

NIDS International Symposium on Security Affairs 2022

# The New Normal of Great Power Competition: The U.S.-China-Russia Relationship and the Indo-Pacific Region



The National Institute for Defense Studies, Japan

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**The New Normal of Great Power  
Competition: The U.S.-China-Russia  
Relationship and  
the Indo-Pacific Region**

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## Chairperson's Summary

The National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS) held the International Symposium on Security Affairs in virtual format on December 7, 2022. The theme was “The New Normal of Great Power Competition: The U.S.-China-Russia Relationship and the Indo-Pacific Region.” This symposium was intended not only to foster security dialogue but also to improve research quality, stimulate interaction, promote mutual understanding among the international public and experts, and contribute to security policy.

The symposium was divided into two parts. Session 1 examined “U.S.-China Rivalry and the Russian Factor” and Session 2 “Impacts on the Regions.” In addition, a keynote speech was delivered between the two sessions. Each session consisted of presentations by panelists followed by a discussion and Q&As with panelists. Below is a summary of the symposium's Session 1, keynote speech, and Session 2, in that order.

In Session 1 on “U.S.-China Rivalry and the Russian Factor,” presentations were made by Dr. Nick Bisley (Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and Professor of International Relations, La Trobe University), Dr. You Ji (Professor of International Relations, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University), and Dr. Yamazoe Hiroshi (Senior Fellow; America, Europe, and Russia Division; NIDS). Mr. Masuda Masayuki (Head, Government and Law Division, NIDS) conducted the discussion with the panelists.

The first speaker, Dr. Bisley, gave a presentation titled, “Minilateralism and the Dynamics of Great Power Competition in Asia: The Case of AUKUS and the QUAD.” He reviewed the history of multilateral security mechanisms in the Indo-Pacific region. Groupings were established after the Cold War to address increasingly complex transboundary challenges, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus, and the East Asia Summit. However, their effects have been limited. As competition between the United States (U.S.) and China intensified, a recent trend has been to move toward minilateralism that brings together a smaller group of members to deal with a narrower set of issues. Their examples include the quadrilateral security cooperation (QUAD) among Japan, the U.S., Australia, and India, and the trilateral security partnership among Australia, the U.K., and the U.S. (AUKUS). Dr. Bisley explained their characteristics as follows. The QUAD is focused on security but also addresses matters concerning prosperity and order. Yet, outcomes have been confined to signaling unity through discussions, and they have translated into few tangible actions.

While members share concerns about China, they have considerable policy gaps in other areas. AUKUS, in contrast, is more an architecture of interstate industrial policy. It is increasingly mentioned in key policy documents and becoming a crucial part of policy decision-making. AUKUS is comprised of two pillars—provision of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia and broader cooperation on advanced technologies—and seems unconcerned with the diplomatic consequences of its actions.

The Ukraine war has revealed that the risk of war is higher than previously recognized. The war has also reaffirmed the danger in the Taiwan Strait. With respect to minilateralism, while the Ukraine war showed what the West can and cannot achieve through sanctions against Russia, it remains to be seen whether the West has the political will to impose similar economic sanctions on China in the event of a Taiwan contingency. In conclusion, Dr. Bisley summarized that there are limitations to what minilateralism can achieve.

The second speaker, Dr. You, delivered a presentation entitled, “The Russo-Ukrainian War and its Impact on the Major Power Rivalry.” In explaining the strategic context, he expressed the view that bloc competition has militarized amid the Sino-U.S. rivalry. Furthermore, the Ukraine war has demonstrated that a similar situation could occur in Asia. He then explained the China-Russia relationship as follows. The two countries have strengthened their military and security cooperation, including expanding joint exercises. However, they are not allies, and each can act freely. While they share a common strategic interest in creating a multipolar international order, there are also differences in their interests, as illustrated by China’s decision not to provide weapons and ammunition to Russia for the Ukraine war. Thus, although the two countries have complementary economic ties, they have no common ideology, nor shared values.

Dr. You explained that China sees Russia as being provoked into waging the war in Ukraine but is opposed to the war. A Russian defeat or collapse is not desirable for China from the perspective of balancing against the U.S. The damages the war has caused to China include the loss of substantial investments in Ukraine and bilateral trade, as well as the possibility of secondary sanctions by the West. Conversely, if Washington becomes preoccupied with the war in Europe, it gives China more maneuverability in the Asian theater, raising the question of whether the U.S. can simultaneously wage war on two fronts. Dr. You explained that the Ukraine war has both positive and negative implications for China.

Furthermore, Dr. You noted that China perceives the U.S. attempt to build a multilateral cooperation network in the Indo-Pacific region as a threat and is countering

it with its own multilateral cooperation. The new Cold War-style rivalry is heating up, and he expressed concern that the asymmetric military capabilities of the two blocs will prompt the U.S. to take preventive actions.

The last speaker, Dr. Yamazoe, gave a presentation titled “The Collapse of Putin’s Great Power Ambitions” for a Japanese perspective. According to Dr. Yamazoe, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia, having been a great power in the past, has regarded the post-Soviet space outside its borders as territory where Russian people reside and should be integrated. With great power ambitions, the Putin administration has acted to establish the post-Soviet space as a sphere of influence where Russia can unilaterally use power and to have it recognized by other great powers. To this end, Russia’s options have included bolstering state power, diplomatic and economic means to align interests, and forceful means to inflict damage on others. With Ukraine as the primary target of these great power ambitions, Putin has endeavored to incorporate Ukraine into the Russian sphere of influence through inducements into economic integration frameworks and political engagement.

However, Russia’s actions vis-à-vis Ukraine from 2014 to 2022 shattered these great power ambitions. The forced annexation of Crimea in 2014 and intervention in the Donbas conflict dramatically weakened economic ties with Ukraine, compelled Ukraine to engage in defense efforts in break with Russia, and eroded its state power due to economic sanctions. In turn, Moscow began to excessively rely on tactics that inflicted damage on Ukraine and Western countries that supported Ukraine. In 2022, Putin waged a large-scale military operation in an attempt to force Ukraine’s submission to Russia and integrate it forcefully. However, Russia underestimated the increased resilience of Ukraine since 2014. It exposed Russia’s lack of military capability to achieve its goal and weakened its state power. Moscow does not have the ability to unilaterally wield power over Ukraine, and Western countries refuse to recognize Ukraine’s subjugation to Russia. Other countries in the post-Soviet space, even if not seeking a break with Russia, have begun to disregard its power, further narrowing the scope for Russia’s exercise of power. Additionally, while Moscow maintains friendly relations with some Middle Eastern countries, it has grown more dependent on these relationships.

Lastly, Dr. Yamazoe noted that China, as a non-Western country with significant power, is an important partner for Russia’s great power ambitions. Both countries have demanded a better position in facing the Western presence in the international order and emphasized their own norms. Meanwhile, Russia lacks the capability to support China amidst the multifaceted U.S.-China competition. Nor has Beijing provided substantial



direct support to enhance capabilities for Russia's military operation against Ukraine. Russia continues to engage in war while its capability declines and may face the risk of regime collapse. This situation is expected to make it challenging not only for Western countries but also for China to treat Russia as a leading country in the world.

In Session 1's discussion, Mr. Masuda provided an overview of the recent debates on great power competition. In the context of the U.S.-China rivalry, the debates have revolved primarily around the rise of China, which is increasing its influence particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, and the threat of Russia has not necessarily been a major focal point. Based on this introduction, the discussant asked questions to the three speakers, which can be summarized into the following two broad issues.

The first issue concerns the impact of the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 as well as Russia's moves on future Sino-Russian cooperation and unilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. Dr. Bisley noted that enhanced China-Russia cooperation, along with the Russian threat, will complicate the implementation of regional unilateral mechanisms like the QUAD, whose members had been addressing China's security threat as a common concern. Dr. You analyzed that, despite China's dissatisfaction with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, it is highly sensible for China to force the U.S. to expend its resources on both the European and Indo-Pacific fronts as long as military conflicts are a possibility in the Taiwan Strait and elsewhere. Due to this strategic convenience, he expected that China-Russia strategic cooperation will continue to deepen.

The second issue is whether China and Russia and their competitors in the Indo-Pacific region—the U.S. and Australia—have the intention and capability to surpass the great power competition and build an international order. Dr. Yamazoe mentioned that Russia's idea of a multipolar world does not seek to build a new order that encompasses the whole international community. Rather, it seeks recognition of a certain sphere of influence and Russia's superior position within an order led by great powers, akin to the 19th-century Concert of Europe. Russia has indicated that it will cooperate with China in interfering with the U.S.'s ability to act. Nonetheless, in the ongoing war, Russia has prioritized escalating armed conflicts over maximizing cooperation with China, which in turn exposed Russia's lack of capability to be involved in transforming the international order.

Dr. Bisley stated that, in Australia, China is seen as a challenger that will fundamentally overturn the existing international order. Dr. You noted that, amid China's military and economic rise, the option to incorporate China into the U.S.-led international order and

coexist peacefully is becoming increasingly unlikely. He expected that unless the U.S. and China accept each other's regional hegemony, both countries will continue to pursue a balance of power (parity) in all fields, from military to economic and technological.

For the keynote speech, Dr. Edward Luttwak (Head of Washington Strategic Advisers) delivered an address titled, "Can China Fight a War?" He described the tendency of recent state leaders to start wars without consideration of the prospects of victory, giving the examples of the invasion of Ukraine by President Putin of Russia and the Iraq War by President Bush of the U.S. He stated that initiating war is a difficult choice to make, making it also difficult to determine whether the Chinese government will go to war or not.

He then analyzed whether China has the capability to successfully wage a war against the U.S. and its allies in the Indo-Pacific region in order to achieve its strategic objectives.

Dr. Luttwak presented the concept of "sustainable war," a war in which nations' ability and resolve to continue fighting can be sustained over an extended period following the outbreak of hostilities. He gave the examples of Russia's maintenance of social infrastructure through self-sufficiency in food and energy in the invasion of Ukraine since February 2022, as well as the low impact of domestic anti-war movements on the execution of the war. A focal point of the discussion is whether China possesses the conditions to fight a sustainable war. Dr. Luttwak explained that, although China used to be self-sufficient, it now relies on imports for items like livestock feed, such as wheat and soybeans, as well as protein sources, such as meat and dairy products, and may experience food shortages in around three months after initiating war. Moreover, China relies on imports for energy, making it highly vulnerable if war causes imports to cease. He pointed out that China's social infrastructure, which would support a prolonged war, could easily be put at risk due to economic sanctions and other factors.

Dr. Luttwak then discussed a potentially greater challenge for China—securing a sufficient number of soldiers which is constrained by the one-child policy. A war with Taiwan is estimated to result in 25,000 casualties. With mothers becoming emotional over their son's death, coupled with media coverage, casualties would have significant impact in China. In this context, he mentioned the clashes between the Indian Army and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Ladakh in 2020. Whereas India disclosed the number of casualties promptly following the clashes and conducted funerals nationwide, China released glorified information seven months later. As this example reveals, combat-related deaths have considerable impact in China. Dr. Luttwak analyzed that Chinese society has low tolerance for sacrificing soldiers, and from the perspective

of stabilizing the domestic rule of the Chinese Communist Party, Party leaders cannot ignore the issue of “post-heroic warfare,” a war that emphasizes the public’s avoidance of war casualties.

Moreover, in maritime operations, the value of aircraft carriers and destroyers has diminished, while the value of submarines has increased. Dr. Luttwak noted that torpedo attacks by Japanese submarines and attacks by U.S. forces in the Taiwan Strait could potentially inflict significant damage on Chinese vessels. Taking these factors into account, he concluded that, in the Taiwan Strait scenario example, China does not have the capability to fight a prolonged war while imposing many sacrifices on its people, as is the case in Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine.

In Session 2 on “Impacts on the Regions,” presentations were made by Dr. Aries Arugay (Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science, University of the Philippines Diliman), Dr. Jagannath Panda (Head, Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs, Institute for Security and Development Policy), and Dr. Satake Tomohiko (Senior Fellow, Defense Policy Division, NIDS). Dr. Shoji Tomotaka (Head, Asia and Africa Division, NIDS) conducted the discussion with the panelists.

Dr. Arugay gave a presentation titled, “Torn Between Two Powers: The Philippines in the U.S.-China Rivalry.” He explained that, in contrast to the previous Rodrigo Duterte administration’s tough stance on the U.S., Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who just took office as president about six months ago, seeks to reboot Philippines-U.S. relations, such as by making progress in the implementation of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. Conversely, Dr. Arugay did not expect a change in the Philippines’ emphasis on China. He gave examples, including continued cooperation between the Philippines and China on resource exploration in the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea), President Marcos’ plan to visit China in January 2023 before visiting the U.S., and adherence to the One China policy. At the same time, he cautioned that the One China policy can have multiple interpretations to the Philippines.

Additionally, while acknowledging that it is premature to assess the foreign policy of the recently established Marcos administration, Dr. Arugay pointed to various challenges facing the independent foreign policy that the administration is exploring. Specifically, he raised questions, such as whether the administration can maintain its hedging strategy amid the increasing uncertainty of the region’s strategic environment. He also wondered whether the administration could formulate foreign policies that align personal and national interests, given that not only President Marcos but also his family have a relationship with China. Dr. Arugay then referred to President Marcos’ remark at

the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in November 2022 where he mentioned that the “best politics is to perform,” suggesting that his foreign policy may be limited to performativity that does not necessarily yield results, rather than performance that entails concrete outcomes.

Dr. Arugay also underscored the importance of Japan-Philippines cooperation. He mentioned that bilateral cooperation is making progress in various ways, including Japan's support for enhancing the capabilities of the Coast Guard and the construction of a subway line in the capital city of Manila, and stressed the importance of advancing middle power cooperation. In this context, he referred to a security survey conducted in the Philippines in 2022, in which Japan was a close second after the U.S. as the Philippines' favored partner for strengthening security cooperation.

The second speaker, Dr. Panda, gave a presentation titled, “Not Drawing a Parallel: An Indian Perspective on Ukraine and Taiwan.” Noting that it was inappropriate to draw a parallel between the Ukraine war and the Taiwan crisis, he discussed the importance of distinguishing the similarities and differences between the two. Starting with the similarities, both Ukraine and Taiwan are democracies and free-market economies, and they are adjacent to authoritarian states. As for the differences, Ukraine is an independent sovereign state unlike Taiwan. China and Taiwan are also separated by sea unlike Ukraine, which has a contiguous border with Russia. In addition, he noted on the geopolitical significance of Taiwan situated in the heart of the Indo-Pacific region. Particularly considering its location in the Indo-Pacific, the Taiwan crisis has a greater security significance for Japan and India compared to the war in Ukraine.

Moreover, Dr. Panda stated that the situation does not allow for complacency, despite views mainly expressed by security experts in the U.S. that China's use of force against Taiwan is not imminent. Rather than sudden use of force, he described that China is pursuing a gradual use of force, beginning with occupying islands in the South China Sea and then islands near Taiwan before extending to the main island of Taiwan. Additionally, Dr. Panda noted that Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the severe Western sanctions against Russia are certainly offering insights to China, whose PLA lacks combat experience.

In light of these circumstances, Dr. Panda emphasized that partner countries in the Indo-Pacific, including the QUAD, must be prepared to respond to unforeseen events. In particular, India needs to take actions recognizing that the Taiwan crisis may have ripple effects on the security issues of India, even if it is obliged to maintain a neutral stance in the West versus China and Russia dynamics. He underscored the importance

of Japan-India cooperation, saying that India needs realistic plans that do not necessarily assume U.S. engagement.

The last speaker, Dr. Satake, gave a presentation titled “Great Power Competition and Japan” for a Japanese perspective. He defined great power competition as a competition for power, interests, and values, as well as a competition over an international order encompassing all of these elements and its legitimacy. While the U.S. once pursued engagement, expecting China and Russia to integrate into the liberal order and carry out domestic reforms, their cooperation with the West gradually declined from the mid- to late 2000s, posing a greater challenge to the existing order. Underlying this shift were also changes in the U.S.-China power balance, coupled with the rise of populism and decline of democracy, which together weakened the legitimacy of the Western order. The Ukraine war since February 2022 revealed that the liberal order did not have the universal influence that Western countries thought it had. Against this backdrop, the U.S. abandoned integration of China and Russia into the liberal international order and is working with its allies to make a comeback against China.

Dr. Satake then presented an outlook for great power competition. Although Russia’s invasion of Ukraine ironically strengthened Western unity, democratic societies have latent instability. Conversely, China and Russia are confronted with their own mounting challenges, such as economic stagnation and the impact of Western sanctions. Furthermore, while both share the overarching goal of overturning the U.S.-led order, there are some differences between the two countries. On the one hand, Russia seeks to forcefully and radically change the order. On the other hand, China uses force but seeks a gradual transformation of the order, through peaceful means such as international organizations, and through the gray zone. In addition, the “China Model” lacks universality more than the Western order. Some argue that the world will likely see a “variegated” order, meaning, instead of the simple binary rivalry of “democracy versus authoritarianism” as observed during the Cold War, the variations in U.S. and Chinese influence will be manifested in each issue and domain differently.

Dr. Satake explained Japan’s response as follows. Japan has been among the countries that benefited the most from the post-war rules-based international order. Nevertheless, until Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Japan viewed great power competition as more or less another country’s affair. As Sino-Russian cooperation deepens, Japan finds itself facing crises on three fronts: China, Russia, and North Korea. Amid Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the escalation of tensions in the Taiwan Strait, Japan increasingly regards itself as a party to the great power competition.

The Kishida administration advocates a “fundamental reinforcement” of Japan’s defense capabilities, aiming to enhance autonomous capabilities that do not necessarily rely on the U.S. For a long time since the end of World War II, Japan has upheld a low-profile security posture, adopted a policy of prioritizing economic activities, and maintained diplomatic relations by separating politics and economics. In today’s severe security environment, however, the economy may become subservient to security.

Dr. Satake concluded his presentation with suggestions for “managing competition.” As long as competition itself should not become an end in itself, and as long as Cold War era containment is unfeasible, he noted that competition with China rests on co-existence. He also described that competition entails not only negative but also positive aspects, such as increased assistance and provision of public goods. The key is to maximize the positive aspects and minimize the negative aspects. In this vein, Japan should further strengthen the U.S.-led alliance network while exploring stable relations with China. Dr. Satake stated that cooperation with regional countries in information sharing, crisis management, and rulemaking will become ever more necessary, and highlighted the importance of Japan taking the lead in enhancing regional cooperation mechanisms.

In Session 2’s discussion, Dr. Shoji began with comments and questions regarding the three presentations. He asked Dr. Arugay about how the Marcos administration will deal with China and the U.S. if a Taiwan crisis arises, Dr. Panda about how India will respond if a Taiwan crisis arises, and Dr. Satake about the balance between security and economy in Japan-U.S. cooperation.

Dr. Arugay briefly discussed the relationship between the Philippines and Taiwan. He then suggested that, while the response of the Marcos administration will vary depending on the situation, it may adopt a U.S.-leaning response based on the history of such responses in the Philippines.

Dr. Panda responded that a contingency in Taiwan would be complex. He suggested that India will adopt a wait-and-see approach while preparing multiple emergency plans. He said that, with a large Indian population in Taiwan, India would first engage in negotiations with mainland China for rescue operations and then consider political and military support for the Indian people in Taiwan.

Dr. Satake noted that, while Russia’s invasion of Ukraine will not directly lead to a Taiwan contingency, the situation in Ukraine may have an impact on the power balance in the Indo-Pacific in the medium- to long-term. Regarding economic security, Dr. Satake stated that Japan should provide cooperation in coordination with the region by adhering to international rules.

In response to a question from the audience regarding international order building and domestic reforms, Dr. Satake noted that Japan strives to build an order based on rules that encompass diverse values, albeit the emphasis is on values such as human rights and democracy. Dr. Panda was asked about the Russian people's reaction to the invasion of Ukraine during his visit to Russia. He stated that there were wide-ranging discussions in the country, and that many experts and individuals expressed negative opinions. He also underlined the importance of India's relationship with Russia from the perspectives of their relationship since the Soviet era, diversification of diplomacy, and China and Pakistan issues. Dr. Arugay was asked about the Philippine government's position on the One China concept, and he explained that successive administrations have expressed slightly different viewpoints.

## *Chapter 1*

# **Minilateralism and the Dynamics of Great Power Competition in Asia: AUKUS and the Quad**

*Nick Bisley*

After nearly four decades of geopolitical stability, great power competition has returned to Asia, the world's most populous region. During those stable years, Asia's states and societies were able to take advantage of that long peace to drive a remarkable period of economic expansion. From Sino-American rapprochement in the 1970s through to the accession of Xi Jinping to the leadership of the CCP and his implementation of a much more competitive approach to Chinese foreign and defence policy, the region not only enjoyed dramatic economic growth and the attendant integration that it created as PRC growth forged a genuinely pan-Asian regional economy, but also explored multilateralism in a range of domains, most notably in relation to international security.<sup>1</sup> By the early 2010s, scholars and commentators were remarking on the region's security architecture, which comprised a mix of both competitive and cooperative ways of managing the diverse array of traditional and non-traditional security challenges confronting the region.<sup>2</sup>

Today, great power competition casts a long shadow over the region. The United States and China each has a view of its preferred configuration of regional order which is incompatible with the other. Indeed, each country increasingly views the other as antagonistic toward its interests and is settling in for a sustained period of overt competition. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has further destabilised the region and shown that the risks of conflict are very real, particularly given that the respective stake that the United States and China have in the key regional flashpoints is much greater than those they have in Eastern Europe. This context makes the emergence of what some have called a new 'minilateralism' an interesting and telling aspect of Asia's international security environment.<sup>3</sup> The revitalisation of the Quad and the creation of the AUKUS pact reflect both the ways in which exclusive and competitive tendencies have come to

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Bisley, *Building Asia's Security*, Adelphi No. 408, Routledge and International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> William T. Tow and Brendan Taylor, 'What is Asian security architecture?' in *Review of International Studies*, 36.1, pp. 95-116.

<sup>3</sup> Joel Wuthnow, 'U.S. 'Minilateralism' in Asia and China's Responses: A New Security Dilemma?' in *Journal of Contemporary China*, 28.116, 2019, pp. 133-50.



replace inclusive and cooperative instincts in the region as well as the impact of great power competition on the dynamics of Asia's international landscape.

This paper explores these trends in four parts. The first sets the context and defines what is meant by the return of great power competition and its causes. The second discusses security multilateralism in the region, why cooperative and inclusive approaches have been overtaken by exclusive and competitive approaches, and the broader appeal of minilateralism. The third details the revival of the Quad, the emergence of the AUKUS partnership, and how they have developed to date. The paper's final section examines how the dynamics of the Ukraine war are affecting these broader trends. It concludes by arguing that while minilaterals are appealing for states seeking to navigate a more competitive environment, there remain very real limits to what they can achieve in shaping the larger dynamics of strategic competition.

## **The Return of Great Power Competition**

The most striking feature of Asia's international relations in recent decades was the almost complete absence of great power rivalry for nearly 40 years following the normalisation of Sino-American relations.<sup>4</sup> On the foundations built by the grand bargain struck between the PRC and the United States, countries in the Asia-Pacific enjoyed an extensive period of geopolitical stability due to the acceptance of the regional order centred around American military and economic primacy.<sup>5</sup> A strong consensus emerged among the region's powers around a restrained approach to foreign and defence policy, allowing states to put a high priority on domestic economic development and state building. This in turn created not just a huge increase in human welfare as the reform programs of many countries succeeded in lifting millions out of poverty, but also reconstituted the region's economic structure leading to a genuinely pan-Asian pattern of trade and investment that had previously not existed.<sup>6</sup> Because of both the durability of the geopolitical settlement and the political interests that were staked to economic growth, as well as the interdependence of the region's key powers, most obviously between the United States and China but also between Japan and China, it seemed that, in the early years of the

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<sup>4</sup> Timo Kivimakki, *The Long Peace of East Asia*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Nick Bisley, 'Asia's regional security order: Rules, power and status' in *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 65.3, 2019, pp. 361-376.

<sup>6</sup> Shiro Armstrong and Tom Westland (eds), *Asian Economic Integration in an Era of Global Uncertainty*, Canberra: ANU Press, 2018.

21st century, geopolitical competition could be kept from returning to blight a region which was all too aware of the human price that will be paid when great powers fight for influence.

That sense of durability has come to an end as the economic success of the long period of geopolitical stability has brought about the end of the order on which it was built. China is no longer willing to live with the deal it struck with the United States and wants to create an international environment more conducive to its interests. For its part, Washington is not prepared to cede its standing in the region nor is it prepared to change the rules of the international road which underpinned an order centred around American power and influence.

The fraying of the old order began to become visible several years into the Obama administration. Following what proved to be a fruitless attempt to forge a more collaborative approach to the PRC,<sup>7</sup> the Obama White House initiated its ‘pivot’ to Asia. This was an effort to reorganize US policy away from the distortions of the war on terror, but was also more importantly an attempt to reconfigure US policy to deal with a rising China that was becoming more confident and making clear that it was not content to live forever in Washington’s shadow.<sup>8</sup> While the United States held out hope that the mix of engagement and military deterrence in Asia that had been the setting which Obama inherited might yet yield preferred results, at its core the ‘pivot’ was intended to shift US strategic policy to reflect the changing balance of power as well as the changes in attitude and intent from PRC elites.

From Beijing’s perspective, the pivot confirmed in the minds of its policy makers that the United States was not interested in accepting China’s new standing. Indeed, for some this was evidence that the United States was intent not just on maintaining the old order, but also that Washington wanted to ensure that the PRC was prevented from fully achieving its potential.<sup>9</sup> From 2011, the United States and China entered into a period of low-level competition which, from time to time, flared up, perhaps most notably with the PRC’s reclamation program in the contested waters of the South China Sea and subsequent militarisation of those installations. But it was not until the Trump administration that the United States began to adopt overtly competitive policies toward the PRC, and it famously also shifted its public rhetoric to match the new orientation.

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<sup>7</sup> Richard C. Bush, ‘The United States and China: A G2 in the making?’ in *Gaiko*, Vol 8, 2011, 9, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-united-states-and-china-a-g-2-in-the-making/>.

<sup>8</sup> Kurt Campbell, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia*, New York, NY: Twelve, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> Lanxin Xiang, ‘China and the “Pivot”’ in *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 54.5, 2012, pp. 113-28.

In the National Security Strategy released toward the end of 2017, the United States made clear that it was moving away from the focus on terrorism that had dominated its strategic policy since 2001 because of threats posed by great power competition, and the PRC was of course the principal focal point for these efforts.<sup>10</sup> Given how much Biden campaigned as an ‘anti-Trump’ candidate, it is striking just how much his administration has maintained his predecessor’s approach to the PRC.<sup>11</sup> While some of the more flamboyant rhetoric has gone, the tariffs remain firmly in place, and the administration is sending decidedly mixed signals about Taiwan.<sup>12</sup> In its National Security Strategy issued in October 2022, the administration makes plain that Washington sees itself in a full spectrum competition with the PRC.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the recent move to hobble the PRC semi-conductor industry in the CHIPS and Science Act is an act of economic coercion on the PRC of a kind that the Trump administration could only dream.<sup>14</sup>

Great power competition is back on centre stage in global politics. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine at the Western end of the Eurasian landmass is a reminder to those in Europe that the longer run rhythms of geopolitical competition have not been tamed by markets and globalization. At the Eastern end of that continent, however, contestation has been visible for some time, fortunately without the tragedy of conflict yet.<sup>15</sup> And while competition is undeniably evident in a number of domains, the overarching structure and purpose of that competition remains unclear. While the Biden administration has recently sought to frame its strategy in more ideological terms, seeking to defend democracy from the threat of autocracies,<sup>16</sup> it remains a fairly abstract proposition. Ultimately, US strategy

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<sup>10</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, DC: Office of President of the United States, December 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Feinberg, ‘China Policy from Trump to Biden: More Continuity than Change,’ *PacNet Pacific Forum*, No. 12, March 5, 2021, <https://pacforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/PacNet12-2021.03.05.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Wertheim, ‘The Troubling Implications of Biden’s Taiwan Gaffes,’ *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 24, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/05/24/troubling-repercussions-of-biden-s-taiwan-gaffes-pub-87196>.

<sup>13</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy*, Washington, DC: Office of the President, October 12, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Victoria Cooper, ‘Explainer: The CHIPS and Science Act, 2022,’ *United States Studies Centre*, Sydney: University of Sydney, August 11, 2022, <https://www.uscc.edu.au/analysis/explainer-the-chips-and-science-act-2022>.

<sup>15</sup> Nick Bisley, ‘Rising Powers and the Return of Geopolitics’ in Mark Beeson and Nick Bisley (eds), *Issues in 21st Century World Politics*, Palgrave, 2017, pp. 9-22.

<sup>16</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy*, p. 8.

in its competition with the PRC in Asia appears to be about defending the status quo as it has existed for the past few decades. The status quo is described in the same language used by the Trump administration: a 'free and open Indo-Pacific'.<sup>17</sup> Given the opacity of its political system, it is not surprising that the PRC's long run aims are less than clear. Based on its actions to date and the many comments from Xi Jinping and other CCP elites, the PRC wants to change the international environment to one more conducive to its interests. In particular, it aims to reduce its vulnerability to US coercion and to the threat it perceives as being presented by liberal ideas.<sup>18</sup> But it is not clear if the PRC has the kind of expansive international ambition of the USSR to remake the world, nor is it evident if there is a consensus within elite circles in Beijing about just what kind of regional or international order would best suit the PRC's interests. This creates a distinctive environment in which power-political competition within the region and amongst the world's largest economies is the pre-eminent factor in the region's international relations, but one in which the dynamics and purpose of competition remain unclear.

## Multilateralism and Minilateralism

During the Cold War, Asia was notable for its reluctance to embrace the broader global trend toward multilateralism and was not at all interested in multi-state groupings to grapple with security challenges. Created in 1967, ASEAN was the sole example of such a grouping, and for its first three decades was focused on intra-elite solidarity to facilitate post-colonial state and nation building programs in the context of high intensity wars being fought on its doorstep driven by Cold War competition.<sup>19</sup> To advance their security interests regional powers looked after themselves or sought to bolster their own efforts with support in the form of alliances. The series of bilateral security arrangements established in the early years of the Cold War, which came to be known as the San Francisco system, enabled the United States to organize the Asian theatre of its global contest with the USSR and provided for defence and security guarantees for junior

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<sup>17</sup> White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*, Washington, DC: Office of the President, February 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Nadege Rolland, *China's Vision for a New World Order: Implications for the United States*, Washington, DC: National Bureau for Asian Research, October 2, 2020, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-vision-for-a-new-world-order-implications-for-the-united-states/>; Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Sean Narine, *Explaining ASEAN: Southeast Asian Regionalism*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002.

partners. These arrangements were avowedly not organized on the sorts of multilateral principles through which the United States managed its Western European strategy.

Following the Soviet collapse and the US decision to retain the basic logic and structure to its Asia policy as set out in the 1995 and 1998 Nye Reports, the Cold War security structure remained in place. But alongside this more conventional realist mode of advancing security interests, Asian states began to explore the possibilities of security multilateralism. Over about a decade and a half, Asia moved from having essentially no forms of security multilateralism to a situation in which some critics argued it had too many.<sup>20</sup> This began with the creation of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994 as the Southeast Asian grouping began to recognize that the primary security challenges facing the organization and its members were likely to come from outside Southeast Asia, and that the group needed to engage with those sources of insecurity.<sup>21</sup> This trend included the establishment of other ASEAN centred bodies like the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus process,<sup>22</sup> and the East Asia Summit (EAS).<sup>23</sup> It also included adding security matters to the work agenda of APEC which had, prior to the turn of the millennium, assiduously avoided the topic, as well as the creation of a number of minilateral groupings such as the Trilateral Security Dialogue (involving Japan, Australia, and the United States), the Six Party Talks, and the short lived first iteration of the Quad. During this period, Japan and Australia both tried to create yet more groupings (which ultimately failed) in Kevin Rudd's Asia Pacific Community<sup>24</sup> and Hatoyama Yukio's East Asia Community.<sup>25</sup> China was an active participant in this process as a member of many of these new mechanisms, but also established the Shanghai Cooperation Organization<sup>26</sup> and sought to reenergise the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building

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<sup>20</sup> Nick Bisley, *Building Asia's Security*, Adelphi No. 408, Routledge and International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Rudolfo Severino, *The ASEAN Regional Forum*, Singapore: ISEAS Press, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> See-Seng Tan, 'The ASMM Plus: Regionalism that works?' in *Asia Policy*, No. 22, 2016, pp. 70-75.

