

A stylized map of the Indo-Pacific region, showing the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Ocean. The map is rendered in shades of blue and green, with a dark red rectangular box overlaid on the top right portion. The title and subtitle are centered within this box.

SECURITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC COMMONS

Toward a Regional Strategy

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Executive Summary

Ensuring security in the Indo-Pacific region will be the primary foreign policy challenge for the United States and liberal nations over the next generation. Doing so successfully will provide the greatest economic and political opportunities for the next quarter century. Conversely, a failure to maintain stability, support liberal regimes, create cooperative regional relations, and uphold norms and standards of international behavior will lead to a region, and world, of greater uncertainty, insecurity, and instability.

Due to its economic strength, military power, and political dynamism, the Indo-Pacific will be the world's most important region in coming decades, and its significance will be felt throughout the globe. Since the end of World War II, it has transformed itself into the world's economic powerhouse, yet has also witnessed a struggle between tides of liberalism, authoritarianism, and even totalitarianism. It remains riven by distrust, territorial disputes, ethnic tensions, and painful historical memories.

The Indo-Pacific's unique geography makes the balance of regional security most vulnerable in its "commons": the open seas, air lanes, and cyber networks that link the region together and to the world. Given the importance of the Indo-Pacific commons to the continued prosperity and stability of the region, the policy objectives of the United States and its Indo-Pacific allies and partners should be to:

- Ensure access to the Indo-Pacific commons for all nations
- Deter or contain conflict in the commons
- Maintain credible military capabilities that can deter or defeat the most likely threats to regional stability

- Encourage the evolution of liberal-democratic norms that will help spread freedom and lead to cooperative behavior in service of the above

The overriding goal of this strategy is to create a security environment that enhances stability and prosperity and does not require the use of U.S. or allied military power.

The interests of the United States and its allies and partners lie in protecting the Indo-Pacific commons from any disruption that would cause political tension or conflict, adversely affect global economic activity, or hinder the access of any nation to the rest of the region and globe for political or military reasons. However, as a result of China's military buildup in particular, the United States and its allies can no longer be assured of maintaining regional superiority of forces either numerically or, eventually, qualitatively. The comprehensive buildup of Chinese military power should be recognized as a tool for the broader geopolitical expansion of Chinese influence, providing the means necessary to achieve regional acceptance of Chinese aims, however those may be defined in the future.

At the same time, security in the Indo-Pacific region must not be reduced to hedging against China's rise or limited to attempting to shape Chinese behavior, but rather must be focused on the Indo-Pacific commons as a whole. Therefore, America's strategy should have three parts: an enhanced, superior, forward-based U.S. presence in the region; an innovative new approach to allies and partners; and a political goal of helping create a more liberal Indo-Pacific region.

Our regional strategy must be based on U.S. forces maintaining their forward presence with

superior power projection capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region, responding to disruptions, and mitigating uncertainty. To do so, a forward-based military force structure in the Pacific must focus on the power projection capabilities and weapons systems most appropriate for defeating potential adversaries' key strengths, and it must be postured to increase U.S. forward presence in the Indo-Pacific in both peacetime and times of conflict. This includes ensuring control of the undersea realm through an increased U.S. attack submarine force, increasing the number of forward-deployed BMD surface combatants, enhancing U.S. Air Force forward presence in the region, and maintaining and increasing comprehensive cyber and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities.

Military capability, however, is only one part of a strategy for security in the Indo-Pacific commons. The United States should also pursue a new political strategy that explicitly links together both its close partners and strategically important nations that increasingly share common concerns. Conceptually, this new strategic arrangement can be thought of as a set of "concentric triangles." The outer triangle links

Japan, South Korea, India, and Australia; the inner triangle connects Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam. The outer triangle should serve as the anchor for security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, as well as for U.S. policy in the region. The inner triangle will play a unique role in enhancing littoral security and focusing on the "inner commons" of the lower South China Sea.

The final leg of this strategy must focus on the overall political environment in the Indo-Pacific. This new strategy for security in the Indo-Pacific commons is not designed explicitly to promote democracy, liberalism, or a freedom agenda. It aims to be a prudent strategy for ensuring stability and the interests of nations that contribute to regional prosperity, including the United States. For this reason, it must be as realistic about the type of regional environment that will promote stability as it is about the means to be used to counter disruptive influences. However, it is clear that liberally inclined nations are more likely to work together to provide public goods, uphold regional security, and cooperate in resolving regional issues. Encouraging a more liberal Indo-Pacific region is therefore a political goal as well as a strategy.

FIGURE 1
THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION



Setting the Strategic Tableau

Ensuring security in the Indo-Pacific region will be the primary foreign policy challenge for the United States and liberal democratic nations over the coming generation. Doing so successfully will provide the greatest economic and political opportunities for the next quarter century. Conversely, a failure to maintain stability, support liberal regimes, create cooperative regional relations, and uphold norms and standards of international behavior will lead to a region, and world, of greater uncertainty, insecurity, and instability.

The Indo-Pacific's economic strength, military power, and political dynamism will make it the world's most important region in the coming decades, and its significance will be felt throughout the globe. The Indo-Pacific includes the waters, islands, and littoral states stretching from the mid-Pacific to the seas west of the Indian subcontinent. It includes a population of nearly 3 billion people, thirty-six countries, three of the world's largest economies (China, Japan, and South Korea), the world's largest democracy (India), and a combined gross national product of nearly \$20 trillion (at purchasing power parity calculations).¹ Since the end of World War II, the region has transformed itself into the world's economic powerhouse, yet it has also witnessed a struggle between tides of liberalism, authoritarianism, and even totalitarianism. It remains riven by distrust, territorial disputes, ethnic tensions, and painful memories.

The post-World War II liberal international order has been the framework in which the Indo-Pacific has prospered, and the stability and freedom of the Indo-Pacific commons has allowed the entire region, as well as the global economy, to grow. The Indo-Pacific's unique geography makes the balance of regional security most vulnerable in

its "commons": the open seas, air lanes, and cyber networks that link the region together and to the world. Today, new threats to the liberal international order and to the Indo-Pacific commons are raising questions about future security in the region. Any change in the stability of the Indo-Pacific commons will have a negative effect on political relations and economic activity, and could well lead to conflict between major Indo-Pacific powers that depend on free and open seas, airways, and cyber connections.

Given the importance of the Indo-Pacific commons, the policy objectives of the United States and its Indo-Pacific allies and partners should be to:

- Ensure access to the commons for all nations
- Deter or contain conflict in the commons
- Maintain superior military capabilities that can deter or defeat the most likely threats to regional stability
- Encourage the evolution of liberal-democratic norms that will help spread freedom and lead to cooperative behavior in service of the above efforts

The overriding goal of this strategy is to create a security environment that enhances stability and prosperity and does not require the use of U.S. or allied military power.

Achieving these goals will require crafting a strategy that builds on current U.S. and allied strengths and policies, yet adapts them to emerging challenges and political budgetary realities. It requires, in short, rethinking the responsibilities that the United States

and a few of its allies have shouldered for the past seven decades: providing public goods that have served the interests of nearly all Indo-Pacific nations.

The Indo-Pacific's Post-1945 Odyssey

For much of the post–World War II era, the Indo-Pacific region underwent a complementary process of decolonization (nation building) and economic development. While never free from military strife, the Indo-Pacific as a whole was spared the draining Cold War competition that sapped European and Russian energies on top of the vast damage of World War II. Although no regionwide war occurred after 1945, two of the Cold War's bloodiest conflicts were waged in the Indo-Pacific on the Korean peninsula and in Vietnam, while major confrontations occurred between China and Vietnam, and China and India, among others. Yet amid these clashes, the region, led by Japan, became a critical part of the global economy by the 1960s. The security guarantees that Washington provided aided this economic growth in no small part by allowing for national investment in industrial production by various countries.

In the post–Cold War era, understanding and improving relations with the Indo-Pacific became a priority for the United States and other nations, not least because their economies and the growth of global trade seemed to depend more and more on manufacturing and shipping from the Pacific region. Yet the Asia taking center stage in the 1990s was a region beginning to undergo significant change. Japan, the main driver of modernization and economic development, suddenly and unexpectedly entered a prolonged recession. As Japan faltered, China became an increasingly important economic player. Beijing's experiments in limited market reforms under Deng Xiaoping ignited a multi-decade period of industrial expansion, trade promotion, and internal development. During the 1980s and 1990s, other nations, including South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, also became export giants in

their own right, even as they and Japan became ever more economically entwined with China.

