POST-PANDEMIC ASIA

A New Normal for Regional Security?

edited by **Axel Berkofsky** and **Giulia Sciorati**
introduction by **Paolo Magri**

ISPI

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Introduction

In 2020, the way we define "insecurity" has drastically changed. No longer does it automatically bring to mind images of armed groups, or a fleet of missiles: insecurity can now also be invisible and all around us, in the shape of a virus that disrupts people's lives, upends the economy, subverts the core functions of national governments, and jeopardises the foundations of international cooperation.

Still, the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic has not made traditional security challenges disappear. As it did with other aspects of our lives, with the "help" of national lockdowns and restrictions to international mobility, the virus merely pushed those challenges to the background. After the first wave of the pandemic subsided and restrictions eased, the terrorist attacks in France last November have served as a painful reminder to Europeans of potential short-term rebounds of violence.

In Asia, one of the world's most insecure continents, the pause button had not even been fully pressed. In fact, in the spring of 2020, while the world was struggling to contain the death toll of Sars-CoV-2, China declared new administrative divisions in the South China Sea, stirring the waters of regional contestation. Put differently: Beijing has exploited the crisis caused by the global pandemic to unilaterally declare that disputed territories in the South China Sea are integral parts of Chinese national sovereign territory. Around the same time, despite the raging health and food crises, North Korea launched short-range cruise missiles off its eastern coast, redoubling concerns in Japan and

South Korea. During the summer, terrorist attacks broke the truce negotiated by the pandemic in the Philippines, while China and the United States (U.S.) moved their respective naval vessels around the Taiwan Straits. In addition, the China-India border was tainted by the first serious violent clashes since the "Line of Actual Control" had been established in the 1910s. Lastly, in the fall, anti-government protests erupted in Thailand and Indonesia.

Therefore, despite the (one can only hope) uniqueness of 2020, traditional security challenges have remained pressing in the Asia Pacific and Indo-Pacific regions, adding a layer of complexity to states' policy responses to the Sars-CoV-2 health and economic crises. As many have argued, the pandemic is acting as the "great accelerator" of our time. While the crisis has had some positive effects – for instance, by accelerating green energy transitions – it is also bound to continue amplifying longstanding and new security challenges, which will remain with us as the world continues to look for its "new normal".

The above-mentioned events and developments span all major Asian hotspots, which are currently at risk of experiencing a post-crisis escalation first-hand. This is one of the reasons why this Report presents short- and long-term scenarios for each one of the hotspots that challenge peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific regions. Both areas remain crucial for the global post-pandemic economic recovery, partly due to China's global role, and partly due to the recently signed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement, which in the longer term is set to spur regional trade. Therefore, Asia's security remains paramount to the international system, as the world cannot afford security crises that jeopardise economic recovery at this current fragile juncture.

The first chapter analyses the search for new security paradigms in the region. Niklas Swanström identifies China-U.S. competition as *the* crucial factor affecting Asia's current security landscape. According to Swanström, the growing polarisation between authoritarian regimes and democracies

during the pandemic has brought the China-U.S. rivalry even more to the fore. Coupled with a gradual linking of traditional and non-traditional security challenges, the competition is the element that is more likely to determine either a cooperating or conflicting period for Asia over the next few years.

The topic is further developed by Valérie Niquet in the second chapter. The author holds China's global engagement strategy accountable for aggravating Asia's "Thucydides trap", but also warns that the establishment of an alliance similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a security provider is unfeasible, especially as Asia is still coming to terms with a U.S.-created power vacuum that no regional power has been able to fill. Although Japan is the best-suited candidate, it lacks the military capabilities and reach to become a credible power. Indeed, what at a first glance appears to be a textbook example of "great power competition", Niquet argues, actually is a collection of regional "survival strategies" that were developed in an effort to react to China's hubris.

Moving on, Shino Watanabe presents an in-depth analysis of China and the U.S.'s penetration within the continent. The author identifies a crucial strategic tool for Beijing in the massive presence of Chinese officials in the United Nations (UN), which has proved to be an asset for the country's efforts to become a central protagonist in multilateral frameworks around the world and in the region. As Watanabe contends, there is still no real competition for China in Asia: the "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue" (Quad) bringing together the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia is in fact lacking full institutionalisation and cannot yet rival China's sophisticated cooperative frameworks like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). What would make a difference for Asia would be a U.S. re-engagement. However, even under the new Biden presidency, not only could the U.S. show that the country for now has other priorities (e.g., the national health and economic crises), but it might also be nearly impossible for Biden to match China's pace of regional expansion.

The remaining chapters maintain the China-U.S. confrontation in Asia as a premise, while looking at three security challenges in particular. Cristina Varriale begins by offerings insights into Asia's nuclear threat, by examining the crucial case of North Korea. At the core of Varriale's argument is the connection between the issue of proliferation and the military innovation of the country's arsenal. To this day, China and the U.S. maintain contrasting approaches to North Korea: the former actually benefits from the country's instability, while the latter prefers a diplomatic approach to Pyongyang's demilitarisation. As the author argues, Sars-CoV-2 has made access to North Korea even more difficult, thus further endangering the country's "diplomatic denuclearisation" and, as sanctions cannot be lifted, anything resembling economic growth and recovery.

Abhijit Singh's chapter makes a case for the dual role – military and economic – of Asia's sea lanes. The author stresses the fact that regional powers will be forced towards cooperation in the post-pandemic world to ensure that maritime routes are secured. However, Singh adds that an escalation of the China-U.S. competition, or the simple continuation of the trade war, risks bringing about a profound restructuring of both Asia's sea lanes and regional value chains, to the detriment of regional security.

Lastly, the impact of Sars-CoV-2 as a trend accelerator is at the core of Giulia Sciorati's chapter on terrorism in Asia. The author unpacks terrorist trends in the continent after the 2014 global peak, showing a partial realignment to global tendencies. The pandemic, Sciorati contends, has heightened the risk of radicalisation by forcing the quick, unregulated digitalisation of everyday life and by inspiring the resurgence of narratives (especially in Islamic countries) that link national epidemic outbreaks to un-Islamic behaviour. The author concludes by pinpointing Indonesia and Muslim regions in the Philippines as the areas in Asia where de-radicalisation strategies should be implemented as part and in support of a post-pandemic recovery.

