to grow, the U.S. has not presented any substantial alternatives to compete in the region's economic domain. Regarding regional trade agreements, Washington's abrupt withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership is widely considered a missed opportunity, and the Biden administration should consider joining the CPTPP.¹³⁶ As Michael Goodman notes, an agreement like CPTPP not only demonstrates Washington's commitment to the region and provides a platform to promote a rules-based order, but it also carries the potential to shape China's behavior.¹³⁷ David Dollar similarly asserts that the primary reason for the U.S. to join CPTPP is to "preserve an open global trading system centered on the U.S."¹³⁸ Washington may need to expend some political capital at home to join CPTPP and the benefits may take time to materialize, but the alternative is to let China take the lead in the Indo-Pacific.¹³⁹ Indeed, as Lee Kuan Yew points out, if the U.S. does not pursue free-trade agreements in Asia, the American economy will be the biggest loser as the region

¹³⁵ US Department of Defense, Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America (Washington, DC, 2018), 1-2, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>; The White House, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington, DC, 2017), 2, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

¹³⁶ Cliff, *A New U.S. Strategy for the Indo-Pacific*, 5, 118-119; Begley, Jason, *Winning Strategic Competition in the Indo-Pacific*, National Security Fellows Program (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, September 2020), 60, <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/StrategicCompetition.pdf>; Petri and Plummer, "RCEP."; Ryan Hass, Ryan Mcelveen, and Robert D. Williams, editors, "The Future of US Policy Toward China: Recommendations for the Biden administration," Brookings and Yale Law School, November 2020, 56, 73, 76, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Future-U.S.-policy-toward-China-v8.pdf>; Cook and Storey, "The Impending Biden Presidency and Southeast Asia," 4; Manning, "A Gaping Hole in US Indo-Pacific Strategy."

¹³⁷ Lewis, *Meeting the China Challenge*, 10-13.

¹³⁸ Hass, Mcelveen, and Williams, "The Future of US Policy Toward China," 76.

¹³⁹ Paul Smith, "Deepening Engagement through Economic Statecraft: Approaching China, Allies, and Partners through Trade Agreements, Aid and Investment, and Multilateral Institutions" (unpublished manuscript, December 17, 2020), Microsoft Word file.

becomes even more tightly integrated into Beijing's sphere of influence.¹⁴⁰ As one element of economic policy, joining the CPTPP will thus help Washington to get its foot back in the door and be positioned to uphold a rules-based order that can influence and curb a revisionist China.¹⁴¹

The U.S. also needs to tangibly increase its investment in the Indo-Pacific to undergird FOIP and offer the region a viable alternative to Chinese investment.¹⁴² The Asian Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) point out the critical need for trillions of dollars of infrastructure investment to support the growth of developing nations throughout Asia and the world—and Beijing is skillfully leveraging its SOEs to answer the call.¹⁴³ The U.S. is right to be suspicious about the BRI, both for Beijing's geopolitical intentions and BRI's opaqueness, questionable quality, and debt-trap concerns.¹⁴⁴ However, in many areas, as a former Pakistani official exclaimed, "China is the only game in town."¹⁴⁵

U.S. commitments to date are a drop in the bucket compared to the BRI, and for many developing countries, even if Beijing's terms and intentions are not entirely favorable, absent concrete offers from Washington or others, BRI remains their only option.¹⁴⁶ Vice President Pence urged other nations to "choose the 'better option' of U.S. financing" at the November 2018 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, yet in this case Washington needs to

¹⁴⁰ Graham Allison and Robert Blackwill, "Interview: Lee Kuan Yew on the Future of U.S.-China Relations," *The Atlantic*, March 5, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/03/interview-lee-kuan-yew-on-the-future-of-us-china-relations/273657/>.

¹⁴¹ Smith, "Deepening Engagement through Economic Statecraft."

¹⁴² Reese, "Beating Them at Their Own Game: The Economic Dimension of Competing with China."

¹⁴³ Feng Yujun, Alexander Gabuev, Paul Haenle, Bin Ma, and Dmitri Trenin, *The Belt and Road Initiative: Views from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019), 2, <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/2299098904?accountid=14746>.

¹⁴⁴ US Department of State, *The Elements of the China Challenge*, 12.

¹⁴⁵ Yujun, Gabuev, Haenle, Ma, and Trenin, *The Belt and Road Initiative*, 2-3.