The Indo-Pacific's changes were not restricted to the economic sphere. The region was transforming itself politically as well. An impressive tide of democracy washed over eastern Asia in the 1980s and 1990s as South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Mongolia all held free elections and adopted democratic political systems. Civil society institutions in many nations were strengthened or developed for the first time, and a free press took root in liberal societies. Yet at the same time, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in the region reaffirmed their power, most notably China after the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, but also North Korea and Burma. In addition, a host of other nations, including Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia, struggled with maintaining domestic stability while embracing moderate political reform. Most disturbing, illiberal regimes in China and North Korea devoted billions of dollars to modernizing their militaries and purchasing advanced weapons systems that were not solely for defense.

The overriding goal of this strategy is to create a security environment that enhances stability and prosperity and does not require the use of U.S. or allied military power.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States and the global war on terrorism shifted Western focus away from the changes sweeping through the Indo-Pacific region. Indo-Pacific nations were also victims of terrorism, such as the 2002 bombing in Bali, Indonesia, and the 2008 Mumbai attack, but for the most part, the political and military priorities of the United States and many European countries shifted to the Middle East during the first decade of the twenty-first century. During these years, with Washington's attention diverted, North Korea made significant strides toward developing a nuclear capability,

while China built the most powerful Indo-Pacific military and began asserting its interests more forcefully in the region.

America Turns to the Indo-Pacific

Today, having largely wound down its combat operations in Iraq and seeking to end its involvement in Afghanistan, Washington is turning its attention back to the Indo-Pacific. Indeed, in some ways, Washington's gaze is coming to rest on the Indo-Pacific in its own right for the first time since before World War II. No longer is it treated as a side theater in the global Cold War, or a distraction from the war on terrorism. Rather, as Europe turns inward and becomes less of a global force, as Western nations seek to contain Islamic radicalism in the Middle East, and as Africa and Latin America continue to struggle with political stability and socioeconomic development, it is the Indo-Pacific that looms as the most important and vibrant region in the coming decades. With over \$1 trillion in trade in goods and services between the Indo-Pacific and the United States—representing 33 percent of U.S. two-way trade—and with it producing nearly one-third of global output, the region is intimately tied to the economic health and, by extension, political health of the United States and all major countries in the world.

The next century will not, however, be simplistically an “Asian century.” Rather, without the continued involvement of the United States, working in concert with like-minded allies and partners, the Indo-Pacific in the decades ahead may be as unstable as it will be dynamic. Indeed, the Indo-Pacific's success depends on not only deepening political and economic liberalization in the region, but also enhancing its integration with the rest of the world and developing security mechanisms that will engender the confidence and trust required to promote trade, strengthen political ties, and set regional norms of behavior.

The developments and trends in all these realms—political, economic, and military—are, to one degree

or another, a function of *security*. A comprehensive U.S. strategy for promoting security in the Indo-Pacific region will therefore range across the whole of the diplomatic, informational/intelligence, military, and economic spectrum. This strategy must evaluate trends, identify threats, and propose realistic policies that will both reflect U.S. interests and benefit our friends and allies in the region, as well as the region as a whole. This report is a first attempt at crafting such a strategy.

Defining the Indo-Pacific and Its Commons

A security strategy in the Indo-Pacific must begin by defining the boundaries of the region. Unlike commonly used artificial boundaries, which divide the region into Northeast, Southeast, and South Asia, the reality is that the Indo-Pacific has always been an interlinked realm, connected by land, air, and sea lines of communication. Its history is one of constant exchange of peoples, goods, and ideas, as well as one of conflict. The peace of the last several decades following the end of the Vietnam War has been one of the few periods of relative regional stability, despite bloody events such as the Killing Fields of Cambodia in the 1970s. This relative peace, along with advances in technology and ever-increasing economic exchange, has allowed the Indo-Pacific to “globalize,” becoming more integrated as a region, with slowly developing, but surely increasing, self-identity.

This report considers the Indo-Pacific to encompass the entire continental and maritime region stretching from the eastern edges of Siberia southward in a vast arc, encompassing Japan, the Korean peninsula, mainland China, mainland and archipelagic Southeast Asia and Oceania, and India. Drawing the Indo-Pacific's borders is an arbitrary matter, but excluding maritime and land areas west of India preserves a largely coherent geographic region—though the region's maritime connections to Africa and the Arabian Sea area are of growing importance to all the major countries, and looming

Indo-Pacific Territorial Disputes

Some of the Indo-Pacific's major territorial disputes in the commons revolve around the Kurile Island chain between Russia and Japan; the Takeshima/Dokdo Islands between Japan and South Korea; the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands between China, Taiwan, and Japan; the Spratly Islands between China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Malaysia; and the Paracel Islands between China, Taiwan, and Vietnam. In addition, the status of Taiwan as a sovereign nation (along with its territorial waters) remains unresolved.

problems such as Pakistan's stability will pose major challenges for India and other Indo-Pacific states.

The commons are the "sinews" of the Indo-Pacific, joining its constituent subregions and individual states. The critical waterways of the Indo-Pacific—including the Strait of Malacca, through which over fifty thousand ships pass per year; the South China Sea; and the Taiwan Strait—are the best known of these sinews.² However, the security of the thousands of miles of coastline in the Indo-Pacific region, key aerial transit routes, and undersea passages determines stability in the commons. Space, too, is of central importance, as threats to communications satellites become reality with new weapons capabilities. Moreover, in addition to the physical commons, the invisible web of cyber networks that underpin transportation, commerce, and daily activity has emerged as a crucial new manifestation of the commons, even as it is linked to the global communications network, and thus not limited solely to the Indo-Pacific. These lines of communication are increasingly vulnerable to disruption by traditional and nontraditional threats. Throughout the Indo-Pacific's commons, territorial disputes over isolated islets and rocky chains, differing interpretations of territorial waters and exclusive economic zones, and clashes between national fishing fleets, among other problems, are endemic and keep tension and distrust in the commons at high levels.

The interests of the United States and its allies and partners lie in protecting the Indo-Pacific commons from any disruption that would cause political tension or conflict, adversely affect global economic activity, or hinder any nation's access to the rest of the region and globe for political or military reasons. This conception of regional security has formed much of the U.S. rationale for maintaining its forward engagement in Asia since the end of World War II. Today, however, the strategic fundamentals of the region are changing so as to potentially call into question free access and security across the Indo-Pacific commons.

The interests of the United States and its allies and partners lie in protecting the Indo-Pacific commons from any disruption that would cause political tension or conflict, adversely affect global economic activity, or hinder any nation's access to the rest of the region and globe for political or military reasons.

Defining a Strategy for Security

The goal of upholding security in the Indo-Pacific commons reflects decades of U.S. policy. However, the geopolitical changes currently transforming the Indo-Pacific raise significant uncertainties about the feasibility of achieving this end using current policy tools. "Strategy" is the application of means to ends, and from roughly 1945 to 2000, the United States and its allies not only had sufficient means to achieve their ends, but also did not face any significant challenge to their desired ends that would have raised questions about the viability of their strategy. The naval challenge the Soviet Union posed was largely contained through close U.S.-Japan maritime cooperation, the People's Republic of China and

India were inwardly focused, and the U.S. military had uncontested access to the Indo-Pacific commons. Washington was thus able to create an environment of certainty necessary for political stability, the development of regional trade, and prevention of another regionwide conflict akin to the Pacific War.

Today, the United States and its allies operate in an increasingly complex regional environment in the Indo-Pacific, and policymakers must again focus on strategy. The means necessary to achieve the ends of security in the Indo-Pacific commons must be reexamined and altered to reflect current and likely future challenges. The most significant challenge comes from China, which has emerged as one of the key drivers of the shift in the balance of power and the rise of regional uncertainty. The U.S. government has not issued a formal statement about its Asian policy since the 1998 Department of Defense report *The United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region*.³ In that document, however, there is little overarching vision of U.S. goals for East Asia; rather, the report is largely reactive, noting that U.S. policy was “to reduce areas of uncertainty and to *reinforce* the region’s progress toward economic prosperity and political cooperation.”⁴ This would be achieved largely through “maintaining comprehensive engagement,” or what the authors called “presence plus.” The policy of sustained U.S. engagement must now be expanded to encompass the broader Indo-Pacific region and be shaped to respond to its future security requirements and the means to achieve that goal.