In the last chapter, Axel Berkofsky analyses the current and future EU and European role in, and impact on, security in the Indo-Pacific Region. Between 2018 and 2020, France, Germany and the Netherlands have all adopted their own national Indo-Pacific policy strategies, and the EU has also announced it will adopt its strategy some time this year. While all of this looks ambitious, pointing to new European courage and determination to make tangible contributions to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific, business will continue to rule supreme for Europe (and its multinational, above all German, companies). In other words, and as the very recent adoption of the EU-China trade and investment agreement shows, the author concludes that European preparedness to confront and deter the "Chinese elephant" in the room will continue to remain fairly limited.

In conclusion, although we will undoubtedly witness the further reintegration of non-traditional into traditional security challenges over the next few years, the complexity of Asia's security landscape should not to be underestimated, as Sars-CoV-2 has taken the continent to a critical juncture. Traditional and non-traditional insecurities, in fact, are bound to morph into new conglomerates that the region will need to counterbalance by devising new, multifaceted tools. Still, even after a pandemic, the fragile equilibrium between China and the U.S. will remain at the core of Asia's insecurities, mimicking the regime struggle between non-democratic and democratic powers that is now posing challenges to security worldwide.

Paolo Magri
ISPI Executive Vice President

1. Linking Economic and Security Factors and Policies After the Pandemic

Niklas Swanström

The Sars-CoV-2 pandemic (also called Corona pandemic in this chapter) is a challenge that most states are still struggling to handle. Originating in Wuhan, China, the pandemic is spreading and affecting the entire world. Arguably, to date it has hit Brazil and the U.S. the hardest. From the outset it appears as though East Asia has been much more successful than many other parts of the world in managing this pandemic, but the threat to states and their respective citizens still looms large, and globalisation and state interaction have fundamentally changed.

Usually, such an extreme situation would trigger cooperation. However, so far, only modest levels of cooperation have been seen and instead we have witnessed a rise of nationalistic sentiment, heightening already existing trends of conflict and triggering new blame game tactics at both a regional and global level. The lack of collaboration between states has even affected the EU, where cooperation fell apart, and national interest took priority, arguably allowing Sars-CoV-2 to spread more easily in Europe.[1] Moreover, new and dormant conflict lines have been allowed to come to the surface, to such an extent that there have been accusations that individual states have been using the crisis to further their political agendas in their respective regions.

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[1] G. Friedman, "The Coronavirus Crisis and the Geopolitical Impact", Horizons, *Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, no. 6, 2020, pp. 24-29.

It has been argued that the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic has changed the terms of economic interaction and that there has been a change of global leadership that would fundamentally change international security. Some have even argued more than one significant power has used Sars-CoV-2 to strengthen their political positions by politicising or possibly weaponising the situation.[2] This chapter looks at the economic and political impact at regional and international level to outline what has changed as a consequence of Sars-CoV-2 and if there has been the watershed change that is often presented in media. The conclusion of the chapter is that we have seen changes in the regional and international levels, but that the pandemic has reinforced already existing trends, rather than creating new ones. The world, and Asia, is heading towards a future of more nationalism, anti-democratic tendencies and Europe risks being a part of the problem rather than a part of the solution unless political leadership is demonstrated in Brussels and the capitals of the European members.

Construction of Alternative Realities?

It would be naïve to assume a potentially powerful political tool such as a pandemic would not be used in domestic and international agendas. China, especially, has been able to assert its influence in several global organisations, promoted Chinese values, and an illiberal agenda which undermines democratic states and democratic values.[3] Even if the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic is not turning China into a world leader overnight,[4] it has

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[2] T. Dearing, *Weaponizing the Ties that Bind: China's Clear Message to Australia Amid the SARS-CoV-2 Inquiry Cause Celebre*, Atlas Institute for International Affairs, 23 June 2020.

[3] S. Zhao, "Rhetoric and Reality of China's Global Leadership in the Context of SARS-COV-2: Implications for the US-led World Order and Liberal Globalization", *Journal of Contemporary China*, 7 July 2020.

[4] M. Green and E. Medeiros, "The Pandemic Won't Make China the World's Leader", *Foreign Affairs*, 15 April, 2020.

effectively attacked its competitors' political foundations, particularly as the U.S., at least in terms of perception, retreats from international institutions and alliances.

If a Cold War 2.0 or a geopolitical shift emerges from the rubble of the pandemic, it will challenge much-needed economic recovery and future efforts to combat global challenges in general. The direction we have seen so far during the Corona pandemic has not evoked a vision of a promising democratic future. China, which has contested U.S. global leadership for some years, saw an opportunity in the pandemic and presented an action-oriented aid and assistance strategy for states in peril. The success has been debatable, but Beijing's intention to promote China as a responsible leader has been clear. Sino-U.S. tensions are not new, but with the Corona pandemic, the negative decline has accelerated. Of course these tensions grow not just out of international posturing, but from domestic factors in both China and the U.S., such as the U.S. presidential campaign and the question of Xi's political coalition support in China.[5]

Confrontations between the U.S. and China have developed into more than just a rhetorical war. Each side has discredited the other and implemented strategically damaging economic policies, such as closed doors for Huawei, sanctions for human rights breaches in Xinjiang, etc. China has responded with countermeasures on imports and sanctions against U.S. legislators, such as Senators Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio for their criticism of the crackdown in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. In and among the hard policies have come rhetorical attacks. President Trump and the U.S. have focused on China's failure to act quickly to stop the spread of the virus, to openly share information, and take responsibility. While Beijing has mostly concentrated on discrediting democratic institutions for a

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[5] G. Shih, "A lion of a porcupine? Insecurity drives China's Xi to take on the world", *The Washington Post*, 7 August 2020; M. Pei, "China's Coming Upheaval: Competition, the Coronavirus, and the Weakness of Xi Jinping", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 100, no. May/June, 2020.

perceived failure to perform, it has also been attempting to change the narrative to suggest that the pandemic originated in the U.S., which they have pursued through mass media campaigns, inserting false information, and threatening states and institutions etc.[6]

The various names that have been attached to this strand of the virus and its origins indicate a willingness to politicise the pandemic, a politicisation that has directly impacted Asia's security dimension. China's refusal to take onus for being the source of the virus coupled with the attempt to deny any responsibility for the subsequent spread indicates both a domestic drive and an international ambition to benefit from the pandemic. In parallel, President Trump has attempted to reinforce the connection of the pandemic to China by naming it the "Kung Flu", "the Wuhan Flu", the "China Flu" etc.