¹⁴⁶ Andrew Chazky and James McBride, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative," Council on Foreign Relations, January 28, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/background/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative#; Yujun, Gabuev, Haenle, Ma, and Trenin, The Belt and Road Initiative, 2-5>.

do a better job of putting its money where its mouth is in conjunction with the U.S. private sector.¹⁴⁷ To be sure, initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Business Forum and the Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development (BUILD) Act are an encouraging step in the right direction.¹⁴⁸ The BUILD Act's \$60 billion commitment may be overshadowed by the trillion-dollar value associated with BRI projects, however, the BUILD Act can offer superior quality, transparency, and private sector solutions to Southeast Asia and should be tailored to support U.S. strategic interests.¹⁴⁹ This is the arena where Washington needs to ramp up its investment while also collaborating with like-minded partners.¹⁵⁰ As detailed above, Japan's leading role in regional infrastructure development makes Tokyo an ideal ally to increase cooperation with on this front.

U.S. policy to support FOIP should also increase the amount of foreign aid and security assistance apportioned in the Indo-Pacific. Current U.S. apportionments of aid do not reflect the priority that the Indo-Pacific should have in American foreign policy. In 2019 for example, the Indo-Pacific received a mere five percent of overall U.S. foreign aid disbursements, while Afghanistan alone received nearly \$5 billion—more than double the amount of the entire Indo-Pacific region.¹⁵¹ Granted, the U.S. was at war in Afghanistan, investing an enormous amount of blood and treasure in a conflict that is still smoldering today—but the numbers illustrate one

¹⁴⁷ Rolland, "A Concise Guide to the Belt and Road Initiative," 5.

¹⁴⁸ Nadege Rolland, "A Concise Guide to the Belt and Road Initiative," The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), April 11, 2019, 5, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/a-guide-to-the-belt-and-road-initiative/>; US Department of State, A Free and Open Indo-Pacific, 13; US Department of State, "2020 Indo-Pacific Business Forum Promotes Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (Washington, DC: Office of the Spokesperson, October 29, 2020), <https://asean.usmission.gov/2020-indo-pacific-business-forum-promotes-free-and-open-indo-pacific/>.

¹⁴⁹ Daniel F. Runde and Romina Bandura, "The BUILD Act Has Passed: What's Next?," CSIS, October 12, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/build-act-has-passed-whats-next>; George Ingram, "2020 And Beyond: Maintaining the bipartisan narrative on U.S. global development," Brookings Blum Roundtable, Post-Conference Report, August 2, 2019, 33-34, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/2020-and-beyond-maintaining-the-bipartisan-narrative-on-us-global-development/>.

¹⁵⁰ Ingram, "2020 And Beyond: Maintaining the bipartisan narrative on U.S. global development," 33-34; Runde and Bandura, "The BUILD Act Has Passed."

¹⁵¹ Foreign Aid Explorer Dashboard, <https://explorer.usaid.gov/#2019>.

aspect of the challenge Washington faces to shift resources in line with strategic priorities. Eric Sayers further exposes the disparity in Indo-Pacific resourcing as he explains that as of 2019, the State Department earmarked less than one percent of Foreign Military Financing and only 15% of international military education funds to East Asia and the Pacific.¹⁵² Recognizing this deficiency, Congress passed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act in 2019 followed by the Pacific Deterrence Initiative in 2020. Both resolutions are modest but noteworthy steps toward bolstering resources for the region and strengthening relations with allies and partners.¹⁵³ Foreign aid and defense spending are no panacea, but as parts of a comprehensive strategy can play a role in undergirding the principles of FOIP.¹⁵⁴

Multilateral Institutions and International Law

Finally, Washington should leverage the influence of multilateral institutions to reassure partners and allies while shaping China's behavior.¹⁵⁵ Although Beijing has certainly been known to flout international rules and norms when it suits its interest, the multilateral institutions underlying the rules-based world order have succeeded in restraining Beijing in some cases.¹⁵⁶ As Michael Mazarr and colleagues note in their RAND report, the existing international order provides the ground rules which nations are obligated to abide by and a framework to hold

¹⁵² Eric Sayers, "Assessing America's Indo-Pacific Budget Shortfall," War on the Rocks, November 15, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/11/assessing-americas-indo-pacific-budget-shortfall/>.