The overriding goal of U.S. and allied security cooperation is to help create the conditions for more peaceful relations, stronger liberal systems, and healthier economies in the region. That depends in no small part on maintaining security in the commons, and in preparing to respond to the disruptive or assertive behavior of any regional actor. That said, our security policy in the Indo-Pacific must not be reduced to hedging against China’s rise or limited to attempting to shape Chinese behavior, but rather must be focused on the Indo-Pacific commons as a whole. Such a focus will, over time, do more to

shape Chinese behavior than direct attempts to make China play a responsible and constructive role in the region. In other words, the Indo-Pacific end state that the United States and its allies should seek is neither value neutral nor status quo. Without clearly articulated goals for a more liberal, more prosperous, and more secure future Indo-Pacific, no policy can hope to garner political support, adequate funding, or the commitment required to see it through. Our focus must remain on the Indo-Pacific as a whole and not on China alone.

Security policy in the Indo-Pacific must not be reduced to hedging against China’s rise or limited to attempting to shape Chinese behavior, but rather must be focused on the Indo-Pacific commons as a whole.

Ensuring security in the Indo-Pacific commons will require significant investment by the United States and its allies and partners to maintain their capabilities and fulfill their responsibilities to act for the regional good, using the full range of political and military means. Some of this can be done by repositioning our forces in the region, but in a budgetary environment of reduced resources, this strategy may fly into strong headwinds. American leaders will also have to refute the claims of those who believe that gradual U.S. disengagement from the Indo-Pacific, or a reduced military presence, is good both for the U.S. domestic economy and for the region. History teaches that security does not uphold itself, nor does stability survive without strenuous efforts to set standards and norms, uphold them, and mitigate shocks that would upend established patterns. No region or historical era has avoided challenges to stability and security without a major commitment on the part of the strongest powers, or coalitions of smaller powers, to confront disruptions and overt attacks. For this reason, neither the United States nor its allies and

partners can trust that an offshore balancing role or a “lighter footprint” will suffice; indeed, historical and contemporary evidence indicate that just the opposite will happen—that those who wish to challenge the prevailing system will be emboldened and act in ways that create further uncertainty.

Thus our strategy should be driven by a global “broken windows” theory: security and stability can be ensured only if the regional neighborhood is not allowed to deteriorate, even gradually. While the United States cannot and will not intervene to solve every problem among states in the Indo-Pacific

region, it must commit to helping establish general regional norms and ensuring that no major change in regional behavior by any state is allowed to replace today’s security regime with something less benign. Such a change, and the uncertainty that would accompany it, would almost certainly benefit rogue nations such as North Korea, or nations such as China that appear to seek to renegotiate at least some of the security understandings of the past half century. Current regional trends give some idea of the shape of an Indo-Pacific without today’s security guarantees.

Security Trends in the Indo-Pacific Commons

No security environment is ever static, yet the changes in the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific over the past decade have been dramatic even by historical standards. The questions for policymakers are what those changes portend for regional stability and whether they will have a negative influence on political relations, economic growth, and trade. At the strategic level, security is influenced not merely by military capabilities and the relative balance of power, but also by changes in regional perceptions, political alignments and policies, and the economic strength of important actors. This section will highlight key changes occurring in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly those with the highest potential of causing instability or disruption.

The Changing Military Balance of Power: The Chinese Catalyst

Throughout the Cold War, the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific favored the United States and its partners, despite Soviet attempts to build a regional navy. Within a half decade of the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, both the People's Republic of China and the Kim family regime in North Korea had emerged as the two most likely disruptive powers in the region, albeit on very different scales. The 1994 Korean nuclear crisis nearly resulted in U.S. air strikes on sites suspected of being connected with the North's clandestine nuclear program. Two years later, the 1996 Taiwan missile crisis, in which China fired ballistic missiles into the waters off the island nation during its first free presidential election, prompted the Clinton administration to dispatch two aircraft-carrier

strike groups to the Taiwan Strait. The decade was rounded out by a U.S. congressional report highlighting how China had stolen classified information to develop its ballistic missile capabilities, which soon included the ability to target the United States directly.⁵

Military developments in the region intensified during the first decade of the twenty-first century while Washington was largely preoccupied with responding to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Under benign regional conditions, Beijing decided to undertake a sustained modernization and expansion of its military forces, aimed initially at Taiwan. Given the lack of any overt threat to China's peaceful development, its buildup indicates a desire to reshape the regional security environment in ways favorable to protecting and even asserting Chinese interests, regardless of the effect on its neighbors or the United States.

China's military development has been broad-based and deep, with double-digit annual increases in its military budget during the 2000s.⁶ The modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) started from a very low base, and some estimates indicate much of the buildup went to increasing military pay, enhancing training, and providing basic supplies.⁷ Nonetheless, China's focus has been on new platforms aimed specifically at eliminating the U.S. edge in numbers and quality, as well as that of smaller regional powers. As a result of China's military buildup, the United States and its allies can no longer be assured of maintaining regional superiority of forces either numerically or, eventually, qualitatively. The following is not an exhaustive list of Chinese military forces, but rather a review of the most significant capabilities affecting the Indo-Pacific security balance.

PLAN

The PLAN currently has fifty-four diesel submarines and six nuclear-powered attack subs and is introducing advanced models, including the Shang-class SSN. While largely modern, PLAN submarines lack sophisticated antisubmarine warfare capabilities, which limits their usefulness against U.S. and Japanese subs. The PLAN currently has three Jin-class nuclear ballistic-missile submarines and plans to increase that number to five or six, with missiles that will be able to reach the West Coast of the United States. The PLAN surface fleet includes twenty-eight guided-missile destroyers that include five different indigenously built classes, fifty-two frigates, eighty-three amphibious vessels, and sixty-eight mine-warfare and counter-warfare ships. Its naval air arm fields 138 fighter ground-attack planes, eighty fighters, and fifty bombers, currently all land-based. The PLAN also continues to maintain a significant level of patrol and coastal forces, including nearly two hundred fast patrol craft and eighty slower patrol craft.

Maritime Forces. China's most conspicuous military advances, and the ones most clearly tied to political aims, have taken place in the PLA Navy (PLAN). In just a few decades, the PLAN has grown from a coastal patrol force into a force with growing operational experience able to operate on a small scale for extended periods of time thousands of miles away from East Asia and with an increasingly sophisticated suite of capabilities.⁸ China has focused in particular on building its surface and submarine fleet, and by 2020, the Congressional Research Service predicts that China will have up to seventy-two modern attack submarines.⁹ China's maritime presence is further enhanced by the over two hundred patrol vessels of the China Maritime Safety Administration (MSA). Armed MSA ships regularly accompany private Chinese fishing vessels in East Asian waters and have been involved in

numerous confrontations with the naval and coast guard forces of other nations.

The PLAN boasts the Indo-Pacific's largest naval force, and one that is becoming more adept at patrolling and joint operations, especially within the "first island chain," which runs south from Japan's southern home island of Kyushu, past Taiwan, and down into Southeast Asia, including the infamous "cow's tongue" demarcating claimed waters in the South China Sea. PLAN ships now regularly travel in the East and South China seas, in addition to those of the China MSA, thereby giving China a regular presence in the East Asian commons. Of equal significance to the U.S. and other navies, as recent confrontations between Chinese and foreign vessels have demonstrated, the PLAN is acquiring or actively developing advanced weapons able to target enemy vessels at increasing ranges. China has been purchasing Russian-made antiship cruise missiles that can be carried on both destroyers (the SS-N-22) and diesel submarines (the SS-N-27), as well as producing its own versions.