<sup>23</sup> Jae Chol Kim, 'Politics of Regionalism in East Asia: The Case of the East Asia Summit' in *Asian Perspective*, 34.3, 2010, pp. 113-36.

<sup>24</sup> Frank Frost, 'Australia's proposal for an 'Asia Pacific Community': issues and prospects,' *Australian Parliamentary Library Research Paper*, December 1, 2009, <https://www.aph.gov.au/binaries/library/pubs/rp/2009-10/10rp13.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Ryo Sahashi, 'Japan's vision: Building an East Asian Community' in *East Asia Forum* August 5, 2010, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2010/08/05/japans-vision-building-an-east-asian-community/>.

<sup>26</sup> Jing-Dong Yuan, 'China's Role in Establishing and Building the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)' in *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19.67, pp. 855-69.

Measures (CICA).<sup>27</sup>

The culmination of this period was the accession of Russia and the United States to the EAS in 2011. By this time, the idea of a regional 'security architecture' had begun to be used in scholarship and policy circles to describe the curious mix of security mechanisms states were using to advance their interests.<sup>28</sup> The US alliance system retained its importance for those within its orbit, with many states strengthening and expanding their bilateral ties with the United States even as they embraced multilateralism.<sup>29</sup> Realist instincts remained even though the liberal ideas of multilateralism were flowering across the region.

There were a number of reasons that states were turning to multilateral security initiatives.<sup>30</sup> The most immediate was due to the complex array of security threats and challenges states were facing created by the networks of globalization. The trade and investment ties that brought significant prosperity also opened up societies to vulnerabilities that required multi-state collaboration to tackle. But it was not just the need to deal with transnational terrorism or infectious diseases that led to the creation of such expansive and ambitious entities as the EAS. Many also saw that the existing regional balance of power was changing, and advocates for multilateralism saw in these large gatherings an opportunity to influence the major powers. Indeed, in their more ambitious moments, some felt the institutions had the potential to 'enmesh' the major powers in their modes of operation and even potentially act as a means through which a new regional order could be managed cooperatively.<sup>31</sup> As the regional architecture began to take shape, notwithstanding its somewhat cluttered setting, Asia had achieved a great deal in forging a wide array of means through which the states of the world's most dynamic region could manage their security interests. This multilateralism had the two core attributes of being inclusive and cooperative.

More than 10 years have elapsed since the expansion of the EAS, and the promise

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<sup>27</sup> Xi Jinping, 'New Asian Security Concept For New Progress in Security Cooperation,' Remarks at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, Shanghai Expo Centre, May 21, 2014, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/20140527\\_678163.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/20140527_678163.html).

<sup>28</sup> Tow and Taylor, 'What is Asian security architecture?'

<sup>29</sup> For example, Nick Bisley, 'Securing the "Anchor of Regional Stability"? The Transformation of the US-Japan Alliance and East Asian Security' in *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 30.1, 2008, pp. 73-98.

<sup>30</sup> See also Michael J. Green and Bates Gill (eds), *Asia's New Multilateralism: Cooperation, Competition, and the Search for Community*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Evelyn Goh, 'Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies' in *International Security* 32.3, 2007-08, pp. 113-57.

of this inclusive and cooperative architecture has not been fulfilled. The speed with which the United States and China have moved into a period of enmity and competition is remarkable, and the tragic inability of the many multilateral bodies to make any meaningful response to the COVID pandemic, a crisis of the kind that these bodies really ought to have been able to respond to, has shown just how hollow that vision of security multilateralism was. However, although geopolitical contestation, the return of nationalism, and a global pandemic have hobbled the more expansive entities, states have not stopped seeking to work with one another to advance their security interests. But where in the past they had turned to inclusive and cooperative bodies, now it is entities that are exclusive and competitive that have captured the imagination.<sup>32</sup> As the region began to move away from self-help and bilateral modes, it experimented with expansive region-wide bodies yet also dabbled with more narrowly focused forms of collaboration. These ‘minilateral’ groupings, so called to distinguish entities that involved more than two members but which had relatively circumscribed membership from larger cooperative groupings, were present during the expansion of inter-state cooperation in the early part of the 21st century, albeit at the margins of state priorities and the attentions of analysts and scholars. But no more, as minilaterals have come to the fore as their scale allows them to move swiftly and narrow functional focus promises a tangible grip on policy outcomes of the kind the large multilateral bodies have found so difficult to achieve.

## The Quad

The Quadrilateral Security Initiative, as it was then styled, was created in 2007 to bring together Australia, India, Japan, and the United States to discuss shared regional security concerns.<sup>33</sup> Japan’s then Prime Minister, Abe Shinzo, was its most visible and articulate advocate. Yet the group dissipated in a little over twelve months, reflecting the significant gaps that existed amongst the states about their broader security interests; the grouping was not suited to the geopolitical circumstances of that time.<sup>34</sup> The group was reconvened ten years later, prompted by the deteriorating security environment and the growing

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<sup>32</sup> Bhubindar Singh and Sarah Teo (eds), *Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific: The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism, and ASEAN*, London: Routledge, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Howard Loewen, ‘The “Quadrilateral Initiative”: A New Security Structure in Asia?’ in *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 27.1, 2008, pp. 101-110.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Flitton, ‘Who really killed the Quad 1.0?’, *Lowy Interpreter*, June 2, 2020, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/who-really-killed-quad-10>.

convergence of interests amongst the four members.<sup>35</sup> The first meeting of the revived Quad was held on the margins of the 2017 EAS, followed by a number of meetings of security officials and military officers in 2019. In that year, the Quad Foreign Ministers met in New York, alongside the UNGA meeting in September, with a follow-up ministerial gathering in Tokyo in 2020 and a virtual meeting in early 2021. The Quad then instituted an inaugural leaders' level meeting hosted by President Joe Biden. The most recent leaders' meeting was to be held in Sydney in May 2023, but had to be cancelled due to President Biden's budget challenges. It was instead held on the sidelines of the G7 meeting in Hiroshima, although it was formally hosted by Prime Minister Albanese of Australia.

Although the revived Quad has moved away from the formal title of its first instantiation – it is simply 'the Quad' in all of the formal statements and communiqués – it remains primarily focused on security cooperation with, ostensibly, a particular emphasis on coordinating military operations and aligning the direction of security and strategic policy amongst its members. In the statement issued following the first of the leaders' meetings, a document that has the feel of an overarching statement of purpose, the group sets out its vision in plain but expansive terms: the Quad aims to promote 'the free, open, rules-based order, rooted in international law and undaunted by coercion, to bolster security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.'<sup>36</sup> From this, it is clear that although the Quad has as its immediate motivation the desire to coordinate security policy, it also has ambitions to buttress the foundations of prosperity and is conceived more broadly as a means to protect a particular configuration of regional order.

It has thus evolved, fairly swiftly, from a grouping intended to focus on security matters understood in relatively traditional military terms, to a body working on a much more expansive set of domains. The grouping has established programs related to climate change, public health, vaccination, and high technology and, in 2022, it added infrastructure, educational exchange, humanitarian and disaster relief, and space to its burgeoning agenda. This reflects the realisation that in the contemporary world, security is multifaceted and requires more than just coordination of defence policies and joint military programs and exercises. It is also a realisation that the larger challenge of geopolitical competition amongst the great powers is itself expansive, entailing not

<sup>35</sup> Sumitha Narayanan Kutty and Rajesh Basrur, 'The Quad: What It Is – And What It Is Not' in *The Diplomat*, March 24, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/the-quad-what-it-is-and-what-it-is-not/>.

<sup>36</sup> Prime Minister's Office, *Quad Leaders' Summit Communique*, September 24, 2021, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/quad-leaders-summit-communicue>.



only traditional jostling for influence over the military balance and areas of strategic significance, but also infrastructure, standards, new frontiers of technology, and the substance of the region's international 'rules of the road'. For the Quad to make a meaningful contribution to advancing shared aims in relation to this competition requires engaging across the spectrum.

The Quad has rapidly moved through the gears in the five years since it reconvened. Yet this expansion of the agenda is notable for two distinct facets. First, it does not have work program related to matters of the economy beyond some talk around infrastructure. Nor is there any indication that this is likely in the future. Given the way that the PRC is able to use its economic weight to advance its foreign policy agenda,<sup>37</sup> this lack of an economic dimension is a distinct shortcoming, and one that is a product of the significant gaps in interest and policy inclination among the four members in the economic domain. Second, the expansion of the agenda risks undermining the organization itself. The traditional logic and appeal of minilateral groupings is their ability to focus on narrow and potentially complex or contentious issues which larger, more wide-ranging groupings find too difficult. One of the abiding lessons of Asia's rapid expansion of inclusive and cooperative multilateral mechanisms is that big and ambitious agendas present a major problem both in terms of the scale of work that must be undertaken as well as for the credibility of the processes. Among the reasons why bodies like the ARF and EAS are perceived to fall short is that they have failed to deliver meaningfully on a big and broad agenda.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, because of the speed and breadth of the issue expansion undertaken by the Quad, some have even taken to questioning whether or not it can be reasonably described as a security institution.<sup>39</sup> At best, the widening out of the policy scope dilutes the Quad's capacity to act on core security business, and at worst it risks suffering from the same fate as the larger mechanisms: becoming seen as little more than a talk shop.

These remain potential problems. There are, however, some already evident weaknesses with the grouping's activities. The most obvious weakness is that in its half-decade of reconstitution, the Quad has not undertaken any meaningful steps to turn its ambitious rhetoric into policy substance. It remains firmly in the realm of diplomatic and strategic signalling of intent and of policy solidarity. To be clear, these

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<sup>37</sup> Mark Beeson, 'Goeconomics with Chinese characteristics: the BRI and China's evolving grand strategy' in *Economic and Political Studies*, 6.3, 2018, pp. 240-56.

<sup>38</sup> See Nick Bisley, 'The East Asia Summit and ASEAN: Potential and Problems' in *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 39.2, 2017, pp. 265-72.

<sup>39</sup> See Tanvi Madan, 'The Quad as a security actor' in *Asia Policy*, 17.4, 2022, pp. 29-56.

things matter in international politics, but they should not be confused with action in relation to matters of international security. One scholar has argued that the Quad's members, particularly the three resident Asian powers, have considerable potential to have an important strategic effect by filling the time gap that exists between any activity to change the status quo and the United States' ability to respond to see that challenge off.<sup>40</sup> In short, by pooling resources of resident powers, the Quad could act as a deterrent in the short term. But that remains in the realm of potential and one that, given the current stasis, remains a long way from being realised. This relates to the second major problem: the very real limits to what the four states can meaningfully do together. With the exception of the United States, the members have significant operational constraints on their militaries and their capacity to take collaborative steps of the kind that would impose costs on China or some other putative challenge is highly limited. Given the budgetary and political constraints faced by Australia, India, and Japan, it is unlikely that they can rectify this issue in the short to medium term. Finally, while the security interests of the four powers have converged in some areas – most notably, all share a high level of unease about growing PRC power and its consequences for the region's strategic balance – there remain significant gaps between the four on a range of security and security-adjacent domains. None more clearly illustrate this than the not-at-all-unified response of the Quad members to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

## AUKUS

The Australia-United Kingdom-United States trilateral security partnership (AUKUS) was announced very suddenly on 16 September 2021. Partners of the three were given little, or in some cases no, advance warning, and indeed many branches of government within the three members were caught unawares.<sup>41</sup> The grouping is, at present, intended to strengthen the shared security interests of the three participants in the Indo-Pacific region by increasing their individual and collective defence capabilities through technology sharing. This takes its most visible form in the commitment by the members to support Australia to acquire, deploy, and maintain at least eight nuclear powered submarines. The move was surprising for a number of reasons beyond the manner of its announcement and the shock of Australia taking the expensive and diplomatically damaging decision to

<sup>40</sup> Oriana Skylar Mastro, 'Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific' in *Asia Policy*, 17.4, 2022, pp.8-18.

<sup>41</sup> See 'An AUKUS surprise – Best of The Interpreter 2021,' *Lowy Interpreter*, December 29, 2021, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/aukus-surprise-best-interpreter-2021>.

cancel its contract for submarines with the French Naval Group. Most obviously, it puts the sharing of complex and controversial technology at the forefront; nuclear options had previously been ruled out by Australia for both political and technical reasons, and the United States and United Kingdom had also previously been unwilling to share such technology even with allies. It also displays a willingness to bear risk and a level of disregard for partners and friends that sits uneasily with the longer run practice of Australian diplomacy. And this risk appetite reflects the acute sense of insecurity that the participants perceive in the region. To take such drastic steps, the members clearly perceive the region to be entering a period of sustained strategic risk. While AUKUS is, technically, a minilateral grouping, it is unlike most forms of multilateral security cooperation. Conventional groups, whether large or small, expansive in scope or narrow in focus, are primarily about intergovernmental policy coordination to advance shared security goals. However, AUKUS is a means to advance broader security goals through concrete developments in technical areas, rather than policy coordination. In this sense, it is less like a piece of security architecture and more like a high-end example of inter-state industrial policy. Also in this sense, its prospects of having an impact on the security dynamics of the region are greater than more conventional forms of inter-state collaboration.

For some months after the initial announcement, AUKUS remained little more than a press-release, at least viewed from outside government. In part, this reflected the complex domestic politics of each side as well as the challenges of navigating an entirely new area of inter-state collaboration. More than a year on, however, the partnership has begun to be fleshed out, at least in terms of the specific intent of the collaborative programs.<sup>42</sup> It has also certainly captured the imagination of many commentators in public debate, and unsurprisingly has become a key component of the members' broader policy planning. AUKUS is repeatedly named in the Biden administration's recently published National Security Strategy, is central to Australian long term strategic planning, and is crucial to the United Kingdom's plans in the Indo-Pacific.

The AUKUS partnership has two distinct pillars of operation. The first is focused on the submarine program and is intended to provide a full spectrum suite of collaboration, engineering, training, and support to deliver nuclear powered, but not nuclear armed, submarines for Australia to be deployed as soon as possible. Australia is committed to

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<sup>42</sup> Peter K. Lee and Alice Nason, '365 Days of AUKUS: Progress, Challenges, and Prospects,' United States Studies Centre, University of Sydney, September 14, 2022, <https://www.ussc.edu.au/analysis/365-days-of-aukus-progress-challenges-and-prospects>.

making the submarines in country, and this is a hugely complex task for which Australia is presently poorly equipped. In March 2023, the three countries announced a three phase 'optimal pathway' to address the concerns that had originally been raised about the time it would take for the Australian-built AUKUS submarines to be operational. In the first phase, the United States and United Kingdom would operate nuclear-powered submarines out of Perth on a rotational basis. In the second phase, Australia will purchase between three and five Virginia Class submarines from the United States, pending US Congressional approval, in the early 2030s. The 'AUKUS' class vessels based on a next-generation UK design will be built in Australia and expected to be delivered in the early 2040s.<sup>43</sup>

The second pillar is about sharing technologies to develop 'advanced capabilities' in a wide range of areas. At the time of writing, those capabilities to which the three countries are committed include: undersea drones, quantum technology, artificial intelligence, cyber, hypersonic and counter-hypersonic capabilities, electronic warfare and innovation, and information sharing. To advance the ambitious goals under both pillars, the three governments have carved out considerable bureaucratic resources. The US National Security Council has established an AUKUS director to manage the broader inter-agency process, while the Department of Defense has an AUKUS Senior Advisor, currently experienced Asia policy hand Abe Denmark, alongside a senior naval officer. In Australia, the country for whom AUKUS promises the most, formal roles have been established in all the key institutions: a nuclear-powered submarine task force was established in the Department of Defence, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has set up an AUKUS taskforce within its Geostrategy Group, and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet has formed a Nuclear Powered Submarine and National Naval Shipbuilding Enterprise Group. The United Kingdom has reportedly allocated roles within its Ministry of Defence, although at the time of writing they are not yet publicly available. Importantly, the first regulatory hurdle has been cleared with the completion of negotiations and signing of the 'Exchange of Naval Nuclear Propulsion Information Agreement' in November 2021.<sup>44</sup>

AUKUS is notable for many reasons. It represents a harder edge to security

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<sup>43</sup> Department of Defence of Australia, *The Optimal Pathway*, March 2023, <https://www.defence.gov.au/about/taskforces/aukus/optimal-pathway>.

<sup>44</sup> Xavier Vavassuer, 'AUKUS: Australia Signs Naval Nuclear Propulsion Information Sharing Agreement' in *Naval News*, November 22, 2021, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/11/aukus-australia-signs-naval-nuclear-propulsion-information-sharing-agreement>.

cooperation from both the United States and Australia. In contrast to the Quad, which has sought very deliberately to adopt a public rhetoric that is focused on ASEAN and its modes of security cooperation,<sup>45</sup> AUKUS seems unconcerned with the diplomatic consequences of its actions which are contributing to a destabilised and uncertain strategic environment. Regional powers, such as Indonesia, are disconcerted by the establishment of AUKUS and the proliferation risks it represents, yet efforts to assuage these concerns have been scant and ineffective.<sup>46</sup> And of course, the speed of its emergence and the depth of resource commitment is illustrative of the shift in mood in the region. Australia, for example, was an enthusiastic multilateralist and approached regional efforts inspired by the liberal notion that cooperation among states would have knock-on effects, with the belief that meeting regularly and talking about technical matters of policy coordination would lead to cooperation in more sensitive areas, and over time build a sense of trust and common cause. While that flame has not entirely gone out, the motivations behind AUKUS and the actions undertaken to date make clear that this no longer holds sway in Washington, Canberra or London. Where inclusive and cooperative instincts once ruled the day, now hard-edged competitive dynamics are what matter most.

## The Ukraine War

The central motivation behind the growth of exclusive and more hard-edged minilateral groupings in Asia is the rise of geopolitical competition and a highly unsettled regional security environment. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has only served to accentuate those perceptions in Asia. Many assumed that the self-evident risks and costs of a full-scale invasion would mean that Putin would be deterred from action. Yet his willingness to defy conventional cost-benefit calculations illustrates that the risk-reward calculus varies much more widely than was previously recognized. This means, for many, that the basic risk of Asia's many long running flash points escalating into war is higher than previously recognized. This is not to say that Xi is likely to follow Putin's lead and launch an attack on Taiwan, but rather to emphasise that when assessing the prospects of acute security crises in the region, Ukraine reminds us to be more conservative than we may

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<sup>45</sup> See, for example the treatment of ASEAN in this foreign ministers' communique: Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia, "Quad Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific", February 11, 2022, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/quad-cooperation-indo-pacific>.

<sup>46</sup> Grant Wyeth, 'Indonesia challenges AUKUS' in *AFSA Monthly: Voices from Asia*, August 3, 2022, <https://www.australianforeignaffairs.com/afaweekly/indonesia-challenges-aukus>.

previously have been. This sentiment further erodes support for the old multilateralism and increases the prospects of exclusive and competitive mechanisms over the short to medium term. Expect more agreements among states to develop military technologies, pool resources, and balance power, and fewer baroque initiatives to advance a common sense of community across the region.

There is one other interesting way in which the Ukraine war experience may affect the minilateralism discussed in this paper. When Russia invaded Ukraine, the response of the United States and many others was to impose heavy sanctions on the Russian federation, including locking many of the country's banks out of parts of the international financial system. The extent and reach of these sanctions took many observers by surprise. Yet Russia has proven highly resilient in the face of this, primarily because of a step that the West has not yet been willing to take: to sanction the full range of Russian hydrocarbon exports.<sup>47</sup> For a variety of reasons, Western powers have not been prepared to bear these costs to punish Russia. And while China would have taken note of the financial power that the United States was able to wield, it will have also noted what steps the West was unable to take. So one potential step that minilateral groupings might take is to coordinate ways in which they manage economic coercion that is deployed to punish or deter PRC aggression. Of course, this would be enormously challenging, particularly among the Quad members who have shown a decided lack of solidarity in responding to Ukraine, but it remains a powerful tool if the participants in minilateral groupings could muster the political will to use it.

## **Conclusion: Limits of Minilateralism**

Great power competition has returned to Asia and the threat of high intensity war increases seemingly by the day. Ten years ago, the risk of a conflict was non-zero in Asia, but the idea that the PRC and the United States would take steps leading to mutually assured economic destruction was almost unthinkable. Now, senior figures on both sides of the Pacific openly discuss the imminent prospects of war. Once optimistic political leaders, like Kevin Rudd, now concede that the strategic future is extremely gloomy.<sup>48</sup> It

<sup>47</sup> Jennifer A Dlouhy and Ari Natter, 'White House Vows to Avoid Future Sanctions on Russian Crude Oil,' *Bloomberg*, February 26, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-25/white-house-vows-to-avoid-future-sanctions-on-russian-crude-oil>.

<sup>48</sup> Eli Green, "'Grave risk': Rudd issues grim warning on China," *news.com.au*, November 22, 2022, <https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/leaders/grave-risk-rudd-issues-grim-warning-on-china/news-story/d848f8a05c5647bdb3a35dca5f60ac3a>.

is not surprising, therefore, that inclusive and cooperative forms of security cooperation are withering, and in turn that mechanisms that advance a harder-edged vision of security and which advance the participants' relative position within a competitive strategic dynamic are the order of the day. Yet as this paper has sought to show, there remain very real limits as to what these minilateral groupings can achieve. Whether this is because of the scale of technological task – many seasoned analysts have argued that even if Australia eventually is able to sail its nuclear powered submarines it will be far too late – or because of the way the region's political economy has been reconstituted by the PRC has meant that aligning strategic interests to manage Chinese power is almost impossible, the likelihood is that minilateral groupings will only ever make a marginal contribution to Asia's strategic balance.

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## *Chapter 2*

# **The Russo-Ukrainian War and its Impact on the Rivalry of Major Powers**

*You Ji*

The Russian-Ukraine war has changed the fundamentals of what we know about the world order. Although this war has been the first European war on the ground initiated by a nuclear power since the end of WWII, regrettably its impact is truly global, reshaping international geopolitics in a profound manner.<sup>1</sup> This paper is an initial assessment of Beijing's response to the war, focusing on its interaction with key parties involved in the war, especially in relation to Russia and the United States. Clearly, the post-Cold War strategic triangular relations between Beijing, Moscow, and Washington have undergone substantial alteration because of the war. The main theme of this piece of research is to address questions such as how these triangular relations will change, which direction the change will take, and what consequences the change will bring about to a new Cold War order in the world after the Ukraine war.

### **Beijing's Reaction to the Ukraine War**

Whether the eruption of the Ukraine war caught Beijing by surprise remains an unanswered question. Given the long-brewing period with talk of invasion and President Xi Jinping's decision-making style based on bottom-line thinking, Beijing should have had contingency plans. On the other hand, most Chinese strategists dismissed the possibility of a Russian invasion of Ukraine when Washington started to warn about an imminent Russian military attack against Ukraine in late January 2022. China's official media repeatedly mocked the US warning of war as an example of information warfare, especially when the Russian army did not enter Ukraine on the date Washington initially alleged would be the start of invasion. This position reflected a psychological preference for no war of the Chinese leadership and population.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the invasion was a disappointment for Beijing, as it worsened unpredictability of world geopolitical

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<sup>1</sup> Mykola Kapitonenko, "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine has Changed the World," *National Interests*, March 4, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Many ordinary Chinese made a substantial loss in the stock market right after the invasion.



strife deeply involving China. Logically, China was not on President Putin's side on this particular issue.

### ***Beijing in a Catch-22 Dilemma***

Immediately after the war broke out on February 24, 2022, one global talking point was whether Moscow notified Beijing in advance about its plan of invasion.<sup>3</sup> The western media widely circulated that Putin revealed the plan to Xi when they held a summit meeting on the occasion of Beijing's Winter Olympic Games in January. This allegation was officially dismissed by Qin Gang, China's ambassador to the United States.<sup>4</sup> It is simply common sense that the happy occasion of the Olympic Games was not ideal for talk of war. If Putin did notify Xi during the meeting, he would have breached a valued diplomatic protocol. Yet constructing a cardinal environment through a Xi-Putin summit would be conducive for Russian invasion even if Putin did not solicit any specific Chinese support.<sup>5</sup>

Here, it is interesting to analyze the hidden message behind the western media's speculation that Beijing knew about the Ukraine war beforehand. Had Putin indeed informed Xi about his war plan during the Olympic Games, he would have put Xi in a difficult situation: should Xi say, "Yes" or "No"? Either option would be harmful to Xi. If yes, the West would hold Beijing partially responsible for failing to persuade Putin not to start the war. On the contrary, if Putin had said nothing about the war during his meeting with Xi, it would have been a reprieve for Xi, yet demonstrated Putin's disregard of the interests of a cherished strategic partner. Again, either way, Beijing would be in a tricky position regardless of whether it knew in advance about the war. Therefore, saying nothing about the war would have been the better choice for Putin in the first place. This conundrum actually reflects Beijing's awkwardness towards the war since the invasion, as China could not win whether or not it blamed Russia.

In a political sense, the West may have hoped that Beijing had been informed so that it could be labeled an accomplice. Beijing's official denial of knowing about Putin's war plan beforehand has saved it from such a negative image, but this has also exposed the cracks in the Sino-Russian partnership. In a similar situation, it is unimaginable that

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, "China's Bad Ukraine War," *Wall Street Journal*, March 3, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> See his opinion piece in *The Washington Post* on March 15, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> In his October 27, 2022 Valdai speech, Putin actually revealed to the audience that he did not tell Xi about the war during their Beijing summit meeting in February. *Greater China Live*, Shenzhen TV, October 28, 2022.

the United States would initiate a war against an adversary without informing its allies prior to the action. On the other hand, not putting the other side into a difficult situation serves the Sino-Russo partnership well, in that it gives each side a level of freedom to avoid security liability caused by its counterpart. In fact, the question of prior notification is an excellent example to test the depth of the Sino-Russo strategic relationship. When each side strives for strategic autonomy, it underlines the fact that the bilateral relationship is not one of alliance. Keeping a comfortable distance from Moscow is China's choice in shaping a partnership based on its own national interests.<sup>6</sup>

Here, the focal point is Xi's remarks to Putin in their Beijing summit in February 2022 that Sino-Russian relations would have "no limits" in becoming deeper. China has not yet officially defined the term "no limits." Therefore, much guesswork could be mounted about such rhetoric. First, is "no limits" an upgrade from the Sino-Russo "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in the New Era," which was Beijing's strategic description of bilateral relations coined during Xi's state visit to Moscow in June 2019? Every word in this 2019 description carries significant meaning. As a starter, the word "strategic" implies a strong security and defense connotation. Secondly, the word "comprehensive" sets the scope of cooperation, which is as wide as possible, clearly going beyond economic interaction. Thirdly, "partnership" reiterates that the bilateral relationship is not one of alliance. Last but not least, the two-word term "new era" was added to the previous description to highlight the new reality of the worsening Sino-US and Russo-US confrontations after Washington identified China and Russia as America's top strategic adversaries.<sup>7</sup>

These four major defining features in the 2019 Xi-Putin description served as the main objects of reference for the two countries to conduct mutual support prior to the Ukraine war. Here, one may wonder if the term "no limits" has furthered the strategic cooperation in the direction of covert alliance-building. This catchphrase has particularly aroused world attention, given the timing the upgrade was uttered – less than one month after the start of Russia's special military operations in Ukraine. Did Putin draw encouragement and become emboldened by this "no limits" rhetoric when he finally ordered the invasion? The Western media seems to have chased such a conclusion. China and Russia had aligned themselves more closely amid the increasingly militarized US containment against them. "No limits" may hint at what Beijing expects Moscow to do

<sup>6</sup> You Ji, "The Changing Strategic Triangular Relations between China, Russia and America," *Italian Geopolitical Review*, Vol. 20, No., 5, 2020, pp. 183-193.

<sup>7</sup> See The White House, *National Security Strategy*, Washington D.C., October 28, 2022.

in a worst-case scenario involving a Sino-US showdown: at least keep the United States in a two-front conflict. Likewise, China may be forthcoming in aiding Russia if the latter is squeezed to the point of desperation. However, a case of “no limits” would not include Russia’s invasion of a sovereign state.

Further, the Ukraine war has revealed another side of the new reality of worsening rivalry of major powers: when Russia is fighting a hot war against the entire West, should Beijing be dragged into it under the formula of “no limits”? The Chinese answer is a clear “No.” Following the summit, the Chinese Foreign Ministry later provided an official interpretation of the formula of “no limits,” stating that the term referred to wide-ranging bilateral cooperation, but that this cooperation does have bottom-lines. For instance, in their summit meeting in November 2022, President Xi and Chancellor Scholz of Germany reached a common position against the use of nuclear weapons in Europe.<sup>8</sup> In this particular point of time, this mutual agreement can be understood as a reference to put Moscow on notice. In a way, “no limits” is a concept for peace-time cooperation, even if it involves security alignment against a common threat. It is not for joint warfare initiated by either side. And it is mainly Beijing’s unilateral rhetoric, not a Sino-Russian bilateral commitment against a third party, e.g., Ukraine, nor practical guidance for Beijing to formulate its Russian policy. Therefore, Beijing’s “no limits” pledge is dialectically both expedient and principled. Clearly, Beijing has its own agenda in managing Sino-US and Sino-EU relations independent of Sino-Russian partnership. Each side avoids becoming trapped by the other’s potential adventurism. For instance, avoiding secondary economic sanctions against China by the West has been Beijing’s top concern in responding to the Ukraine war, which does set the limit in regard to Russia’s war efforts. In sum, “no limits” is a peacetime game, and not applicable to any war situation. Putin may think likewise. He would be non-committal to China in a Sino-US armed conflict in the Taiwan Strait. This is the essence of the bilateral relationship not being one of alliance.<sup>9</sup>

### *A Nexus of Positive and Negative Assessments of Russian Military Operations*

Despite all the negativities to China of the Russian war in Ukraine, many Chinese commentators believe that the war may have somewhat diverted America’s obsessive focus on China. For instance, the war may have lessened the US Indo-Pacific Initiative

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<sup>8</sup> “Chancellor Scholz defends its China trip with accord on nuclear message” [in Chinese], *Reuters*, November 5, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Chinese ambassador Qin Gang’s speech to the ASPEN International Forum, July 21, 2022.

against China in terms of troop redeployment and short-term strategic planning.<sup>10</sup> If this is true, it is certainly a positive outcome of the war for Beijing, no matter how minor this diversion may be. With the entire Western world now devoting the bulk of its leadership attention, material resources, and military focus against Russia at the moment, Beijing may have somewhat obtained a little more breathing room for maneuvering in Asia. This would help it to tackle its more urgent challenges at home, such as the waves of COVID-19 outbreaks after termination of the zero-tolerance policy and the growing domestic pressure caused by the economic slow-down.