President Xi initially attempted to centre China's actions in the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic around his concept of a "community of common destiny for mankind", with his premier vision to transform China into a global leader.[7] It seems as though China has used the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic as a test case to expand China's global leadership role, something that could explain the harsh reactions to even modest criticism of China's actions in the pandemic. China has consistently attempted to change the narrative surrounding the pandemic to fit its political objectives, to the point the initial support for Wuhan from the U.S. and the EU has been suppressed in this narrative. For example, the U.S. sent 18 tonnes of medical supplies to Wuhan to support China in combating the early stages of the outbreak, which was seemingly silenced in the Chinese storyline.[8] By

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[6] K. Campbell and R. Doshi, "The Coronavirus Could Reshape Global Order: China is Maneuvering for International Leadership as the United States Falters", *Foreign Affairs*, 18 March 2020; P. Rough, "How China is Exploiting the Coronavirus to Weaken Democracies", *Foreign Policy*, 25 March 2020.

[7] D. Dorman, "China's Global SARS-COV-2 Assistance is Humanitarian and Geopolitical", *Security Nexus*, April 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24866

[8] M. Crowley, E. Wong, and L. Jakes, "Corona virus Drives the U.S. and China

contrast, Chinese aid to the outside world and its expertise in combating the coronavirus have been heavily promoted by China, ignoring the delivery of often-faulty medical equipment coupled with the political and economic pressure and threats that have accompanied China's international engagement.

Moreover, the achievements of Taiwan and South Korea in tackling the virus, two close neighbours with similarly densely populated urban centres, have purposefully been ignored as this success does fit with the narrative Beijing wants to push. This tactic was somewhat successful in the early days of the pandemic, as a U.S. or EU policy that could provide an alternative was largely absent and President Trump's unpredictable and rather confused statements played into the hands of Beijing.

Equally crucial to the tensions that have arisen during the pandemic is the strong recognition globalisation has created unwanted and sometimes even dangerous dependencies. At the beginning of the pandemic most general medical supplies were produced in China. In June 2020, China was producing 150 tonnes per day of mask fabric, 15 times the quantity the U.S. was able to manufacture.[9] Pharmaceutical dependency will decrease due to the challenges many states face in the light of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic. Japan has already adopted severe measures to limit any potential future impact by reducing foreign investment in the pharmaceutical sector.[10] Countries throughout Asia have attempted to decrease their dependency on China by changing their supply chains.[11] Moreover, agricultural production and consumer goods will increasingly need a domestic base in the future to avoid a complete absence of stock.

Deeper into Global Power Struggle", *New York Times*, 22 March 2020.

[9] K. Bradsher, "China Dominates Medical Supplies, in This Outbreak and the Next", *The New York Times*, 26 October 2020.

[10] Nikkei Staff Writers, "Japan to Block Foreign Investments in Medicine amid Coronavirus", *Nikkei Asia*, 22 April 2020.

[11] C. Campe, "Supply chain cooperation to reduce dependency on China", *Asia Fund Managers*, 8 September 2020.

External dependency and national interests in Europe made joint action problematic, as states focused primarily on their own security and disregarded the regional context. This was an unfortunate reality for the European Union and their ambitions for better integration as there should be no reason why Europe needs to rely on external parties to supply strategic goods, such as medical supplies, but rather use its shared common market to meet the needs of individual states. Europe should use this period as an incentive to minimise any external dependency on goods and trade and maintain its independence by strengthening internal production and independence while still building new free trade agreements with the rest of the world.

Is There a New Security Landscape After Sars-CoV-2?

In early 2020, Berkofsky and Sciorati asked if China was playing ball or rocking the boat.[12] Over the course of this year at least it is clear that China has certainly been rocking the boat, both unintentionally and intentionally. China's "Wolf Warrior diplomacy" strategy in combination with its pandemic aid, violation of the democratic institutions in Hong Kong, "re-education" camps in Xinjiang,[13] mounting pressures in the South China Sea, heightening tensions in Cross-Strait relations, as well as skirmishes in the Himalayas, have been sending a clear message to regional states: we are on your side as long as our interests and preferences are guaranteed. The pressure and demands China has put on many of its "allies" have reached unprecedented levels.[14] The harsh response China

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[12] A. Berkofsky and G. Sciorati, *Mapping China's Global Future: Playing Ball or Rocking the Boat?*, Milan, ISPI-Ledizioni Ledi Publishing, 2020.

[13] E. Graham-Harrison, "China Has Built 380 Internment Camps in Xinjiang, Study Finds", *The Guardian*, 26 October 2020.

[14] C. Grundy-Warr and S. Lin, "SARS-COV-2 geopolitics: Silence and erasure in Cambodia and Myanmar in times of pandemic", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 61, no. 4-5, 2020.

has taken to any international criticism of what it considers to be its "internal affairs" has been exceedingly sharp. During the Corona pandemic, the same pattern was seen when China attempted to rewrite and change the narrative to fit its political purposes and long-term plan in Asia as well as internationally. China tried to project itself as the saviour of Asia (especially in the absence of the U.S.) and as a reliable power under its umbrella of a "common destiny of mankind".

It was a great surprise to many Chinese policymakers that the response to the country's Sars-CoV-2 assistance was not received entirely positively and that so many parties saw through Beijing's attempts to reformulate the narrative and use this in its political agenda. The pandemic also manifested China's attempts to control regional and international bodies to expand its influence and implement a significant degree of self-censorship in these organisations. The World Health Organization (WHO) has come out of the pandemic very much tainted by Chinese pressure and its kowtow to Beijing and flagrant denial of the health needs of Taiwan (also known as the Republic of China and considered a renegade province by Beijing).[15] It has also become evident China has significant influence over health issues internationally, to the extent they prevented Taiwan from sitting on WHO roundtables, despite the significant success Taiwan has had in countering the Sars-CoV-2 epidemic.

The support and aid that came during the early stages of the pandemic to China has not been noted at all in its domestic media. Instead, once Beijing was able to get the epidemic under control locally, China's support for the outside world has been used in what could be termed as Sars-CoV-2 diplomacy.[16] This Sars-CoV-2 diplomacy tactic was, of course, put in place after China delayed critical information about the novel coronavirus

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[15] H. Davidson, "Senior WHO Adviser Appears to Dodge Question on Taiwan's SARS-CoV-2 Response", *The Guardian*, 26 October 2020.

[16] K. Campbell and M. Rapp-Hooper, "China Is Done Biding Its Time: The End of Beijing's Foreign Policy Restraint?", *Foreign Affairs*, 15 July 2020.

and purchased a great deal of the global supply of health equipment, something that has put China at odds with several governments, particularly the U.S.[17] The criticism that has, rightfully, come out of Washington regarding China's behaviour has infuriated Beijing and increased tensions between them.[18]

China has been attempting to push the narrative that its own political system and leadership capability have been instrumental in managing the pandemic, a storyline that is not entirely reflected by the facts. Arguably democracies such as South Korea and China's own "renegade province" Taiwan have been much more successful and transparent in their policies to manage Sars-CoV-2. However, putting reality aside, this is not how China has presented it and there is little chance of that changing. Beijing has been actively using the construct that democracies, particularly the U.S., cannot respond appropriately to crises either regionally or internationally.