Despite its numbers, the PLAN remains qualitatively and operationally inferior to the U.S. Navy, and it continues to operate predominantly in home waters. However, Chinese naval doctrine has shifted focus to power projection outside coastal zones and is stressing joint operations. Chinese plans to build aircraft carriers have garnered much attention. Current estimates indicate that the PLAN will build between three and six carriers, though it will take well over a decade to produce them and train for carrier-launched aircraft operations to become a viable force. "Far sea defense" is among the newest strategies adopted by the PLAN, referring to the operation of coordinated fleet actions in Pacific waters, in key maritime passageways, and as far afield as the Indian Ocean. China dispatched a small flotilla of two destroyers and a supply ship to the Arabian Sea in late 2008 to participate in antipiracy operations off the Horn of Africa. Such long-range operations illustrate its growing competence and provide valuable operational experience.

FIGURE 2
FIRST AND SECOND ISLAND CHAINS



PLAAF

The PLAAF today maintains over 2,500 aircraft, including roughly 1,600 fighter jets. This is in addition to the PLAN's approximately three hundred fleet-defense aircraft. While the bulk of the PLAAF fighter force is based on older Soviet models, the newer, fourth-generation fighters, such as the J-11 air superiority fighter, based on the Su-27, and the indigenously produced J-10, represent a rapidly growing percentage of the total overall force. In addition, observers are closely watching the development of the next generation of the J-10 fighters, as well as the purported fifth-generation twin-engine J-13 and J-14 stealth fighters, which U.S. intelligence sources predict may be operational as soon as 2018. November 2010 news reports also indicated that Russia may sell China its most advanced fourth-generation aircraft, the Su-35.

The PLAAF also flies fighter-bombers, such as the Su-30MKK multirole fighter, newer versions of which were delivered starting in the 1990s; older ground-attack aircraft; and H-6 bomber variants. The H-6 was originally based on a 1950s Soviet design but has been steadily modernized through at least twelve production versions. The H-6H/M versions are outfitted for cruise missile payloads, along with the newest version, the H-6K, which came online in 2009 and has a reported range of 3,500 kilometers, thanks to improved turbofan engines.

Air Power Capabilities. The PLA Air Force (PLAAF) has been modernizing its fleet of fighters and bombers concurrently with the PLA buildup. The PLAAF is also acquiring unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and unmanned combat aerial vehicles, though their numbers and quality are far lower than foreign counterparts, and developing advanced combat and reconnaissance versions. In addition, the PLAAF has worked to improve its lift and aerial refueling capabilities. However, orders for Russian-made transport and aerial tankers have run into problems, and there have been no deliveries to date.

The PLAAF's primary mission remains the defense of the Chinese homeland, although planning for Taiwan Strait contingencies, including attacks on Taiwan, run a close second. The combat radius of Su-30MKKs, J-11s, and J-8IIs would allow them, if taking off from coastal airstrips, to cover almost the entirety of the first island chain, providing an air umbrella for PLA forces and the potential to vastly outnumber Japan-based American fighters and bombers. Their range also potentially allows them to reach significant portions of the Japanese home islands, much of Indochina, and the northern reaches of Southeast Asia. Improvements in aerial-refueling and ground-control capabilities could extend the range of land-based fighters and attack aircraft deeper into Southeast Asia and hold at risk crucial shipping lanes in the South China Sea. However, to take full advantage of these capabilities, improvements in aerial- or ground-based control are required. The successful deployment of aircraft carriers and assigned air wings would significantly increase China's ability to project air power into the lower South China Sea, leaving the PLAAF free to concentrate on traditional missions. According to recent news reports, both the PLAAF and its naval air counterpart are holding night training missions and improving joint operations capabilities, thereby providing aerial support to maritime operations inside and outside Chinese territorial waters.

Missile Forces. China's swift development of its missile capabilities has drawn much attention. Forces under the control of the 2nd Artillery Corps can cover all of the northern reaches of the South China Sea, as well as Taiwan and the northern portions of the first island chain. This covers all of Japan, the Philippines, and Southeast Asia except for Indonesia. In addition, Chinese long-range ballistic missiles can cover all major land masses, including the West Coast of the United States. China today can hold at risk all major U.S. and allied bases in the region, thereby directly threatening the ability of the U.S. Air Force and Navy to conduct operations in the Indo-Pacific.

China nearly doubled the number of short-range missiles across the Taiwan Strait to 1,300 during the latter 2000s, and some analysts suggest that China is not only continuing to field more long-range ballistic missiles than the U.S. government acknowledges, but also moving toward putting multiple warheads on those missiles.¹⁰ More importantly, official U.S. statements and news reports indicate China is beginning to test the DF-21D medium-range antiship ballistic missile, with a potential range of nearly 1,500 kilometers, which can target moving ships at sea with maneuverable reentry vehicle warheads. Such a capability, if actually fielded and effective, would present considerable problems for U.S. ballistic missile defenses and call into question the viability of operating U.S. aircraft carriers in waters within the first island chain.

As a result of China’s military buildup, the United States and its allies can no longer be assured of maintaining regional superiority of forces either numerically or, eventually, qualitatively.

Open source material cannot discuss with authority the accuracy of these missiles or whether China possesses a true “precision strike” capability. The accuracy question is particularly important for the DF-21D antiship ballistic missile, which would have to pinpoint a mobile target using accurate surveillance and targeting information from space-, air-, or sea-based sensors. Yet the number of missiles China is deploying allows it to have high confidence of being able to target bases and forces in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Vietnam—all areas where the United States currently operates or would like to operate.

Cyber and Asymmetric Capabilities. China is also aiming at employing or targeting cyber capabilities, as its security thinkers have discussed waging “local war

PLA Missile Forces

Under the control of the 2nd Artillery Corps, the PLA has over 1,100 short-range ballistic missiles (radius of one thousand kilometers). It also fields just under one hundred medium-range ballistic missiles and up to five hundred long-range land-attack cruise missiles, with ranges from one thousand to three thousand kilometers. Finally, China currently deploys five different types of medium- and long-range ballistic missiles, for a total of approximately eighty missiles, with ranges from three thousand to eleven thousand kilometers.

under informationized conditions.”¹¹ From one perspective, this refers to PLA attempts to network its military operations on sea and land and in the air and space using advanced electronic communications systems, much like U.S. forces. Yet the United States and other Western nations strongly suspect that China is actively seeking to wage cyber warfare as a separate warfighting discipline that can support other military operations and act as an offensive means in its own right by using computer network operations, electronic warfare, and kinetic strikes to “attack an enemy’s networked information systems.”¹² Targets would include intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) systems, databases, satellites, and network architecture, with the goal of blinding an enemy or disrupting its ability to achieve battlefield awareness and coordinate operations, thereby undermining the connectivity that fundamentally underpins the U.S. way of war.

China has already been successful in conducting kinetic attacks against communications targets in space, as witnessed when the PLA shot down an obsolete weather satellite in early 2009, and Canadian researchers exposed a supposed Chinese-run electronic spy network targeting foreign computers.¹³ Given the success of Russian hackers in crashing Georgian government websites during their 2008 conflict, antinetwork operations seem to be an

The North Korean Wildcard

North Korea's continued provocations remind South Korea, Japan, and the United States that they cannot focus on China's long-term growth while ignoring more immediate threats. With the country likely to undergo a leadership change in the near future, its sudden aggression against South Korea in March 2010, when it sank a South Korean naval vessel, killing forty-six sailors, and November 2010, when it shelled a South Korean island near the disputed Northern Limit Line, suggests that the regime may be prepared to take even more aggressive actions against its neighbors. The six-party talks have failed to halt or reverse Pyongyang's nuclear program, and North Korea continues to work on achieving a reliable intercontinental ballistic missile capability. In response, the United States and its allies in Seoul and Tokyo must continue to cooperate on ballistic missile defense, maintain a regular and timely schedule of military exercises in and around the peninsula, and maintain sufficient military strength to prevail over North Korean forces in the case of hostilities. Chinese support for North Korea further captures the range of challenges to stability in Asia and illustrates how authoritarian regimes can control the pace of events and inject ongoing uncertainty into the security equilibrium in a region.

increasingly viable method of causing disarray and disruption in an enemy's command-and-control systems. Not only military systems, but also economic systems, public service networks (like utilities), and governmental communications could be put at risk by an increased Chinese cyber warfare capability.