Additionally, the West's sweeping economic sanctions against Russia may eventually drag Europe into a new round of economic recession. Then the EU may seek to improve EU-China economic relations with geopolitical significance. For instance, the EU has fine-tuned its new China policy and the way it supports the US pressure on China against the backdrop of the emerging new Cold War order in the world. If it is the case that the order-reshaping in Europe after the Ukraine war is a protracted process which pits Russia as the primary target, Chinese security specialists anticipate a temporary easing of EU pressure on China, as indicated by German Chancellor Scholz's visit to Beijing. Scholz opposes US economic decoupling against China, and is supported by the German business community, which increased investment in China by 114% in the first three quarters of 2022.<sup>11</sup> French President Macron also renewed his call for strategic autonomy in the wake of US oil sales at a distorted price. In the meantime, Chinese analysts debate whether China's interests would be better served by a short war or a protracted one. A short war would quickly return the world back to normalcy, in which China could do business with other powers with ease. A lengthy war would continue to drag the United States into a two-front fight, not necessarily a bad thing for Beijing. Regardless of whether the war is long or short, China is a victim of the Ukraine war. China's \$9 billion USD investments in Ukraine may be lost in their entirety. China is also Ukraine's largest trading partner, with Sino-Ukraine trade totaling about \$200 billion USD in 2021. China imported goods from Ukraine that it highly valued, such as grain, iron-ore, and parts of military equipment.<sup>12</sup> Now, these imports are wiped out. Moreover, a large proportion of China's European-bound freight through trans-Eurasia railroads has been

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<sup>10</sup> Senior Colonel Teng Jianqun (ret.), *News in Focus*, CCTV-4, November 11, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> *Greater China Live*, Shenzhen TV, October 30, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Bonnie Girard, "The Cost of the War to the China-Ukraine Relationship," *The Diplomat*, March 30, 2022.

suspended due to Russia's blockade, a blow to China's Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, China may have made geopolitical gains due to the Ukraine war. Logically, the war may have slowed down US troop relocation from Europe to Asia. It seems that the Indo-Pacific momentum has been somewhat weakened now. The US military has continued to enhance its presence in Europe, probably at the expense of its original Indo-Pacific deployment plans. As the Ukraine war entered its tenth month and gradually escalated, some conciliatory remarks were heard from Western leaders. In the long meeting of nearly three hours between President Biden and Xi during the G-20 Summit in Bali, Biden reiterated the United States' "five noes" assurances to China, and even congratulated Xi for his third term in office.<sup>14</sup> The Ukraine war seems to have given China additional leverage to offset US pressure. In contrast to China's economic losses due to the war, Sino-Russian military cooperation has become more complicated. On the one hand, it has been strengthened in three key areas: joint war drills, collaborative R&D of military technology, and bilateral military sales.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, China has intentionally avoided any cooperation that may enhance Russia's military operations in Ukraine. For instance, China has suspended supply of Longxin-3 computer chips, which the PLA widely used in its military modernization. Clearly, the Ukraine war is not a copy of the strategic opportunity period for China's rise in the aftermath of the US war on terror in 2001, nor a reset of Sino-US relations. However, the war could be a protracted drag on the global posture of the United States, forcing it to deal with China and Russia simultaneously.<sup>16</sup>

Such a prospect may fulfill some Chinese analysts' spiritual wish of Russia winning the Ukraine war, as this would help divert the West's focus on China, and further drain NATO's resources in the long run. It may not be a relevant question to ask the level of sustainability of US military aid to Ukraine, but some Republican politicians have already expressed reservations about unlimited aid to Ukraine. With the protracted militarized confrontation between Russia and the West, China would be somewhat

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<sup>13</sup> Elliot Wilson, "War in Ukraine threatens BRI, disrupts China-Europe rail freight," *Euromoney*, March 3, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Five noes: 1) no desire to change China's political system; 2) no intention to seek a new Cold War against China; 3) no plan to seek military confrontation vis-à-vis China; 4) no support for Taiwan's independence; and 5) no change to US policy against "two-Chinas, one-China and one-Taiwan." Biden also pledged to Xi in their summit that Washington had no desire to encircle China through its alliance-building, no desire to economically decouple China, and no desire to disrupt China's development.

<sup>15</sup> *Greater China Live*, Shenzhen TV, October 28, 2022.

<sup>16</sup> "The Invasion of Ukraine is an Opportunity for China," *Japan Times*, March 3, 2022.

cushioned amidst the intensified global geopolitical competition.

The United States is now focusing more on the Russian war efforts, including concerns of a potential nuclear strike against NATO countries. As a result, despite strong rhetoric against China, the level of US antagonist acts against China has been lowered in recent months. For instance, the frequency of US naval vessels conducting freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) inside the 12 nautical miles of China's holdings in the South China Sea (SCS) has been noticeably reduced. Further, the relatively mild tone of Secretary of State Blinken's outline of US China policy on May 26, 2022 also pointed to an easing of confrontation. The lengthy official talk between Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and National Security Advisor Sullivan in Luxembourg on June 13, 2022 achieved some basic mutual understanding of bilateral problems. The warmer than expected atmosphere for the first lengthy face-to-face summit meeting between Xi and Biden in Bali on November 15, 2022 further confirmed Washington's caution towards excessively confronting China. Somewhat eased tensions with China are conducive for Biden to tackle his most urgent challenges at home: US domestic economic problems, such as high inflation and a looming recession. As a result, Washington may remove a portion of tariffs on Chinese imports, which were imposed by President Trump in his trade war with Beijing.

Wishful thinking or not, Chinese defense analysts continue to claim that Russia has the upper hand in the Ukraine war. For instance, they have painted a picture of Russia's positive gains from the invasion as follows:

- 1) Russia's very act of war is an indicator of Putin's great courage to dare to face the entire West single-handedly, which has stimulated Russian patriotism at home;
- 2) NATO blinked to avoid a direct combat engagement with Russia. It has not even drawn a no-flight zone against the Russian military, a clear disappointment for the Ukrainians;
- 3) It would be more difficult for Ukraine now to earn a NATO membership;
- 4) Reconfirmation of Crimea's legal status;
- 5) Russia is forcing a new fait accompli onto Ukraine through its annexation of the four Republics;
- 6) Ukraine's defense and industrial capabilities have been weakened;
- 7) The "Azov" Battalion has been expelled from the East Ukraine region;
- 8) Russia is taking revenge against Ukraine for its disrespect by "teaching it a lesson through invasion." A number of Ukraine cities have been bombed back to "the stone-age."

Here, it is important to point out that, to the Chinese, the results on the battlefield for both sides are not a proper definition of victory in the Ukraine war. To them, what is more relevant is whether Putin has attained his basic objectives in launching the war. If annexation of the four Republics is Putin's initial objective of invasion, he may have obtained what he wanted. Morally, many Chinese do not support Russia's war acts. That being said, they do not hope to see Russia lose the war either, as they consider it a war against US hegemonism.<sup>17</sup>

Chinese defense analysts have also assessed the combat performance of Russian soldiers, which differs from evaluations by Western military experts. Some of their counter-arguments are listed below:

- 1) Russian military operations were first of all politicized, and did not aim for occupation of Ukraine with the exception of its eastern regions. For instance, Chinese analysts dispute the West's assertion that Russia's failure to take Kyiv is a failure in the war. Given the scale of Russian troops involved in the Kyiv operations, they had to be a kind of diversion to disguise Russia's real purpose in eastern Ukraine.
- 2) The fast success of the allied operations in the Iraq War is not comparable with Russia's Ukraine operations. It does not apply to Russia's basic criteria for victory. As the Ukraine war is a politicized war, the Russia military had its hands tied in the battlefields from the very beginning. For instance, the Russian Army did not concentrate an overwhelming personnel superiority against its opponent when initiating the war, which was very different from tactics by Allied forces in recent wars, nor did it wage massive aerial or missile strikes, again unlike US operations in the two Iraq wars.
- 3) The factor of casualties has not been as heavily weighted in Moscow as in NATO headquarters. Russia does not have a culture of "body-bags" like that of the United States. It is Russia's own estimation of costs and damages that is more relevant in determining its performance in the war. If Putin's logic of war is built on irredentism (seizing the lost land in east Ukraine) and setting his position in Russia's long history, battlefield performance is only of secondary importance.

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<sup>17</sup> Yamaguchi Shinji, "China and the Russia-Ukraine War: The Deepening and Limitation of China-Russia Cooperation against the United States" [in Japanese], *NIDS Commentary*, No. 218, May 12, 2022.

Beijing's military commentators have certainly pointed out many problems in Russia's combat operations in Ukraine. In this aspect, they do share the assessments of their Western counterparts.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the Ukraine war is timely for the PLA to learn the latest developments of battlefield combat in the post-IT era both in terms of military science and practical operations, just like what they learned in the aftermath of the first Iraq war.<sup>19</sup> For instance, Russia's tactics of employing battalion-sized battle groups in combat is also what the PLA has emphasized in its ground force restructuring in its latest round of military reforms. The formation of battalion tactical groups is a dispersed means of operations that is more mobile and agile, and helps avoid heavy human losses under an enemy's aerial superiority and precision strikes. Yet without concentrated manpower superiority, it has been hard for the Russian forces to achieve significant headways in the war. Russia's defects in troop structure, backward communications, and hardware employment sound alarm to the PLA, which has much to think about concerning such forms of combat operations in its own future warfare. Another lesson for the PLA is the massive use of drones by both sides in the war, especially when loitering munitions are used as a basic tool for anti-tank and anti-logistical-supply operations. The use of unmanned combat arsenals has recast the PLA's thinking on the RMA-led transformation and heralds the entry of the era of intelligentized warfare.<sup>20</sup>

## China's Careful Positioning in the Ukraine War

Since the eruption of war, Beijing has been under enormous pressure from the West to choose sides between Russia and Ukraine. To the West, Beijing's resistance to condemn the Russian invasion is tantamount to supporting the Kremlin. Usually there can be hardly a thing called neutrality on the matter of war, at least in terms of morality. In response to the West, Beijing has condemned such pressure embodied in US bullying of "be with us or with our enemy."<sup>21</sup> While avoiding comments on the nature of the war per se, Beijing has emphasized the complexity of the very causes of the war, especially the NATO eastward expansion. China has abstained in most UN meetings in response

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<sup>18</sup> "The showdown in East Ukraine is imminent: the strong and weak points of the two militaries," *Lianhe Zaobao*, April 13 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Scobell (ed.), *Chinese Lessons from Other People's Wars*, Carlisle: US Army War College, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Xie Kai, et, al, "The revolution of winning mechanism of war in the era of intelligentized warfare," *The PLA Daily*, April 26, 2022, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Blinken's speech for the Webinar *Global Challenges to the 21st Century Diplomacy*, April 14, 2022, University of Michigan.



to West-sponsored bills and vetoed the US proposal to suspend Russia's seat in the UN Human Rights Commission. It is thus logical to describe China's position to be pro-Russia in this regard. On the other hand, Beijing has tried its best to help Ukraine with economic assistance and humanitarian relief. It has lately doubled down efforts to facilitate a cease-fire on the battlefield. On September 23, 2022, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met his Ukrainian counterpart in New York during the annual UN conference and expressed China's respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.<sup>22</sup> In addition, China's official reporting on the war has been evenly balanced, citing briefings by the Russian and Ukraine foreign spokesmen on the war without taking a particular side.

### ***Beijing's Chief National Interests in Judging the War***

Beijing's basic attitude towards the Ukraine war is more determined by its strategic evaluation of the new Cold War geopolitics where it has to endure relentless US economic and military pressure. When China is besieged by the intensified bloc-making against it, such as QUAD and NATO's Asian expansion, the question of who initiated the Ukraine war is only of secondary relevance in Beijing's calculation of how to best meet the challenge of the new Cold War order in the advent of the Ukraine war. Specifically, in regard to Russia, Beijing has effectively separated maintenance of an overall positive relationship with Moscow from reacting to the latter's military operations in Ukraine. This underlines Beijing's principled choice of whether to align with Russia further against the US in the off-balanced Sino-US-Russo strategic triangular, or to keep a proper distance from Russia on the invasion issue so that China's vital economic relations with the West can be protected.

Inevitably, the Ukraine war has further precipitated dynamic changes in the Sino-US-Russo strategic triangle and put adrift with many uncertainties ahead. For instance, the US may regard a war-weakened Russia as less of a meaningful peer rival. Beijing, too, may see rising liability in the Sino-Russo strategic partnership in countering Western pressure. And the resultant impact is sufficient to trigger the alteration of the whole international system. Particularly if Russia is indeed crippled by the war and western sanctions, the question to Beijing becomes more acute on how much Beijing needs Russia to balance against US hostility. Should Beijing start to think about distancing itself from Moscow until the clouds of the war are cleaned? For the time being, the answer would

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<sup>22</sup> *The New China News Agency Report*, New York, September 24, 2022.

be more of a “no,” as intensified US pressure on China and Russia stimulate the two to build closer ties.<sup>23</sup> Beijing must always hypothesize a situation of a Sino-US military clash in the SCS or in the Taiwan Strait. In such a situation, Russia’s practical function of pinning down a proportion of US forces in the European theater would be highly appreciated. This bottom-line of Chinese thinking determines Beijing’s overall calculus of the Beijing-Moscow-Washington triangle. The key to understanding Beijing’s current response to the China-Russia-US trilateral game in the backdrop of the Ukraine war is that Beijing would not want to see Russia fall due to the West’s sweeping sanctions or its battle-field frustrations. If Kissinger’s two-against-one was a winning formula in the Cold War strategic triangular of Beijing-Moscow-Washington, today China is again in such a relatively eased position in the new Cold War era, although Russia is a much weaker partner.<sup>24</sup> If the Ukraine war bleeds the Putin regime into a mode of slow collapse or if Putin is forced out of power as a result of the failed war endeavor, Beijing would have to cope with a one-to-one phenomenon of Sino-US confrontation, which would much enhance the US hand in containing China from “a position of strength,” to quote US Secretary of State Blinken’s opening speech in the Anchorage Meeting in March 2021.<sup>25</sup> This strategic reality underlines China’s basic stance towards the triangular, with or without a war in Ukraine.

In fact, the Chinese leaders are not really so naive that they believe the Ukraine war would meaningfully distract the US from the Indo-Pacific theater. Strategically, according to US Defense Secretary Austin, Russia is the US’s primary target (acute threat) but China is its pacing challenge,<sup>26</sup> meaning that the US will not sideline China as a primary adversary while militarily focusing on the Ukraine war. Washington has its own rhythm to implement containment measures against China at each phase. In the current phase, Washington’s Ukraine war objective is to fatally cripple Russia and have Europe security dependence on US protection further increased.<sup>27</sup> Most international

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<sup>23</sup> Brandon Yoder, “Power shifts, third-party threats, and credible signals: explaining China’s successful reassurance of Russia,” *International Politics*, Vol. 57, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Lowell Dittmer, “The Strategic Triangle: An Elementary Game-Theoretical Analysis,” *World Politics*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 1981.

<sup>25</sup> US Secretary of State Blinken’s opening statement in the meeting with senior Chinese diplomats, March 18, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> US Defense Secretary Austin’s testimony on the defense budget to the US Senate Hearing, November 11, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> US DoD Secretary Lloyd Austin made it clear in his April 25 speech that the US would like to see Russia weakened sufficiently in the Ukraine war so that it would not pose a serious threat. *The Washington Post*, April 25, 2022.

commentators concur that Washington is arguably the only winner of the Ukraine war. Through the war, it has mended the cracks with Europe, forced Germany and France to challenge Moscow with greater economic and strategic pressure, and made a fortune by selling more energy resources to Europe at a much higher price. Eventually, the US will be in a much better position to command NATO and in a better position against its adversaries, such as China, with stronger NATO support.

Such a conceivable reality means that, after stifling Russia through the Ukraine war, the West would be able to concentrate all its power to deal with China in the next phase of East-West contention, which would make it harder for Beijing to manage its already adverse geopolitical environment. Therefore, Beijing's reaction to the Ukraine war is in general based on its perceived long-term objective of offsetting the intensified Western squeeze, not safeguarding of the vested interests of other states, including Russia. And Beijing's reaction to the war is not very much influenced by any kind of morality about war nor any ideological values. A comparison can thus be drawn between what China does towards Russia with what India does in response to the war: each looks at the war from a cost-benefit lens.<sup>28</sup>

This means that strategically, Beijing will keep a subtle balance of helping Russia withstand the Western squeeze but not go to any additional lengths to prop up Russia at the expense of its own vital interests. China has substantially increased its import of Russian energy products by 40% in comparison with that of 2021, a great financial boost to cash-starved Russia.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, China has refused to provide vital defense equipment to Russia, such as drones, and this has overshadowed their bilateral relations. Chinese firms have complied with some of the Western sanction regimes in scaling down their business ties with Russia, even though China does not openly admit it for fear of an unnecessary backlash from Russia and from its own citizens, many of whom are supportive of Russia. It is likely that Beijing and Moscow achieved some acquiescence in regard to Beijing's position on Russia's Ukraine war. Yet Beijing's search for strategic autonomy has somewhat served as a footnote to a Western definition of Sino-Russo relations, namely the "axis of convenience."<sup>30</sup> Over the long run, it is not impossible to imagine an evolutionary process in which the Sino-Russian partnership is de-specialized. More fundamentally, a regime change in Moscow would reset Russian-NATO relations

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<sup>28</sup> "US 'understands' India's position on Ukraine war," April 12, 2022 <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/us-understands-indias-position-on-ukraine-war-1099944.html>

<sup>29</sup> *Xinhua News Agency*, October 25, 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing and New Geopolitics*, Brookings, 2008.

with China targeted as a rival. Beijing's handling of its Russian relations is solidly based on its own national interests. After all, only eternal interests matter to all, including China.

## **China's Response to US Endeavors to Shape the Post-Ukraine War World Order**

More generally, Beijing's assessment of its external environment is that it would worsen significantly following the Ukraine war. Specially, the following is the list of challenges that the Chinese strategists contemplate.

- 1) The West's bloc-making will accelerate. Not only will NATO's eastward expansion continue, but also NATO's Asian expansion would become more conceivable, grafting NATO into the US-centered Indo-Pacific security networks more organically.<sup>31</sup>
- 2) The militarization of the new Cold War will deepen, raising it to the level of a worldwide arms race and re-invigorating nuclear threats from both sides. For instance, the Korean Peninsula would see renewed confrontation with thicker nuclear clouds. All the regional sovereignty disputes involving China would be structured into the global geopolitical strife under the US Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS), such as the SCS dispute and tensions over Taiwan.
- 3) The West's economic decoupling will deepen in key high-tech and IT sectors in the aftermath of the Ukraine war. Unlocking China from certain critical value chains, such as supply of computer chips, will be stepped up.
- 4) The Western camp will become more united than before the Ukraine war. Fewer countries in Europe will speak up for China.

### ***US Indo-Pacific Offensive: Intensified Bloc Competition***

Among Washington's many practical measures against China is its tightening of the IPS amid the Ukraine war. In May 2022, the White House published the Biden edition of the IPS, which puts emphasis on an enhanced coalition approach against China. It

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<sup>31</sup> "NATO reviving Cold War extending its expansionist gaze to the Asia-Pacific," *China Daily* editorial, April 11, 2022.

confirms Washington's pursuits of two parallel fronts against Russia in Europe and China in the Indo-Pacific, although for the time being the former enjoys more priority. Beijing regards the US' relentless coalition building against China under the hostile IPS to be a long-term pacing threat it has to deal with, especially in the Indo-Pacific region where bloc formation becomes increasingly confrontational.<sup>32</sup> The danger is multifold.

First of all, this Indo-Pacific bloc rivalry is built on an exclusionary ideological offensive embodied in the notion of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific." The West has intensified its values offensive against non-democracies by taking advantage of Russia's war against Ukraine. Even Asian leaders, such as Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, see camp building based on ideational differences as an unfortunate indicator.<sup>33</sup> With the West's new Cold War ideological zeal mounting, many Chinese analysts sense a new end-of-history Crusade in the making against the West's rivals. To Beijing, the new Cold War bloc competition may differ from the old Cold War specifics yet share one fundamental feature with it, which is the West's intense ideational drive against its identified adversaries, such as China and Russia. China is of course a chief target in this powerful ideological campaign.

A number of Indo-Pacific countries, especially those with territorial disputes with China, have been drawn into this bloc competition to varying degrees. They have repeatedly encountered the dilemma of choosing where to stand in between the two top powers. For instance, they have been encouraged to join the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) but worried about the response from their largest trade partner, China, if they indeed follow the US initiative. Such a catch-22 decision is similar to their hesitation on whether to cast their UN votes to condemn Russia in March 2022. Only India has successfully avoided criticizing Russia and received no punishment from the West due to its unique position vis-a-vis China in the Indo-Pacific. However, other countries may not be as lucky.

For instance, under the pressure of bloc-making promoted by the US and its allies, the SCS disputants now entertain narrower space to move around China and the US. On the one hand, they have been pressured to join US-sponsored multilateral war drills aimed at curtailing China's SCS activities. On the other, they hope to stabilize the SCS situation so that they can focus on economic development at home, to which

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<sup>32</sup> *Xinhua News Agency*, May 22, 2022.

<sup>33</sup> *Lianhe Zaobao*, May 23, 2022.

China is an indispensable contributor.<sup>34</sup> Most Southeast Asian countries experience uneasiness in coping with bloc competition, as they manage the off-balanced ASEAN-China-US trilateral relationship in terms of security and economics. With all the regional sovereignty disputes involving China now structured into the global geopolitical strife, none of the implicated states would find it easy to maintain a good relationship with both superpowers simultaneously. They may have faced growing Western pressure of “you are either with us or against us.”

Beijing is now concerned about this bloc competition that has facilitated NATO’s Asian expansion amid America’s Indo-Pacific push. Washington has seized the opportunity of the Ukraine war to extend the West’s anti-Russia campaign beyond Europe, meaning that it is targeting Moscow’s partners elsewhere. In the renewed East-West confrontation, China has become a convenient excuse for NATO expansion into the Indo-Pacific. For instance, the China topic was a hot one in most NATO-sponsored global conferences, such as the conference of national defense ministers in a NATO military base in Germany on April 26, 2022. As the West ties Russia and China together as the villain, a globalized network with a military alliance against them would become institutionalized conveniently under the IPS.

Such a network would be supported by two anchorages, namely the trans-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific mechanisms. Now the world is witnessing a trend of institutional integration of the two: the NATO Asian expansion is embedded in the US Indo-Pacific coalition building. The attendance of Japanese Prime Minister Kishida in the NATO Summit in June 2022 marked the first move in this integration, which alarmed Asian security analysts.<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, Tokyo has specifically set the mark of two percent of GDP for its defense budget increase, a figure that aligns with that of NATO. In this process of bloc forging, various Indo-Pacific security frameworks, especially the AUKUS, serve as a carrier and bridge for NATO powers to penetrate into the Indo-Pacific region, which would reshape the international order through the clash of civilizations, values, and military conflicts.

China has not been sitting idly by in response to this globalized coalescence against it. Among the countermeasures it has taken is enhanced military cooperation with Russia, although not under any formal framework of alliance. Yet when assessing the contents

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<sup>34</sup> Julius Cesar Trajano, “US-Philippines: Resetting the Security Alliance?,” *RSIS Commentary*, No. 035 February 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Chen Qingqing and Wan Hengyi, “Japan upping ante on Taiwan question, NATO expansion causes concern in Asia-Pacific,” *Global Times*, June 6, 2022.

of the recent Sino-Russian joint war drills, one can sense the close interconnectivity of the two armed forces to respond to the US-initiated bloc completion. At the height of the Ukraine war in May 2022, China and Russia conducted their joint air patrol inside the Japanese air defense identification zone, followed by their joint maritime exercises in the Japan Sea in September 2022. They both dispatched nuclear-capable bombers and capital ships to the scene with an implicit signal.<sup>36</sup> They reminded Japan of the potential nuclear consequences of challenging China and Russia at the urging of the US. NATO did not grant direct personnel support to Ukraine for fear that this could trigger Russia's nuclear retaliation. Tokyo would have to face two nuclear powers had it joined a US-sponsored war against China and Russia.

### ***The Hidden Military Agenda of the Quad***

It may have been a forgone conclusion that a mini version of NATO in Asia will eventually emerge, which is Washington's objective in promoting the Indo-Pacific as a strategic counterweight against China's rise.<sup>37</sup> However, this paper argues that the core of NATO in Asia would be built on AUKUS rather than the Quad, given India's non-allied positions in its international pursuits. India's non-committal attitudes towards a NATO war against Russia has further testified to the potential holes in the US push for bloc-forging against another nuclear power, such as China, if its relationship with other Quad members is not firmly rested on a formal alliance. For instance, would New Delhi militarily assist Japan in a Russo-Japanese military clash? The answer is quite certain. The official depiction of the Quad is informality.<sup>38</sup> As such, it would tie members closely in peacetime, but how it would work in a war of major powers is truly untested.

Yet the foundation of the NATO-Asia framework has to be built on coalescing efforts along the lines of Quad enlargement, which serves as a stepping stone for NATO expansion in Asia. Now each Quad state makes initiatives to invite NATO members to enter bilateral or multilateral defense agreements with them and arrange their participation in joint military exercises in the Indo-Pacific regions. A gradual Quad expansion, although unofficial, is necessary for the US push for bloc formation. The enlargement identifies like-minded states through the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision

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<sup>36</sup> *Radio France Internationale*, "What Oriental-22 means to Japan" [in Chinese], September 7, 2022.

<sup>37</sup> You Ji, "The Nexus of Land and Sea: The Shaper of Future Indo-Pacific Forces," *Australian Army Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Brendon J. Cannon and Ash Rossiter, "Locating the Quad: informality, institutional flexibility, and future alignment in the Indo-Pacific," *International Politics*, March 2022.

which not only helps absorb Asian states into the bloc-making, but also makes NATO involvement relevant under a common-threat narrative.<sup>39</sup> Various programs are in place to substantiate a Quad Plus and broaden the entry scope for bloc-enlargement within in the Indo-Pacific framework, including states outside the Indo-Pacific regions.

What is the exact nature of the Quad? This question has been repeatedly raised by China's security experts, although without a unanimous answer. First, as the Quad is a network based on a common threat perception, its military orientation is its primary nature, although in official rhetoric such an emphasis is hidden. Many security analysts in the Quad believe that no other means of response to economic, diplomatic, or ideational threats can be as effective as the one of military pressure based on superiority of defense capabilities, a time-honored part of US military culture.

Secondly, containment of China through military means can be seen from the nature and goals of numerous Quad-sponsored bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral war drills. Their mission design has been clearly set to target China, including exercises of anti-submarine warfare, sea blockade warfare, amphibious warfare, cyber warfare, close-in reconnaissance and monitoring, and so on.<sup>40</sup>

The Ukraine war has sharpened Beijing's sense of the Quad's military orientation and its future expansion. First, the Indo-Pacific militarization based on AUKUS and the Quad reflects the origin of the ongoing European war. The space of ambiguity, meaning a buffer zone previously in existence between nuclear powers, is wiped out in the competition of major powers. This leaves one side to take deadly retaliatory actions despite all reluctance. Second, the small allies and partners of the US exercise little constraints in provoking their big-power opponents in order to achieve their practical interests, believing that the US support to them would effectively deter their big power adversaries from taking military actions to punish them. This is likely where people draw parallels between the Ukraine war and Taiwan conflict.

### *The Taiwan Parallel*

The Chinese are generally sympathetic towards Russia in the Ukraine war because they perceive Russia to have been provoked into initiating this war, and believe that the root cause was NATO's eastward expansion and Ukraine's color revolution against Russia.

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<sup>39</sup> This vision has been further elaborated by the Japanese Prime Minister in his keynote speech for the 2022 Shangri-la Dialogue in Singapore on June 10, 2022.

<sup>40</sup> You Ji, "Sino-US 'Cat-and-Mouse' Game Concerning Freedom of Navigation and Overflight," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 5-6, 2016, pp. 631-661.



They draw a Ukraine parallel with the joint Washington-Taipei treading on Beijing's red lines in the Taiwan Strait, including increasing visits by senior US officials to Taiwan and more openly acknowledged US-Taiwan military cooperation. This may inflict a dilemma onto Beijing just as Ukraine did to Russia. Taking no forceful action would not only damage Beijing's core interests and international status, and also embolden Taiwan to quicken the slide towards de jure independence and further provocations. Yet any military actions against Taiwan could trigger sweeping Western sanctions against China, similar to those against Russia. This would also hurt China's vital interests.

Likewise, Beijing's war option against Taipei would also create a similar dilemma to Western countries, especially to those of the old Europe which would sustain huge collateral economic damage, if hijacked by US sanction regimes. For instance, Germany, Italy, and France would otherwise be truly reluctant to follow US sanctions against China, their top trading partners, probably more so than their initial reaction to US sanctions against Russia. Yet in the case of a PLA action against Taiwan, they would be left with no choice but to follow US sanctions against China, even though at enormous cost to their economic wellbeing. Certainly they would differentiate the causes of PLA strikes: for the purpose of reunification or for retaliation against Taipei's moves in the direction of de jure independence. The lesson of the Ukraine war is positive for Beijing in that the huge cost of a direct Sino-West confrontation and associated sanctions would lead the West to pressure Taipei more vigorously against its efforts for changing the status quo, which is more likely than a war for reunification by Beijing.

It would be a tragedy to Beijing if it is forced to take military action in the Taiwan Strait to respond to the continued red-line crossing by the US and Taipei authorities. A Taiwan war would definitely put to an end of China's peaceful rise. This may be exactly what the hawkish US politicians hope to see, as provoking Beijing into a short, limited, and controllable war against Taiwan would serve Washington's strategic interests and be doable with minimum cost to the US, just as the Ukraine war has shown. China may experience what Russia today suffers. If an armed conflict indeed occurs, needless to say, the biggest winner from a Beijing-Taipei war would still be the US, while China, Taiwan, East Asia, and Europe would be victimized. Therefore, the lesson of the Ukraine war is profound for all to learn.

The Ukraine parallel has also likely reminded Taiwan of the horror of war in important ways. First, it is not a given that the US would send soldiers to protect Taiwan in the case of a mainland attack. Military aid would be certain, but anything short of putting soldiers on the ground would not be enough for effective protection of Taiwan.

The capability gap between the armed forces across the Taiwan Strait is simply too huge. Secondly, even if China were to be severely sanctioned by the West, this would not be a comfort to Taiwan if its key civilian and military infrastructure was devastated and a large number of people killed, just like in the example of Ukraine which has lost human lives in the thousands and \$600 billion USD in economic assets.<sup>41</sup> Would the Taipei authority allow the island to be used as a proxy for torpedoing China's rise, enduring enormous destruction?

Since the eruption of the Ukraine war, repeated public surveys in Taiwan have recorded a continued drop in popular confidence about the US honoring its commitment to defending Taiwan with its troops on the ground.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, to the mainlanders and the Taiwanese, the Ukraine war may have them become more sensible and sensitive towards matters of armed confrontation. Beijing will be more careful about the idea of military reunification, and Taipei will become more constrained in its push for *de jure* independence.

## Conclusion

As the world watches the unfolding of the first European war on the ground since the end of WWII, the competition between major powers for shaping the future of the Indo-Pacific is also intensifying. Inevitably, the Ukraine war has raised the stakes of major power competition in Eurasia, as it has oriented the regional geopolitical strife in the direction of confrontational bloc-formation. In this process, the US is on the offensive in this theater, mobilizing collective deterrence against China and Russia. For instance, the US has successfully constructed a broad united front against Russia's war in Ukraine and encouraged its allies, such as Australia and Canada, to conduct close-in monitoring activities near China's maritime regions. This has inevitably stimulated Beijing and Moscow to move closer strategically with their accelerated preparation for a war of top powers. The emerging Cold War II is taking the form of "hot" prospects of military brinkmanship.

This paper has highlighted the changing logic and posture of the Beijing-Washington-Moscow strategic triangle. In countering Russian war efforts in Ukraine and the rise

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<sup>41</sup> Ukraine Prime Minister Shmyhal told the visiting leaders of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia on March 16 that by mid-March, Ukraine had already suffered \$500 billion in economic losses.

<sup>42</sup> "The Ukraine war makes fewer Taiwanese convinced of US troop support on the ground to assist Taiwan defense," *Lianhe Zaobao*, March 16, 2022.

of China, Washington employs a more militarized collective approach in deterring its perceived challengers. This approach exercised in Eurasia is best illustrated by the US IPS, which entails: (1) the dominant and driving force of the US, (2) the primary containment building bricks of the two island chain concealment lines and the Indo-Pacific Deterrence Initiative, (3) the core frameworks of defense cooperation, namely AUKUS, the Quad, and the Five Eyes alliance, and (4) the connecting geopolitical linkages of US-centered bilateral alliances, the IPEF, NATO's Asian expansion, and institutionalized regimes of multilateral military drills. This has formed a vast umbrella with the whole of Eurasia under its cover.

To China, the Ukraine war has sounded a serious warning to all that when a hot war is no longer unimaginable among the top powers, nuclear peace has to be maintained. Structural realism advocates that in order to avoid mutually assured destruction, nuclear powers should not only deter adversaries but also respect their deterrence capabilities.<sup>43</sup> Our world today has become increasingly more dangerous exactly because such respect is loosening up. As a result, it is logical to expect that the weaker sides in the Beijing-Washington-Moscow triangular would align more strongly, despite their own conflicts of interests. However, their partnership is way short of that of alliance. They have prescribed autonomy to avoid unnecessary liability in their relationship against the backdrop of their own interaction with the West. On the other hand, if their vital interests are fatally threatened, they would probably go to additional lengths in forging a common response to perceived provocations, including a military one. Therefore, among the lessons to be learned from the ongoing Ukraine war, the critical one is that in the geopolitical competition of nuclear powers, the superior side must respect the red lines (core interests) of its rivals and leave room for compromise for the common good of the world (avoidance of a nuclear exchange). If the envelope is pushed without constraints, the outcome would be suffering for all.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Jervis, "The Dustbin of History: Mutual Assured Destruction," *Foreign Policy*, November 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Xi Jinping's summit with Biden on November 15, 2022, in which he emphasized that the relationship of major powers must not evolve into the state of war. The way to peace is to respect each other's core interests.