¹⁵³ Jim Inhofe and Jack Reed, "The Pacific Deterrence Initiative: Peace Through Strength in the Indo-Pacific," War on the Rocks, May 28, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/05/the-pacific-deterrence-initiative-peace-through-strength-in-the-indo-pacific/>; "U.S. Military Strategy in the Indo-Pacific," The Republican Policy Committee, August 25, 2020, <https://www.rpc.senate.gov/policy-papers/us-military-strategy-in-the-indo-pacific>; Zack Cooper, "5 Asia-related items to watch in the National Defense Authorization Act," American Enterprise Institute, July 15, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/foreign-and-defense-policy/5-asia-related-items-to-watch-in-the-national-defense-authorization-act/>.

¹⁵⁴ Smith, "Deepening Engagement through Economic Statecraft."

¹⁵⁵ Smith, "Deepening Engagement through Economic Statecraft."

¹⁵⁶ Michael J. Mazarr, Timothy R. Heath, and Astrid Stuth Cevallos, *China and the International Order* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), 122, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2423.html.

Beijing accountable.¹⁵⁷ Though not a total remedy for Chinese revisionism, multilateral institutions play a partial role in constraining Chinese behavior, as Beijing seeks at least in part to be viewed as a trustworthy global leader.¹⁵⁸

Washington should thus, in cooperation with allies and partners, champion international rules and norms via multilateral institutions to temper Beijing's revisionist tendencies.¹⁵⁹

Concerning BRI's often opaque and predatory nature, the U.S. should encourage China to join the Paris Club and become a globally responsible lender, while safeguarding developing nations from debt-traps.¹⁶⁰ Engagement in forums such as APEC, World Trade Organization, IMF, and Group of Seven can likewise be leveraged to promote existing rules and norms governing international commerce, particularly for pressing China on issues such as higher standards for the digital economy, SOEs, and infrastructure investment.¹⁶¹ Here a critical step for Washington would also be joining the CPTPP. While Tokyo's leadership helped save the CPTPP, without U.S. support and participation, it will be all the more difficult to compete with RCEP on regional trade rules and norms.

Washington can ill afford not to engage through multilateral venues, as Beijing will quickly move to fill the void left by any lack of U.S. leadership and increase Chinese influence on the global stage.¹⁶² Washington's recent move to slash funding for the World Health Organization bears out this point, as China immediately pledged new funding to exploit the U.S.

¹⁵⁷ Mazarr, Heath, and Cevallos, *China and the International Order*, 120-124.

¹⁵⁸ Mazarr, Heath, and Cevallos, *China and the International Order*, 119-122.

¹⁵⁹ Smith, "Deepening Engagement through Economic Statecraft."

¹⁶⁰ Hass, Mcelveen, and Williams, "The Future of US Policy Toward China," 27, 30, 73-75.

¹⁶¹ Lewis, *Meeting the China Challenge*, 13-14; Cliff, *A New U.S. Strategy for the Indo-Pacific*, 45; Mazarr, Heath, and Cevallos, *China and the International Order*, 122.

¹⁶² Smith, "Deepening Engagement through Economic Statecraft."

retreat—all but guaranteeing increased Chinese influence to serve Beijing’s interests.¹⁶³ As John Mearsheimer asserts, the U.S. should pursue maximum influence in multilateral institutions or else risk Chinese domination of such institutions and relative Chinese gains in legitimacy and power within the international community.¹⁶⁴

If applied prudently, encouraging adherence to international law can also bolster FOIP. International law may not have an enforcement mechanism, but its application can buttress a rules-based order while delegitimizing Beijing’s expansionist tendencies.¹⁶⁵ In the SCS for example, China may have ignored the 2016 UNCLOS ruling with relative impunity, however, the process and verdict of international arbitration certainly damaged the legitimacy of Chinese claims.¹⁶⁶ This past year Secretary of State Pompeo took a step in the right direction with a stronger endorsement of the 2016 UNCLOS ruling.¹⁶⁷ However, for even greater effect, Washington should consider U.S. ratification of UNCLOS while also encouraging other states to follow Manila’s tactic of a legal challenge.¹⁶⁸ As it stands, Washington gives lip-service to UNCLOS as customary international law, yet without congressional ratification, America’s position is weaker in the Indo-Pacific, especially vis-à-vis Beijing’s expansive SCS claims.¹⁶⁹

Conclusion

¹⁶³ Kimberley Dozier, “China Wins: Why Trump’s WHO Funding Cut is a Gift to Beijing,” *Time*, April 15, 2020, <https://time.com/5822078/china-wins-trumps-who-funding-cut/>.