China has been very blunt in its ties to the outside world; the states that have criticised China's behaviour during the pandemic or referred to the epidemic as the Wuhan virus have been sharply rebuked by Beijing. One example of this is the case of Australia, when Canberra called for an independent evaluation of the source of the virus. Shortly after the Chinese ambassador to Australia explained that tourism, education, and trade would be affected if Australia continued to press for such an investigation.[19] There have been several similar incidents that have occurred all around Asia and in other regions. As a countering paradigm, China has claimed that the U.S. Army brought the virus to Wuhan and that it is not a virus originating in China.[20] More than simply being a claim that disregards all

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[17] M. Crowley M. Wong and L. Jakes (2020).

[18] Ibid.

[19] T. Dearing (2020); A. Tillet, "China consumer backlash looms over Morrison's coronavirus probe", *Australian Financial Review*, 26 April 2020; P. Karp, "China's trade bans are retaliation to SARS-COV-2 inquiry, more than half of Australians say", *The Guardian*, 25 May 2020.

[20] Reuters Staff, "China Government Spokesman Says U.S. Army Might Have

evidence, it also shows the lack of sincerity from the Chinese government; however, it has been somewhat effective in certain circles and states (often without free media), serving as an alternative paradigm.[21] The use of disinformation to discredit democratic countries is not a new phenomenon, but the massive use of it in China's Sars-CoV-2 diplomacy is relatively new and it is likely that China will continue using this toolbox.

What Impact Has Sars-CoV-2 Had on Pre-Existing Trends, and Is It Irreversible?

It would be a flawed argument to contest Sars-CoV-2 has completely changed the international or regional order or even its engagement terms. In reality, it has accelerated trends and exposed flaws in the global system as well as the failures of many democratic states to properly coordinate themselves and formulate a crisis response. There is now a strong perception the U.S. is withdrawing from international commitments, and China is promptly trying to fill the void, promoting the opinion that China is the only reliable power to act. In terms of the U.S., China has sought to focus on a narrative that points to the unpredictability of President Trump and his inability to act. When it comes to the EU, the overarching perception is that it is a union divided, which has been exploited and highlighted by China. Certain polls in Italy have shown China is more popular than the U.S. or EU.[22] This, even if we could argue China is not helping Italy but instead waging information warfare against it, is a clear example of the success of Chinese disinformation campaigns.[23] Other polls such as the Pew Institute show similar

Brought Virus to China", *Reuters*, 26 October 2020.

[21] P. Rough (2020).

[22] F. Bechis, "Polls Show Concerning Effects of Chinese Coronavirus Charm offensive in Italy", *New Atlanticist*, 17 April 2020.

[23] M. Ferraresi, "China Isn't Heling Italy: It's Waging Information Warfare", *Foreign Policy*, 31 March 2020.

tendencies,[24] but on the other side we have a lack of moral compass among many politicians that will make a compromise with China likely. In Asia, there is a similar trend where states dependent on China have accepted China's narrative and are reluctant to allow alternative views in media. In Asia, there is a similar trend where states dependent on China have accepted China's narrative and are reluctant to allow alternative views in media.

Simultaneously, China, and to a certain degree Russia, have been actively promoting their political system and their respective abilities to take decisive action – this of course is nothing new but their focus on building this narrative has accelerated during the pandemic.[25] The polarisation of interpretations is increasingly problematic in Asia, and globally, this has strengthened already existing divisions between states and political systems. This might not be a Suez moment[26] but the significance is there are direct impacts on the global security environment. Notably, there is increased cooperation between Japan, the U.S., India, and Australia in the form of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), and bilateral agreements with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members. The upgrade of the Quad to the Foreign Minister meeting in Tokyo in October 2020 was a direct reaction to China's misuse of information about the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic, its economic fallout, and China's attempts to manipulate the repercussions to fit its political agenda, in addition to the maritime challenges China increasingly projects.[27] It has been argued the Quad could be the initial structure of an "Arc of Democracy",[28] but that

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[24] L. Silver, K. Devlin and C. Huang, *Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries*, Pew Research Center, 6 October, 2020.

[25] C. Grundy-Warr and S. Lin (2020).

[26] K. Campbell and R. Doshi (2020).

[27] A. Singh, "India, US, Japan and Australia's Quad: A comprehensive regional construct", *Financial Express*, 6 October, 2020.

[28] R. Heydarian, "Quad alliance forms 'arc of democracy' around China", *Asia Times*, 27 July 2020.

might be too far-reaching unless China increases its pressure on democratic states or engages in military confrontation with Taiwan. The Quad was initiated in 2007, but the timing was premature as there were minimal common security challenges. The deepened geopolitical tensions in 2020 and the trigger effect of the Chinese use of Sars-CoV-2 has led to increased and deepened cooperation in the Quad.

In addition to the Quad, and a variety of bilateral defence cooperation agreements among Quad-members, there is also a "Supply Chain Resilience Initiative" (SCRI) between the Quad-members "to take a lead in delivering a free, fair, inclusive, non-discriminatory, transparent, predictable and stable trade and investment environment and in keeping the markets open".[29] In addition to the founding members, ASEAN has been invited to participate. In the tracks of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic it has been a short move to a more localised approach all across Asia when it comes to company supply chains, and decreased dependency on China.[30] Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the demand for surgical masks and the N95 respirators that were in no small degree produced in China and held back from sale until the country managed to contain the pandemic domestically. A spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry tweeted that if foreigners were not pleased with Chinese aid, they should stop wearing Chinese face masks,[31] something that will be a reality as states increase their own production.

Due to increased polarisation and the failure of states in the era of economic and political globalisation to show solidarity the subsequent international crisis has revealed frays in the legitimacy of a democratic and Western-led order. The first step for national governments will be to improve national sustainability and build smaller coalitions of like-minded states. It is not unlikely that these will be formed along the lines of

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[29] C. Campe (2020).

[30] K. Campbell and R. Doshi (2020); Bank of America, *Tectonic shifts in global supply chains*, 4 February 2020.