## *Chapter 3*

# The Collapse of Putin's Notion of Great Power<sup>1</sup>

*YAMAZOE Hiroshi*

### **Putin's notion of a great power**

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, relations between Russia and its neighbors have been fraught with problems. In 1992, while many of the newly formed sovereign states were focused on integrating populations living within their borders and forming governments and institutions, only Russia perceived that it had additional responsibilities in the post-Soviet space beyond its borders. Given that Russia succeeded the legal status of the Soviet Union, it had room to believe that it had rights and obligations to integrate this space and to the facilities that remained there.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Russians struggled to instantly view people of Russian descent as complete foreigners; there was still the sense that they should be protected as part of "us." Without a "Republic of Russia" serving as a motherland in the Soviet Union, nor anything to indicate who constituted "Russians" outside of the union, it was difficult to define who was "Russian" in the hastily established, smaller Russian Federation.

Russia referred to the former Soviet republics as "near abroad," making an ambiguous distinction between them and countries outside the post-Soviet space. In the 1990s, hardliners in Russia advocated using military means to regain this space. However, this was unfeasible, and the mainstream idea became leveraging traditional economic ties to realize integration and gain influence.

When President Vladimir Putin first took office in 2000, he took the pragmatic approach of suppressing hardline arguments and developing relations with both the former Soviet republics and Western countries to enhance Russia's state power.<sup>3</sup> In his April 2005 annual address to the Federal Assembly, President Putin discussed the major

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a summary of the main points of a presentation given at the International Symposium on Security Affairs (December 7, 2022). For further details, see "Russia's Classical Notion of Great Power and Waning 'Sphere of Influence,'" in *The Shifting Dynamics of Great Power Competition*, ed. Masuda Masayuki (National Institute for Defense Studies, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Serhii Plokhyy, *Lost Kingdom: A History of Russian Nationalism from Ivan the Great to Vladimir Putin* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), p. 318.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321.

ideological challenges in developing Russia.<sup>4</sup> During this address, he famously stated that “the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster,” and mentioned the compatriots who were left outside Russian territory and the social chaos that ensued. Nevertheless, his aim was not to highlight Russia’s intention to rectify the mistake of the Soviet collapse, but rather how Russian society has been implementing reforms aimed at the values of freedom and democracy even in difficult times. He rejected the notion that Russians do not need freedom, and argued that, over the past three centuries, Russia, as a European nation, had overcome hardships in achieving freedom, human rights, justice, and democracy as its own values, along with other European countries. He also urged countries in the post-Soviet space newly admitted to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) to respect the rights of Russian minorities. While President Putin raised serious issues caused by the Soviet collapse in this address, he treated them as part of many challenges, and signaled that Russia was willing to develop together with Western countries, without emphasizing pressure or danger from the West. Similarly, the 60th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Germany in May 2005 served as, in a sense, an opportunity for Russia to gain recognition as a great power amid a cooperative atmosphere, and leaders or equivalent representatives from permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, the major victors of World War II, as well as from Germany and Japan, the defeated nations, were invited.

In these instances, Russia is seen as having made a strong claim to its status as a great power, and this has been a key subject of the discourse on Russia.<sup>5</sup> Its main goals are thought to have been the unilateral exercise of power in the post-Soviet space and Western recognition of Russian influence. In practice, the Putin administration has pursued these goals in three principal ways: enhancing state power; leveraging diplomatic and economic means to coordinate interests; and taking coercive measures to cause damage to its opponents. However, it was only in the lead-up to 2022 that various attempts to deal with the Ukrainian issue failed and Russia resorted exclusively to coercive measures.

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<sup>4</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation,” President of Russia (April 25, 2005), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>

<sup>5</sup> There are diverse interpretations of the goals of Russian great powerism. The following literature divides it into three major perspectives: Russia as a revanchist power, Russia as a defensive power, and Russia as an aggressive isolationist. Elias Götz and Camille-Renaud Merlen, “Russia and the Question of World Order,” *European Politics and Society* 20, no. 2 (2018).

## **Catastrophic consequences of Ukrainian intervention and full-scale invasion**

In January 2014, clashes intensified between anti-government protesters and suppression forces in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv. Despite peace mediation by Russia and the EU in February, President Viktor Yanukovich fled Kyiv the day after signing the agreement, and a pro-Western government was established in Ukraine. Subsequently, protests against pro-Western central governments erupted in the Crimean Peninsula, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Odessa, and other areas. In the Crimean Peninsula, Sergei Aksyonov led a political uprising to become prime minister of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea with support from Russian forces. Through a “referendum,” his political group indicated Crimea was in favor of becoming a part of Russia. In March, Russia unilaterally claimed this part of Ukrainian territory as its own under the pretext of fulfilling Crimea’s wish. Armed conflicts broke out in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and Russia continued to provide support to sustain them. However, it could not gain control over all of both oblasts or much of the southeastern part of Ukraine, and the unrest in Mariupol, Kharkiv, and Odessa drew to a close.

At the same time, Russia heightened tensions in neighboring areas outside of Ukraine, particularly in the Baltic Sea. This presented NATO members and neighboring countries, such as Sweden and Finland, with the risk of dangerous military clashes. The West had no tolerance for Russia’s actions and imposed economic sanctions. Russia may have thus believed that the leveling up of hostile actions was necessary and justifiable. Russia further waged cyberattacks on Ukraine, as well as operations to influence public opinion during U.S. and French elections, which further deepened hostilities.

Nevertheless, Russia’s actions at this time proceeded with certain constraints. While it did not tolerate rebellions in areas it viewed as its sphere of influence and elevated the level of fighting to increase pressure on Western countries, it also left room for trade and mutual recognition between the great powers. Russia’s continued backing of separatist regions within Ukrainian territory made the integration of Ukraine and its membership in NATO unrealistic for the foreseeable future. While Western countries were aware of Russia’s illegal occupation and intervention in the Crimean Peninsula and the eastern region of Donbas in Ukraine, they avoided escalating the conflict with Russia to a high-risk level, such as to full-frontal clashes or to conflicts that would threaten Russia’s internal security. Rather, the West supported a diplomatic approach to achieve stability through reconciliation with Russia.

However, on February 24, 2022, President Putin declared a “special military

operation” and launched an open invasion of Ukraine. This was a costly full-frontal clash, and Ukrainians and those in partner countries acted in unison to counter it. On the same day, Russian airborne troops raided an airport near the capital of Kyiv, but the seizure operation failed. In addition, several assassination operations targeting President Zelensky were reportedly thwarted.<sup>6</sup> The Ukrainian military presence outside of the eastern conflict zone was small, and Russia deployed much larger invading forces than the Ukrainian defense forces around Kyiv.<sup>7</sup> In cities like Kherson, Ukrainian resistance collapsed early, perhaps due to the successful clandestine operations inside the defense forces, and Russian military occupation and governance began. These factors suggest that President Putin went ahead with the “special military operation” with the expectation that it would be successful in coercing the entire Ukrainian nation.

If the operation had succeeded early on, the Russian side would have taken minimal losses due to Ukrainian resistance. Western countries would have been unable to apply united pressure on Russia, and Russia would have suffered far less damage. However, Western countries may have still vehemently disapproved of Russia’s actions, further eroding the foundation of cooperation between the great powers. Furthermore, Western countries may have built up their military capabilities near Russia’s borders and posed a danger to the country. In other words, the Putin administration had made a calculated decision to prioritize controlling Ukraine as its prerogative as a great power, and to relegate the balance of great powers, as well as its status, security, and capacity building, to the background.

What actually happened after Russia failed to achieve the operation’s initial objective revealed Russia’s lack of capability and significantly undermined its strategic position. Russia’s defensive line penetrated deep into Ukrainian territory, and its elite units suffered losses. Meanwhile, Ukraine improved its forces with the support of Western countries. Russia’s seizure of parts of Ukraine since 2014 had both solidified Ukraine’s resolve as a country to refuse integration with Russia and increased its political and military capacity. Thus, the actions taken by the Putin administration since 2014 had the effect of hindering its ability to achieve its goals in 2022, and the administration failed to accurately assess this situation. Russia’s decision to launch a full-scale invasion has led Finland and Sweden

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<sup>6</sup> Manveen Rana, “Volodymyr Zelensky Survives Three Assassination Attempts in Days,” *The Times*, March 3, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Mykhaylo Zabrodskyi, Jack Watling, Oleksandr V Danylyuk, and Nick Reynolds, “Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022,” Royal United Services Institute (November 30, 2022).

to announce their intention to join NATO, and capabilities to strike St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad are increasing.

Among its deficiencies, the dysfunction of Russia's conventional forces stood out. During February and March, Russia failed to ready the resources necessary to take Kyiv by conventional combat, causing a significant depletion of elite forces, such as airborne and tank units. As a result, Russia was forced to reduce its overly extended front line and concentrate its forces toward the Donbas region. From April to June, Russian forces slowly took control of cities such as the major city of Mariupol in southern Donetsk oblast and Severodonetsk in western Luhansk oblast by inflicting massive destruction. Then, from July to August, Ukrainian forces appeared to launch counterstrikes against the Russian forces' rear areas in Kherson oblast, making the Russian forces prioritize the defense of those areas. However, in early September, Ukrainian forces carried out several simultaneous attacks on Russian-held positions in eastern Kharkiv oblast, exploiting the vulnerabilities of the Russian forces. The Russian forces then retreated, leaving behind a large number of military supplies. In November, the Russian forces withdrew from the occupied territory of Kherson oblast on the western bank of Dnieper River, a difficult-to-defend area. The Ukrainian forces fought valiantly using intelligence, precision guidance, and other means, despite their limited firepower. In contrast, the Russian forces failed to secure air superiority, lost the Black Sea Fleet's flagship and many tanks, allowed sabotage operations in the rear, and lost senior commanders to sniper attacks. All of this shed light on a reality that greatly diverged from the image Russia had projected of itself as a military great power.

The prestige Russia desired in the post-Soviet space is decreasing. At the October 2022 summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), President Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan directly urged President Putin to respect each member country.<sup>8</sup> Not only has Ukraine rejected Russian-led integration, but relatively friendly countries have also been asserting their right to speak. Western countries have also significantly reduced the level of diplomatic and economic relations they maintained with Russia up until 2021, rejecting Russia's claim to its sphere of influence. The main objectives of Russian great power politics—exercising power in the post-Soviet space and getting Western countries to respect Russia's sphere of influence—have suffered severe setbacks.

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<sup>8</sup> Saito Ryota, "The Sense of Distance between Central Asia and Russia Seen from the CIS Summit: The Background to the Rahmon Statement, and Putin's 'View of the Alliance,'" International Information Network Analysis, Sasakawa Peace Foundation (November 2, 2022). [https://www.spf.org/iina/articles/saito\\_03.html](https://www.spf.org/iina/articles/saito_03.html)



## Cooperation with China

As Russia asserted its sphere of influence and deepened confrontation with Western countries, “neo-Eurasianism” has gained traction. According to this ideology, Russia does not follow European traditions, but maintains its own unique civilization as a major “Eurasian” country that inherits Asian traditions as well. In Russian usage, “Eurasia” almost exclusively refers to the post-Soviet space, which Russia claims to be leading. It also reinforces the idea that Russia should naturally cooperate with Asian countries as well as European ones.

This “Eurasia” concept is also behind the idea of cooperating with China, which implies joining forces with other Asian powers against the West as well. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which China’s Xi Jinping administration has identified as a project for transforming the international order, generally falls in line with Russian interests, as it is an example of an initiative that differs from that of Western countries. At the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in April 2019, President Putin stated that the BRI promotes economic development in the Eurasian space, and that the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union and the BRI will cooperate in opposing U.S. trade protectionism and unilateral sanctions.<sup>9</sup> In other words, rather than Russia’s individual participation in the BRI, President Putin stressed that Russia would cooperate with the BRI’s efforts to break away from the United States, while also highlighting the presence of a Russian-led framework.

Thus, Russia seeks an international system that is not led by the West, which overlaps to some extent with China’s aspirations. However, the two countries also have many differences that prevent them from acting in unison. For example, while China puts efforts into UN peacekeeping operations, Russia has reduced its involvement in them, perhaps because it does not see any significant benefits. Furthermore, compared to China’s extensive involvement in the global economy, Russia’s involvement is limited to a few sectors, such as the energy and weapons industries. This makes it easier for Russia to pursue its own narrow national interests even if doing so disrupts the global economy and, in fact, has negative consequences on China’s economic activities.<sup>10</sup>

To begin with, the Russia-led framework in the post-Soviet space does not have the power to exert influence outside of that space. Countries in the post-Soviet space are also

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<sup>9</sup> Masuda Masayuki, Yamazoe Hiroshi, and Akimoto Shigeki, *China Security Report 2020: China Goes to Eurasia*, English edition (Tokyo: NIDS, 2019), 44-45.

<sup>10</sup> Marcin Kaczmarek, “Convergence or Divergence? Visions of World Order and the Russian-Chinese Relationship,” *European Politics and Society* 20, no. 2 (2018), pp. 218-221.

deepening their relationships with China and individual Western countries. Whereas China has a competitive relationship with the United States in a range of areas, including trade and technology, Russia lacks the capacity to support China in this regard. For example, Russia was incapable of taking actions to support China or restrain the United States when it imposed tariffs on Chinese products. When soybean exports from the United States to China decreased, Russia took over U.S. exports, but this only served the interests of Russian trade rather than solving China's issue.

The February 2022 invasion of Ukraine was a decision that prioritized Russia's own sphere of influence over working with China to create a favorable international environment. While China has not made any harsh statements or taken actions against Russia, neither have countries such as India, Brazil, and South Africa. China mainly sources its energy from the Middle East and Central Asia. Although China also imports from Russia, it is unlikely that China's purchases will be enough to offset the drop in demand for Russian resources from the EU since 2022; Russian revenues will not be recouped because of China. And whereas economic sanctions have made it difficult for Russia to procure semiconductors, China's major IT firms have always prioritized Western markets and have not gone as far as to actively operate in the now sanctioned Russian market.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit held from September 15 to 16, 2022, in the ancient city Samarkand, Uzbekistan, provided an opportunity for the leaders of diverse Eurasian countries to meet and talk face-to-face. For President Putin, it served as an occasion to showcase his relationships with numerous non-Western countries. At the same summit, however, following Russian military debacles in the Ukraine's Kharkiv oblast, Putin was told by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India that "today's era is not an era of war." Putin also had to assure President Xi Jinping of China: "We understand your questions and concern about this. During today's meeting, we will of course explain our position." This occasion made clear that Russia was not getting China's full support to overcome its predicament.

## **Conclusion**

As the discussion above shows, the Putin administration's core goals of great power politics are to unilaterally exercise power in Russia's sphere of influence and to get other great powers to recognize Russia's status. However, the reality is that it is far from achieving these goals.

Since the invasion began in February 2022, the means the Putin administration has employed to achieve its goals have also suffered significant losses. While Russia has demonstrated the destructive force of its military capabilities, it has proven itself to be incapable of using these means to effectively achieve its objectives and win full-scale battles. Russia has financial reserves, and daily life is carrying on. However, considerable restrictions on trade with Western countries have substantially decreased foreign currency income and access to international technology markets, and in turn, Russia's prospects for growth and the buildup of state power have plummeted. Ukraine and Western countries' united stance against Russia has made it difficult for Moscow to overturn this situation diplomatically. Because Russia did not sufficiently coordinate its actions with countries such as China and India, it has lost credibility in its capabilities as a great power and has struggled to develop partnerships that contribute to "multipolarization." And although military cooperation with China continues, such cooperation has not produced any visibly favorable outcomes, neither for Russian interests in Europe, nor for China's actions in East Asia and the globally. All of this reveals that Russia has made missteps in setting its goals and selecting its means in great power politics, and has lost the capabilities necessary for great power politics. In the post-Soviet space, the results have been the de-russification of Ukraine and significant decline in other countries' trust in Russia. Additionally, Western countries increasingly building up their military strength in rejection of Russia's sphere of influence.

If Russia manages to carry out the invasion advantageously and impose its will on Ukraine in the future, friendly countries in and outside the post-Soviet space may become more cooperative toward Russia, bringing Russia closer to its desired image of a great power. However, even then, losses and devastation in Ukraine, as well as the enduring effects of Western sanctions are inevitable, and it will not be until the distant future that Russia achieves the status of an honorable great power. Conversely, if Russia cannot stop its invasion of Ukraine despite facing disadvantages, it may continue to use coercive measures as a weak player while expanding the scope of its international norms violations. If Russia's declining norms result in inappropriate military cooperation with Iran and North Korea, the spread of destabilizing factors will add to these concerns. In either case, Russia may not provide substantive support to China in the U.S.-China competition, but it is likely to hinder the actions of the Western countries. Until Russia retreats from Ukraine, fundamentally changes its behavior so as not to become a reemerging threat, and becomes a member of a new stable balance of power, it will remain a destabilizing factor in international politics.

***Chapter 4: Keynote Speech***  
**Can China Fight a War?**  
**In Recent Years, the Government of the People's**  
**Republic of China Has Repeatedly Threatened War.**  
**But Could It Sustain a War?**

*Edward N. Luttwak*

**Preliminary note**

What follows does not address the question of whether the Chinese government will decide to start a war, because the evidence of recent history is that leaders, democratically-elected as well as dictatorial, are apt to start wars only to discover that they should not have done so due to realities perfectly discernable beforehand, which they chose to ignore.

The question actually addressed is what would happen on China's home front if the People's Republic of China were to initiate combat operations on a scale sufficient to provoke sanctions equivalent to those imposed on the Russian Federation because of the Ukraine war, and which would entail a significant number of combat casualties.

**A. By way of comparison: Russia's capability to sustain war**

When the Russian Government invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022, it did so with too few troops and without a war-winning plan, as it turned out. But Russia did have all the means necessary to wage war, successfully or otherwise. It could certainly do so *sustainably*, because Russia is self-sufficient for both food and fuel (oil, natural gas, coal), as well as for all war-relevant raw materials, or near enough.

Therefore, in regard to material requirements, Russia can continue to fight indefinitely in spite of the sanctions quickly imposed by the G-7 countries, and the additional sanctions and limitations that have been added until now.

It should be noted that the sanctions are not ineffectual.

In fact, the Russian economy as a whole was much more globalized than many in and out of Russia had believed. But the consequences have remained manageable even in the sector most severely affected: civil aviation.

Russian airlines are mostly equipped with leased Airbus and Boeing airliners and cargo aircraft.

Therefore, all international flights had to stop as soon as the G-7 sanctions were imposed. This was because the aircraft would be subject to immediate lessor retrieval if they landed outside the Russian sphere given that the SWIFT sanctions prohibit the monthly lease payments, triggering the expedited confiscation and recovery procedures of the Capetown convention.<sup>1</sup>

That did not apply to internal flights within Russia, where the operation of Airbus and Boeing aircraft is only constrained by the need for replacement parts and aviation consumables such as brake pads, some producible locally given time, and others not.

But the almost immediate grounding of most of the fleet, with domestic travel mostly diverted to the railways, will enable essential and all very long-range flying to persist for a long time by resorting to cannibalization, once replacement part and consumable inventories run out (although parts such as brake pads are being smuggled successfully).

Similar remedies are available for most other non-replaceable imports, including contraband by shuttle traders in the case of high-value, low-weight items transportable as luggage, such as microprocessors and small electronic devices (Moscow is still connected to destinations around the world by numerous third-party carriers).

More sophisticated forms of covert commerce provide other necessities, such as spare parts for imported machinery.

In addition, overt commerce persists with, or via, neutrals including Turkey and India, and China as well as Cuba, North Korea, and Venezuela.

In addition to having its own food and fuel, and secret ways of by-passing import restrictions for small, portable essentials like microprocessors, Russia also has that most basic requirement of war: *expendable combat manpower*.

There are certain conditions on the supply. President Putin has not declared war nor mobilized the armed forces to send into action the army's regular combat formations with their quota of conscripts aged 18 to 21, no doubt to avert the mobilization of Russian mothers.

But there have not been any consequential political or popular reactions within Russia to the casualties of the professionals of the Air Assault Brigades, of the units

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<sup>1</sup> The ["Capetown"] Convention on International Interests in Mobile Equipment of November 16, 2001, and Protocol on Matters Specific to [leased] Aircraft Equipment, which assures the expedited retrieval of aircraft if lease payments are delinquent-- regardless of the habitual pace of the local civil courts.

manned by contract soldiers, of the Donetsk and Luhansk troops, of the recently mobilized reservists, and the Wagner mercenaries, all of which have suffered 11,770 combat deaths between February 24, 2022 and the end of September 2022<sup>2</sup> according to the lowest possible estimate to be found on the internet (with more than twice that number more probable).

## **B. The People's Republic of China's capability to sustain war**

### **Expendable Military Manpower**

In Russia, the deaths of tens of thousands of soldiers have required no special mitigation efforts.

But in China, when three PLA soldiers and one officer were killed in a night brawl with Indian troops in Ladakh's Galwan valley on June 15-16, 2020, those four killed in action were of such great significance that their deaths were not announced until February 19, 2021,<sup>3</sup> a delay of eight months. This was long enough to allow very elaborate material and media preparations to mitigate the repercussions of announcing four combat deaths.

On February 19, 2021, it was announced that the senior of the four, battalion commander Major Chen Hongjun (陈红军) had been posthumously decorated with the "July 1 Medal," the highest award given to Chinese Communist Party members, which can only be granted by the Party's General Secretary and State President, namely Xi Jinping himself.

Chen's pregnant widow, Xiao Jianwen, received assistance from the military affairs departments of two different provinces, Shaanxi and Gansu. Because she had a degree in music, she was appointed to a professorial position in the region's highest-ranking musical institution, the Xi'an Conservatory of Music (西安音乐学院). Officials also arranged the relocation to high-grade new housing of Xiao Jianwen and her infant son in Xi'an.<sup>4</sup>

Chen Xiangrong, the youngest PLA soldier killed was the beneficiary of a professional

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<sup>2</sup> There is an official 5,937 KIA count for the regular armed forces for February 24 to September 21, 2022; 800-1,000 KIA estimated for Wagner mercenaries through November 4, 2022; and 3,833 KIA for the DPR and 1,000 KIA for the LPR through November 17. This puts the KIA total at 11,770; but the actual number could be twice that. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties\\_of\\_the\\_Russo-Ukrainian\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties_of_the_Russo-Ukrainian_War).

<sup>3</sup> Liu Xin, Guo Yuandan, Zhang Hui. "China unveils details of 4 PLA martyrs at Galwan Valley border clash for first time, reaffirming responsibility falls on India." *Global Times*, February 19, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1215914.shtml>.

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chen\\_Hongjun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chen_Hongjun)

media presentation and photographic processing to make him appear downright pretty, thereby (reportedly) making him an instant youth hero.<sup>5</sup>

He was further remembered anew on his posthumous birthday.<sup>6</sup>

A somewhat older soldier, Xiao Siyuan was presented as an earnest defender “of every inch” of the motherland.

His mother echoed the patriotic sentiments of her only son, but did so over-enthusiastically. This provoked social media criticisms of her inadequate motherly feelings, which necessitated a further media intervention.<sup>7</sup>

The presentation of the fourth and final “martyr,” Wang Zuoran, was addressed to a more traditional audience. It emphasized the filial sentiments supposedly preserved in a pre-combat precautionary letter.

The letter was translated, all too idiomatically, for an American-slanted English-language readership as follows:

“Mom and dad, sorry to be an unfilial son. I am sorry that I might not be able to be there for you through the end.

If there is an afterlife [martyrs obviously benefit from a degree of ideological indulgence from the materialist Party], I wish I could be your son again and repay your love and care.”

By the time of Wang Zuoran’s official funeral, for which his parents had to express spontaneous grief preserved fresh over the intervening months, a permanent Wang Zuoran exhibit graced the local “Martyr’s Hall.”<sup>8</sup>

The above cannot prove but does strongly suggest that the Chinese government is responding to an intense sensitivity to casualties in Chinese society that is plainly absent in the Russian case.

Presumably, this is so because the Chinese population at large has a decidedly “post-heroic” attitude towards war and its casualties. The reasons may be more complex, but may simply reflect the nature of contemporary Chinese families, or more specifically

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<sup>5</sup> “Chinese youngsters flood social media to mourn border heroes who died in clash with India with surging patriotism.” *Global Times*, February 20, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1216001.shtml>.

<sup>6</sup> “China-India border clash martyr remembered on his birthday.” <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202112/1241125.shtml>

<sup>7</sup> “Chinese netizens rush to defense of border Martyr’s mother following comments calling her ‘selfish’ and ‘thoughtless.’” *Global Times*, March 04, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202103/1217353.shtml/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuq2xjaZ93k>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZci-wOjT9Q>; <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202104/1220153.shtml>

ethnically Han families, whose children of military age are very largely single children, the single vectors of two nuclear families whose members themselves have very few relatives.

The present writer's "Post-Heroic" thesis,<sup>9</sup> which has generated something of a literature,<sup>10</sup> was predicated precisely on the diminished and diminishing size of families in developed, and now also semi-developed, societies.

The implication was that the wars of the past with their high casualties were made possible by the availability of "spare" male children, whose non-return from war would still leave at least one male child but more often two to perpetuate the nuclear family, which itself had many relatives.

*What can be said categorically is that if the PLA goes to war, it will be the first armed force in history to do so with personnel consisting very largely of single children.*

## Food

China is today by far the world's largest importer of animal feed (chiefly soya beans) and of human food (poultry including chicken offal, pork, beef, and dairy products), essentially because of its very limited supply of arable land. As of 2020, China had 0.08 hectares per capita of arable land, a very low number, even inferior to India's 0.12 hectares per capita.

That scarcity is not simply the result of China's very large population, but also of decades of policy failure. When Stalin launched his Five Year Plans centered on heavy industry, the additional cost of locating much of it far to the east of Moscow in the Ural mountains and Kazakhstan (especially under the Second Five Year plan 1933-1937) was redeemed when the German advance overrun many of the historic industrial areas.

By contrast, when Deng Xiaoping, his colleagues, and successors launched China on its path of export-driven industrialization and concomitant urbanization, no attempt was made to locate factories and housing in the non-arable lands that account for much of China's total territory, including in zones quite close to ports and otherwise quite accessible, and not just the Tibetan plateau or Xinjiang's deserts. Instead, housing and industry spread across arable lands.

This policy error was supposedly corrected by new regulations that imposed

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<sup>9</sup> Edward N. Luttwak. "Toward Post-Heroic Warfare." *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Some listed in Kristian Frisk. "Post-Heroic Warfare Revisited: Meaning and Legitimation of Military Losses." *British Sociological Association*. January 24, 2017. SAGE publication <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0038038516680313>



increasingly strict controls.<sup>11</sup>

But a great deal of additional farmland was lost to industrialization and urbanization even after the imposition of supposedly strict controls. In the 2019 year-end survey, total arable land was counted as 1.28 million square km (490,000 square mi), 6% less than a decade earlier in 2009.<sup>12</sup>

It seems that while the central authorities ordered local authorities to preserve arable land for agriculture, they failed to supply them with alternative funding for their projects that required capital in excess of their revenues, which were therefore funded by land sales.

In spite of continuing technological advances in agriculture, the acute shortage of arable land sets definite limits that defeat government attempts to increase the production of specific, high priority crops.

For example, at the outset of a major drive to increase soya bean production by 40% from 16.4 million tons to 23 million tons by 2025,<sup>13</sup> in order to reduce the current reliance on imports for 85% of supplies, actual soybean output instead fell by 16% in 2021. This was simply because farmers allocated more land to more profitable crops, chiefly maize (corn), leaving that much less for soya beans.

One reason why the authorities are so focused on soya beans is simply because China depends on them more than any other feed imports to produce pork, poultry and eggs, mutton, beef, and dairy products, with the amount imported, 96,516,785 metric tons in 2021, itself constituting the largest type of freight on the world's oceans other than iron ore and petroleum.

But another reason for the authorities' concern is the origin of the soya beans. They are mostly shipped from just four sources: the Pacific ports of the United States and Canada from which no shipments would arrive if G-7 sanctions were imposed, and the Atlantic ports of Brazil and Argentina, which are an ocean too far from the Chinese point of view.

Moreover, most of the other animal feeds imported (9.4 million tons of sorghum and 28 million tons of maize (corn) in 2021) also comes from the same four countries,

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<sup>11</sup> Minghao Li, Wendong Zhang, and Dermot J. Hayes. *Can China's Rural Land Policy Reforms Solve its Farmland Dilemma?* CARD Iowa State University Agricultural Policy Review, Winter 2018 APR, [https://www.card.iastate.edu/ag\\_policy\\_review/article/?a=78](https://www.card.iastate.edu/ag_policy_review/article/?a=78).

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-total-arable-land-shrinks-nearly-6-2009-2019-survey-2021-08>.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Reidy. "Chinaplan to produce 40% more soybeans in five years." WorldGrain.com, January 13, 2022, <https://www.world-grain.com/articles/16343-china-plans-to-produce-40-more-soybeans-in-five-years>.

which in addition supply most of the imported animal proteins (pork, poultry and parts, mutton, beef, and dairy products) for which China is also the world's largest importer.

The PRC's published "food security" goals include the domestic sourcing of 95% of its pork, 100% of its poultry (and eggs), mutton, and beef, and 70% of dairy products. These are all feasible goals *if animal feed continues to arrive*—except in the case of dairy products as the 70% domestic sourcing goal cannot be attained unless imports are limited by quotas to 30% of total demand, because many Chinese buyers refuse to purchase domestic dairy products if imports are available, even at much higher prices.

As for the *political* importance of food and feed imports, the recorded public reactions in Shanghai to the 2022 food-supply restrictions caused by the Covid-19 movement restrictions, are very revealing.

—The *facts* are that Shanghai's locked-down population was supplied with more and better food than urban Chinese had under Mao when Beijing's population (I lived there in August-September 1976) survived on rice, wheat, sorghum, some green vegetables, and very small amounts of pork and chicken (less than one chicken per family per week). Eggs were a real luxury, and cabbage was eagerly bought to be dried as winter food on balconies everywhere. People were thin, but there was no starvation.

—Yet in 2022, Shanghai's locked-down population reacted bitterly to their far superior food supply, with some protesting that they were "starving." This was not actually a great exaggeration because many Chinese have evolved *physiologically* since becoming habitual protein-eaters. They are bigger and taller, and males especially are significantly heavier. They need more food, and especially protein, as well as dairy products that did not exist in 1976.

(Also, government-stored frozen pork delivered to locked down Shanghai inhabitants provoked very negative reactions as being "tasteless.")

An altogether different indicator of the *political* importance of food and feed imports is that the PRC authorities support private, or ostensibly private, companies that acquire land by lease or even purchase in some cases to produce soya beans and other agricultural products in locations outside the borders of the PRC but *accessible overland*, in the Russian Federation, Laos, Nepal, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, all countries unlikely to adhere to any sanctions regime.

None of those sources promise to supply large quantities, but evidently whatever is

produced is valued as “sanction-proof.”

Finally, it is worth noting that in both Argentina and Brazil, the authorities have examined their options in the event of G-7 sanctions that would limit or stop their exports of soya, other feeds, and meat to China.

In both countries, it is anticipated that there will be no supply to China (across the US-Navy controlled Atlantic, around South Africa, across the Indian Ocean, or through the Straits of Malacca), but there is an expectation of G-7 purchases of their produce for distribution to food-deficit countries.

In other words, Xi Jinping has made important speeches about “food security,” but he has not been able to assure it beyond a large reserve of rice and wheat that may be enough for two years of consumption, as well as several months of frozen pork.

Aside from cereals and the frozen pork, it would be back to the late-Mao diet, which may indeed be a semi-starvation diet for the new generation of protein-fed Chinese.

## Oil and LNG

China is the world’s largest consumer of crude oil, in the amount last registered at 12,791,553 barrels a day, and is also the largest LNG importer, as noted below.

But China’s dependence on imported hydrocarbons is not comparable to its dependence on imported proteins because of three different considerations:

- domestic oil production (at 4,905,071 barrels a day in 2022) supplies almost 38% of current domestic oil demand;
- imports from Russia (also via a Kazakhstan pipeline) continue to increase;
- export industries account for a substantial part of total oil and gas demand, and their requirements would decline very sharply under a G-7 sanctions regime.