¹⁶⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, “Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order,” *International Security* Vol. 43, No. 4 (Spring 2019), 50, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00342.

¹⁶⁵ Paul Smith, “China’s Strategy Towards Southeast Asia and the South China Sea: Asserting Dominance for Economic Gains and Chinese Centrality” (unpublished manuscript, February 5, 2021), Microsoft Word file.

¹⁶⁶ Yung and McNulty, “An Empirical analysis of Claimant Tactics,” 10; Chang, “Uncertain Prospects: South China Sea Code of Conduct Negotiations.”

¹⁶⁷ Gregory B. Poling, “How Significant is the New U.S. South China Sea Policy?” CSIS, July 14, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-significant-new-us-south-china-sea-policy>; Dolven, Lawrence, and O’Rourke, “South China Sea Disputes.”

¹⁶⁸ Smith, “China’s Strategy Towards Southeast Asia.”

¹⁶⁹ Aristyo Rizka Darmawan, “The USA and UNCLOS: Time to Ratify,” Fulcrum Analysis on Southeast Asia, published by ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, February 22, 2021, <https://fulcrum.sg/the-usa-and-unclos-time-to-ratify/>.

The Indo-Pacific region is vital to American prosperity and perhaps the most visible arena of great power competition with China. U.S. policy in the region should take a whole of government approach with robust economic engagement and leverage multilateral institutions and international law, all in conjunction with allies and partners. As Washington promotes its Indo-Pacific strategy, Tokyo is uniquely positioned to make a difference in the region and Japan's role should not be undervalued. Japan's FOIP initiatives align well with U.S. interests and warrant Washington's full support. Beijing's massive economic influence and plans for a China-centric order will certainly conflict with elements of FOIP, but Japan's longstanding and continued economic investment in the Indo-Pacific combined with Tokyo's soft power edge will enable Japan and like-minded nations to make measured headway toward the realization of FOIP.

As the U.S. military reorients to the Indo-Pacific, it is critical to understand China's regional influence and coercive power and the proclivity of partners and even allies to hedge, seeking to avoid Beijing's ire. These dynamics can impact how far U.S. allies and partners are willing to take military cooperation. As an example, one need look no further than the Philippines, as the Duterte administration has cozied up to China and threatened to nullify the Visiting Forces Agreement that underpins military cooperation with the U.S.¹⁷⁰ Thus, as it stands, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and U.S. Marine Corps assumptions about access to ally and partner territory in support of precision-strike networks and expeditionary advanced base operations in the first island chain are likely tenuous at best. Indeed, without robust use of the diplomatic and economic instruments

¹⁷⁰ Michael J. Green and Gregory B. Poling, "The U.S. Alliance with the Philippines," *Hard Choices: Memos to the President*, CSIS, February 1, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-alliance-philippines>; Reuters Staff, "Philippines' Duterte tells U.S. 'you have to pay' if it wants to keep troop deal," Reuters, February 12, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-usa-defence/philippines-duterte-tells-u-s-you-have-to-pay-if-it-wants-to-keep-troop-deal-idUSKBN2AC1K2>.

of national power, the limits of what the military instrument can accomplish are even more constrained.

For Washington, Japan is America’s “most important ally in the Asia-Pacific region” and the U.S.-Japan alliance is the “cornerstone of peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.”¹⁷¹ Tokyo’s strengths in the region include its presence, reputation, and longstanding economic ties. Tokyo’s inclusive approach and the breadth of Japanese investment in Southeast Asia also fill significant gaps in Washington’s foreign policy and Japan adeptly maintains influence with the entire neighborhood to include the region’s non-democratic states. Washington should thus play a supporting role to bolster Tokyo’s efforts, deepening cooperation and staying in lockstep with Japan on regional initiatives. Indeed, as America mulls the renewed significance of the Indo-Pacific region, Washington would do well to remember that the surest road to a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” runs through Tokyo.

¹⁷¹ U.S. Department of State, “Integrated Country Strategy: Japan,” September 21, 2018, 2-3, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ICS-Japan_UNCLASS-508.pdf; Philip S. Davidson, “Statement of Admiral Philip S. Davidson, U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Before the Senate Armed Services Committee on U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Posture,” Senate Armed Services Committee, March 9, 2021, 11, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_03-09-21.pdf.

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