[31] K. Campbell and M. Rapp-Hooper (2020).

democratic and non-democratic countries. Friedman argues that national decision-making, regionalism, and globalisation will take a step back in favour of the nation-state.[32] It is not unlikely even more well established initiatives such as the EU will have to re-evaluate some of their policies unless European politicians can rise to the occasion. The potential of increased fragmentation would further weaken small and medium-sized states, such as Germany, Malaysia, Mexico, Sweden, Singapore in favour of great powers such as China and the U.S. If the U.S. continues on its path towards isolationism, cooperation between small and medium-sized states will have to increase, as well as democratic coalitions if increased pressure from China is to be managed. This is something the EU should support, not only to strengthen its own position, but also to support other democracies.

Another unfortunate trend is that certain individual states have used the Corona pandemic to maintain control, make political change more complicated, and even decrease democratic norms. This a trend that has not only been seen in weak political systems, but also India, Israel, Slovakia, Spain, etc. have all imposed significant restrictions on their citizens to combat the pandemic, and in many cases rightfully so.[33] However, it is increasingly evident a substantial consequence of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic is that some states have reduced their openness and democratic credentials, in some cases, to combat the epidemic, but in others to maintain and even expand political powers for leaders. This trend is aligned with the anti-globalisation movement, left and right-wing extremism, and the weakening of international organisations.

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[32] G. Friedman (2020).

[33] A. Ilyas, *Impact on Geopolitics: Emergence of a new geopolitical perspective*, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2020.

Empty Pockets and Restrictions in the Economy

Initially, economic recovery will be a priority for all states post-Sars-CoV-2, and the question is if the democratic world and China can do this without each other. It will be difficult and undesirable to decouple too much from China and vice versa. Still, on the other hand, this could be an ideal time to break free from the trade deficit and the political and economic dependencies. Production was already moving out of China, and restrictions on Chinese investments were on the rise pre-pandemic. Sars-CoV-2 has accelerated this trend in national interest areas, such as medical equipment but also through rising anti-Chinese sentiment.

China is strongly dependent on exports to the EU, the U.S., and Japan and would not be able to restart its economy without a simultaneous rebound from some of the hardest-hit economies. 40% of China's export ties are with the 12 hardest-hit economies, and without recovery in these states, the Chinese economy as a whole will not recover.[34] China might be forced to wait for a global recovery or stimulate the global economy for its benefit, even if such a strategy would be portrayed as an international rescue operation were it to materialise. The aforementioned cooperation between all major economies will be crucial in the post-pandemic recovery. Decoupling with China, or China with the EU, or the U.S., is a delusory route as the international global economy is so intertwined. Still, more realistic, transparent, and fair engagement is a necessity. This will affect China, and its trading partners, negatively, but hopefully, with time, even China will open up politically, socially, and geopolitically so that engagement could also benefit China.

The economic recovery will be challenging and will impact the security situation in Asia. As one example, the impact on military budgets will be significant. As the key player, the U.S. will have difficulties maintaining the current budget in light of

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[34] M. Green and E. Medeiros (2020).

rising unemployment and economic restructuring. Similarly, China has been hit hard by the pandemic even if arguably not as hard as the U.S. and many of its allies. It is unlikely U.S. allies in NATO will step up and cover the security deficit, particularly as many of these states have learned to rely on U.S. security guarantees at a low cost. However, if this were to come to fruition, it could lead to a more diverse security situation where the U.S. no longer compensates financially for the rest of its allies and a case where individual states have to take greater responsibility for their own security. This could result in individual states leaning towards China if the U.S. fails to re-engage with Asia. The EU should do well in expanding its own security interest to the region, and possibly engage with the Quad and other influential democracies to counter trends that would be against Europe's long-term interests.

To What Extent Should Asia's Security Concept Be Revisited?

It is not so much that Sars-CoV-2 has changed the security dimension in the region, but rather it has accelerated ongoing policy trends and revealed cracks in the sincerity of many states' foreign policy objectives. If anything, the division between democratic and authoritarian states has been made more prominent, and there is more of a willingness to use trade, economic needs, and health issues as political tools. Hong Kong became the first manifestation of this new reality when China's actions were endorsed by non-democratic states, and criticism was mainly from democratic countries.[35] The new security lines in Asia (and even internationally) are increasingly cut along political lines, i.e. democracies versus autocracies.

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[35] E. Lederer, "Nearly 40 nations criticize China's human rights policies", *A.P. News*, 7 October 2020.

Is then China a potential global leader? Before President Trump, the U.S. regularly took the lead when dealing with an international crisis, with both political and economic responsibilities. Even if U.S. leadership has been severely tainted in the last few years, it is easy to imagine the U.S. bouncing back on the international stage again. However, it is also a question over whether China is able and willing to lead regionally or internationally. Many states are seemingly willing to condone China's autocratic state policies and their approach to internal security (which relegates human and civil rights to the sidelines), but taking the global lead is another matter. If China were able to lead, it would have to compromise on some of its interests to show a benign policy and increase trust among its followers, something that China has been unable to do to date.

However, since the beginning of this crisis it has been quite clearly laid out that China is not ready to take the lead. This was apparent when it failed to inform and set a strategy to assist other states simultaneously as it combated its internal Sars-CoV-2 challenges. The pandemic was quickly deprioritised below its national strategy, party ideology, and Xi Jinping's prestige. It is hard to see the development of a new security concept in Asia led by China, as long as this remains, especially if the next U.S. government reinitiates international responsibility. China can most certainly provide an ideological alternative and criticise U.S. attempts to take action, but to lead proactively is another matter entirely. Even China has realised criticism of the country was on the rise due to its Sars-CoV-2 diplomacy tactics. A report from the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) warned the leadership in Beijing that anti-Chinese sentiments were at their highest levels since the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989.[36]

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[36] "Exclusive: Internal Chinese report warns Beijing faces Tiananmen-like global backlash over virus", *Reuters*, 4 May 2020.

Bilateral relations between China and the U.S. will continue to be difficult for many years to come; even with possible short-term improvements in ties. The systemic differences, the perception of freedoms and trade, etc. are too essential to their respective ideological outlooks and even seemingly minor issues quickly become impassable obstacles to overcome. The reverberations of these fluctuations of ties will impact all relations in the Asia-Pacific region, but also the world at large. The Quad cooperation and the Sino-Russian cooperation are two aspects of this. It will be increasingly difficult for states to sit on the fence and play the two emerging blocks against one another. Europe would need to clarify its stance and more clearly take a transatlantic and democratic position against a non-democratic block. The pandemic has pointed to the consequences of a potential geopolitical shift, especially as U.S. commitment to international cooperation is weak. The EU would need to take greater responsibility (and financial obligations), and other democracies need to cooperate. Regardless, the pandemic will not immediately make China the leader of the world.