China was the world’s fourth-largest producer of natural gas in 2021 (after the United States, Russia, and Iran), but it was also the world’s third-largest consumer (after the United States and Russia), so that in 2021 it imported 10.5 billion cubic feet per day of LNG, with a lesser amount of pipeline gas from Russia, Kazakhstan, and also Myanmar.

Natural gas demand for electrical generation has been increasing as coal-fired generation declines (the many new coal-fired power stations still coming on line replace decrepit older plants), but again a significant portion of that demand is generated by

export industries.

## **Conclusion**

China's dependence on imported energy is not of decisive importance. On the other hand, China's dependence on imported protein would cause increasing deprivation after three or four months, and its lack of expendable male children is irremediable.

As noted at the start, the fact that China is not capable of sustained warfare without drastic consequences does not guarantee that its leader will not start a war.

But it is unlikely that China's leader would enjoy Putin's immunity from significant opposition if he were to start a war. This is so because such a war would trigger G-7 sanctions that would gradually but relentlessly diminish China's food supply, while incurring casualties in numbers that will not be limited to just four or five, and might start at 1,000 on the first day and reach 4,000 the next day with ship sinkings.



## *Chapter 5*

# **Defying the Water's Edge: The Philippines and Its Strategic Policy toward the United States-China Competition**

*Aries A. Arugay*<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

There is no dearth of studies regarding the inextricable linkages between domestic politics and the making and implementation of strategic policy—an amalgam of security, defense, and foreign policies—in the Philippines. The scholarly consensus depicted Philippine domestic politics as either a distracting (inward-looking) or a muddling (inconsistent) factor to the pursuit of its strategic interests as a small power in the Indo-Pacific. However, the role of the public and security experts (scholars and practitioners) is considered a minor influence in strategic policymaking. Using findings from an original survey of 663 members of the Filipino security community, this paper discusses their perceptions, opinions, and evaluations of the Duterte administration's strategic policies on the South China Sea dispute, US-China competition, and the Philippines' relations with the US and China. Findings reveal that the domestic security community and the Duterte administration have several diverging views. Considering the views of the Filipino security community, this paper aims to shed light on the role of domestic factors which are beyond presidential politics. Domestic factors such as strategic culture and civil-military relations can account for the bureaucratic resistance to a more accommodative strategic policy toward China.

**Keywords:** Strategic policy, Duterte, security elites, strategic culture, civil-military relations, Philippines-China relations

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## Introduction

The adage “Politics stops at the water’s edge” is a mantra ingrained in every foreign policy practitioner and often imbibed by every scholar and analyst of strategic policy. This ubiquitous tenet of foreign policy is often assumed among practitioners. For international relations scholars of neoclassical realism and liberalism, there is a great deal of variation in its actual implementation across states (Milner 1997; Rose 1988). In transitioning states with weak and un-institutionalized systems and transitioning regimes, domestic politics usually have profound impacts on the making and implementation of *strategic policy*—defined as the amalgam of security, defense, and foreign policies that seek to defend the national interest (Mansfield and Snyder 2007).

The Philippines is a prime example of a country where domestic politics have shaped the contours and trajectories of its strategic policy. The Philippine political landscape has often confounded foreign governments as well as scholars given the lack of policy continuity, shallow implementation, and ever-shifting dispositions on matters of international security and foreign relations (Baviera 2020). Factors such as presidential leadership, executive-legislative relations, partisan politics, and legitimacy deficits have influenced major policy decisions related to the Philippines’ national security and foreign relations. Examples include the failed renewal of the military bases agreement with the US, the country’s pull-out from the Coalition of the Willing in the Global War on Terror, and even its maritime policy in the South China Sea (Castro 2010; Cibulka 1999; Eadie 2011).

As a small power, the Philippines has been in the middle of US-China superpower competition in the Indo-Pacific. Its political leadership identified regional power shifts and lingering conflict flashpoints in Asia at the core of its national security interests. Since 2016, the Philippines has seriously explored expanding its network of security partnerships beyond like-minded status quo states as part of its strategic policy. Some scholars have labeled this strategy as “hedging,” which is commonly pursued by its neighbors in Southeast Asia (Kuik 2016). While the Philippines maintains its sole military alliance with the US, the Duterte administration has explored security cooperation with China, Russia, Israel, Japan, and India. President Duterte has signaled that he is even willing to downgrade the country’s partnership with the US to bolster its reputation as a “free agent” to other possible regional security partners. As the foundations of the Philippines’ foreign and national security policies are shaken by the rhetoric of its current chief executive, its bureaucracy (particularly the defense establishment) is either resisting this “pivot,” or not entirely convinced that veering totally away from established

operating practices is a good idea (Arugay 2020).

Despite Duterte's rhetoric, there is scant evidence on issues such as the pushback against the pro-China and anti-US stance espoused by the Duterte presidency from the country's defense and security establishment (Castro 2017). What are the explanatory factors behind this divergence in strategic policy preferences? This paper provides empirical evidence on the opinions, attitudes, and sentiments of the country's security elites about Duterte's strategic policy toward China. It goes beyond domestic political variables such as the idiosyncrasies of political leadership and regime characteristics to pay attention to the country's strategic culture and the state of civil-military relations (Brooks 2008; Raymond 2018). It also examines how these two variables are perceived by security elites to explain the strategic policy divergence on the role of China between security elites and the presidency.

Based on findings from an original survey on the Philippine security community comprising 663 academics, civilian bureaucrats, and uniformed officials, this paper discusses their perceptions, opinions, and evaluations of strategic policy under the Duterte administration. It specifically focuses on security issues such as the South China Sea (SCS) dispute, US-China competition, and the Philippines' relations with China, revealing divergent views between the security community and the Duterte government. The country's strategic culture (particularly its elements shared by the military, namely a domestic focus and a partiality to the US) will likely resist the development of a strategic partnership with China. This resistance is bolstered by the state of civil-military relations under Duterte as more members of the armed forces (both active and retired) have occupied the upper echelons of decision-making and directed the trajectory of strategic policy.

The next section of the paper reviews the scholarly literature on the role of domestic politics and strategic policy with an emphasis on the impact of strategic culture and civil-military relations. After that, the paper discusses the empirical findings that reflect the policy divergence between the Duterte administration and the Filipino security community. In the conclusion, this paper provides some initial insights on the likely shape of Philippine strategic policy beyond the Duterte administration.

### **Domestic politics and strategic policy: Linkages and undercurrents**

For most of international relations scholarship, factors related to domestic politics (or the second image) (Gourevitch 1978) are often perceived as distractions or muddling



influences to foreign and security policy (Fearon 1998). This effect is arguably more apparent in a small state due to the deficits in its capacities for projecting power, protecting its national interests, and influencing the regional or global arena. Often, leaders of small states are more concerned with domestic issues and trade-off participation in external affairs to score political victories at home (Magcamit 2016).

The position of a certain state in the international system's hierarchy is associated with the role that domestic politics play in its national strategy. Big powers can use their hegemonic position globally and shape the international agenda to their liking (Mearsheimer 2001). On the other hand, small powers are concerned with survival both at home and abroad. With unfinished state- and nation-building projects, small states are often caught in various security predicaments that limit their maneuverability in the international arena. This vulnerability makes domestic political dynamics a key causal factor influencing policy preferences for dealing with other states, big or small (Thorhallsson and Steinsson 2017).

In the Philippines, scholarly research on the impact of domestic politics on strategic policy has focused on the negative repercussions emanating from its political environment at home. The major bulk of the literature highlights the confounding role of Philippine domestic politics in articulating a coherent and consistent policy abroad. Scholars often point to the lack of state capacity, limited democratization, social fragmentation, and unfavorable economic conditions as pull factors that limit the Philippine government's ability to promote national interests through clear strategizing of its foreign and security policy (Dosch 2006; Morada and Collier 2001; Rüländ 2020; Zha 2015). In the post-authoritarian era, domestic political contexts have informed the analysis of key events related to Philippine strategic policy. Examples of such events include the non-renewal of the US bases treaty in 1991 (Stromseth 1991), the 1995 Mischief Reef crisis with China (Marlay 1997), participation in the Global War on Terror after 9/11 (Santos 2010), and the current SCS dispute with China (Santamaria 2018). As argued by Baviera, "An additional problem is that the preferences of the Philippine leadership and the elite, which matter greatly in foreign policy, are not always clearly articulated as a consensus position... democracy in the Philippines seems to thrive on the cacophony, the plurality, the multitude of voices and opinions" (2014, p. 137).

Among various domestic political variables, the role of presidential leadership and its interaction with other powerful political actors more often dominate academic debates (Castro 2018). This view is also echoed by Baviera: "Foreign policy is largely an executive function in the Philippines, with the president given much leeway as its chief

architect" (Baviera 2012, p.9). A new administration often brings its own definition of the national interest and its own priorities. Personal patronage and satisfying powerful interests tend to guide Philippine foreign policy, disrupting the engagements made by prior governments because the hold of political parties does not often last beyond a term of office. Consequently, the idiosyncrasies of the presidents and their specific political style become a critical domestic variable in Philippine strategic policy considerations (Baviera 2012, p.9).

This is palpable under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte. He sought to recalibrate Philippine foreign and security policy away from the West and into the arms of countries such as China and Russia. Once a political nobody abroad, he expressed a desire to embrace China while rejecting the country's long-time ally. The often-neglected country was instantly pushed into the limelight given its new leader's musings, which usually took the form of highly emotional rants under the guise of foreign policy. At one point, he threatened to scrap the Mutual Defense Treaty with the US and at the same time pursue deep security relations during its ongoing territorial disputes with China. These "adventures" in Philippine foreign relations were officially labeled as the pursuit of an "independent" foreign policy (Baviera 2017).

Scholars immediately offered their own analysis of the domineering impact of Duterte on the country's strategic policy, often relying on concepts from political science such as populism or international relations theories such as neoclassical realism (Magcamit 2020). Duterte's populist pivots in foreign policy were seen as performative acts to invite new foreign allies like China while signaling for more commitment from its traditional partners such as the US to gain more economic and security benefits for the Philippines (Arugay 2018). To improve Philippines-China relations, Duterte seeks to leverage his domestic popularity as critical political capital to simultaneously convince China to provide economic assistance to the country (mainly through the Belt and Road Initiative), reinforce his political legitimacy at home through economic development and political stability, and sway current Filipino public opinion in favor of China (Baviera and Arugay 2021).

The current analyses do not transcend the role of the presidency despite some evidence of differences in policy preferences by the country's top decision maker and the actual implementers of strategic policy, who are uniformed officials and civilian bureaucrats as well as experts in security studies and practice. Two important variables to consider are the strategic culture and civil-military relations (CMR). Both variables can be empirically investigated by surveying the country's security community comprising

academics, researchers, and analysts to government officials such as civilian bureaucrats, and members of the security sector.

Strategic culture comprises patterns of thinking and beliefs that are capable of influencing preferences and decisions of actors. For Raymond (2018), strategic culture acts as a map (history as a guide to present policy), a millstone (social process of decision-making), and a filter (limits the options in finding solutions to security problems). Academic work on Philippine strategic culture is also few and far between. Castro (2017)'s study emphasized that strategic culture exists in the Philippines and is dictated by the country's armed forces. Like its security policy, there is little difference between strategic culture and military culture (p. 20).<sup>2</sup> Philippine strategic culture can be characterized by emphasis on the archipelagic nature of the republic, the internal security role of the military, anti-communism, and dependence on alliances from other powers, notably the US and others. There are current debates on whether the desire to reorient the Philippine military toward external defense during its maritime and territorial disputes in the SCS ran contrary to its established strategic culture (Misalucha and Amador 2016). This is a key theme in the discussion of the perceptions of the Filipino security community in the succeeding pages.

CMR also received minor attention in the analysis of Philippine foreign or security policy. While there is no dearth of academic literature on Philippine CMR (Lee 2020), the current body of literature do not link CMR with strategic policy. Given the country's political history with authoritarianism, CMR is often associated with the challenges of democratization and peacebuilding as the Philippines continues to face internal challenges from a communist insurgency and from a Muslim secessionist movement in Mindanao (Arugay 2011).

CMR as a more specific domestic political variable can further enrich our understanding of Philippine strategic policy given that it is heavily influenced by the relative distribution of power between civilian political actors and the armed forces. For many years, the desire to impose civilian supremacy over the military has furthered the cause of democratic civilian control in the Philippines, but arguably at the expense of modernizing the armed forces to address external security challenges (Castro 2005).

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<sup>2</sup> He differentiated between strategic culture and military culture. A country's strategic culture comprises national strategic culture and military organization culture. The former is defined as "public and shared symbols and narratives that concern matters of military force" while the latter are "beliefs, habits, and assumptions that a military uses to adapt to its external environment and integrate internally" (p. 20).

The scholarly consensus seems to be that the more undue influence the military enjoys in a particular administration in the Philippines, the more the military can assert its institutional stance vis-à-vis the current policy defined by the political leadership. In her study of Philippine maritime security policy, Despi (2020) argued that the while the civilian political leadership wants to downplay China's assertiveness in the SCS, the military establishment (particularly the navy) continues to push for a more confrontational stance that contradicts the Duterte administration's preference. Thus, by looking into the policy preferences of the Filipino security community and how they diverge from the official government line, one can possibly attribute this to the current state of CMR in the country.

## **Methodological notes: An expert survey of the Filipino security community**

### *The role of expert surveys*

Surveys gauging public opinion in the Philippines started in the 1990s, particularly in reporting public satisfaction with administration performance, trust ratings of political leaders, candidate preferences during elections, and pre-election and exit poll surveys to validate the integrity of government-proclaimed electoral results (Abad and Ramirez 2008). As Hedman (2010) argues, public opinion has emerged as a social fact or political discourse in the Philippines.

However, much less has been said about large-N “national elite surveys” which are used to directly assess the perceptions of elites on a given topic, often with the goal of differentiating sentiments, beliefs, and knowledge by elite groups (defined by profession and economic class) from those of the public-at-large (Durch 1999; Grøholt and Higley 1972). More importantly, elite surveys reveal prevailing attitudes among those in position to inform or influence policy. In political contexts such as the Philippines, a survey of elites provides information on policy views or preferences held by a more informed group.

Similar national security expert surveys had been conducted on regional topics such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and strategic policy opinions in Southeast Asia (Huong 2018; Tang et al. 2020). Following these studies, one of the most recent expert surveys probed the perceptions and opinions of Filipino strategic elites on the role of the Quad in Philippine national security (Arugay, Misalucha-Willoughby and Amador

2019).

These surveys are often limited by low response rates, limiting their ability to express findings as definitively representative of the opinion of the elite in general or its subsections; nonetheless, they are useful in enhancing our understanding of the strategic landscape (Green and Szechenyi 2014). Given the logistical restraints of conducting research imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper believes that this is an optimal data collection strategy.

### ***Survey conducted for this paper***

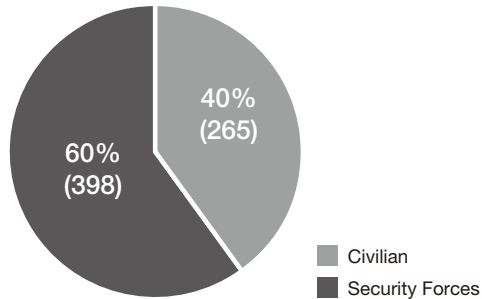
The survey for this paper was conducted online from October to November 2020 with its subjects set as academics, public sector employees, and particularly the graduate classes of key defense learning institutions such as the National Defense College of the Philippines and the Philippine Public Safety College. This yielded a good representative sample of emerging leaders of the security sector with entrance qualifications and requisite recommendations from their respective educational and training institutions.

### ***Sample description***

Using an online non-random survey of Filipino members of the country's strategic community, the survey was able to collect data from 663 respondents from two sectors:

- (1) civilian sector comprising members of the (a) academe, (b) government agencies outside the security sector, and (c) civilian personnel in the security forces, and
- (2) security sector comprising military and uniformed personnel in the security forces.

Military and uniformed personnel comprising 60% (N=398) of the persons surveyed were mostly sampled from key security officials, while the civilian sector is represented by 40% of the sample (N=265). While the authors strived to have an equal balance between uniformed and civilian respondents, they had no effective control over the response rate given the non-probabilistic sampling nature of the survey.



**Figure 1: Distribution of sample**

Survey findings showed that 491 (74%) respondents were identified as male, 156 (24%) as female, and 16 (2%) preferred not to answer. As for educational attainment, 60% (401) of respondents possessed master's degrees, 31% (203) possessed an undergraduate or bachelor's degree, and 7% (47) possessed a doctorate. Moreover, given the sample profile of respondents who are normally mid to senior level in their respective careers, 58% (386) of respondents obtained overseas training.

### **The Philippine security community survey: Findings and analysis**

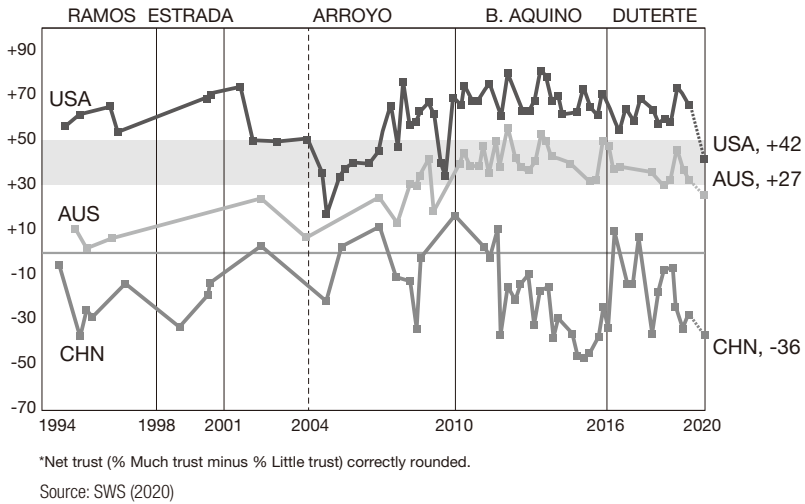
This section provides empirical evidence on the policy preferences of officials and experts that form the Philippine security community. Do the strategic policy preferences of the Duterte administration diverge from those of the larger security community of the country? Given the uncertain conditions of the regional strategic environment amid US-China competition, the relevant part of the survey that can be used for this question is the alliance preferences of the Philippines.

Despite the Duterte administration's desire to forge new security partnerships with countries like China and Russia, the strategic policy experts tended to disagree with the Duterte administration and support the republic's old allies. The results indicate an apparent deep loyalty with traditional security partners: Japan (91.1%), the US (85.2%), and Australia (80.2%). The latter two have respective visiting forces agreement or status of forces agreements in the country. The Philippines and Japan have an existing strategic partnership prior to Duterte's tenure as president. China is the least preferred partner, with Russia not far behind.



**Figure 2. Preferred security partner-countries of the Philippines**

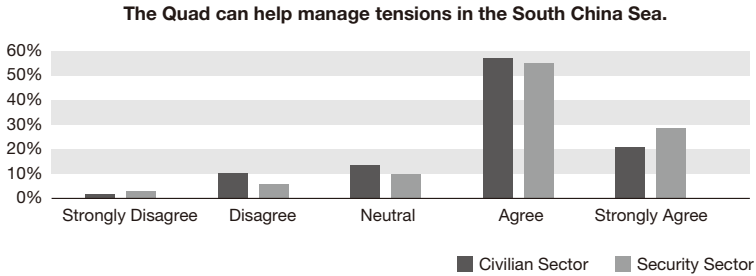
Some of the survey respondents engaged in activities that emanate from the Philippines's long standing strategic partnerships with Japan, the US, and Australia. As stated earlier, six out of ten survey respondents had foreign education and/or training that were mostly provided by these three countries. Evident from these preferences are the years of strong relations and overlapping linkages between both security sectors in these countries. While the Duterte administration appreciates the role of these traditional partners and the accompanying benefits, it also desires to diversify the partnership portfolio of the nation. However, buy-in from the country's security community remains lukewarm, an indication of bureaucratic pushback from officials in government who have invested in cultivating relations with established partners and scholars who also see the value of deepening strategic relations rather than exploring new ones. There seems to be a sense that forging new partnerships can divert the attention on an inward-looking security sector away from the meager resources it possesses (Manantan 2020).



**Figure 3. Filipino public's trust in China, the US, and Australia.**

The hesitation of the security community to break away from the state's orthodox position suggests that the security community's policy differs from the Duterte administration in two ways: (a) its push for an independent foreign policy is characterized as being "friend to all, enemy to none" and (b) the Philippine president's ideological disagreement with the US-led alliance system (Amador, Arugay, Misalucha-Willoughby and Baquisal 2020). But the opinion of the Filipino security community is like the public at-large in terms of its low regard or trust with China and positive view toward countries like the US and Australia (Figure 3). Net trust in China recovered after Duterte took over, but China still ranks much lower than other countries.



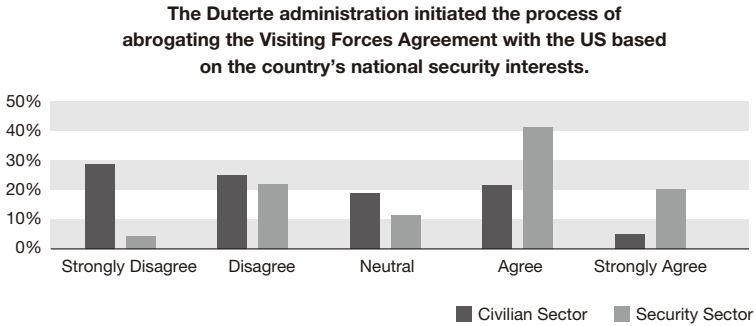


**Figure 4. Preferences on the role of the Quad in the SCS dispute**

The more conservative preferences of the security community are also consistent with their appreciation of the role of the Quad in promoting Philippine national security by advancing its strategic interests in the SCS. According to regional observers, after the sudden withdrawal of Australia in 2008, both the post-2017 revival of the Quad and the promulgation of the United States’ Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy served to counterbalance China’s growing military power and assertiveness in the region.

Across the board, respondents positively affirmed the Quad’s role in managing tensions in the SCS and its positive benefit to the Philippines’ geopolitical position and national security. This is despite the lukewarm treatment of the Duterte administration by some members of the Quad (i.e., the US) and the possible role of the US in the SCS. For the Filipino security community, what the Quad contributes to the Philippines is a sense of familiarity and cordiality in diplomatic and military relations. The Philippines and the US, despite some heated rhetoric coming from Malacanang in recent years, have committed to more security and defense-related activities and exercises in 2019 (Viray 2018). Strong bilateral ties exist between Japan and the Philippines because both countries “have common cause to seek closer security cooperation with each other” (Amador 2013). The implication is that anti-Western policy rhetoric by President Duterte and some of his loyalists in his government is being tempered by more sober actions by the members of the country’s strategic community, whether in government or academe, through informal track-two diplomatic channels.

The Duterte administration’s statements of appreciation for the US role are possibly due to the impact of the push by the bureaucracy, particularly the country’s security sector. Evidence for this is the extension of the deadline for the abrogation of the country’s visiting forces agreement (VFA) with the US.



**Figure 5. Opinions about the abrogation of the US VFA**

On this issue, one can see that the divergence in the preferences of the Filipino security community could be a function of bureaucratic politics. While 65% of respondents in the security sector tended to support the administration's decisions, only 55% of civilian respondents disagreed with the move to abrogate the VFA with the US.<sup>3</sup> This comes as a bit of a surprise since it is expected that the security sector would oppose the move of the Duterte administration given its probable deep linkages with the US. However, this also reflects the Filipino security sector's perception of the declining US commitment to defend Philippine national interests (Venzon 2020).

To summarize, evidence of policy differences between the Duterte government and the Filipino security community can be seen in the choice of strategic partnerships that the Philippines would likely benefit from as well as in the possible stabilizing role of the Quad in managing tensions in the SCS. The survey findings clearly show that the rhetoric at the top of the country's strategic hierarchy is not necessarily shared by those below and those outside of it. However, the often messy, muddled nature of bureaucratic politics was also apparent in the divided view toward Duterte's unilateral desire to abrogate the US VFA. While the civilian sector expressed disagreement with this move, the security sector—cognizant of the declining US commitment in the region—shared the view of President Duterte.

<sup>3</sup> The mean scores between the civilian sector and security sector also indicate a wide gap. Out of the highest score of 5 and the lowest score of 0, the entire sample has a mean score of 3.11, while the civilian sector has a mean score of 2.51, which is a whole point less than the security sector (3.51).

***Viscosity of security priorities: The role of strategic culture***

For small states, strategic culture is less about the projection of force and power abroad and more about an understanding of its status in the strategic environment. It contains “deeply embedded conceptions and notions of national security that take root among the elite and the masses alike. It encapsulates a country’s security posture, its place in the international hierarchy of power, and the nature and scope of its external ambition” (Castro 2014, p. 250).

As bureaucratic politics reveal the intra-policy differences within the security community, the strategic culture in the Philippines seemingly acts as an anchor against “political adventures” by the government of the day. One can use the identification of security priorities of the Philippines as a useful proxy. As the Duterte administration has put the highest premium on security and order, this paper will examine whether the priorities of the larger security community and political leadership are similar.

<b>TOP 3 PRESSING NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUES</b>	
	Percentage of respondents who picked the issue
1 COVID-19 Pandemic	53.4%
2 Terrorism and Violent Extremism	48.0%
3 Communist Insurgency	46.0%
4 Natural and Human Disasters	44.0%
5 External Territorial Defense	43.4%
6 Cybersecurity	24.1%
7 Disinformation and Fake News	20.1%
8 US-China Competition	14.0%
9 Regional Secessionism	3.6%
10 Others	5.2%

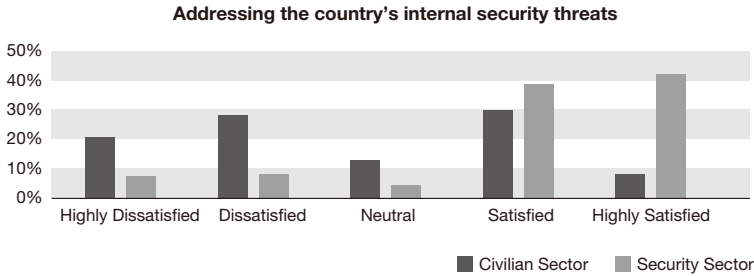
**Figure 6. Top national security issues**

Respondents in our survey were asked to identify what they perceive as the top three pressing national security issues confronting the Philippines. The COVID-19 pandemic, a non-traditional security issue, occupies the top spot.<sup>4</sup> Following this, terrorism and violent extremism (48%), communist insurgency (46%), natural and human disasters (44%), and external territorial defense (43.4%) were also identified as security priorities. More internal-oriented security threats are prioritized by the survey respondents—something that they shared with the Duterte administration in keeping with the inward-looking nature of the country's strategic culture.

This finding is also consistent with the existing national security documents of the Duterte administration, such as its National Security Policy (NSP) and National Security Strategy (NSS). Both documents identify external defense and issues such as the SCS dispute as significant security threats, but they are only mentioned after the threat of illegal drugs, communist insurgency, and terrorism (Arugay and Kraft 2020). The Philippine security community therefore continues to be guided by a strategic culture that is inadequate for the Philippines, a small power in the geopolitical middle of a turbulent regional neighborhood. Thus, one can surmise that the viscosity of this internal focus will affect future efforts to further re-orient the security sector to put more premium on external security threats.

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<sup>4</sup> Observers, however, have raised the Duterte administration's militarized response in non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g., lockdown or mobility restrictions) and the more contentious stewardship of interagency initiatives by former generals, notably the Secretary of National Defense as head of the National Task Force on COVID-19, and the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation, and Unity—a former general—being the “Chief Implementer” of the pandemic response and its vaccination strategy (Beltran 2020; Dizon 2020).

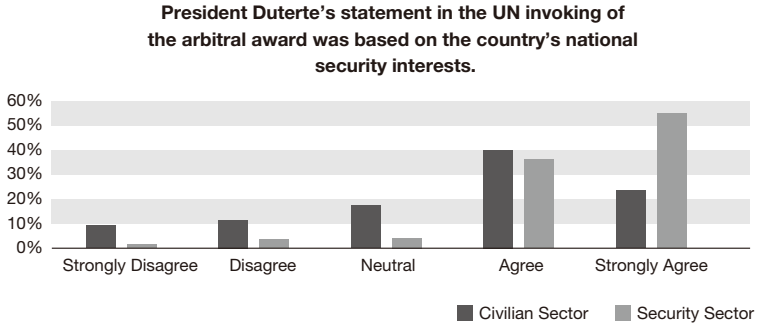


**Figure 7. Performance of the Duterte administration in internal security**

The evaluation of the country's performance in addressing internal security threats (such as the communist insurgency, terrorism, and armed regional groups like the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Moro National Liberation Front) has been generally positive. The mean response from the entire sample is 3.51 out of 5. However, there is noticeable difference between the civilian and the uniformed sample. Strong positive performance evaluation in addressing internal security threats does not go beyond the security sector. Albeit with a less within-group representative sample, bureaucrats outside the security sector, scholars of the academe, and members of the private sector that were sampled in this survey reported a strong general dissatisfaction in national security performance overall, including internal security. This is indicative of the prevalence of a more internally oriented strategic culture in shaping the assessment of the performance of the government. However, observable differences within the security community (with the military and police enjoying a more positive evaluation of performance) could be a function of smooth CMR under Duterte. Another explanation could be that the security sector has imbibed the country's strategic culture more than the other members of the Filipino security community.

Another critical part of this strategic culture is anti-communism. Considering the emphasis given by the security community (particularly the security sector) to the communist insurgency threat, it is confounding how the Duterte administration can balance this with a cordial approach to China. Philippine military doctrine as a pillar of the country's strategic culture has identified communism as a non-negotiable enemy, and the insurgent movement's Maoist origins can be seen as something irreconcilable. This is particularly salient as the security sector has branded the New People's Army as a communist-terrorist group. The addition of the "terrorist" label is an unequivocal

declaration that Chinese Communists are enemies not only of the government but of the Philippine state.

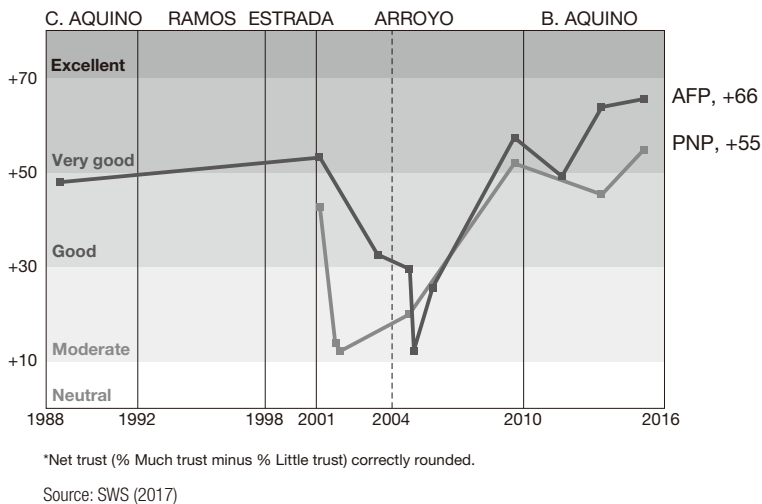


**Figure 8. Views on the invocation of the Philippines' UN arbitral award**

Castro (2014) argued that it is part of Filipino strategic culture to rely on multilateralism, considered a strategy of a small power. Prior to the Duterte administration, there was little doubt of the country's commitment to multilateralism, liberal-democratic norms such as human rights and democracy, as well as its proximity to more Western beliefs as a product of its colonial past. The resort to international law to clarify territorial claims in the SCS shocked China and others in the region, since this maneuver defied pragmatism and reflects little regard for negative repercussions. While the Duterte administration seemed to downplay the arbitral award in the beginning of its term, it has recently invoked the award as seen in the speech of President Duterte at the September 2020 meeting of the United Nations General Assembly. According to the survey, respondents uniformly positively receive the invocation of the Permanent Court of Arbitration award in international fora such as the United Nations and accept ASEAN's role in advancing Philippine national interests. It seems like that the security community, whether civilian or uniformed respondents, clearly espouses a strategy that confronts the SCS issue with international law and a strategy involving multilateral institutions, a key component of Filipino strategic culture.