Reaching for Anti-Access/Area Denial. Procuring the advanced systems noted above moves China closer to achieving "anti-access/area denial" (known as A2/AD) capabilities in home waters, including the Taiwan Strait, and possibly down into the South China Sea as well. Achieving such capabilities would

not only counter U.S. forces in the region and lock the United States out of contested waters, but also allow China to control important strategic waterways of Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia, thereby holding at risk the economies of numerous states. Current trends point to China increasingly being able to target key U.S. and allied bases in the region and operate across the commons using advanced naval, air, and space military platforms in joint operations. True effectiveness at such operations will take further years of training, but U.S. strategists cannot ignore the future potential for Chinese joint operations both in home waters and possibly throughout the wider Indo-Pacific commons.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the relative rapprochement between China and Taiwan since the election of Ma Ying-jeou in 2008, the PLA has broadened its horizon and begun to operate more assertively in common areas deemed crucial to national security. As China has developed its naval, air, and missile capabilities, observers have been most concerned about the military operations the PLAN has started undertaking. In the past several years, Chinese assertiveness in the Yellow, East China, and South China seas has grown, including interference with U.S. survey ships, warning the United States not to conduct naval exercises in waters near China, increased armed patrols, surveillance operations, and confrontations with neighboring naval forces, primarily while intervening on behalf of private Chinese fishing boats caught fishing illegally in foreign territorial waters. These actions are tied to demands for greater regulatory rights over larger maritime tracts and seem to correspond with previously expressed desires to control waters up to the first island chain.

The actions noted above indicate the current desire on the part of the PLA and Chinese leadership to probe just how far they can push regional states and the United States into acquiescing to China's presence and activities in Indo-Pacific waters. This goal is a political counterpart to China's military operations, and rewriting the norms of regional conduct without having to risk even a minor military

confrontation would be an enormous success for Chinese policymakers. The comprehensive buildup of Chinese military power, then, should be recognized as a step in the broader geopolitical expansion of Chinese influence, providing the means necessary to achieve regional acceptance of Chinese aims, however those may be defined in the future. For this reason, the regional response to China's buildup holds great importance in predicting future security trends.

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The Regional Response

The advances in PLA and North Korean military spending, development, procurement, and deployment have occurred despite continuous U.S. efforts to engage China and North Korea politically for the purposes of confidence building and, in the case of China, constructive engagement in regional and global issues. From this perspective, engagement has yet to be successful, though it has remained one tool for keeping communications open with Beijing and Pyongyang, as well as a means for assessing strategic developments and political trends.

Chinese military growth, however, has not occurred in a regional vacuum. Indo-Pacific nations have responded to Beijing's buildup (and North Korea's provocations) with a flood of spending on advanced naval and air assets. Recognizing the centrality of the commons and the necessity of keeping open the territorial waters that lead to them, nations throughout the Indo-Pacific are building up their

submarine fleets. Some industry sources expect over one hundred new submarines to be built over the next two decades, at a cost of \$53 billion.¹⁴ Australia, for example, will double its fleet of six submarines with new models over the next decade, and Japan will delay retiring older subs, thus effectively increasing its modern diesel fleet from sixteen to twenty-two in coming years. Moreover, Australia is involved in the production of the next generation F-35 stealth fighter, and Singapore is an official Security Cooperative Participant in the F-35 program. Both Japan and South Korea are expected to purchase several dozen of the aircraft when it becomes available in the mid- to late-2010s.

Japan and South Korea. Both Japan and South Korea continue to field sophisticated national militaries, with particular strengths in naval and ground forces. In addition to its submarines, Japan has forty guided missile destroyers, four of them with Aegis systems and SM-3 missiles, while Seoul plans a current force of four Aegis-equipped ships among its ten destroyers. Since the end of the Cold War, Japan's antisubmarine warfare (ASW) capability has been of secondary importance, but it still maintains significant ASW assets, including 101 P-3C patrol planes and ASW-capable submarines and surface vessels. Japan's fighter fleet comprises 250 aging F-4s and F-15s, and newer indigenous F-2s, and Tokyo is actively seeking a next-generation stealth fighter to replace its older platforms. South Korea has nearly 470 F-15s, F-16s, and older F-5Es and is a likely candidate to purchase the F-35 later this decade. Responding both to North Korea's missile program and long-term Chinese capabilities, Japan has been more heavily involved in ballistic missile defense development and deployment than South Korea. Tokyo works closely with the U.S. military on information sharing, testing, and development of both sea- and land-based defense systems and has successfully intercepted several sea-based test missiles, most recently in late October 2010. South Korea, however, has concentrated on short-range ballistic missile defense capabilities entirely focused on the North Korean threat.

India. Given its population and strategic position astride the Indian Ocean waterways, as well as its longstanding tensions with China over land borders, India has the potential to be the most significant military counterweight to China in the Indo-Pacific commons. It is, however, decades away from being on par with the PLA. While maintaining its nuclear deterrent, India has embarked on a major conventional building campaign and now deploys seventeen submarines, eight guided missile destroyers, twelve frigates, and twenty-four corvettes. In addition, it has nearly 650 fighters and ground-attack fighters, more than 200 transport aircraft, and 326 helicopters. Some industry sources indicate that India will be the single largest procurer of naval equipment over the next decade, spending over \$39 billion.¹⁵ In addition, India is currently developing with Russia a purported fifth-generation stealth fighter, the PAK-FA, to complement its fighter and ground-attack aircraft.

Washington must seek to maintain an open, liberal international system in the Indo-Pacific, one in which no state obtains a preponderance of power that can be used to unilaterally force changes in the security balance in the Indo-Pacific commons.

Southeast Asia. Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam all maintain small coastal navies (mainly large numbers of patrol craft, some frigates,

and corvettes), and they lack larger surface combatants. Singapore currently has four submarines in active service, and Vietnam has contracted for six Russian-made diesel subs. Malaysia has two new subs, and Indonesia is planning to procure submarines sometime this decade. Southeast Asian air forces are smaller, although Indonesia has 256 military planes of all types, including nearly 75 fighter and attack aircraft (F-16, Su-27, and Su-30 among them), which are at varying levels of readiness.

Despite the range of capabilities discussed above, none of the Indo-Pacific militaries can ensure security on its own. Their capabilities, however, can complement U.S. forces in many cases, and our allies will prove increasingly important as we field common systems in missile defense, fighters, and submarines. Nevertheless, the United States will remain the ultimate guarantor of stability in the Indo-Pacific commons for the foreseeable future, unless Washington decides to reduce America's capabilities, commitments, or role. In light of this reality, Washington's hesitancy over the past decade to publicly challenge Chinese provocations has led many in the Indo-Pacific region to wonder whether American policymakers, both Republican and Democrat, are resigning themselves to an Indo-Pacific in which China has much greater influence and indeed redefines international norms of behavior in the commons. Such an environment would increase uncertainty and insecurity. Washington therefore must seek to maintain an open, liberal international system in the Indo-Pacific, one in which no state obtains a preponderance of power that can be used to force changes unilaterally in the security balance in the Indo-Pacific commons.

Forging a Regional Strategy for the Twenty-first Century

The potential for uncertainty, insecurity, and instability in the Indo-Pacific region has grown over the past decade. Despite continued attempts to forge a pan-Asian community or closer working relationships, distrust and minor conflicts among Indo-Pacific nations have increased, as has domestic instability in countries like Thailand and the Philippines. Overshadowing all that has been the emergence of the Chinese military as a regional force that is increasingly assertive in areas it considers central to Chinese national security. With access to the Indo-Pacific commons remaining of the highest economic and political importance for all nations in the region, as well as for the United States, it is no surprise that these nations are increasingly concerned about stability in the commons and their own access to vital communications routes.

Choosing a strategy to ensure security in the Indo-Pacific commons is a political act. The United States must not only commit to maintaining its leadership and influence in the region, but also forge a credible and realistic strategy for doing so. In the absence of greater trust and a viable indigenous security mechanism among the nations of the Indo-Pacific, stability can be ensured only by an active, forward-leaning, collaborative strategy on the part of the United States. America's strategy should have three parts: an enhanced, superior, forward-based U.S. military presence in the region; an innovative new diplomatic approach to allies and partners; and a political goal of helping create a more liberal Indo-Pacific.