Current international debates focus strongly on non-traditional security threats, such as pandemics and environmental degradation. Still, as we move forward in time, these will be intertwined with traditional security challenges. It is notable China has increased pressure on Taiwan and used the opportunity to strengthen its coalition-building in Asia and beyond. China will challenge Taiwanese control of its offshore islands and U.S. free movement in the South China Sea. The pandemic has not been instrumental in creating this geopolitical situation, but the crisis has accelerated the timeframe and created opportunities to speed up the coming changes. This trend could be slowed down if the U.S., as the strongest state internationally, once again took up the leadership that it has lost and restructured and strengthened cooperation among democracies or democratic leaning states. This should not simply be for altruistic reasons but its long-term interests.

The potential strengthening of free and democratic societies is a beneficial consequence, but this is no longer possible without serious support from other like-minded states, such as the Quad and the EU.

Unfortunately, in the coming years, authoritarianism will not be as disregarded as previously. Much like in the 1920s and 1930s in Europe and Asia, there will be a growth of authoritarian states, this time led by China. This will not only be because China has taken a more assertive stance, but arguably more because democracies have not actively defended their liberal values to the point where they have taken cooperative and decisive action. The U.S., and to a certain degree, the EU, would be the preferred choice for leadership in many states, even if the cost-sharing has to be more equal. However, the EU is still divided, and the U.S. has become more isolationist once more, and therefore, China will, by default, increase its influence over Asia.

The Corona pandemic has created an increase in anti-China, and anti-Chinese sentiment, both regionally and internationally,[37] which will make it difficult for China to take a leadership role and reformulate the geopolitics of Asia. However, the trend has been set in motion, and China will learn from its mistakes in this crisis. China has acted very aggressively, responding to opposition to its Sars-CoV-2 strategy by highlighting trade discrimination. This strategy may have been one of the biggest reasons that prevented China from taking the role as a new leader, and effectively rewriting the regional order.

Europe is in a position, if the EU can unite, to play a positive role in the strengthening of democracies and offer alternatives to small and medium-sized states in the more polarised international community. To do this Europe needs to strengthen its own production lines, build new supply lines, and not shy away from setting its own agendas. The EU will have

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[37] R. Verma, "China's diplomacy and changing the SARS-COV-2 narrative", *International Journal*, 2020, vol. 75, no. 2, pp. 248-258.

to start defining its own core interests, and not only normative interests, and act accordingly with broader geopolitical interest, something that could be difficult when Europe is divided about the future. The reality is, however, the EU has the ability to build its own future together or stand divided and be ruled by the agendas of other states, but does it have the moral compass and political strength to enforce this?

2. Great Power Rivalry in Asia: Thucydides Trap or Leninist Power Game?

Valérie Niquet

The emergence of a new Cold War in Asia between two profoundly different ideological systems, more than 30 years after the first ended, seems to have established itself as the latest unquestionable narrative. The United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC), the world's first and second economic powers respectively, are on a collision course: competition between them, exacerbated by the consequences of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic, has become the main driver of international relations and balance of power in the region. This narrative, however, raises many questions concerning the equilibrium between China and the United States, and the veracity of a "Cold War" narrative that tends to assign sole responsibility for antagonising foreign policy choices regarding China and multilateralism in general to the Trump administration. This narrative fits well with the PRC who, for years, have been denouncing the United States' unipolar hegemony and anticipating the emergence of a multipolar world where an emerging China will be accepted as the major power in its own natural and historical sphere of influence in Asia.[1]

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[1] Wen Tiejun, 温铁军 "新冷战的究竟新在哪里为何让人如此指手不及" ("In what is the new cold war so dominant") 观察者网 (*The Observer*), 19 August 2020.

Sino-U.S. rivalry is driving the region's re-bipolarisation along different dividing lines from those prevalent during the post-1950s Cold War. Russia is now marginalised and to speak of a China-Russia ideological alliance would be a mistake, whatever common interests they may have at the tactical level. Moreover, the PRC today makes a point of differentiating itself from the former Soviet Union. While the Chinese regime is very much governed by Leninist principles, one of the keys to its success and its emergence as a great economic power has been its denial of ideological specificities and its stress on a pro-globalisation market economy that distinguishes it from the failed Soviet Union. China now rejects the idea of an open, full-blown confrontation with the western world and more specifically with the United States. It proclaims itself not interested in "spreading Marxism" but in making use of capital to access market shares and resources to compete within the framework of the liberal world order.[2] At the same time, however, China is also increasing its capacity to influence, which obviously serves its quest for power and the regime's survival strategy.

In the context of this new rivalry (one that will not disappear after the United States presidential elections in 2020), one major issue remains the positioning of regional powers and U.S. allies, who might well be torn between the need to maintain a lucrative working relationship with China and preserving the assurance of U.S. security.

The Sars-CoV-2 pandemic that erupted in Wuhan and spread around the world in January 2020 has also played a role, raising tensions and focusing debate on China's aggressive strategic choices. Such tensions, however, did not originate with the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic. More importantly, they will not disappear after the end of the pandemic in Asia. This chapter will focus first on the role of the Trump presidency in increasing tensions in the Asia-Pacific region. It will then

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[2] Chen Zhao, "Donald Trump Anti-China Policy is Doomed to Fail as his Coronavirus Strategy Did", *South China Morning Post*, 14 August 2020.

introduce the China factor, as the main driver of these tensions to demonstrate that, far from traditional great power rivalries, these tensions are essentially the specificities and priorities of the Chinese regime.

The Trump Presidency and the Emergence of the Concept of "Great Powers Rivalries" to Characterise Sino-U.S. Relations

Under the Trump presidency, tensions with China have indeed increased and a new "Great Power rivalry" has taken centre stage, intensifying over the last year of the administration as the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic has run its course. Tensions have assumed many forms, from economic to military, including technological and cyber-security dimensions. Naturally, they have had immediate consequences for strategic stability in East Asia, the U.S. becoming increasingly involved in the region at many levels to counter China's advance and assertive posture.

After initial hopes of a "deal", the choice of a "strategy of maximum pressure" by President Trump and his entourage has translated into a multi-targeted offensive focusing on all relevant aspects of Chinese power.

Inaugurating a "trade war" with the PRC in 2018, new tariffs were adopted by a Trump administration expecting concrete results more than dialogue. The objective was to impose on the PRC a reduction in trade deficit and a reform of trade practices, from forced technology transfers to failure to respect intellectual property rights. On these issues, the Trump administration's posture on Chinese trade practices was shared by partners from Japan to the European Union. In spite of tensions, however, a first phase economic agreement was reached between Beijing and Washington, though with limited impact on China's imports from the United States.