*The internal counter-flow: The role of civil-military relations*

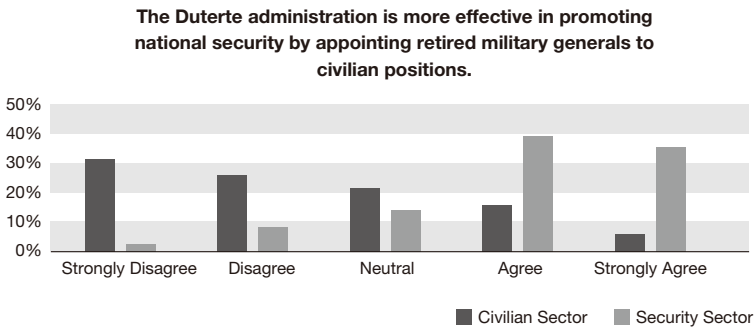
The military has become a key partner of the Duterte administration not only in strategic affairs but in overall governance of the republic. From its bloody war on drugs to its various policies to deal with the lingering communist insurgency and Mindanao conflict, it has heavily relied on the security sector, particularly the military and police, to accomplish its national security goals (Esguerra 2019). Clearly favoring military officers for their apparent efficiency and obedience, by 2017 President Duterte had started to appoint more than the usual number of retired generals to the executive branch of the government. To date, he has the greatest number of retired generals in any presidential cabinet in the post-dictatorship period (Ranada 2018). Although defense and security institutions (such as the Department of National Defense) are usually led by former military officers, the Duterte administration distinguishes itself by also appointing them to the cabinet and chief government departments, such as those dealing with the environment and social welfare, and even the office in charge of the peace process.



**Figure 9. Public trust ratings on the military (AFP) and the police (PNP)**

Duterte's successful propping of the military has also affected the conventionally negative view of the public toward the security sector. A 2016 survey revealed that the AFP was enjoying its highest trust ratings since public opinion polling began (SWS 2017). A March 2020 survey by the same firm also revealed that 79% of respondents were satisfied with the military's performance (SWS 2020).

From the question of whether the Duterte administration is more effective in promoting national security by appointing retired military generals to civilian positions, one can see polarization within the Filipino security community: the security sector agreed with the practice, while the civilian sector vehemently opposed the practice. This glaring division is reflected in the mean averages of the respondents. With five as the highest score, the civilian sector has a lower response average (2.39) compared to the security sector (3.99).



**Figure 10. Views on the role of retired generals in Duterte's cabinet**

The balance in CMR is tipped in favor of the latter when some of these ex-soldiers replaced officials endorsed by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) who formed part of Duterte's first cabinet.<sup>5</sup> Despite the Duterte government's promising start, the window for peace negotiations with Filipino communists started to close. Duterte's policy reversal from all-out peace to all-out war became evident at the beginning of December 2018 with the issuance of Executive Order No. 70, which created an

<sup>5</sup> An example of a CPP-endorsed appointee is the former secretary of social welfare and development, Judy Taguiwalo, who is a retired professor of community development. She was replaced by a retired general, Rolando Bautista.

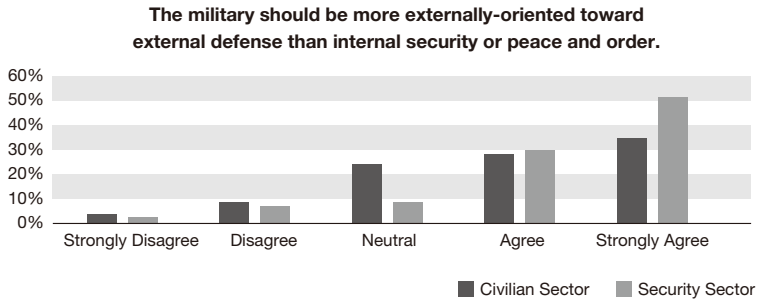


inter-agency body tasked with ending the local communist armed conflict. A year before December 2018, Duterte recognized the New People's Army (NPA) as a terrorist group. With both retired and active leaders of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in charge of implementing this executive order, it seems that the military is determined to put a violent rather than negotiated end to perhaps the longest Maoist-inspired insurgency in the world.

The appointment of retired military officers to the civilian government is common in the Philippines (Gloria 2003). What sets the Duterte administration apart is not only the unprecedented number of these officers, but also the portfolios that they are responsible for and the dominant voice they possess in the current government. Decades of fighting the communist insurgency led these ex-combatants to decide that what is needed is a "whole-of-nation" approach, with the appointment of former military officers (instead of civilian officials) as heads of key civilian institutions. This decision threatens to undermine democratic CMR, especially in a country where the military has often exercised political autonomy vis-à-vis politicians and bureaucrats (Arugay 2011).

There is little doubt that this group of retired generals dictate current peace and security policy. More than that, their placement in other agencies involved in rural development and public services delivery obscures the civil-military divide that is essential for maintaining civilian supremacy in governance structures and democratic civilian control over the military. This trend also potentially confounds the military's reformist stance and reorientation toward external defence that form the focus of its current doctrine and strategy. Therefore, formulation or implementation of strategic policy, especially one that focuses on the military's external mission, is affected by the imbalance between the civil and military spheres in Philippine politics.

One can argue that with the military possessing leverage to influence the civilian government, it can divert precious attention and mobilize scarce resources to more strategic concerns. However, the Philippine military seems to be more interested in quashing domestic enemies rather than in countering external security threats. The Filipino security community seems to have more idealistic aspirations for a more professional military that is more outward-looking (Figure 11).



**Figure 11. Views on the appropriate mission of the Philippine military**

For the Filipino security community, there is consensus that a more professional military must be externally oriented. While this was shared by Duterte’s predecessor, the current government dominated by retired generals who have fought the country’s internal enemies such as the communists, terrorists, and Mindanao rebels have doubled down on internal security challenges. The passage of the draconian Anti-Terrorism Law and the current communist purge in the country’s top universities are more recent manifestations of this policy leaning.

### **Conclusion and prospects: The future of Philippine strategic policy toward China**

This paper discusses the role of two domestic factors affecting Philippine strategic policy toward China under the Duterte administration: strategic culture and CMR. Focusing on these two conceptual handles added more complexity to the domestic political terrain that profoundly influences the security and foreign policies of the Philippines. This paper also gives a nuanced picture of the common one-sided view that domestic-level variables or conditions act as a distracting or muddling factor in the protection and promotion of the country’s strategic interests abroad. Using an expert survey on members of the Philippine security community comprising academics, civilian bureaucrats, and uniformed officials, this paper provides empirical evidence on how their strategic policy preferences diverged from the official line of the Duterte administration, particularly President Duterte himself. These differences in policy positions could be attributed to the nature of bureaucratic politics, given the long tenure and inter-institutional juxtaposition of the interests and agendas of relevant strategic actors. From the discussion, the ripples

generated by different bureaucratic institutions such as the military, diplomatic corps, and other civilian agencies ran contrary to the viewpoints of the government of the day. In terms of dealing with China, the country's bureaucracy is not entirely convinced that it is in the interest of the country to forge closer strategic relations. In this sense, there is sub-state evidence that the Philippines might likely rely on China for economic benefits while continuing to be loyal to its traditional partners to further its security interests despite the prodding of Duterte and his political allies. As his government ends its tenure in 2022 and unless his true proxy wins the presidency, it is doubtful whether this pro-China push will be sustained.

These two domestic factors obfuscate the Duterte administration's accommodative stance toward China. The Filipino security community maintains the viscosity of the state's strategic culture —one that is inward-looking, pro-West, anti-communist, and liberal. Even if China offers economic incentives for closer ties, it will not be easy to depart from conventional beliefs, especially if China continues its unwarranted aggression in the SCS. Even the Duterte administration might change its friendly stance. If it does, then the entire security establishment, influenced by its strategic culture, will have to confront China. On the other hand, strategic culture also prevents the Philippines from being more externally focused in its strategic priorities. The anti-communist orientation of the security community exposes a dilemma of mutual exclusivity: focusing inwards prevents the country from adopting a more external orientation. This current inward-looking orientation might actually work in China's favor.

Finally, the Duterte administration has unduly empowered the military establishment through a politico-military network of retired and active officials from the security sector. This troubling development for the country's democratic CMR is an indication of the larger process of democratic erosion. There is some evidence that the process of de-democratization is aligned with China's support to the Duterte government (Arugay 2020). This civil-military imbalance can shape the future of Philippines-China relations. On the one hand, the country can "navel-gaze" and focus on defeating its communist insurgency, thereby countering the flow of promoting national interests in a coherent and unified manner. The security sector also cannot decouple the communist movement from China as its ultimate inspiration and inceptor. Thus, any form of strategic cooperation with China can easily be spoiled by this monkey wrench.

More research in the future can be devoted to further tease out these two complex domestic factors with more empirical data. This expert survey of the Philippine security community serves as a crude snapshot of the perceptions, views, and opinions of those

working on strategic policy, whether inside or outside the government. Other types of evidence and methodologically sound ways of gathering information should be used in order to look for other ways that domestic politics defy the water's edge as well as to find solutions in order to keep the country's water flowing in accordance with its national interests.

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## Chapter 6

# Not Drawing a Parallel. Ukraine and Taiwan: An Indian Perspective

*Jagannath Panda\**

### Introduction

Russia's war against Ukraine has not only had economic, diplomatic, and geopolitical repercussions, but also exaggerated the fear of accelerated conflicts in the Indo-Pacific, a region with several unresolved conflicts (from Northeast Asia to the Himalayas). The dissonance in political stands on the Russia-Ukraine conflict among Asian states is also a manifestation of this fear of the Indo-Pacific being unwittingly caught in the new Cold War situation precipitated by the Ukraine war in the wake of increased ideological bipolarization.<sup>1</sup>

On the one hand, China, India, and the states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), among others in the Global South, have chosen neutrality, dialogue, humanitarian aid, and abstention in multilateral forums.<sup>2</sup> India and the Global South see this as a currently applicable “independent” approach to secure their respective interests (e.g., energy, food, and weapons security) while also not souring historical associations and continuing outreach with the West. However, for China, which has been falling out of favor with the West, the intent is certainly to showcase solidarity with the anti-U.S. sentiment while coalescing China-centered Global South/emerging economies.<sup>3</sup> The expansion of both the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa plus (BRICS+) is evidence of China's promotion of the “true

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Hirsh, “We Are Now in a Global Cold War,” *Foreign Policy*, June 27, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/27/new-cold-war-nato-summit-united-states-russia-ukraine-china/>.

<sup>2</sup> Jagannath Panda and Eerishika Pankaj, “New Delhi on the Ukraine War: Between Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific Region,” Italian Institute for International Political Studies, May 26, 2022, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/new-delhi-ukraine-war-between-eurasia-and-indo-pacific-region-35054>; David Adler, “The West v Russia: Why the Global South Isn't Taking Sides,” *The Guardian*, March 28, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/10/russia-ukraine-west-global-south-sanctions-war>.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent Ni, “Ukraine War Deepens China's Mistrust of the West,” *The Guardian*, June 6, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/06/ukraine-war-deepens-chinas-mistrust-of-the-west>.

spirit of multilateralism and multiculturalism” in developing economies.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, U.S. treaty allies like Japan, Australia, and South Korea have not only provided nonlethal military aid (including bulletproof vests, blankets, helmets, and medicine) but also embraced the West’s hardline approach, including punitive sanctions against Russia, as a means to protect national interests and territorial sovereignty against growing intimidation from authoritarianism.<sup>5</sup> Their hardened stance is also part of a growing trend in the Indo-Pacific toward strengthening defense capabilities, evidenced through increased military spending amid a shared concern about the accelerated North Korean nuclear threat and its growing convergence with China, as well as China’s military adventures in the South and East China Seas, Indian Ocean, and Taiwan Strait.<sup>6</sup>

In this context, the other crises in Asia notwithstanding, the long-standing Taiwan question is especially relevant not just regionally but globally. Primarily, the reason is Taiwan’s centrality for China. The long-term success and legitimacy of the People’s Republic of China (PRC)’s ruling regime, namely the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), is intricately interlinked with the prevention of Taiwanese independence and with ultimately achieving Taiwan’s reunification with China. Following President Xi Jinping’s record re-coronation at the 20th National Congress, the reunification pursuit has received a significant thrust, evidenced by the harsher tone on Taiwan as compared to the 19th Congress.<sup>7</sup>

Besides, the Taiwan contingency bodes ill for the Asian stability, including economic repercussions on an emerging region due to the Taiwan Strait being one of the most lucrative maritime trade routes that connect Northeast Asia to the West. The question of

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<sup>4</sup> Leronardo Dinic, “Will the ‘BRICS-Plus’ Keep Growing?” *China-US Focus*, October 3, 2022, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/finance-economy/will-the-brics-plus-keep-growing>; “What Is the Shanghai Co-Operation Organisation?” *The Economist*, September 14, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2022/09/14/what-is-the-shanghai-co-operation-organisation>.

<sup>5</sup> Jiji Kyodo, “Japan Readopts Hard-Line Stance on Territorial Dispute with Russia,” *The Japan Times*, April 22, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/04/22/national/japan-russia-islands/>; “Invasion of Ukraine by Russia,” Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/crisis-hub/invasion-ukraine-russia>; “In Rare Stand, South Korea, Singapore Unveil Sanctions on Russia,” *Al Jazeera*, February 28, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/2/28/in-rare-stand-south-korea-singapore-unveil-sanctions-on-russia>.

<sup>6</sup> “World Military Expenditure Passes \$2 Trillion for First Time,” SIPRI, April 25, 2022, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2022/world-military-expenditure-passes-2-trillion-first-time>.

<sup>7</sup> Helen Davidson and Emma Graham-Harrison, “Xi Jinping Opens Chinese Communist Party Congress with Warning for Taiwan,” *The Guardian*, October 16, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/16/xi-jinping-speech-opens-china-communist-party-congress>; Jagannath Panda, “The Essence of Xi Jinping’s 20th National Congress Report,” *The National Interest*, October 21, 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/essence-xi-jinping%E2%80%99s-20th-national-congress-report-205479>.

Asian states’ “interdependence” on China and its resurgence to fuel their overall growth, while they are acutely aware of the need for the U.S. to balance Chinese assertiveness and maintain the Cross-Strait status quo, is a rather valid concern.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the issue involves not just the U.S., but also U.S. allies like Japan and Australia, as well as its partners like India, which fears the domino impact of the Taiwan crisis on the Himalayan border and in the Indian Ocean region. Officials in Australia and Japan, in particular, have alluded to supporting the U.S. were it to decide on defending Taiwan.<sup>9</sup> The two have recently also deepened their military cooperation by signing a landmark pact to share military intelligence on China.<sup>10</sup> Importantly, the four states of Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S., through their growing bilateral connections as well as via their security grouping, the increasingly relevant Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), are attempting to create a stronger deterrence network, if not a security architecture, against China’s growing belligerence.

Against such a scenario, what can be made of the drawing of parallels between Ukraine and Taiwan? Is it justifiable or needed to ascertain a level of deterrence or preparation measures against China? Or is it an exercise in futility, or worse, sensationalism? In a similar vein, to what extent would China count on lessons from the Ukrainian war? Could Indo-Pacific states like India and Japan recalibrate their Taiwan stance for the greater good, i.e., regional security?

## Drawing Parallels: A Question of Hits and Misses?

Even before Russian President Vladimir Putin’s “special operation” against Ukraine began, commentators had begun to analyze the “uncanny resemblance” between the crises in

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin Varley, “Taiwan Tensions Raise Risks in One of Busiest Shipping Lanes,” Bloomberg, August 2, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-02/taiwan-tensions-raise-risks-in-one-of-busiest-shipping-lanes>; Ashley, J. Tellis, “The Regional Perspective: Asian Attitudes toward the Taiwan Conflict and Future Implications,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and China Reform Forum, April 6, 2005, <https://carnegieendowment.org/files/TellisPaper1.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> “‘Inconceivable’ Australia Would Not Join U.S. to Defend Taiwan – Australian Defence Minister,” Reuters, November 13, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/inconceivable-australia-would-not-join-us-defend-taiwan-australian-defence-2021-11-12/>; Anthony Kuhn, “After Being Silent for Decades, Japan Now Speaks Up About Taiwan – And Angers China,” NPR, August 2, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/26/1020866539/japans-position-on-defending-taiwan-has-taken-a-remarkable-shift>.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Hurst, “Australia and Japan to Share Intelligence on China in Security Deal, Ambassador Says,” *The Guardian*, October 19, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/oct/20/australia-and-japan-to-share-intelligence-on-china-in-security-deal-ambassador-says>.

Eastern Europe and the Taiwan Strait.<sup>11</sup> There was talk of Ukraine being a “proxy” for Taiwan; and the comparisons about the respective threats to the two vibrant democracies that champion free-market economy (namely Ukraine and Taiwan) from geographically close authoritarian strongholds (Russia and China) were labelled “prophetic.”<sup>12</sup>

Even the then UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson joined the fray by stating that any Russian attack would “be heard in East Asia, they would be heard in Taiwan,” although Taipei continued to emphasize the geographic differences between Taiwan and Ukraine.<sup>13</sup> China, too, rubbished talks of comparison primarily to assert Taiwan’s status as an “inalienable” part of China’s territory. According to an official statement from China’s foreign ministry,

Confusing the Taiwan question with the Ukrainian issue is totally out of ulterior motives ... to take advantage of chaos ... to create a new crisis in the Taiwan Strait ... and contain China’s revitalization and development.<sup>14</sup>

Momentarily keeping the question of Chinese hegemonic motives vis-à-vis Taiwan aside, the similarities drawn in such parallels were superficial to an extent, in that any neighboring democratic state faces a certain level of threat from an autocracy under a strongman with imperialistic ambitions. For example, the Korean Peninsula and India’s Himalayan border both face a similar situation. Thus, the argument of Russia and China as “overwhelmingly powerful” neighbor states that respectively see Ukraine and Taiwan historically as an inalienable part of their own exclusive sphere of interest or territory is simplistic. Such contentions ignore the rich, complex, and unique histories of two disparate regions, and also in some cases even sensationalize the Taiwan contingency by continually spreading a sense of impending war.

<sup>11</sup> “Ukraine and Taiwan: Two Conflict Zones with Destabilizing Potential,” MERICS, February 4, 2022, <https://merics.org/de/kommentar/ukraine-and-taiwan-two-conflict-zones-destabilizing-potential>.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Hanson, “Whatever Russia Does in Ukraine, China Will Be Watching,” *The National Interest*, January 10, 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/whatever-russia-does-ukraine-china-will-be-watching-199301>; Hanson, “Whatever Russia Does in Ukraine, China Will Be Watching.”

<sup>13</sup> “UK Says Western Inaction on Ukraine Would Send Dangerous Message for Taiwan,” Reuters, February 19, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-wants-inflate-tensions-by-ignoring-planned-peace-talks-kyiv-says-2022-02-19/>; “Taiwan Says Inappropriate to Link Its Situation to Ukraine’s,” Reuters, February 28, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/taiwan-says-inappropriate-link-its-situation-ukraines-2022-02-28/>.

<sup>14</sup> “Confusing the Taiwan Question with the Ukrainian Issue Is Totally Out of Ulterior Motives,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (MFAPRC), April 18, 2022, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zwjg\\_665342/zwbd\\_665378/202204/t20220418\\_10669227.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/202204/t20220418_10669227.html).

This sensationalization of the threat from China, especially in Western media, was most evident during the visit to Taiwan by U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, wherein the Indo-Pacific at large was in danger of becoming the scapegoat of hegemonic ambitions.<sup>15</sup> Rather than downplaying China's narrative of the Pelosi visit, some in the media overzealously highlighted China's bombastic claims and threats, which were unnecessarily portrayed as impending actions that could lead to war.<sup>16</sup>

Notably, China's Taiwan reunification plans have been in the works for a long time, and hence are not contingent or derived from the relatively recent (though brewing) situation in Eastern Europe. For decades, the PRC has positioned missiles on its coast pointed at and within striking distance of Taiwan.<sup>17</sup> In fact, throughout history, the level of antagonism from Beijing has waned and surged depending on which of Taiwan's two main parties was in control after democratization: the Kuomintang (KMT) party, which does not support Taiwan's independence and favors closer ties with Beijing, versus the ruling pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which is unwilling to recognize the 1992 Consensus<sup>18</sup> and is considered a disruptive/radical entity by China.

Under Xi, China-Taiwan tensions have intensified in part due to the ruling DPP's commitment to safeguarding "Taiwan's freedom, democracy, and way of life, as well as ... the Taiwanese people's right to decide our own future," which is a sore point for Beijing.<sup>19</sup> Another important reason is Taiwan's growing international profile, courtesy of President Tsai Ing-wen's COVID-19 measures, successful international outreach, and Taiwan's

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<sup>15</sup> Wilfred Chan, "Hoopla and Yellow Journalism: Taiwanese Americans Bemoan Media Fearmongering over Pelosi Visit," *The Guardian*, August 3, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/02/taiwanese-americans-pelosi-visit-taiwan-china>.

<sup>16</sup> Niklas Swanström, "Hijacking Speaker Pelosi's Visit: Beijing Distends the Cross-Straits," Institute for Security and Development Policy, August 8, 2022, <https://isd.se/hijacking-speaker-pelosis-visit-beijing-distends-the-cross-straits/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Why the Taiwan Issue Is So Dangerous," excerpts from interviews with David Lampton, Kurt Campbell, Erik Eckholm, Fred Thompson, Yang Jiechi, Zhu Bangzao, and Joseph Wu, *Frontline*, Autumn 2001, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/china/experts/taiwan.html>.

<sup>18</sup> A controversial political understanding/agreement between the CCP and the KMT on the "One China" policy/principle. Also read, Jessica Drun, "The KMT Continues to Grapple with its '1992 Consensus,'" *Global Taiwan Brief* vol. 7, no. 19 (September 21, 2022), <https://globaltaiwan.org/2022/09/the-kmt-continues-to-grapple-with-its-1992-consensus/>

<sup>19</sup> "Full Text of President Tsai Ing-wen's National Day Address," *Focus Taiwan*, October 10, 2017, <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201710100004.aspx>; "Embassy Spokesperson's Remarks on the DPP Authorities' Provocative Actions for "Taiwan independence" and the External Forces' Moves of Playing the "Taiwan card," PRC embassy, September 1, 2022, [http://gb.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/PressandMedia/Spokepersons/202209/t20220902\\_10759332.htm](http://gb.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/PressandMedia/Spokepersons/202209/t20220902_10759332.htm).

ascendance as the fulcrum of the semiconductor industry.<sup>20</sup> However, despite the spike in tensions, the Chinese tactics (e.g., the post-Pelosi multi-directional coercion) seem to have become somewhat normalized in Taiwan; as a result, some are worried about what is called Taiwan's "complacency."<sup>21</sup> Yet such fears are not productive, nor correct. Taiwan has upped its defense spending amid its focus on military reform and introduced diversification policies. Above all, the fact that the majority of Taiwanese continue to support the pro-independence party highlights the sturdiness to fight.<sup>22</sup>

Unarguably, both Ukraine and Taiwan are democratic territories that are the targets of aggressive nationalism from more militarily advanced and dangerous nearby autocracies. Still, it is important to realize that while lessons can be drawn, international conflicts are unlikely to be replicated as they vary with the evolving context. Chinese President Xi is not an ideological twin of Russian President Putin, and Taiwan is not Ukraine.<sup>23</sup> They do not have the same political and legal status, for starters.<sup>24</sup> Only 14 states (including the Vatican) officially recognized Taiwan (Republic of China or ROC) as a nation in 2022. It is often called a "de facto"<sup>25</sup> state, a complicated status that some argue does not really exist. In the United Nations (UN), the PRC is China's only legitimate and legal representative.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast, Ukraine is a sovereign state, a member of the UN, and a "de jure" state. Moreover, with the 2005 anti-secession law, China has created a legal instrument to

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<sup>20</sup> Ryan Hass, "The COVID-19 Crisis Has Revealed Taiwan's Resilience," Brookings, June 15, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/06/15/the-covid-19-crisis-has-revealed-taiwans-resilience/>.

<sup>21</sup> James Baron, "Taiwan and Ukraine: Parallels, Divergences and Potential Lessons," *Global Asia* vol. 17, no. 2 (June 2022), [https://www.globalasia.org/v17no2/cover/taiwan-and-ukraine-parallels-divergences-and-potential-lessons\\_james-baron](https://www.globalasia.org/v17no2/cover/taiwan-and-ukraine-parallels-divergences-and-potential-lessons_james-baron).

<sup>22</sup> "Taiwan Unveils Record Defence Budget amid Tensions with China," Al Jazeera, August 25, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/8/25/taiwan-unveils-record-defence-budget-amid-tensions-with-china>; Christina Lai, "Power of the Weak: Taiwan's Strategy in Countering China's Economic Coercion," *China Brief* vol. 21, no. 21 (November 5, 2021), <https://jamestown.org/program/power-of-the-weak-taiwans-strategy-in-counteracting-chinas-economic-coercion/>.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Scobell and Lucy Stevenson-Yang, "China Is Not Russia. Taiwan Is Not Ukraine," United States Institute of Peace (USIP), March 4, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/03/china-not-russia-taiwan-not-ukraine>.

<sup>24</sup> Maëlle Lefèvre, "Ukraine-Taiwan: To Compare or Not to Compare, That is the Question?" Asia Centre, March 1, 2022, <https://asiacentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/UT-template-VF.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Ben Saul, "Explainer: The Complex Question of Taiwanese Independence," *The Conversation*, August 16, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/explainer-the-complex-question-of-taiwanese-independence-188584>.

<sup>26</sup> Frank Chiang, "Sadly, Taiwan Is Still Not a State," *Taipei Times*, March 12, 2005, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2005/03/12/2003245941>.

justify a military invasion of Taiwan.<sup>27</sup> This directly correlates with President Xi stating at the opening of the 20th CCP Party Congress that he intends to contain separatist elements, and so using “force” against Taiwan is not out of bounds.<sup>28</sup>

After more than eight months of the Ukraine war, the regional complexities are now being included in the narrative, and a more nuanced take has certainly emerged. It now includes generalized parallels with caveats noting that Ukraine is not just geographically far from Taiwan, but also has markedly different historical and geopolitical issues as well.

### **No Immediate Threat of a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan?**

Undoubtedly, the geographical distance notwithstanding, certain similarities between Ukraine and Taiwan are obvious – the two democracies face existential threats from authoritarian states ruled by imperialistic strongmen as well as the United States as a democratic superpower in declining relevance taking the lead to protect the larger goal of democratic ideals. What is worrying though is that Ukraine seems to have become a test case to justify or criticize American power and credibility. Such fickle narratives based on weak hypotheses will only complicate matters in the case of Taiwan, where the stakes are naturally high.

Moreover, despite an escalation of China’s military incursions into Taiwan’s air defense zone and the tenuous U.S.-China rivalry, U.S. military experts have denied fears about any immediate worries of an “imminent” invasion, especially as a consequent action to or in conjunction with the Ukraine war, for the following reasons:<sup>29</sup>

*First*, there is the geographical reason. Taiwan is an island separated from mainland China by 100 miles of sea, whereas Ukraine and Russia share a 1,200-mile land boundary. Thus, any Chinese invasion would be a massive, intricate operation that would be obvious to the world well in advance.

*Second*, Taiwan is a dominant supplier of semiconductors and electronics (making

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<sup>27</sup> Edward Cody, “China Sends Warning to Taiwan with Anti-Secession Law,” *Washington Post*, March 16, 2005, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2005/03/08/china-sends-warning-to-taiwan-with-anti-secession-law/5dcdfae8-4523-4350-9d45-77a85f6b240f/>.

<sup>28</sup> “Key Xi Quotes at China’s 20th Communist Party Congress,” Reuters, October 16, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/key-xi-quotes-chinas-20th-communist-party-congress-2022-10-16/>; Jesse Johnson, “Xi Refuses to Rule out Taking Taiwan by Force, Warning of ‘dangerous Storms’ Ahead,” *The Japan Times*, October 16, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/10/16/asia-pacific/politics-diplomacy-asia-pacific/xi-jinping-ccp-congress/>.

<sup>29</sup> “Taiwan: China Attack Not Imminent, but US Watching Closely, Says Gen Milley,” BBC, July 3, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62022308>.



65 percent of the world's semiconductors and almost 90 percent of the advanced chips).<sup>30</sup> Hence, it has a strong role in the world economy, and its security is a top priority to sustain global manufacturing chains. In addition, Taiwan is Washington's ninth-largest economic partner; in contrast, Ukraine is ranked 67th among the goods trading partners by the U.S. Trade Representative.

*Third*, Taiwan's strategic importance to the Indo-Pacific has increasingly grown. The Biden administration's Indo-Pacific strategy, released in February 2022, has continued the trend to bolster regional security and counter Chinese coercion in order to maintain "peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait."<sup>31</sup> Moreover, according to the Taiwan Relations Act, the U.S. is obligated to provide Taiwan weapons for defense, highlighting the continued importance attached to the self-governing island. Yet, there are questions whether and in what capacity the U.S. would engage in the event of Taiwan's invasion, especially as it did not deploy soldiers to defend Ukraine.

Here, while it is true that the U.S. has been vague about its intentions on intervening in Taiwan in the event of an attack, it is important to note that the U.S. is first and foremost an (Indo) Pacific power with significant interests in the region. Its interest in Central Europe is not that prominent in comparison. This would go much beyond simply defending Taiwan. In such a circumstance, the U.S. would also rely heavily on its Indo-Pacific partner states for support. The reaction of each of the Indo-Pacific states to a potential Taiwan invasion – which remains unlikely – would draw from each other; while the U.S. would rely on its partners and allies, they in turn would look to the U.S. to determine the extent of their involvement.

### **Taiwan's Security: India, Japan, and the Indo-Pacific**

China's military activities in the Taiwan Strait have been escalating since the DPP came back into power in 2020, largely (among many other factors) because the CCP regime fears a bolstered attempt by Taiwan to rejuvenate the pro-independence movement. Official communications between the PRC and Taiwan were already suspended indefinitely in 2016 when Tsai (who is considered a separatist by China) took office as

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<sup>30</sup> Saibal Dasgupta, "Race for Semiconductors Influences Taiwan Conflict," VOA, August 10, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/race-for-semiconductors-influences-taiwan-conflict-/6696432.html>.

<sup>31</sup> "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States" (The White House, February 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

president.<sup>32</sup>

Following the thwarting of the democracy movement in Hong Kong, the “successful” imposition of the wide-ranging, draconian new national security law (NSL), and the effective “cleansing” of the electoral system to ensure the survival of only “true” patriots, similar tactics in Taiwan are to be expected.<sup>33</sup> The introduction of the NSL in Hong Kong, which amounts to a breach of the “one country, two systems” principle because of the loss of democratic freedoms, is a potent indicator of Taiwan’s future. Notably, there are contentions that the amendments to the CCP constitution about Hong Kong linking the “full, faithful, and resolute” implementation of the “one country, two systems” policy with Taiwanese independence is a warning for Taiwan.<sup>34</sup>

Concurrently, not only have the number of intrusions into Taiwan’s air defense zone spiked considerably, but irregular grey-zone activities like cyberattacks, increased military patrols, economic coercion, and diplomatic isolation have become the norm for the past two years so as to exhaust the island’s defense resources and put pressure on the U.S. and its allies in the region.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, China’s continuous forays into creating legal frameworks to amplify its reunification attempt present a grimmer future.

A glimmer of such “encroachment” tactics was witnessed in the wake of Pelosi’s Taiwan visit, when the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) carried out naval-air joint drills that surrounded the island and crossed the median line and fired missiles over the island for the first time in history in an effort to normalize its activities closer to Taiwan, in addition to increased thrust of the now routine grey-zone tactics.<sup>36</sup>

Notably, the Ukraine war has put into question whether the desire to pursue a peaceful global future by controlling or forsaking weaponization (Ukraine gave up its nuclear arsenal in 1994 in exchange for security guarantees) is a pipe dream, or conducive

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<sup>32</sup> Yimou Lee, Sarah Wu and Greg Torode, “Analysis: China’s Freeze on Taiwan Contact Fuels Worry as Tensions Build,” Reuters, November 17, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-freeze-taiwan-contact-fuels-worry-tensions-build-2022-11-17/>.

<sup>33</sup> “Hong Kong National Security Law: What Is It and Is It Worrying?” BBC, June 28, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52765838>.

<sup>34</sup> “Does China Intend to Rule Taiwan under ‘One Country, Two Systems?’” Bangkok Post, October 29, 2022, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/world/2425387/does-china-intend-to-rule-taiwan-under-one-country-two-systems->.

<sup>35</sup> Yimou Lee, David Lague, and Ben Blanchard, “China Launches ‘Gray-Zone’ Warfare to Subdue Taiwan,” Reuters, December 10, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/hongkong-taiwan-military/>.