U.S. Capabilities: Enhancing Forward Presence and Power Projection

To say simply that the United States must remain the preeminent military power in the Indo-Pacific is to

downplay both the military trends detailed in the last section as well as the burden entailed in being such a power. Given current budget realities, the U.S. military will likely have to buy and fight smarter in the years ahead regardless of which political party controls Congress. That requires matching force structure and posture to achieve the biggest strategic effects and have the greatest likelihood of influencing the political decisions of potential competitors in the region. This must also be done in preparation for the period in the 2020s when U.S. force levels will be at their lowest, as many of the ships and planes bought in the 1980s and 1990s are retired.

A regional strategy must be based on U.S. forces enhancing their forward presence and power projection capabilities in the Indo-Pacific.

A regional strategy must be based on U.S. forces enhancing their forward presence and power projection capabilities in the Indo-Pacific. Calls for a "lighter footprint" or an offshore balancing role for the United States ignore the "tyranny of distance" in the Pacific as well as the political impact of a decrease in U.S. presence. Steaming times (at a standard transit speed of sixteen knots) from the main U.S. naval base in Yokosuka, Japan, to the South China Sea under normal conditions would be close to one week, while it would take over ten days for reinforcements from Pearl Harbor, and over two weeks from 3rd Fleet headquarters in San Diego. Thus, the United States is unlikely to be able to maintain stability during a crisis or intervene in a timely manner, even

Distances and Steaming Times

From Hawaiian bases, it is 3,700 miles to Guam, the closest major forward U.S. Navy and Air Force base; from Pearl Harbor, it is approximately 6,200 kilometers to Yokosuka and 8,100 kilometers to Taiwan, making for a twelve day normal transit. The Strait of Malacca is located 10,800 kilometers from Pearl Harbor, with a steaming time of over two weeks. From Yokosuka, Singapore and the Strait of Malacca are 5,300 kilometers away. From Guam, it is 2,760 kilometers to Taiwan and 4,949 kilometers to the Strait of Malacca.

with air power, unless it can use bases in Japan and Okinawa close to the likely flashpoints in the Indo-Pacific. The more U.S. forces and materiel are required to respond to contingencies, the more important forward basing and deployment becomes.

Given the growth in Chinese military capabilities noted above, U.S. planners are aware that forward-based forces increasingly are at risk, particularly in the case of conflict between China and the United States. But reducing the U.S. presence in the Indo-Pacific region would increase uncertainty and limit U.S. military options. Reduced war-fighting options may well lead commanders to rely on long-range strike assets, including U.S.-based strategic bombers and air- and sea-launched cruise missiles.

Yet our presence in the Indo-Pacific also gives us the ability to influence actors' behavior on a continuing basis. There is much uncertainty today in regional capitals regarding the U.S. commitment to its security partners in the Indo-Pacific. Some doubt that Washington will intervene when necessary to maintain stability, while others see a gradual reduction in U.S. maritime and air activities in the region as indicative of a reduced ability to intervene militarily. Their perception of our readiness and commitment influences their political calculations, whether benign or malign. This reality also militates against any reduction in U.S. presence in the Indo-Pacific.

In the coming decades, U.S. military force structure in the Pacific must focus on the weapons systems most appropriate for defeating potential adversaries' key strengths, and it must be postured to increase U.S. forward presence in the Indo-Pacific in both peacetime and times of conflict. The United States must be able in times of crisis to intervene quickly and effectively in crucial waterways or areas of conflict throughout the commons. Moreover, increased numbers of U.S. naval and air assets will blunt the increased presence of PLAN ships and PLAAF aircraft during peacetime, thus underscoring our commitment to regional stability. Some of this can be done by reposturing current and projected forces to increase our presence without making new budgetary demands; however, further modernization and upgrading of key systems is necessary, as well as increasing the number of crucial assets. Key elements in such a force structure and posture concept include:

- a. **Maintaining superiority of the under-sea domain** through a larger U.S. attack submarine force. The current U.S. Pacific Fleet force of twenty-four active attack submarines and two cruise missile submarines (SSGNs) needs to be increased, as does the forward basing of three subs at Guam and three in Yokosuka, on a rotating basis. The U.S. Navy should ultimately seek to have forty-five subs in the Pacific (up from the current thirty) to maintain coverage of key sea lines of communication and open water areas such as the South China Sea and eastern precincts of the Indian Ocean, assuming only one-third of that force—approximately fifteen subs—will be at sea at any given time. This posture will stress the submarine fleet as older Los Angeles-class subs are retired before the Virginia class is at full strength at thirty boats; the production rate of Virginia-class subs thus should be increased from two per year, as analyst Ronald O'Rourke of the Congressional

Research Service suggested, and newer boats should be deployed to the Pacific once available.¹⁶

- b. **Increasing the forward posture of the number of surface combatants**, to continue to “use the sea as maneuver space,” as the U.S. Navy’s Naval Operating Concept puts it. The Navy should increase the regular deployment of destroyers (DDGs) and cruisers (CGs) to the western Pacific. Currently, only seven DDGs and two CGs are forward ported in Yokosuka, while just two cruisers and six destroyers are at Pearl Harbor. The U.S. Navy should expand temporary berthing space at both bases or build up berths at Guam to move forward from San Diego Aegis-capable CGs and Aegis-capable DDGs for extended cruises; this will increase U.S. patrol capabilities throughout the region and provide fuller sea-based ballistic missile defense coverage against both North Korean and potential Chinese threats. Having canceled the DDG-1000 (Zumwalt) program at three ships, no fewer than thirty of the thirty-eight guided missile cruisers and destroyers deployed to the Pacific Fleet should be Aegis-capable with advanced SM-3 Block IIA missiles (current U.S. Navy plans call for having a total of thirty-two Aegis ships fleetwide by 2013). These platforms will also provide offshore support to littoral operations by the United States and allied countries (discussed in the section below on allies).
- c. **Temporary forward basing of a second U.S. aircraft carrier**, most likely at Pearl Harbor. While this would be controversial, given projections of China’s submarine and ballistic missile capabilities, having the ability to form a second carrier strike group quickly in the region provides

both a surge force potential as well as a political statement about U.S. commitment to the Indo-Pacific. Further, expanding berthing facilities at Guam for temporary stays would also provide flexibility for U.S. naval forces, even with the risk of Chinese ballistic missiles, thereby decreasing steaming times to the western Pacific and allowing for increased U.S. presence on a regular basis.

- d. **Enhancing U.S. Air Force forward presence** in the Indo-Pacific to offset the tyranny of distance and ensure the ability to respond immediately to crisis situations. First response in many contingencies may come from U.S. Air Force units, but the United States currently has only two F-15 squadrons and two F-16 squadrons in Japan, and will have one F-22 squadron at Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii (a joint Hawaii Air National Guard and U.S. Air Force unit). B-1, B-2, and B-52 expeditionary bomb squadrons rotate in and out of Andersen Air Force Base on Guam, which also has rotating F-22 units. U.S. airpower capabilities need to be augmented, with hardening of airfields and hangars at Andersen and Kadena Air Base and basing of multiple squadrons of F-35s in Okinawa and Japan when available to form a quick response force. Similarly, the United States should base half of its total F-22 force on the West Coast of the United States and Hawaii (along with necessary refueling tankers), where it can be moved quickly to bases on Guam and in Japan, since the F-22 is the only U.S. fighter that will be able to defeat China’s integrated air defenses and fifth-generation aircraft. At least one squadron of F-22s should be constantly based, on a rotating basis, on Okinawa if shelters are hardened. In addition, development and

production of the Next-Generation Bomber needs to be fully funded to have a credible capability to penetrate heavily defended airspace by 2020, operating from the continental United States or forward bases such as Guam and Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

- e. **Maintaining and increasing comprehensive cyber and ISR capabilities**, given the disadvantages of operating so far from the continental United States. Effective employment of ISR assets will allow U.S. forces to pre-position in areas of brewing conflict or during the early stages of conflict, thereby potentially snuffing out crises before they get out of hand. ISR requirements will include increased satellite coverage and expanded listening posts, but also use of mid- and high-level UAVs like Global Hawk and Fire Scout to saturate the airspace for information gathering. The current plan to have just nine Global Hawks for the entire U.S. Pacific Command area is insufficient, and the numbers of both Global Hawk and the maritime Broad Area Maritime Surveillance version should be increased to no fewer than thirty, which would provide ten platforms in the air on a regular basis. In addition, the United States will have to integrate information sharing among ISR assets to achieve seamless domain awareness in the Indo-Pacific commons. Given China's development of computer network operations, the U.S. military must aggressively pursue cyber defense capabilities, as well as explore cyber attack capabilities to exploit weaknesses in China's "informationized" warfare systems.