As part of this trade war, the United States also took decisions directly affecting Chinese high-tech companies, particularly

in the telecom sector. The U.S. decided to ban chip sales first to ZTE, then to the telecom giant Huawei, challenging their capacity to survive. Washington's decision evidenced the PRC's dependency on the outside world and its weakness in key industrial sectors, inflicting a direct blow to China's ambitions to be perceived as an innovation power, an important tool in its exercise of regional and global influence.

This decision, though, also had implications for U.S. allies in the region, particularly for Japan and South Korea, whose economies rely heavily on high-tech exports to China.[3] In this sense, the U.S.-China trade war has introduced a new element of internal debate, particularly in Japan, between preserving economic cooperation with China and avoiding tensions with the U.S. as the only credible security guarantor in the region.

At the same time, Japan has aligned itself with the United States in paying increased attention to the PRC's strategy for influence in the country through research programs, investments and scientific cooperation, potentially at the service of the PRC's objective of civil-military integration.[4]

More specifically, the United States has also focused its offensive on cybersecurity, traditionally conceptualised by Chinese strategists as a point of strength as well as weakness in developed societies. One development in this area (apart from a ban on technology transfer to some companies) has been the "Clean Network Initiative" (CNI) launched by the U.S. State Department in 2020. The CNI openly targets the People's Republic of China. Its declared objective is to "safeguard national assets, citizens' privacy and companies' most sensitive information from aggressive intrusion by malign actors such

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[3] Rebuilding trust and close relationships with U.S. allies in the region, including with Japan, is one of the most pressing challenge that the new Biden administration will be facing in 2021.

[4] Civil-Military integration is at the heart of China's technological development and priorities. President Xi Jinping, Secretary general of the CCP is President of the Central military commission of the Party-State is also the head of the civil military integration commission.

as the CCP". This naming of the target has made it difficult for Japan to endorse the initiative despite Washington's high expectations.

At the military level, the United States has continued to pursue the Obama "Pivot to Asia" strategy while simultaneously denying continuity: after some initial confusion, the Trump administration soon realised the necessity and urgency of reassuring its allies. Japan and South Korea in particular were worried by President Trump's "America first" rhetoric and by growing pressure to considerably increase their financial contribution to the U.S. presence in their respective countries.

In spite of "America first" rhetoric, U.S. presence in a region threatened by an assertive PRC has actually increased and has been firmly reasserted to avoid any miscalculation by China. While Chinese strategists and the PLA (People's Liberation Army) might be prudent enough not to risk a full-fledged war with a potential intervention by the U.S., the political leadership under Xi Jinping might too readily interpret signs of weakness or hesitation as a signal to take dangerous risks either in the South China Sea, the East China Sea or regarding Taiwan. Thanks to President Trump's unpredictability, China has not risked seizing additional territories in the South China Sea, though it has applied pressure on Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia within their own exclusive economic zones (EEZs). At the same time, the U.S. military has organised numerous exercises and Freedom of Navigation (FON) operations in the region, including in zones specifically claimed by the PRC as "territorial waters" or air space. In a demonstration of force, and to persuade the PRC that the U.S. navy has not been weakened by Sars-CoV-2, the United States conducted air defence exercises in the South China Sea in 2020 with two ACGs "in support of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific".

Taiwan is another example of the new U.S. posture regarding China's claims and offensives under the Trump Administration. In a break with the previous administration, the United States has multiplied initiatives to support Taiwanese democracy,

crossing a number of red lines. Trump accepted a call from President Tsai Ing-wen after being elected, to the fury of the Chinese leadership, establishing a new, less ambiguous position regarding the United States' ideological support for democratic Taiwan. In August 2020, the U.S. Secretary of Health Alex Azar visited Taiwan to discuss Sars-CoV-2 in the context of China's embargo on Taiwan's participation as an observer to the World Health Organization (WHO). He was followed in September by the Under-Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment, who participated in the memorial service for former president Lee Teng-Hui, a major bête noire for Beijing since his election in 1996.[5]

This evolution in relations between Taiwan and the United States follows its own logic, based on ideological convergence since the election of President Tsai Ing-Wen. It is also a mark of the growing rivalry between the United States and China as two diverging ideological models. In Taiwan, Alex Azar insisted that "we consider Taiwan to be a vital partner, a democratic success story and a force for good in the world". More precisely on health issues, he declared the priority of recognising Taiwan as an open and democratic society executing a highly successful and transparent Sars-CoV-2 response, and insisted that Taiwan deserves to be recognised as a global health leader. Change in the presidency of the United States is unlikely to alter this position given the large consensus on Taiwan and its democratic values.

Under the Trump administration, more stress has also been placed on the need to avoid the U.S. being replaced as world leader on an economic and technical level rather than in ideological terms and human rights. At the same time, China's ambition to displace the United States as the preponderant power in East Asia is a preoccupation shared by many actors in Asia.[6]

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[5] "Under Secretary of State Keth Krach Visits Taiwan", State Department, 16 September 2020.

[6] A. Friedberg, "An answer to aggression: How to push back against Beijing", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 99, no. 5, September/October 2020.

Particularly in the year leading up to the 2020 elections in the United States, the ideological dimension has assumed greater importance, following the Chinese leadership's call to resist "western values" and regime change or evolution theories.[7] In July 2020, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo delivered a talk titled "Communist China and the Free World's Future", stressing major differences with the Obama administration's Pivot to Asia. If there are differences in methods, however, the fundamental principles of antagonism to a Chinese power that favours the use of force and nationalism is not limited to the Trump administration and will probably survive into the next presidency, particularly if the PRC does not renounce its aggressive power play.

Highlighting the fundamental ideological divide between an obsolete ideological regime and the nation that remains the prime power and security guarantor in Asia, the United States under Tump has increased its military visibility in the region, particularly in the South China Sea and regarding Taiwan. Arms sales to Taiwan have taken place on a regular basis since Donald Trump's election and this policy will be a test for the new Joe Biden administration in its approach to Asia.[8] Military exercises have also taken place in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, involving Japan, Australia and India, as well as FON operations in the vicinity of features claimed by the PRC. In July 2020, a dual aircraft carrier exercise took place in the South China Sea to deter China from seizing the opportunity presented by the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic to attempt aggressive action in the region. In October 2020, Pompeo also declared

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[7] N. Gan, "China President Xi Jinping Warns Communist Party School Against Western Capitalist Values", *South China Morning Post*, 1 May 2016.