<sup>36</sup> Phelim Kine, “China’s Median Line Violations Suggest Taiwan ‘Decapitation’ Rehearsal,” *Politico*, September 1, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/09/01/chinas-violations-suggest-taiwan-decapitation-rehearsal-00054568>; Lee et al., “China Launches ‘Gray-Zone’ Warfare to Subdue Taiwan.”

to national interests, in a dangerous world with adversaries willing to take the nuclear option.<sup>37</sup> This was evidenced by Putin's flagrantly unapologetic tone while proclaiming his willingness to use all options as "not a bluff."<sup>38</sup> Hence, even as the debates about an exploding arms race in the Indo-Pacific are pertinent, equally important is developing deterrence capabilities to avoid war in the face of self-serving obstinate rivals focused on fantastical visions of both past and future.

Against such a scenario, the role of U.S. allies like India and Japan, as well as security groupings like the Quad, becomes all the more important to maintain a stable, peaceful rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

### ***Japan's Hardening Stance Gets Vindicated?***

Largely due to the increased Chinese threat in its neighborhood recently, Japan has been vocal about crossing China's "red" line on the Taiwan question.<sup>39</sup> This is in line with Shinzo Abe's oft-repeated statement about the direct correlation of the Taiwan Contingency to Japanese interests. Defense white papers in 2021 and the 2022 focused on the impending crisis or the "sense of crisis" in Taiwan, and subsequently, Japan's important policy documents have highlighted the need to monitor China's activities in the Taiwan Strait. Even during the controversial Pelosi visit, despite stringent criticism from China, Japan's solidarity with democracy and the U.S. highlighted Prime Minister

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<sup>37</sup> Joshua Keating, "Will More Countries Want Nuclear Weapons after the War in Ukraine?" Grid, June 1, 2022, <https://www.grid.news/story/global/2022/06/01/will-more-countries-want-nuclear-weapons-after-the-war-in-ukraine/>.

<sup>38</sup> At the end of 2022, Putin later denied any intentions of using nuclear weapons ("We see no need for that") and insisted on not using weapons of mass destruction first ("We have not gone mad, we are aware of what nuclear weapons are"). At the same time, he has asserted that the risk of nuclear war is rising. In February 2023, it was reported that the Norwegian Intelligence Service has called attention to the presence of tactical nuclear weapons on Russian vessels in its annual report. See, "Will Russia Use Nuclear Weapons? Putin's Warnings Explained," Reuters, October 5, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/qa-will-russia-use-nuclear-weapons-putins-warnings-explained-2022-10-04/>; Alys Davies, "Russia's Putin Says He Won't Use Nuclear Weapons in Ukraine," Associated Press, October 28, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/putin-europe-government-and-politics-c541449bf88999c117b033d2de08d26d>; "Putin: Nuclear risk Is Rising, But We Are Not Mad," BBC, December 7, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63893316>; Jon Jackson, "Russian Warships Armed with Nuclear Weapons Deployed: Norway," *Newsweek*, February 14, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/russian-warships-armed-nuclear-weapons-deployed-norway-1781135>.

<sup>39</sup> Jagannath Panda, "Pelosi's Taiwan Visit: Has It Burdened Japan's Taiwan Trajectory?" *Japan Forward*, August 25, 2022, <https://japan-forward.com/asias-next-page-pelosis-taiwan-visit-has-it-burdened-japans-taiwan-trajectory/>.

Kishida's intent to sharpen multi-directional deterrence against China.

Japan's new intelligence pact with Australia, strengthened alliance with the U.S., growing ties with South Korea, defiance against Russia, and steady bonhomie with India (despite India's steadfast position on Russia) convey an adamant refusal to kowtow to China's coercion or intimidation tactics. Moreover, Japan's shift in policy against Russia has highlighted Prime Minister Kishida's concerns for the Indo-Pacific as outlined in his address at the Shangri-La Dialogue security summit in Singapore in June 2022, in which he warned that "Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow."<sup>40</sup> For Japan, China's "coercion" and "faits accomplis" in the East and South China Seas are unilateral attempts to alter the status quo.

Notably, Xi's increasingly absolutist rule and the rise of total loyalists in his coterie following the 20th CCP National Congress have hastened fears in Japan of being further drawn into escalating conflict with China over not just the status quo changes in the disputed Senkaku Islands but also Xi's intention to forcefully invade Taiwan if needed.<sup>41</sup>

Against such a scenario, Japan, in a bold action, released three strategic documents, namely the new National Security Strategy (NSS), the National Defense Strategy (NDS), and the Defense Buildup Program.<sup>42</sup> Two important aspects of this move are the increase in Japan's defense budget and counterstrike capabilities, which form part of its long-term deterrence strategy. In addition, the NSS has hardened its stance on China, Russia, and North Korea, while describing Taiwan as an "extremely important partner" (although Japan's basic position on Taiwan remains unchanged).<sup>43</sup> It is clear that the "mounting" concerns about the Taiwan Strait are part of Japan's new pragmatism on defense.

On the economic front, Xi's increasingly inward-looking policies do not bode well for Japanese companies' interests, including a higher risk of technology leaks.<sup>44</sup> The latter is a significant concern amid China's increasing use of hybrid tools for coercion.

<sup>40</sup> "Ukraine Today Could Be East Asia Tomorrow": Japan PM Warns," France24, June 10, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220610-ukraine-today-could-be-east-asia-tomorrow-japan-pm-warns>.

<sup>41</sup> Jagannath Panda, "What the Xi Jinping Historic Third Term Means for Japan," *Japan Forward*, November 4, 2022, <https://japan-forward.com/asias-next-page-what-the-xi-jinping-historic-third-term-means-for-japan/>.

<sup>42</sup> Mirna Galic, "What You Need to Know About Japan's New National Security Strategy," USIP, December 19, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/12/what-you-need-know-about-japans-new-national-security-strategy>

<sup>43</sup> "Japan's Security Policy," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (December 27, 2022), [https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we\\_000081.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000081.html)

<sup>44</sup> Maya Kaneko, "China's State-Led Economy Could Put Japan Firms in Tight Spot," Kyodo News, October 23, 2022, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2022/10/6f42a697c141-focus-chinas-state-led-economy-could-put-japan-firms-in-tight-spot.html>.

Hence, Japan is strengthening its defense largely in response to the China threat amid worries about Yonaguni in Okinawa, about 110 km off the east coast of Taiwan, becoming a PLA target, and has increased its rhetoric to enhance support for Taiwan (e.g., economic security cooperation), in alignment with the U.S. position on Taiwan, apart from the buildup of defense capabilities.<sup>45</sup> However, the reality of a large pacifist Japan militarily engaging with China is complex, and may not have overwhelming public support.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, Japan must prepare for all contingencies, including maritime blockade of the Taiwan Strait; improve coordination with allies; and catalyze trade diversification plans so as to support its “reframing” of relations with China.<sup>47</sup>

### ***India’s Growing Defiance***

Taiwan is becoming a growing factor in India’s foreign policy due to the former’s economic and technological rising profile amid an increasing threat from the common adversary China. Importantly, their shared commitment to democracy and the rule of law provides a critical convergence of universal values and a strong basis for a mutually beneficial comprehensive relationship. However, their bilateral ties have not reached their true potential, and have remained at the economic trade partnership level primarily to prevent Chinese wrath. China is highly sensitive about Taiwan’s strategic association/collaboration with other nation states, in view of the “One China principle,” which views Taiwan as a province of China.

For India, Taiwan’s historical lack of support for its border dispute with China, as well as India’s compulsions to not cross China’s red line on Taiwan, namely India’s “one China policy” or have ties that stray from the routine (restricted to “interactions in areas of trade, investment, tourism, culture, education and other such people-to-people

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<sup>45</sup> “Japan, Taiwan Ruling Parties to Boost Economic Security Cooperation,” Kyodo News, December 24, 2021, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2021/12/4dbc41d8ff48-update1-japan-taiwan-ruling-parties-to-boost-economic-security-cooperation.html?phrase=kyodo>.

<sup>46</sup> Erin Hale, “Despite Tough Words, Japan Might Not Enter a Taiwan War,” VOA, October 16, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/despite-tough-words-japan-might-not-enter-a-taiwan-war/6791868.html>.

<sup>47</sup> “At 50, Japan-China Friendship Remains a Pipe Dream,” Editorial, *Japan Forward*, September 30, 2022, <https://japan-forward.com/editorial-at-50-japan-china-friendship-remains-a-pipe-dream/>; “Will Russia Use Nuclear Weapons? Putin’s Warnings Explained”, *Reuters*, October 5, 2022.

exchanges”) have proved decisive for long.<sup>48</sup> India, as a result, has favored the significant economic and developmental partnership (albeit through pragmatic power-parity engagement) with China, despite tensions, over creating geopolitical ripples.<sup>49</sup>

Nonetheless, India’s growing profile following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has compelled both U.S. allies and China to court India – a result of India’s highly adroit, proactive foreign policy comprising a multi- and pointed-alignment vision aimed toward strategic autonomy goals.<sup>50</sup> This has helped usher in certain key disengagements along the border, a temporary respite from the ever-escalating tensions with China.

Moreover, the growing regional instability and Taiwan’s increasing significance as democratic, technological, economic leverage against China has gradually marked a shift in the Indian approach to Taiwan. For example, Taiwan’s value as the dominant global semiconductor supplier is critical for India’s growth, too, especially as India is looking to build itself as a global semiconductor manufacturing hub. India is relying heavily on a potential free trade agreement (FTA) with Taiwan while a recent \$20 billion semiconductor project between India’s Vedanta and Taiwan’s Foxconn has been signed already.<sup>51</sup>

This shift toward acknowledging Taiwan as potent leverage has been part of the overall hardening of India’s China policy, especially after the Galwan crisis in 2020. For example, India has refused to accept China’s overture to compartmentalize border dispute

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<sup>48</sup> “Question No. 1205 People-to-People Contact with Taiwan,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, February 11, 2022, [https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/33511/QUESTION\\_NO1205\\_PEOPLETOPEOPLE\\_CONTACT\\_WITH\\_TAIWAN](https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/33511/QUESTION_NO1205_PEOPLETOPEOPLE_CONTACT_WITH_TAIWAN).

<sup>49</sup> Jagannath P. Panda, “Narendra Modi’s China Policy: Between Pragmatism and Power Parity,” *Journal of Asian Public Policy* vol. 9, no. 2 (March 31, 2016): 185–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17516234.2016.1165334>; “Joint Statement between the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of China on Building a Closer Developmental Partnership,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, September 19, 2014, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24022/Joint+Statement+between+the+Republic+of+India+and+the+Peoples+Republic+of+China+on+Building+a+Closer+Developmental+Partnership>.

<sup>50</sup> Jagannath Panda, “Negotiation and Negation: India’s Post-Galwan Diplomacy Vis-à-Vis China,” *South Asian Voices*, May 25, 2021, <https://southasianvoices.org/negotiation-and-negation-indias-post-galwan-diplomacy-vis-a-vis-china/>; Ravi Buddhavarapu, “India Is in a Sweet Spot, Courted by the Quad, China and Russia,” CNBC, March 24, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/24/india-is-in-a-sweet-spot-courted-by-the-quad-china-and-russia.html>.

<sup>51</sup> “India’s Vedanta, Taiwan’s Foxconn Sign \$20 Bln Gujarat Semiconductor Chip Deal,” *Al Arabiya*, September 13, 2022, <https://english.alarabiya.net/business/technology/2022/09/13/India-s-Vedanta-Taiwan-s-Foxconn-sign-20-bln-Gujarat-semiconductor-chip-deal>; Pritam Bordoloi, “Free Trade Agreement with Taiwan Could Boost India’s Semiconductor Ambitions,” *Analytics India*, October 12, 2022, <https://analyticsindiamag.com/free-trade-agreement-with-taiwan-could-boost-indias-semiconductor-ambitions/>.

and regional cooperation; continued to highlight the abnormality along the border, and hence in ties; pointed at the need for China to have an “independent” India policy; and resisted any reiteration of the use of “one China” policy in its official statements owing to the lack of reciprocity from China in accepting India’s unofficial stance on “One India.”<sup>52</sup>

Post China’s escalation of the Taiwan crisis (labeled widely as the Fourth Taiwan Crisis) in August 2022, which destabilized the atmosphere in the Indo-Pacific at large, India has been cognizant of the “militarization” of the Taiwan Strait. In a rare reference with respect to Taiwan, India called out China for its coercive and dangerous “attitude,” in response to an article by a Chinese diplomat that linked a recent Chinese ship docking at Hambantota to Taiwan Strait militarization.<sup>53</sup> Already, post the Pelosi visit, India had issued a nondescript but stern statement on recent Cross-Straits’ developments criticizing unilateral actions that alter the regional status quo.<sup>54</sup>

China’s prospective invasion of Taiwan, whether peaceful or violent, will completely destroy the already poor level of confidence between India and China and could lead to a low-level confidence between the militaries. China’s most recent white paper on Taiwan stipulates that Taiwan’s status as a “special administrative region” following reunification would be conditional under the “One China” principle, in that “Two Systems is subordinate to and derives from One Country.” This release has given Xi’s potential reunification plans a boost.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, as a deterrence measure or leverage, it is incumbent on India, as well as other Indo-Pacific partners, to put in place clear policies vis-à-vis Taiwan, and certainly re-evaluate the “One China policy” should India and China themselves engage in another bloody conflict along the border.

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<sup>52</sup> “Transcript of Special Briefing by External Affairs Minister on Meeting with Foreign Minister of China,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, March 25, 2022, [https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/35076/Transcript\\_of\\_Special\\_Briefing\\_by\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_on\\_Meeting\\_with\\_Foreign\\_Minister\\_of\\_China\\_March\\_25\\_2022](https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/35076/Transcript_of_Special_Briefing_by_External_Affairs_Minister_on_Meeting_with_Foreign_Minister_of_China_March_25_2022); “Why Beijing Must Link One-China Policy with One-India Policy,” *Economic Times*, August 9, 2022, <https://cio.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/government-policy/why-beijing-must-link-one-china-policy-with-one-india-policy/93456434?redirect=1>.

<sup>53</sup> Ananth Krishnan, “In a First, India Refers to ‘Militarisation’ of Taiwan Strait by China,” *The Hindu*, August 28, 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/in-a-first-india-refers-to-militarisation-of-taiwan-strait-by-china/article65821313.ece>.

<sup>54</sup> “Transcript of Weekly Media Briefing by the Official Spokesperson,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, August 12, 2022, [https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/35635/Transcript\\_of\\_Weekly\\_Media\\_Briefing\\_by\\_the\\_Official\\_Spokesperson\\_August\\_12\\_2022](https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/35635/Transcript_of_Weekly_Media_Briefing_by_the_Official_Spokesperson_August_12_2022).

<sup>55</sup> “China Releases White Paper on Taiwan Question, Reunification in New Era,” Xinhua, August 10, 2022, [https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/202208/10/content\\_WS62f34f46c6d02e533532f0ac.html](https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/202208/10/content_WS62f34f46c6d02e533532f0ac.html).

At the same time, India does not see a true parallel between the Ukraine war and the Taiwan flashpoint, primarily because it believes that superimposing concerns of one region over another is “misleading.”<sup>56</sup> Indian Minister for External Affairs S. Jaishankar has been unambiguous about reiterating that “both are products of very complex histories of that particular region.”<sup>57</sup> Hence, for India, even on broad grounds, the post-Soviet dynamics between Russia and Europe/the West and the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) cannot be equated with the events in Chinese history even though Asia was impacted by the post-Cold War developments.

Moreover, Jaishankar has clearly noted that Ukraine is not a “precedent” for China’s actions in Taiwan, because of historical reasons as well as evolving geopolitical shifts and challenges such as the intensifying rivalries.<sup>58</sup>

### ***Role of the Quad: A True Cohesive Indo-Pacific Framework?***

For a long while, even as Taiwan’s security has been hanging in the balance and precariously dependent on China’s whims and the China-U.S. equation, there has been no consensus among the Indo-Pacific states to question, let alone cross, the China-mandated “red line.”<sup>59</sup> The same has been true for the Quad despite its shared concerns on China and emphasis on maintaining the principles of a free and open Indo-Pacific, including the rule of law, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

However, despite the questions over parallels and the Quad’s dissonance over Russia, the Ukraine war has accelerated the need to examine the security architecture in the Indo-Pacific and the importance of better coordination and communication among partners.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, there is little hope that the Taiwan question will be formally/directly addressed by the Quad as a whole. What is hopeful though is the shifting

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<sup>56</sup> “Ukraine Crisis Has Its Roots in Post-Soviet Politics: Jaishankar,” *The Indian Express*, February 23, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/ukraine-crisis-has-its-roots-in-post-soviet-politics-jaishankar-7786688/>.

<sup>57</sup> “Ukraine Crisis Has Its Roots in Post-Soviet Politics: Jaishankar”

<sup>58</sup> “Raisina Dialogue 2022: Conference Report,” Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, April 2022, <https://www.kas.de/documents/264392/264441/Raisina+Dialogue+2022+Conference+Report+1.pdf/f0c0feff-7fe0-0f94-bf8e-efdfe8c75f56?t=1654662546202#:~:text=S.,in%20India%20and%20the%20EU.>

<sup>59</sup> Jagannath Panda, “Will the Quad Evolve and Embrace Taiwan?” *The National Interest*, February 17, 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/will-quad-evolve-and-embrace-taiwan-178351>.

<sup>60</sup> Jagannath Panda, “Quad: Divided over Ukraine, United in the Indo-Pacific?” *The National Interest*, March 18, 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/quad-divided-over-ukraine-united-indo-pacific-201243>.



(hardening) stances of all four states in the face of increasing Chinese assertiveness and the Quad's repeated focus on the "core" objective of promoting regional stability and prosperity.<sup>61</sup> These aspects highlight that cohesion exists, even if clear policy or consensus on "one China" does not. Thus, if push comes to shove, support to Taiwan will possibly emerge for fear of extended crises in the neighborhood, if not for the island itself. If that does not happen, then the security grouping would be in danger of losing relevance and credibility.

### **The Ukraine War: A Chinese Test Case?**

There must be a certain caution when drawing conclusions on whether or not the Ukraine war benefits China. At least initially, the war in Europe certainly diverted attention away from China's activities in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, while the war has allowed China to push propaganda and disinformation amongst Taiwanese citizens, it does not necessarily bode as a precursor to stronger action by China.<sup>62</sup> Besides the aforementioned reasons why an imminent invasion is unlikely, China also has to take into account the economic and geopolitical repercussions of taking unilateral military actions that break the sanctity of international laws. For example, it will consider Russia's economic slowdown due to sanctions and isolation in multilateral forums despite tacit support from certain global corners.

Xi is likely using Russia's Ukraine invasion to gauge potential ramifications vis-à-vis his future move on Taiwan. Despite the advanced stage of PLA modernization, Xi might well be considering how his untested military would fare if ordered to invade. Xi and his new loyalty-conscious, combat-oriented Central Military Commission (CMC) would also need to assess carefully what will happen if serious resistance is confronted after seeing the poor, demoralized performance of Russian troops.<sup>63</sup>

Xi must also be concerned about the effects that severe sanctions would have on his economy should he choose to take strong action on Taiwan, especially as the Chinese

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<sup>61</sup> "Joint Readout of Quad Leaders Call," The White House, March 3, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/03/joint-readout-of-quad-leaders-call/>.

<sup>62</sup> "Ukraine and Taiwan: Parallels and Early Lessons Learned," transcript of an online panel discussion, Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 22, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/ukraine-and-taiwan-parallels-and-early-lessons-learned>.

<sup>63</sup> Brad Lendon, "Xi's 'Action Men' Now Lead China's Military. Here's What That Means for Taiwan," CNN, October 27, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/27/china/china-central-military-commission-taiwan-intl-hnk-mic-ml/index.html>.

economy is struggling due to strict COVID-19 lockdowns.<sup>64</sup>

Taking into account Putin's insistence and then denial of the use of nuclear weapons, another question that might draw China's attention is how to successfully employ nuclear deterrence so as to be able to not just instill fear, but also limit the scope of conventional military conflict against the U.S. and its Indo-Pacific allies.<sup>65</sup>

In any case, China is not in a hurry to act on Taiwan, instead choosing to play the cautious and relatively long game. The leaders of China, still a rising power, have good reason to think that time is on their side.<sup>66</sup> The Chinese economy, which is currently the second largest in the world and the largest in the Indo-Pacific, has profited greatly over the past three decades from the structure of the existing international economic and security system. China's efforts to change the international order have largely involved working via existing international institutions and constructing supplemental ones that it can control, which is building up rather than dismantling, in stark contrast to Russian behavior.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, as Xi returns to an unprecedented third term, it becomes all the clearer that despite the central focus assigned to reunification, he is unlikely to act unless sure of victory to cement his political power. The roles that the UN, as well as the "like-minded" partner-states of the U.S., namely the European Union, India, Japan, and Australia, would play in a full-scale Taiwan conflict will have to be individually as well as collectively assessed by Xi before making any move.<sup>68</sup>

This begs the question: Is Beijing then taking a backseat on Taiwan? It seems unlikely, though at the maximum what can be ascertained is that China is probably biding time.

<sup>64</sup> Frank Tang, "How Much Is China's Economy Struggling and How Much Worse Can It Get?" *South China Morning Post*, November 2, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3198040/how-much-chinas-economy-struggling-and-how-much-worse-can-it-get>.

<sup>65</sup> "Joint Readout of Quad Leaders Call," The White House, March 3, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/03/joint-readout-of-quad-leaders-call/>.

<sup>66</sup> Shane Mason, "Taiwan Is Not Ukraine: Stop Linking Their Fates Together," *War on the Rocks*, January 27, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/01/taiwan-is-not-ukraine-stop-linking-their-fates-together/>; Kinling Lo and Kristin Huang, "Xi Calls for Unity, Resilience as He Sets out China's Vision for next 30 Years," *South China Morning Post*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3117314/xi-jinping-says-time-and-momentum-chinas-side-he-sets-out>.

<sup>67</sup> Nadège Rolland, "China's Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative," National Bureau of Asian Research (May 23, 2017), <https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-eurasian-century-political-and-strategic-implications-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative/>.

<sup>68</sup> Jagannath P. Panda, "Examining the Roles of the UN, Europe, and the US If China Invades Taiwan," *Global Taiwan Brief* vol. 7, no. 7 (April 6, 2022), <https://globaltaiwan.org/2022/04/examining-the-roles-of-the-un-europe-and-the-us-if-china-invades-taiwan/>.

Beijing seems inclined to opt for “incremental” militarism, rather than a sudden military attack. The strategy of occupying the outlying islands in the wider South China Sea or in the Taiwan Strait, and then going for a full-scale military occupation, seems a most plausible military scenario.<sup>69</sup>

The various likely or unlikely scenarios and debates notwithstanding, China’s calculus vis-à-vis a “forceful” occupation of Taiwan is an evolving policy, which must be assiduously monitored. In this context, it is imperative to gather regular bona fide intelligence on Chinese postures and tactics in its wider neighborhood and review China’s evolving perspectives on Russia’s fate in Ukraine in the coming months. At the same time, the Indo-Pacific partners must focus on the positives in their bilateral and multilateral ties and coalesce better to first and foremost improve their communication gap. In the absence of a proper security architecture, any potential or apparent weak link is liable to be exploited by China to the whole region’s disadvantage, not just Taiwan’s.

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<sup>69</sup> Based on the authors’ interactions and observations with many maritime and military experts. Some have also argued with a similar line of thinking. For example, see Ted Galen Carpenter, “China Could Start a Mini ‘Island War’ with Taiwan,” Cato Institute, August 8, 2022, <https://www.cato.org/commentary/china-could-start-mini-island-war-taiwan>.

## Chapter 7

# Great Power Competition and Japan

SATAKE Tomohiko

### What is great power competition?

In December 2017, the United States' new "National Security Strategy (NSS)" was released. The new NSS expressed the view that, as a result of challenges to the United States' dominance since the end of the Cold War and the rise of revisionist states such as Russia and China, great power competition has returned. Since then, "great power competition" has become a key phrase symbolic of contemporary international relations and has been frequently used in academic discourse, various discussions, and the media.

However, the meaning of this phrase is not always clear. To begin with, what exactly does "competition" among great powers refer to? The simplest and most straightforward explanation is that it refers to a struggle for regional or global "dominance" or "hegemony."<sup>1</sup> The United States, which prevailed in the fight for hegemony over Germany and Japan in Europe and Asia, succeeded in consolidating its primacy in the world after World War II based on its overwhelming military and economic power. Repelling the challenge posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the United States enjoyed an era of prosperity known as "Pax Americana." However, it has been argued that as its hegemonic position began to come under threat from the rise of China, the United States has completely reversed its previous policy of "engagement" with China in pursuit of a new

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<sup>1</sup> Major studies that have adopted this position include Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (W.W. Norton, 2011) [Japanese edition is *Shihai e no kyōsō: Beichūtairitsu no kōzu to ajia no shōrai* 支配への競争—米中対立の構図とアジアの将来, trans. & ed. Sahashi Ryō 佐橋亮 (Nippon Hyōron-sha, 2013)]; Hugh White, *The China Choice: Why America Should Share Power* (Black Inc., 2012) [Japanese edition is *Amerika ga chūgoku o erabu hi: Hakenkoku naki ajia no meibun* アメリカが中国を選ぶ日一覇権国なきアジアの命運, trans. Tokugawa Iehiro 徳川家広 (Keisō Shobō, 2012)]; and Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017) [Japanese edition is *Beichūsensō zenya: Shinkyūtaikoku o shōtotsusaseru rekishi no hōsoku to kaihi* 米中戦争前夜—新旧大国を衝突させる歴史の法則と回避, trans. Fujiwara Tomoko 藤原朝子 (Diamond-sha, 2017)]. Studies in Japanese include Mifune Emi 三船恵美, *Beichūhakenkyōsō to nihon* 米中覇権競争と日本 [Japan and the U.S.-China Fight for Hegemony] (Keisō Shobō, 2021), etc.

“containment” posture.<sup>2</sup>

While the view of great power competition as a fight for hegemony between the United States and China certainly highlights an important aspect of the competition, there are also several problems with it. Firstly, if we understand great power competition as a fight for hegemony, such a definition is inevitably limited to describing the competition between the United States and China. In today’s international relations, no other country besides China has the ability to displace U.S. hegemony. Nevertheless, Russia is often positioned as a major player alongside China where great power competition is concerned.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, several countries besides the United States and China have also adopted a posture aimed at countering China’s rise through security cooperation alliances such as the Quad (comprising Japan, the United States, Australia, and India), AUKUS (comprising Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), etc. Are these countries, many of which with larger economies than Russia, not positioned as players in the great power competition? Conversely, are the United States, China, and Russia the only actors in the great power competition?

The view of great power competition as a mere struggle for hegemony also neglects, if not ignore, aspects such as institutions and values in the international community. As Kōsaka Masataka argued previously, international politics is not only a system of power centered on military power but also one that involves the interests and values of various states.<sup>4</sup> The postwar leadership of the United States has successfully gained support in Europe and parts of Asia not simply because of sheer American power but because the international institutions and ideology it offered were attractive and provided benefits to many countries.<sup>5</sup> From the perspective of these countries, China and Russia pose a threat to an international order that is aligned with their interests and values under U.S. hegemony, setting aside the question of whether one should call this a U.S. “hegemonic order”. This explains why “Western” countries have strengthened cross-regional cooperation across Europe and Asia in a bid to counter the influence of China

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<sup>2</sup> This view is often pointed out by Chinese commentators in particular. See, for example, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Foreign Minister Qin Gang Meets the Press,” March 7, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, p. 27, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Kōsaka Masataka 高坂正堯, *Kokusaiseiji: Kyōfu to kibō* 国際政治—恐怖と希望 [International Politics: Fear and Hope] (Chūkō Shinsho, 1966).

<sup>5</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2012), esp. chap. 5.

and Russia, which have jointly challenged the existing order.

Based on the above perspective, this paper approaches the phrase “great power competition” not simply as a struggle for dominance or hegemony between the United States and China but as a struggle over the nature and legitimacy of an international order composed of status-quo countries, including the United States and other countries in the West on one hand, and revisionist states such as China and Russia on the other hand.<sup>6</sup> “International order” is a general term that refers to the principles, rules, and norms that govern relations among states, as well as the institutions that serve as a guarantee for these principles, rules, and norms, including the balance of power among the various states.<sup>7</sup> For states with certain agreements on the legitimacy of the international order, incentives are created to maintain the order through alliances and institutions. Conversely, countries that are dissatisfied with the existing order will form coalitions with other discontented countries and attempt to overthrow the existing order through legal or illegal means.

In such revolutionary situations, diplomacy often becomes dysfunctional as a restraint on the use of force. As Henry Kissinger has pointed out, when two states with fundamentally different views on legitimacy and their desired order confront each other, it becomes difficult for the two sides to reconcile their interests through a common language. In such cases, diplomatic dialogue tends to devolve into an exchange of accusations of unreasonableness and immorality on the part of the opposing side or an attempt to win over neutral parties to their own side.<sup>8</sup> Under these circumstances, it not only becomes extremely challenging for opposing sides to reconcile their views but also raises the specter of war and arms races sparked by the fear that existing allegiances to their respective regimes may be overturned.<sup>9</sup> Great power competition is nothing but a power struggle between regimes with fundamentally different views on their desired

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<sup>6</sup> Studies offering a similar perspective on U.S.-China relations include, for example, Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (Oxford University Press, 2021). Also, on issues of order and legitimacy, see Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812-1822* (Grosset & Dunlap, 1964) [Japanese edition is *Kishshinjā: Kaifukusareta sekaibeitwa* キッシンジャー 回復された世界平和, trans. Itō Yukio 伊藤幸雄 (Hara Shobō, 2009)], chap. 1; Kurt Campbell and Rush Doshi, “How America Can Shore Up Asian Order: A Strategy for Restoring Balance and Legitimacy,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 12, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-01-12/how-america-can-shore-asian-order>.

<sup>7</sup> Hedley Bull, *Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1977) [Japanese edition is *Kokusaishakairon: Anāikikaru sosaieti* 国際社会論—アナーキカル・ソサイエティ, trans. Usuki Eiichi 臼杵英一 (Iwanami Shoten, 2000)].

<sup>8</sup> Kissinger, *Kishshinjā: Kaifukusareta sekaibeitwa*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

order based on mutual distrust and the partial (or total) breakdown of the possibility of negotiations.

## The struggle for an order

The end of the East-West conflict after the Cold War created the appearance that a liberal international order founded on the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law had become universal. The United States and its allies emphasized the inclusion of Russia, other former Eastern Bloc countries, and China in the international order through the expansion of free markets, human rights diplomacy, and multilateral institutions. The post-Cold War eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), as well as the provision of aid to China by countries in the West, were basically founded on this idea of integrating the former Eastern Bloc into the West. Behind this approach was the expectation that as Russia and China became increasingly integrated into the international community, domestic reforms such as democratization and support for open markets would simultaneously take place in these countries.<sup>10</sup>

This policy of U.S. engagement seemed to be going smoothly until around the early 2000s. Russia joined the G7 in 1998, and China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. Both China and Russia also took collective action with the United States in the war on terror following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001. China and Russia had a number of policy elites, especially in their respective foreign policy departments, who embraced the values of the international society and believed that it is in their country's interest to abide by the international society's existing rules, thus providing impetus for greater international cooperation.<sup>11</sup> President Vladimir Putin agreed to manage Russia's relations with NATO in a manner that was not mutually hostile even after former Eastern European countries, including Estonia, Latvia, and

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<sup>10</sup> Sahashi Ryō 佐橋亮, *Beichūtairitsu* 米中対立 [*The U.S.-China Rivalry*] (Chūkō Shinsho, 2021), p. 17. In his book, Sahashi identifies “three expectations” (China's political reform, marketization reform, and contribution to the existing international order) that were behind U.S. support for China after the Cold War.

<sup>11</sup> On China, see, for example, Susan L. Shirk, *Chūgoku: Ayau chōtaikoku* 中国一危うい超大国 [*China: Fragile Superpower*], trans. Tokugawa Ichiro 徳川家広 (NHK Publishing, 2008), chap. 5; on Russia, see Hyōdō Shinji 兵頭慎治, “Pūchin/roshia shinseiken no taigai/anzenhoshō seisaku” プーチン・ロシア新政権の対外・安全保障政策 [“The New Putin/Russian Administration's Foreign and Security Policies”], 防衛研究所紀要 [*NIDS Security Studies*], vol. 4, no. 3 (2002).