This force structure and posture builds on current U.S. strategy and force levels but focuses on increasing the systems most suited to defeating likely threats and upgrading or expanding bases

from which the systems need to operate. The strategy therefore allows for greater presence in the Indo-Pacific region without immediately increasing budget costs, but it does call for significant investments over the long run in procurement of subs and bombers, upgrading DDGs, and increasing ISR assets. Given the current and likely trends in the Indo-Pacific security environment, the United States must commit to maintaining both a qualitative and quantitative edge in the most sophisticated systems, including fighters and bombers, submarines, ballistic missile defense, and satellites.

However, assuming that U.S. forces can do the same, or more, with less will eventually invite unacceptable levels of risk in both times of peace and war. In peacetime, a reduced U.S. presence, or even the perception of such, will increase uncertainty in the minds of our allies and partners and invite probing by nations that seek to change the status quo. This pattern has been evident in the recent past in East Asian waters. This could lead to a vicious circle that could result in miscalculation or assertiveness on the part of rising powers like China, causing further decline over time in regional stability. At moments of crisis or conflict, of course, the inability of U.S. forces to intervene quickly and decisively would deny the United States the strategic and operational advantage, limiting the opportunity to prevent or mitigate hostilities, or possibly even placing victory in doubt.

That said, U.S. military posture is but one aspect of a strategy to ensure security in the Indo-Pacific commons. Not only will U.S. forces have to work more closely with other nations in the years ahead, but a new diplomatic approach to allies and partners will be needed to reap greater benefits for regional stability and common interests.

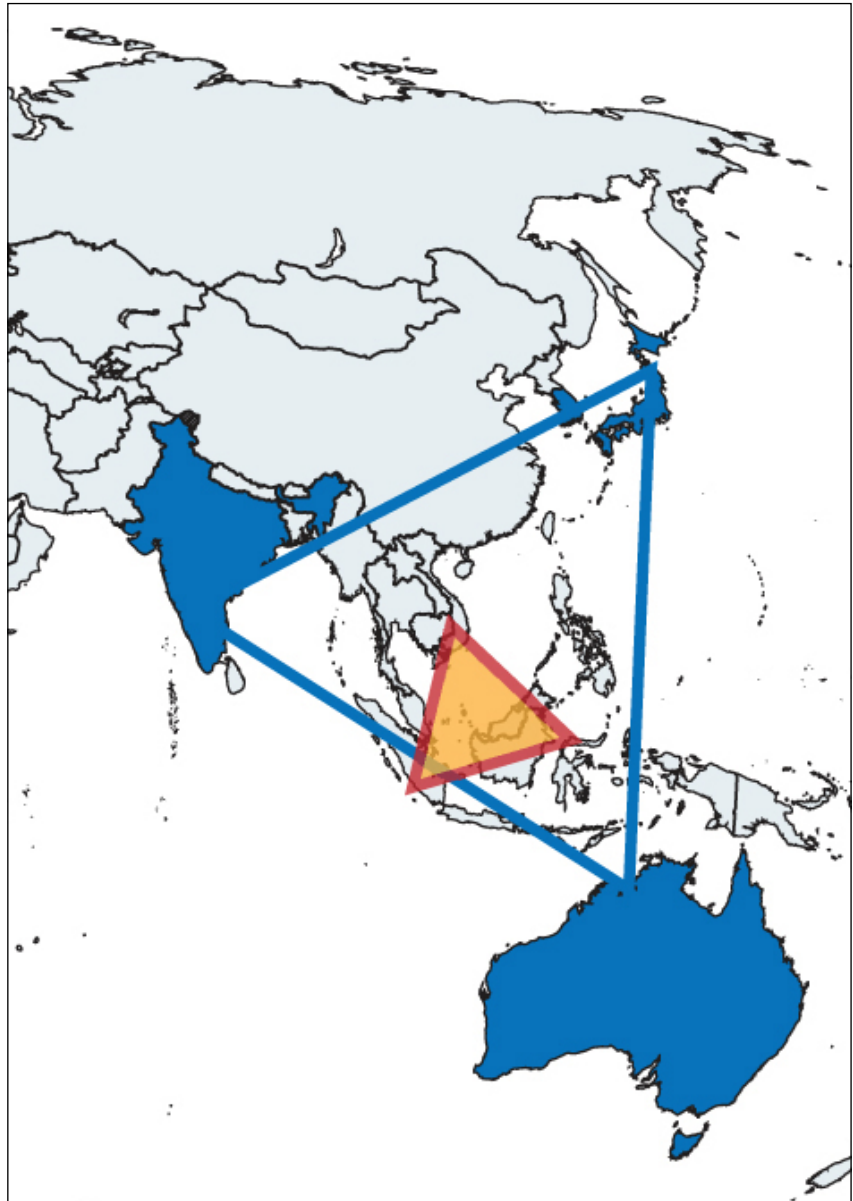
The "Concentric Triangle" Strategy: A New Approach to Friends and Allies

For the past six decades, the United States has had a "hub-and-spoke" strategy in East Asia, through

which Washington has maintained formal bilateral security alliances with five nations: Australia (1951), the Philippines (1952), South Korea (1953), Thailand (1954), and Japan (1960). Forward basing in Japan, South Korea, and, until the 1990s, the Philippines, meant a strategic northern and southern presence for U.S. air and naval forces. Intelligence sharing, particularly with Australia, and the presumption of access to bases in Thailand and Australia, provided further support for U.S. operations. Moreover, increased security cooperation with nonaligned states, such as Singapore, also created potential basing options and partnership capabilities.

For the foreseeable future, this hub-and-spoke model will remain the primary security arrangement between the United States and its allies. However, given the challenges to security in the broader Indo-Pacific commons posed by China's buildup, North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, and numerous territorial disputes, among other issues, it is time for the United States to pursue a new diplomatic strategy that explicitly links its close partners with strategically important nations who increasingly share common concerns in this expanded geographic space. This strategy should seek not only to draw current U.S. allies closer together, but also to encourage other Indo-Pacific powers to forge closer relations with the United States and the region's leading liberal nations. As such, the strategy can serve as a vehicle for enhancing coordination among leading Indo-Pacific states based on a set of shared issues, and it can even serve as a basis for engaging China and Russia in regionwide discussions.

FIGURE 3
THE CONCENTRIC TRIANGLES



Conceptually, this new strategic arrangement can be thought of as a set of “concentric triangles,” based on rough geographic coverage. The outer triangle links Japan, South Korea, India, and Australia; the inner triangle connects Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam. These triangles include the Indo-Pacific’s largest and oldest democracies, leading economies, and most strategically located nations. Each has an abiding interest in ensuring

free passage and stability in the Indo-Pacific commons, and each is either a democratic nation or is moving at its own pace to more liberal political, economic, or social systems. Each also does or can play a significant security role in the commons, based on current and projected capabilities. The goal of the concentric triangle strategy is to forge a shared consensus on stability and cooperation in the commons, tailored to the interests and strengths of each state.

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The Outer Triangle. The outer triangle, composed of Japan, South Korea, India, and Australia, should serve as the anchor for security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, as well as for U.S. policy in the region. The economic strength, political stability, liberal social system, and military capability of the nations in the outer triangle place them at the core of ensuring security in the coming decades.

U.S. policy should aim at enhancing military cooperation with the nations of the outer triangle. To do so, Washington should structure political discussions with Tokyo, Seoul, Canberra, and Delhi to address significant regional security issues and set standards and norms for the commons. Each country should take responsibility for first response to problems in the areas closest to them, but immediately bring in the other members of the outer triangle for political consultation and contingency planning. To ensure a concerted approach on the part of these actors, regular security exercises and an “outer triangle summit” of principals and deputies

should be held annually, with observer sessions open to other nations.

India obviously occupies a different position vis-à-vis the United States compared to the three formal allies. However, the clear desire on the part of Delhi and Washington to forge a strategic partnership should lead to greater political and security cooperation in the Indian Ocean area, in the Strait of Malacca, and in relation to Southeast Asia generally. Coordination between the U.S. and Indian navies, along with that of Australia, can ensure free passage through the Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok straits. Those three countries can also work with Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore to focus on security in the littorals. In addition, the United States and Australia should seek gradually to pool ISR data with India, giving a comprehensive awareness of threats and conditions from the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific.