Lithuania, began the process of joining NATO in 1999.<sup>12</sup>

However, China and Russia's cooperative policy toward the West gradually began to break down in the mid- to late 2000s. At the Munich Security Conference in February 2007, President Putin delivered an aggressive speech in which he claimed that the rules-based international order was merely an "instrument of domination by the United States" and explicitly condemned the trend of NATO expansion and the strengthening of the NATO missile defense system.<sup>13</sup> In the following year, Russia launched a military intervention in a conflict on Georgian territory. Russia subsequently intensified its rhetoric on seeking a "multipolar" world and strengthened its ties with authoritarian states in Asia that also oppose the U.S.-led order.<sup>14</sup> Despite U.S. President Obama's calls for a reset in U.S.-Russia relations after taking office in 2009, Russia suddenly occupied and annexed Crimea in 2014 before intervening in the Syrian civil war in support of the Assad regime's suppression of civil society in the following year.

China, on the other hand, having successfully held the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and grown in confidence following its rapid recovery from the Global Financial Crisis, has intensified its activities in the so-called "gray zone" and adopted a more hardline diplomatic approach on issues such as land reclamation and militarization in the South China Sea. Xi Jinping, who was nominated as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in November 2012 and became China's President in March of the following year, brought Marxist ideology to the fore and stepped up China's centralization, domestic surveillance regime, and information control, while simultaneously strengthening efforts aimed at achieving the nationalistic goal of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." In November 2013, China's Ministry of National Defense suddenly declared the establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea, and in August of the following year, a Chinese Air Force fighter was involved in an abnormal approach toward a U.S. Navy P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft flying over the high seas in the South China Sea.

At the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs held in November 2014, President Xi Jinping made a high-profile declaration that China would conduct

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<sup>12</sup> Yamazoe Hiroshi 山添博史, "Daisanshō: Roshia no kotenteki na taikokukōsō: Tōnoku 'seiryokuken'" 第3章 ロシアの古典的な大国構想—遠のく「勢力圏」["Chapter 3: Russia's Classical Notion of Great Power and Waning 'Sphere of Influence'"], in *Taikokukankyōsō no shinjōtai* 大國間競争の新常態 [*The Shifting Dynamics of Great Power Competition*], ed. Masuda Masayuki 増田雅之 (NIDS, 2023), p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.



“major power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.” Behind this declaration is believed to have been China’s recognition that the international balance of power is undergoing a major shift due to the decline of U.S. hegemony and the rise of China.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, around 2016, China began to express its support for the United Nations and a UN-centered international order while clearly stating that it does not support a U.S.-centered security network or Western values.<sup>16</sup> At the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in October 2017, President Xi Jinping presented his view that “socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era” would pave the way for the modernization of developing countries and “offer a completely new alternative” to these countries and their peoples.<sup>17</sup>

Under these circumstances, it was a natural progression for China and Russia, which have both become increasingly resistant to the U.S.-led order, to deepen their cooperation. In his speech in March 2014 declaring Russia’s annexation of Crimea, President Putin expressed his gratitude to China for understanding Russia’s actions in Crimea. In March 2015, the two countries committed to a “comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership” in a joint statement issued after the China-Russia summit. China and Russia then conducted their first joint exercises in the South China Sea in 2016 and in the Sea of Okhotsk in the following year. The two countries also promoted

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<sup>15</sup> Yatsuzuka Masaaki 八塚正晃, “Daihashō: ‘Chūgoku no tokushoku aru taikokugaikō’ to chūtō” 第8章「中国の特色ある大国外交」と中東 [“Chapter 8: China’s ‘Major Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics’ and the Middle East”], in *Beichūkankai o koete: Jiyū de hirakareta chiikichitsujo kōchiku no ‘kijiku kokka nibon’ no indotaiheiyo senryaku chūtō/afurika* 米中関係を越えて—自由で開かれた地域秩序構築の「機軸国家日本」のインド太平洋戦略 中東・アフリカ [*Beyond U.S.-China Relations: The Indo-Pacific Strategy of Japan as a Cornerstone State in Building a Free and Open Regional Order—The Middle East and Africa*], ed. Japan Institute of International Affairs (Japan Institute of International Affairs, 2022), p. 106.

<sup>16</sup> Kawashima Shin 川島真, “Madarajō no ryūdōteki chitsujokukan e: Beichūsōkokuka no sekaichitsujo” 『まだら状』の流動的秩序空間へ—米中相剋化の世界秩序 [“Toward a ‘Dispersed’ Dynamic Spatial Order: The World Order Amid Intensifying U.S.-China Rivalry”], in *Afutākōrona jidai no beichūkankai to sekaichitsujo* アフターコロナ時代の米中関係と世界秩序 [*U.S.-China Relations and the World Order in the Post-COVID Era*], eds. Kawashima Shin 川島真 and Mori Satoru 森聡 (University of Tokyo Press, 2020), p. 250.

<sup>17</sup> “Shī jīnpīn-shī: Shōkōshakai no zenmenteki kansei no kessen ni shōrishi, shīnjidai no chūgoku no tokushoku aru shakaishugi no idai na shōri o kachitorō—Chūgokukyōsantō dai-109-kai zenkokudaihyōtaikai ni okeru hōkoku” 習近平氏：小康社会の全面的完成の決戦に勝利し、新時代の中国の特色ある社会主義の偉大な勝利をかち取ろう——中国共産党第19回全国代表大会における報告 [“Xi Jinping: Let’s Win the Decisive Battle for the Perfection of a Moderately Prosperous Society and Achieve a Great Victory for Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era—Report of the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party”], *Xinhua News Agency*, October 28, 2017, [http://jp.xinhuanet.com/2017-10/28/c\\_136711568.htm](http://jp.xinhuanet.com/2017-10/28/c_136711568.htm).

cooperation with countries surrounding Afghanistan and strengthened ties in the region, including in the area surrounding Japan as we will see later, and steadily expanded their influence in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, known collectively as the “Global South,” through social media as well as military and economic aid.

This strengthening of cooperation between China and Russia and the expansion of their influence certainly reflect a shift in the balance of power between the United States and China. At the same time, it is no doubt also a result of “own goals” by the West and the loss of its legitimacy. The appeal and legitimacy of core values on which the Western order was founded, such as freedom and democracy, have been severely undermined by events such as the rise of populism in the United States and European countries, the division and confusion surrounding identity politics, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU known as Brexit, as well as the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and the subsequent rise of the Taliban.

In particular, the emergence of the Trump administration in the United States in 2017 and the ensuing political turmoil around that period left a strong impression on China and Russia that the United States was on the decline and that a shift toward a multipolar world was under way.<sup>18</sup> The bitter confrontations that took place during the U.S. presidential election were said to have further weakened the admiration for democracy, as exemplified by the United States, that existed even within China.<sup>19</sup> Beijing and Moscow also often contributed to the chaos in the West by spreading disinformation, intervening in elections, and carrying out cyber attacks. The Trump administration’s “America First” policy and disregard for international organizations provided further impetus for the expansion of Chinese and Russian influence in the arena of multilateral and economic diplomacy. Even as Trump decided to withdraw the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and refused to participate in the East Asia Summit, trade volume between China and Southeast Asian countries continued to grow steadily, making ASEAN the largest trading partner of China in 2020.<sup>20</sup>

In February 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin launched an invasion of Ukraine with Russian forces and condemned the “hypocrisy” of the world order led

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<sup>18</sup> For example, Rush Doshi, “Beijing Believes Trump Is Accelerating American Decline,” *Foreign Policy*, October 12, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Carrie Gracie, “US election 2016: China eyes chance to weaken US power,” *BBC News*, November 10, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-37924880>.

<sup>20</sup> Issaku Harada, “ASEAN becomes China’s top trade partner as supply chain evolves,” *Nikkei Asia*, July 15, 2020.

by the United States and other countries in the West, while justifying Russia's actions in terms of self-defense.<sup>21</sup> China, which denied the possibility of a military invasion by Russia until shortly before the invasion, implicitly endorsed Russia's military actions and even criticized the West's reaction, including its sanctions against Russia. In a video conference held in December 2022, President Xi Jinping and President Putin committed to strengthening strategic cooperation between China and Russia, including in the military arena.

Many countries in the Global South supported the UN resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine but did not support the resolution calling for the suspension of Russia's membership in the Human Rights Council. Although these countries are critical of Russia's use of force to change the status quo, they are also skeptical of Western countries that have swept their past actions during the era of colonial rule under the rug while brandishing the "rule of law." As a result, the waning fortunes of the liberal order led by the United States have sparked a complex game involving the West, China, Russia, other revisionist states, and various other countries.

Confronted with this reality, the United States has abandoned its goal of "integrating" China and Russia into the international order and shifted its policy toward pushing back against China together with its allies. The United States' 2017 National Security Strategy, which proclaimed the return of great power competition as mentioned at the start of this paper, demonstrated the country's determination to unite with its allies and friends to confront the threat posed by China and Russia. President Trump's policy of unilateralism had initially raised concerns that he might adopt a conciliatory policy toward China. Yet he ultimately adopted a hardline stance toward China that included a "trade war" through export control and tariff hikes in response to the outcry from people who had lost their jobs due to the influx of cheap Chinese goods.

The Biden administration that took office in 2021 has basically inherited the same strategy but departed from its predecessor's unilateralism to adopt a strategy that places more emphasis on partnerships and cooperation with allies and friends. In particular, ever since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Biden administration has fully embarked on the rhetoric of "democracy versus authoritarianism" and sought to reinforce the unity among democratic states through events such as the Summit for Democracy. This can be

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<sup>21</sup> "[Enzetsu zenbun] Ukuraina shinkō chokuzen pūchin-daitōryō wa nani o katatta?" 【演説全文】ウクライナ侵攻直前 プーチン大統領は何を語った? ["[Full Text of Speech] What Did President Putin Say Right Before the Invasion of Ukraine?"], *NHK*, March 4, 2022, <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/news/html/20220304/k10013513641000.html>.

seen, so to speak, as an attempt to revive the unity among countries in the West as well as the legitimacy of the democratic order that had been undermined under the Trump administration.

### Where is the competition headed?

Putin's plan to overthrow the Western order by invading Ukraine has, ironically, reinforced the unity among countries in the West, something which had been faltering under the Trump administration. On the other hand, it is unclear the extent to which the West will be able to maintain this sense of unity, given that the war in Ukraine is starting to look like a long grind that will test the patience of both Russia and the West. In particular, Russia is the EU's fifth largest trading partner, and sanctions against Russia have hit the European countries harder than the United States.

Furthermore, the governments of most G7 countries, including Japan, have seen their approval ratings decline due to factors such as prolonged inflation, while radical populism is on the rise in several countries. Although the Democrats fared better than expected in the November 2022 U.S. midterm elections, losing control of the House of Representatives is expected to make their management of national policies more difficult moving forward.<sup>22</sup> George Kennan, who advocated a policy of long-term containment against the Soviet Union, once suggested that the only way to overcome the international communist movement was to continue to demonstrate the value of the United States, including its ideology, to the international community.<sup>23</sup> If democratic societies continue to be mired in turmoil, the legitimacy of the liberal order itself will surely be further shaken. In this sense, it can be said that the real threat to a free society comes not from outside but from within.

On the other hand, problems are also piling up for China and Russia. In addition to stagnant economic growth in China, it also cannot be denied that the legitimacy of the communist regime may be undermined by issues such as wealth inequalities, an aging society with a declining birthrate, the lack of education among young people, rising unemployment, a massive brain drain, excessive debt, corruption, and the excessive

<sup>22</sup> For example, Watanabe Tsuneo 渡部恒雄, "Chūkansenkyo kekka wa baiden gaikō ni dō eikyōsuru ka?" 中間選挙結果はバイデン外交にどう影響するか? ["How Will the Midterm Election Results Affect Biden's Diplomacy?"], 日米関係インサイト [Insights into Japan-U.S. Relations], December 26, 2022, [https://www.spf.org/jpus-insights/spf-america-monitor/spf-america-monitor-document-detail\\_129.html](https://www.spf.org/jpus-insights/spf-america-monitor/spf-america-monitor-document-detail_129.html).

<sup>23</sup> George F. Kennan, *Amerika gaikō gojūnen* アメリカ外交50年 [American Diplomacy, 1900-1950], trans. Kondō Shin'ichi 近藤晋一, Iida Tōji 飯田藤次 and Aruga Tadashi 有賀貞 (Iwanami Shoten, 2000), pp. 188-190.

pursuit of a zero-COVID policy. In particular, some people are starting to question if the former view that time is on China's side is still necessarily valid in light of the looming "middle-income trap" in China.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, some have pointed out that the exacerbation of China's dictatorship has led to more rigid decision-making and greater unpredictability, and that even if President Xi Jinping were to make poor decisions in foreign or domestic affairs, it is becoming increasingly difficult for these mistakes to be rectified given that he has surrounded himself with an entourage of "yes men."<sup>25</sup>

Russia, too, is experiencing problems such as stagnant economic growth and rising unemployment due to sanctions imposed by the West, in addition to a protracted war that has resulted in countless casualties. Even if Russia were to ultimately achieve its military objectives in Ukraine, it could become economically vulnerable due to its heavy reliance on Western technology and markets, from which it could be isolated. Although Russia would become more reliant on China in such a situation, China and Russia may not necessarily become a monolith as they possess markedly different political regimes, economic systems, and cultures. In particular, although the two countries share the major goal of overthrowing the U.S.-led order, it can be said that there is a certain difference in temperament between them. While Russia seeks to change the order through violent and radical means, China seeks to supplement the use of force with a gradual transformation of the existing order through gray zones and peaceful means such as international organizations.

In the first place, countries in the region accept aid from China and Russia from a pragmatic standpoint, and it is doubtful that they are actually attracted to the regimes themselves. It is no doubt true that many countries are attracted to China's governance, advanced technology, and political mobilization capabilities, but these qualities alone will not necessarily result in the widespread adoption of the "China model," as it is also necessary to assess if the values on which the model is based, the legal structure

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<sup>24</sup> Tsugami Toshiya 津上俊哉, *Beichūtairitsumo no saki ni matsu mono: Gurēto risetto ni sonae yo* 米中対立の先に待つもの—グレート・リセットに備えよ [What Awaits Us Beyond the U.S.-China Rivalry: Prepare for the Great Reset] (Nikkei Publishing, 2022), p. 78.

<sup>25</sup> Jude Blanchette, "Xi Jinping's Faltering Foreign Policy: The War in Ukraine and the Perils of Strongman Rule," *Foreign Affairs*, March 16, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-03-16/xi-jinpings-faltering-foreign-policy>. For a discussion on the vulnerabilities of the Xi Jinping regime due to the problems and inefficiencies inherent in authoritarian regimes, see Matthew Kroenig, *The Return of Great Power Rivalry: Democracy versus Autocracy from the Ancient World to the U.S. and China* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

founded on such a model, etc., will be adopted worldwide.<sup>26</sup> Daniel A. Bell, a professor at Tsinghua University who has written positively on the meritocratic principles that undergird the Chinese political model, is nevertheless pessimistic about the possibility of its spread to other countries, including authoritarian states, because such a model is deeply entrenched in Chinese history and culture.<sup>27</sup>

The Chinese model is also characterized by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party across all areas and domains, down to every nook and cranny of society. It is said to be a model that is inextricable from the very existence of the party itself.<sup>28</sup> Radical policies such as the so-called zero-COVID policy are only possible under such a unique Chinese model, and it is highly dubious that other countries can emulate it. Moreover, there are views that the appeal of the Chinese model has been undermined by domestic problems, social disparities, environmental degradation, and occasional episodes of political repression.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the Chinese model has already sparked a backlash in many countries in response to its excessive debt and surveillance regime, resulting in the defeat of pro-Chinese parties in elections. In short, while the liberal international order advocated by some in the West has not been as universal as they would like, the Chinese model is even less universal.

Many regions, including the Global South, have also adopted the strategy of reaping the benefits of this competition by maintaining relations with both powers instead of choosing between the United States and China. For these countries, although great

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<sup>26</sup> Kawashima Shin 川島真, “Joshō: Gendai chūgoku o yomitoku sanyōso: Keizai, tekunoroji, kokusaikankei” 序章 現代中国を読み解く三要素—経済・テクノロジー・国際関係 [“Introduction: Three Elements for Reading Contemporary China: Economy, Technology, and International Relations”], in *Gendai chūgoku o yomitoku sanyōso: Keizai, tekunoroji, kokusaikankei* 現代中国を読み解く三要素—経済・テクノロジー・国際関係 [Three Elements for Reading Contemporary China: Economy, Technology, and International Relations], eds. Kawashima Shin 川島真 and The 21st Century Public Policy Institute (Keisō Shobō, 2020), p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel A. Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 195-198.

<sup>28</sup> Miyamoto Yūji 宮本雄二, “Joshō: Beichū-dekappuringuron e no shiten: Ryōkokukankei no fukuzatsusa to chūgoku no kahensei?” 序章 米中デカップリング論への視点—両国関係の複雑さと中国の可変性 [“Introduction: Perspectives on the U.S.-China Decoupling Theory: The Complexity of Bilateral Relations and China’s Unpredictability”], in *Beichūbundan no kyōjitsu: Dekappuringu to sapuraichēn no seijikeizaibunseki* 米中分断の虚実—デカップリングとサプライチェーンの政治経済分析 [The Myth of the U.S.-China Divide: A Political and Economic Analysis of the Decoupling and Supply Chain], eds. Miyamoto Yūji 宮本雄二, Ijūin Atsushi 伊集院敦 and the Japan Center for Economic Research (JCER News Publishing, 2021), p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Phillip C. Saunders, “China’s Role in Asia: Attractive or Aggressive?,” in *International Relations of Asia*, ed. David Shambaugh, 3rd ed. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2022), p. 125.

power competition amplifies geopolitical risks, it also presents them with opportunities to draw the attention of the international community and maximize their own interests. Taking all these points into consideration, it seems reasonable to suggest that the world will likely become a “dispersed” order in which different gradations of U.S. and Chinese influence manifest themselves across disparate issues and domains, instead of an order founded on a rivalry characterized by a simple “democracy versus authoritarianism” dichotomy, such as that which existed during the Cold War.<sup>30</sup>

## Japan’s response

Japan is said to have been one of the greatest beneficiaries of the free and open international order led by the United States in the postwar era.<sup>31</sup> However, until Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Japan had attempted to keep a certain distance from the great power competition.<sup>32</sup> At the 2018 Japan-China Summit, then Prime Minister Abe and President Xi Jinping agreed to move Japan-China relations “from competition to cooperation.” These words were strongly insisted on by the Japanese instead of the Chinese.<sup>33</sup> Japan thought it possible to maintain its own relations with China even if the rivalry between the United States and China were to escalate further. This could be seen as an idea inspired by Japan’s successful experience in developing its own trade relations with China through its policy of “separation of politics from economics” during the Cold

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<sup>30</sup> Kawashima Shin 川島真 and Mori Satoru 森聡, “Beichūtairitsu to afutākorona jidai no ‘madarajō’ no sekaichitsujo” 米中対立とアフターコロナ時代の『まだら状』の世界秩序 [“The U.S.-China Rivalry and the ‘Dispersed’ World Order in the Post-COVID Era”], in *Afutākorona jidai no beichūkankai to sekaichitsujo* アフターコロナ時代の米中関係と世界秩序 [*U.S.-China Relations and the World Order in the Post-COVID Era*], eds. Kawashima Shin 川島真 and Mori Satoru 森聡 (University of Tokyo Press, 2020).

<sup>31</sup> Funabashi Yōichi 船橋洋一 and G. John Ikenberry, “Joshō: Nihon to jiyū de hirakareta kokusaichitsujo” 序章 日本と自由で開かれた国際秩序 [“Introduction: Japan and a Free and Open International Order”], in *Jiyūshugi no kiki: Kokusaichitsujo to nihon* 自由主義の危機—国際秩序と日本 [*The Crisis of Liberalism: The International Order and Japan*], eds. Funabashi Yōichi 船橋洋一 and G. John Ikenberry (Tōyō Keizai, 2020), p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Takahashi Sugio 高橋杉雄, “Nihon wa ‘mirai’ o kaerareru: ‘Taikokukankyōsō’ ni okeru tōjishishiki no jūyōsei” 日本は『未来』を変えられる:『大國間競争』における当事者意識の重要性 [“Japan Can Change Its Future: The Importance of Being an Interested Party in Great Power Competition”], Research Report, Japan Institute of International Affairs, March 24, 2021, <https://www.jiia.or.jp/research-report/post-75.html>.

<sup>33</sup> For example, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Nicchu kyōdōkshihappyō ni okeru abe-sōri hatsugen” 日中共同記者発表における安倍総理発言 [“Statement by Prime Minister Abe at the Japan-China Joint Press Conference”], October 26, 2018, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a\\_o/c\\_m1/cn/page3\\_002632.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a_o/c_m1/cn/page3_002632.html).

War. In other words, it was based on the old paradigm of Japan's foreign and security policies.

Regarding Japan's relations with Russia, then Prime Minister Abe held as many as 29 meetings with President Putin to discuss the Northern Territories issue and economic cooperation even amid deteriorating U.S.-Russia relations. Behind this was Japan's strategic expectation that maintaining good relations with Russia would not only resolve territorial disputes but also prevent the possibility of a two-front conflict with both China and Russia.<sup>34</sup> Here, too, one can identify a dualistic approach that sets Japan's regional strategy apart from the great power competition to some extent.

Contrary to Japan's expectations, however, China has continuously intensified its coast guard and military activities in the area surrounding Japan. China has also continuously strengthened cooperation with Russia and intensified joint activities in the area. Since 2019, Chinese and Russian bombers have conducted joint flight training in this area on an annual basis. In October 2021, Chinese and Russian naval vessels jointly sailed around the Japanese archipelago, and in September of the following year, the vessels engaged in the live firing of machine guns in the Sea of Japan. Furthermore, right before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, China and Russia declared the relations between the two countries as a "no-limits partnership." Instead of having avoided a two-front conflict with China and Russia, Japan is now faced with a three-front crisis involving China, Russia, and North Korea.

In this sense, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 can be said to have served as a "wake-up call" for Japan. Immediately after the outbreak of war, Japan and other countries in the West offered strong support for Ukraine and joined in sanctions imposed against Russia. Indeed, although Japan also joined in the sanctions imposed against Russia when Russia invaded Crimea in 2014, the West had mulled over taking action on Russia and intentionally delayed the imposition of sanctions.<sup>35</sup> The sanctions imposed on this occasion are significantly heavier than those in 2014, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Prime Minister Kishida has also sought to maintain Western unity across the Pacific

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<sup>34</sup> Ōta Masakatsu 太田昌克, Kanehara Nobukatsu 兼原信克, Takamizawa Nobushige 高見澤將林 and Banshō Kōichirō 番匠幸一郎, *Kakubeiki ni tsuite honne de banasō* 核兵器について、本音で話そう [*Let's Say What We Really Think About Nuclear Weapons*] (Shinchō Shinsho, 2022), p. 167.

<sup>35</sup> Kitade Daisuke 北出大介, "Nihon no tairoseisai no kōka ni tsuite kangaueru" 日本の対露制裁の効果について考える ["Reflecting on the Effects of Japan's Sanctions Against Russia"], Mitsui & Co. Global Strategic Studies Institute, July 7, 2016, [https://www.mitsui.com/mgssi/ja/report/detail/1220959\\_10674.html](https://www.mitsui.com/mgssi/ja/report/detail/1220959_10674.html).



and Atlantic through cooperation with G7 and NATO based on the idea that what happened to Ukraine today may happen to Asia tomorrow. This reflects the Japanese government's heightened sense of crisis over the fact that if the European order were to collapse as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Asia would certainly be embroiled in its aftermath as well. Given these circumstances, Japan has become increasingly aware of its position as an "stake holder" in the great power competition.

Based on the above recognition, the Kishida administration has pushed for a fundamental reinforcement of Japan's defense capabilities, including an increase in Japan's defense spending to 2% of GDP. This means reinforcing autonomous capabilities so that Japan does not necessarily need to rely completely on the United States as threats evolve from gray-zone situations into higher-end threats. The National Security Strategy (NSS) and the National Defense Strategy (NDS) formulated based on the NSS, both of which published in December 2022, set forth a policy of focusing on the reinforcement of Japan's capabilities across seven key domains: stand-off defense capabilities, integrated air and missile defense capabilities, unmanned defense capabilities, cross-domain operation capabilities, command and control and intelligence-related functions, mobile deployment capabilities and civil protection, as well as sustainability and resiliency.<sup>36</sup> Japan is also enhancing its economic security by strengthening supply chains, protecting infrastructure, and supporting the development of specific key technologies.

For a long time after World War II, Japan has adopted the so-called "Yoshida Doctrine," a policy of keeping a low profile with regard to security under the protection of the United States while prioritizing economic activities. Japan has also maintained an approach of adopting the policy of "separation of politics from economics" with respect to China, as mentioned above, in its attempt to maintain relations by disentangling economics from politics. This approach was a highly rational choice in an international environment in which the United States is able to sustain its primacy in terms of military and economic power.

However, today's challenging security environment is making it increasingly difficult to maintain such a traditional approach under the old paradigm. Japan's new economic security policy suggests that it will be leveraging economic means to achieve security objectives, which may lead to the subordination of the economy to security

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<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Defense of Japan, "Kokka hōei senryaku (gaiyō)" 国家防衛戦略(概要) ["National Defense Strategy (Outline)"], December 2022, p. 9, [https://www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/strategy/pdf/strategy\\_outline.pdf](https://www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/strategy/pdf/strategy_outline.pdf).

considerations in some cases. This policy is a stark departure from the Yoshida Doctrine, which prioritizes the economy while keeping military forces to a minimum. In this sense, Japan's security in the postwar era has entered a critical juncture.

### **Toward a state of “controlled competition”**

As the competition between great powers intensifies, Japan is also emerging as a player in the competition. Yet, competition is ultimately a means to maintain one's desired order and is not an end in itself. Moreover, since containment as implemented during the Cold War is no longer practicable, competition with China should be premised on the principle of “coexistence” based on the partial resumption of negotiations rather than an attempt to destroy its regime.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, from a global perspective, competition between great powers has not only negative elements such as the escalation of conflict and the risk of division but also positive elements. For example, some developing countries can become major beneficiaries of the competition between China and the West to provide infrastructure support and aid. Climate change initiatives, sanitation, and a stable supply of energy are also public goods that all countries can benefit from. If interstate competition brings about a greater supply of public goods, this may be said to be a desirable result for the international community as a whole.

In this sense, Japan will be required to make an effort to maximize the positive elements of such competition while minimizing its negative elements. In fact, Japan is seeking to further strengthen U.S.-led alliance networks by strengthening the U.S.-Japan Alliance and the Quad (a security cooperation framework between Japan, the United States, Australia, and India) while simultaneously pursuing stable relations with China. At the Japan-China Summit Meeting in November 2021, Prime Minister Kishida called for the establishment of “constructive and stable Japan-China relations” in which the two countries would engage in honest dialogue to address existing challenges and concerns, act together on international issues as responsible powers, and cooperate on various common challenges. This can be said to be founded on the new idea of managing bilateral relations on the basis of competition while repudiating the optimistic prospect of moving Japan-China relations “from competition to collaboration” as suggested in

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<sup>37</sup> Kurt M. Campbell and Jake Sullivan, “Competition Without Catastrophe: How America Can Both Challenge and Coexist With China,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2019.

the past. The expeditious launch of a hotline between Japanese and Chinese defense authorities as a liaison mechanism for maritime- and aviation-related matters and the strengthening of communication through Japan-China Security Dialogues, etc., agreed to by the two leaders at the meeting can be seen as attempts at achieving this.

Japan has also maintained some distance from the dichotomous worldview of “democracy versus authoritarianism” espoused by the Biden administration. For example, the vision of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” advocated by Japan is highly restrained in its push for values such as human rights and democracy; instead, it focuses on the pursuit of a diverse and inclusive order that encompasses non-democratic states as well.<sup>38</sup> The abovementioned National Security Strategy also calls for the strengthening of a “free and open international order based on the rule of law” while at the same time pointing out the need to achieve “coexistence and coprosperity” in the international community through the promotion of multilateral cooperation and efforts aimed at addressing global environmental issues.<sup>39</sup>

Accordingly, even as Japan strengthens its readiness for the competition between great powers, it will become increasingly important moving forward to make efforts to keep the competition as controlled as possible through partial collaboration and risk management based on the principle of “coexistence” with China. This is especially true given that China’s rapid buildup of nuclear capability has led some to believe that the world is shifting from a relatively stable bipolar system comprising the two nuclear powers of the United States and Russia to a more unstable “tripolar system” that also includes China as a nuclear power,<sup>40</sup> thus making efforts to avoid nuclear war and the proliferation of nuclear weapons an urgent task.

In order to achieve these goals, Japan must not only rely on its own efforts but also establish cooperative mechanisms in collaboration with other countries in the region that are in a similar position. Especially in an era of great power competition, the need for Japan to strengthen cooperation with countries in the region in the areas of

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<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Kishida-sōridaijin no indosekaimondai-hyōgikai (ICWA) ni okeru sōriseisaku supichi” 岸田総理大臣のインド世界問題評議会 (ICWA) における総理政策スピーチ [“Prime Minister Kishida’s Prime Minister Policy Speech to the Indian Council on World Affairs (ICWA)”], March 20, 2023, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100477738.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, “Kokka anzenhoshō senryaku ni tsuite” 国家安全保障戦略について [“About the National Security Strategy”], December 16, 2022, pp. 28-29, <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-j.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., “The New Nuclear Age: How China’s Growing Nuclear Arsenal Threatens Deterrence,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2022.

information-sharing and rule-making has become more vital than ever. For example, it is necessary to establish a framework that allows like-minded countries to work together to coordinate export control systems and operations and to counter China's economic coercion in a concerted manner. It may also be possible to encourage both the United States and China to work together to prevent the abuse of systems such as export control.

Other potential areas of cooperation include the establishment of a crisis management mechanism to handle unforeseen situations such as the outbreak of regional conflicts, natural disasters, and pandemics; the promotion of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation; and the development of common standards and a code of conduct to facilitate the exchange of critical goods in times of emergency. As great power competition continues to intensify, Japan's roles and initiatives to stabilize the international order have become more important than ever.



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*Ukuraina sensō no shōgeki* [*The Impact of the War in Ukraine*], ed. Masuda Masayuki (Interbooks, 2022); “Taikokukankyōsō no naka no gōshū: Dōmei to chiiki no hazama de” [“Australia in an Era of Great Power Competition: Navigating the Middle Ground between the Alliance and the Region”], in *Taikokukankyōsō no shinjōtai* [*The Shifting Dynamics of Great Power Competition*], ed. Masuda Masayuki (Interbooks, 2023); etc.



**NIDS International Symposium on Security Affairs**

**“The New Normal of Great Power Competition:  
The U.S.-China-Russia Relationship and the Indo-Pacific Region”**

Wednesday, December 7, 2022, Online

**9:00-11:00 Session 1: U.S.-China Rivalry and the Russian Factor**

Chair: **Mr. HYODO Shinji** (Director, Policy Studies Department, NIDS)

Moderator: **Dr. ARAKAKI Hiromu** (Senior Fellow in the America, Europe, and Russia Division, NIDS)

Speakers:

**Dr. Nick Bisley** (Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences and Professor of International Relations, La Trobe University)

**Dr. You Ji** (Professor of International Relations, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University)

**Dr. YAMAZOE Hiroshi** (Senior Fellow in the America, Europe, and Russia Division; NIDS)

Discussant: **Mr. MASUDA Masayuki** (Head of the Government and Law Division, NIDS)

**11:10-12:00 Keynote Speech**

**Dr. Edward Luttwak** (Head of Washington Strategic Advisors)

**14:00-16:00 Session 2: Impacts on the Regions**

Chair: **Mr. HYODO Shinji** (Director, Policy Studies Department, NIDS)

Moderator: **Mr. ISHIHARA Yusuke** (Senior Fellow in the Global Security Division, NIDS)

Speakers:

**Dr. Aries Arugay** (Professor and Chair in the Department of Political Science, University of the Philippines Diliman)

**Dr. Jagannath Panda** (Head of the Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs, the Institute for Security and Development Policy)

**Dr. SATAKE Tomohiko** (Senior Fellow in the Defense Policy Division, NIDS)

Discussant: **Dr. SHOJI Tomotaka** (Head of the Asia and Africa Division, NIDS)

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