Both Japan and South Korea have major roles to play in protecting sea and air lines of communication in the Sea of Japan/East Sea, Yellow Sea, and East China Sea areas, but likely will do so only in concert with Washington. Establishing combined patrolling, ISR work, and joint exercises will help ensure that free passage from the Pacific to Indian waterways is not put at risk. Washington should encourage each to purchase UAVs for reconnaissance, thereby reducing stress on the U.S. fleet. This will require Tokyo and Seoul to commit to maintaining top-level navies, with significant numbers of modern guided missile destroyers, submarines, manned and unmanned reconnaissance assets, and fighters. Enhanced joint exercises, modeled on Malabar 08, should also be a regular part of the military preparation of these leading countries.

The Inner Triangle. The “inner triangle,” composed of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam, will play a unique role in enhancing littoral security and focusing on the “inner commons” of the lower South China Sea, including the key Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok waterways. Here, the United States will act as the balancer of last resort but should coordinate training, joint exercises, and capabilities

enhancement among these nations. U.S. Navy littoral combat ships should partner with coastal patrol craft of the inner triangle nations, maintaining presence, responding to small-scale problems, and continuously training to improve awareness of security in the commons. The strategic location of Vietnam and Malaysia, in particular, should be leveraged to provide unique ISR data on the commons. Washington should attempt to secure air and naval basing access—not permanent bases—in Indonesia, Malaysia, and if possible Vietnam, thereby expanding U.S. options for operating both steady-state and surge forces in the region.

At the same time, U.S. strategy should encourage the further liberalization of each of the inner triangle countries. Indonesia, especially, should be a focus of U.S. policy in the region, given its size, influence, and potential for leadership in Southeast Asia. As with the outer triangle states, a regular summit among U.S., Indonesian, Malaysian, Singaporean, and Vietnamese leading ministers should be organized, along with supporting programs to enhance civil society, economic liberalization, and education. The inner triangle nations should be a particular target for upgraded military-to-military exchanges of young officers, as well as quasigovernmental programs like the Fulbright and International Visitors Program, designed to reach out to the next generation of regional leaders. Both the Philippines and Thailand, which have been U.S. allies for decades, should also be considered for inclusion in the inner triangle. However, the Philippines has been tilting closer to China in recent years, while Thailand continues to suffer from domestic political instability; Washington should reach out to both but must be wary of engendering misplaced hopes for enhanced cooperation.

Vietnam is a bit of an outlier in this group, given its continued commitment to one-party rule. However, its strategic location and security differences with China, as well as its growing economic role, make it an important member of the inner triangle as well as a focus of continued U.S. attention.

Finally, in keeping with the goal of creating a community of interests in the Indo-Pacific, Washington

should facilitate enhanced exchanges between the inner and outer triangles, including summit meetings, grassroots exchanges, and economic partnerships.

This concentric triangle strategy is not designed to supplant current pan-Asian initiatives, like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, the East Asian Summit, or the Asian Defense Ministers Meeting. Each of those gatherings, while useful, plays to the lowest common political denominator, thus limiting their ultimate usefulness in addressing regional issues or establishing effective policies. The concentric triangle strategy, however, is not value neutral, but seeks to provide a common set of regional norms, behaviors, and coordination among most of the leading nations of the Indo-Pacific. This can serve as a template for an expansion of the community of nations participating for political, economic, or security reasons. Its effectiveness should be evident in its clarity on security and other issues, as well as its flexibility in responding to challenges to the system.

**Encouraging a more liberal Indo-Pacific
is a political goal as well as a strategy.**

Equally important, the goal of this strategy is not to encircle China, or constrain it in any way. Rather, the goal is to encircle the commons and establish a credible, effective regional security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region based on the cooperation of liberally inclined countries. Such an arrangement must be based on a proven set of norms that have benefited global security, economic, and political mechanisms. Based on transparency, respect for sovereignty, and the defense of the commons, this arrangement can enlarge the group of nations that adhere to its principles and that commit some level of national effort to upholding the shared goals. It will of course take time to build the trust and working relationships necessary to make the concentric triangles theory work. However, as Washington and its partners do so, they will be steadily moving toward a broader

regional goal that will be the most important factor in securing the commons: the strengthening of a more liberal Indo-Pacific.

Shaping a Liberal Indo-Pacific Region

This new strategy for security in the Indo-Pacific commons is not designed explicitly to promote democracy, liberalism, or a freedom agenda. It aims to be a realistic strategy for ensuring stability and the interests of nations that contribute to Indo-Pacific prosperity, including the United States. It recognizes regional trends and the nascent threats to stability represented by the growth of China's military, North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, and unresolved territorial disputes. It also uses history as a guide for understanding how uncertainty can turn into insecurity and instability without clear norms of behavior and nation-states' willingness to spend national treasure on underwriting security as a public good, no matter how little they can contribute.

Yet it is also true that liberal nations with strong civil societies, representative governments, and a history of acting to some degree for the common good have created the global and regional security arrangements that have benefitted themselves and those around them. The post-World War II global era was one in which a liberal internationalist movement set broad boundaries of international behavior and promoted global economic growth, underwritten by a firm U.S. military commitment. This provided the conditions for regional (and global) growth. Challengers to that system have always existed, most notably the Soviet Union, but today there is increasing evidence that security in the world's most economically and politically dynamic region cannot be taken for granted.

For this reason, a strategy for twenty-first-century security in the Indo-Pacific commons must be as realistic about the type of regional environment that will promote stability as it is about the means necessary to counter disruptive influences. Encouraging a

more liberal Indo-Pacific is therefore a political goal as well as a strategy. From this perspective, then, the United States is not a status quo power, nor should its policies be status quo. The desire to enhance liberal political and social systems around the globe is as much a part of U.S. security policy tradition as is restraint in the use of force.

Such a goal is made more important by the renewed groupings of authoritarian or illiberal powers in recent years. From China's long-time support for North Korea to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or an informal Iran-China-Venezuela axis, challengers to the liberal international order are increasingly cooperating, providing each other moral support, and seeking to undermine international institutions and norms. While authoritarian nations do not have a good track record of allying for extended periods of time, the planned transfer of nuclear technology from Iran to Venezuela, North Korean nuclear support to Syria, and Russia's likely selling of advanced air defense systems to Iran show how illiberal regimes support each other in ways that directly undermine regional and global stability.

The allied military posture outlined above is a necessary means to curtail the disruptive effects of authoritarian cooperation and assertiveness, and so is the building of a stronger, liberal, free-trade regional order. Using the concentric triangles strategy to forge a common agenda among the key Indo-Pacific states will also encourage other countries to join the liberal community, out of self-interest if for no other reason. To this end, Washington should pursue the following policies for enhancing the region's liberalism:

- Convene regional meetings of liberal or liberal-leaning countries, including the Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand along with the United States and its partners, which is an important step to supplement pan-Asian gatherings like the ASEAN Regional Forum. India and Japan, as the region's oldest and largest democracies,

should be encouraged to play a leading role in such efforts.

- Enhance lower-level diplomatic meetings, sponsor grassroots gatherings, and aid civil society activists in the hopes of encouraging liberal growth throughout the region, as well as use cultural and student exchange as a way to influence younger generations in those societies. Newer democracies, like Taiwan and South Korea, should be encouraged to share their expertise on these issues.
- Offer special aid and trade packages to those countries that commit to contributing to Indo-Pacific security, through whatever means they can muster.

This is not a plan for an Asian NATO, but it is also not a call for a value-neutral strategy. The United States and its allies must make explicitly clear their interests in stability in the Indo-Pacific commons, actively underwrite such efforts, and reach out to other nations in the region to join the common cause. The spread of democracy has made Europe, first Western then Eastern, stable for several generations. East Asia benefited most of all from the spread of liberal systems over the past three decades, with the United States playing the key supporting role. Today, given its increased importance to global prosperity, the cause of wider Indo-Pacific security and liberalism should be U.S. policymakers' primary focus. The expenses we will incur to do so will pale next to the costs we will pay for failing to secure the Indo-Pacific commons in the coming decades.

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