[8] In 2013, along with National Security Adviser Susan Rice, Joe Biden was apparently taken by the "Great Powers relationship" concept pushed by Xi Jinping to redefine China's relation with the United States. To be recognised by Washington as *the* other Great Power, partner or adversary also plays a role in the legitimation process for a regime influenced by the bilateral system of the cold war.

that "to push back against stepped up military activities near Taiwan and in the South China Sea was a means of deterring conflict with Beijing".

While exacerbating Great Power rivalry in the Pacific and challenging the PRC's constant denunciation of a "cold war type system of alliances", the Unites States under Trump has also tried to reassure its allies on security matters. Japan was and still is the main target of this reassurance, as defence arrangements between Tokyo and Washington, dating back to the 1950s, are still central to U.S. security policy in Asia.[9] This was reiterated by President Elect Joe Biden and Prime Minister Suga during their first phone call in November 2020. The same goes for South Korea, even though this defence relationship is focused on the security of the Korean peninsula and is also more complex, depending on the political majority in Seoul.

Consolidation of the U.S. presence and arrangements in the Indo-Pacific has placed new emphasis on the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) format (United States, Japan, Australia, India) at a time when India seems less reticent as a result of border incidents with China in 2020, and with Australia and Japan signing their own defence agreement in November 2020.

The second Quad meeting took place in Tokyo in the presence of Secretary of State Pompeo a few days before the presidential elections in the United States, and despite the ongoing Sars-CoV-2 pandemic and the fact that the president of the United States was himself infected at the time. Together with increasing visibility, countering the threat of China was very much at the forefront of the agenda.

For Mike Pompeo, Quad could be transformed into a more effective instrument to support the FOIP (Free and Open Indo-Pacific) concept. However, conscious of Japan's serious limitations in military terms, Pompeo also added that the

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[9] Japan-U.S. Security Treaty on https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/ref/1.html

concept of security was to be understood in the broader sense, beyond the military, including common democratic values and the economy.[10] The proposal to work more effectively with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) has, however, been countered by the signature, after years of negotiations, of the RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) between ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, China, Australia and New Zealand, but without the U.S. and India, a classical balancing act by countries in the region.

Despite the emphasis placed on the American offensive in the great new game being played in the Indo-Pacific, China remains the dominant cause of growing tensions between great powers in the region and of re-bipolarisation along lines of division set by the Chinese regime.

Conclusions: China as the Trigger of Great Power Rivalry and Source of Tensions in the Region

The awareness of an emerging threat from China is not specific to the region, and not related exclusively to the Trump administration. Since 2016, the European Union's perception of China has also evolved, from a source of opportunities to a "systemic rival" whose destabilising role in Asia could have immediate consequences for the security of Europe. In the United States, the Pivot strategy originated under Obama as a result of disappointment in relations with the PRC. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was instrumental in developing the concept in Vietnam when she participated in the ASEAN Regional Forum meeting there in 2010. On all these issues the PRC has driven the refocusing of priorities, from the integration of a "responsible stakeholder" to the need to counter a source of tensions and conflicts.

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[10] "Q and A With Mike Pompeo: We Won't not Bend our Knee to China", *Nikkei Asia*, 6 October 2020.

Tensions in the region, and Great Power rivalries are thus not, or not only, the result of a Thucydides trap where a failing power, the United States, and western values in general, are confronted by an inevitably rising power, the People's Republic of China.

Even before Donald Trump's election and his conversion to a strident China containment policy, the priorities of the Chinese regime, and their quest for new factors of legitimation were leading to heightened tensions in East-Asia and a growing need for U.S. engagement in the region, as the sole acceptable instrument of strategic stability. Japan, the world's third economic power, would have the technological and economic capacity to play that role. For historical reasons however, Tokyo would be hamstrung as much by external reticence as by internal opposition. Unfortunately, the development of an effective security organisation in East Asia, openly geared to containing an aggressive Chinese regime, similar to NATO's balancing of the Soviet threat in Western Europe during the first Cold War, is not possible.

Meanwhile, the Chinese have increased pressure on the region's margins and interior, particularly since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012 with the clear aim of saving the regime with lofty ambitions of a "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" and building of a "war ready" People's Liberation army. Xi's mission is to save the Party/State even at the price of provocative foreign policy, as well as to revive Maoist-type mass mobilisation campaigns and control.[11] According to Xi Jinping's world vision, the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic has presented the Chinese regime with new opportunities to demonstrate its superiority and to make overtures at the economic and technological levels. In short, it has given China a chance to reassert itself. This hubris,

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[11] Ren Lixuan 任里轩, « 在危机中育新机于变局中开新局深入学习习近平思想 » ("Nurturing new opportunities in a crisis, opening new opportunities in the changing situation, an in-depth study of Xi Jinping's thought"), 人民日报 (*People's Daily*), 12 October 2020.

which began after the 2008 economic crisis, has been reinforced by the heavy impact of Sars-CoV-2 on the western world. It has also provided an answer to the long-term structural difficulties and impasse the Chinese regime is facing, between opening up to the outside world, vital for its economic growth and stability, and regaining ideological control.

Alongside offers of beneficial regionalism and increased investment under the Belt and Road Initiative, Xi Jinping has not hesitated to use military and quasi-military coercive actions or "grey zone" threats to assert China's claims and power, despite the fact that these run counter to the international rule of law.

In the South China Sea, the threat of possible retaliation by an unpredictable Donald Trump has deterred China from seizing new features in the maritime domain. China has, however, prevented Vietnam from pursuing oil exploration in its own EEZ, which it claims. The PRC also rejected as irrelevant the decision of the Hague International Court of Arbitration in favour of the Philippines in 2016.[12] As a result, despite regime differences, Hanoi has been increasingly in favour of rapprochement, including in security matters, not only with Washington but with regional allies like Japan too. The first trip abroad by Prime Minister Suga after his appointment in September 2019 was to Indonesia, which is facing incursions by Chinese fishing flotillas, and to Vietnam where he reasserted the importance of the concept of "free and open Indo-Pacific".

As for relations with Japan, constant Chinese pressure on the Senkaku islands has not decreased despite the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic. This has had a counter-productive effect on those in Japan who would otherwise favour better relations with China. In 2020, there have been seven incursions into Japan's territorial waters by Chinese vessels.

The PRC has also triggered multiple incidents at the border with India, at the risk of alienating another regional power

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[12] J. Perlez, "Tribunal Rejects Beijing Claims in South China Sea", *New York Times,* 12 July 2016.

which, as a result, has increased its strategic cooperation with the United States and its allies within and outside the framework of Quad. New Delhi was also the first major actor to refuse to sign up to the new RCEP agreement that China presents as a diplomatic and strategic triumph in the face of U.S. "isolationism".

Inside China's borders, tensions have also been on the rise, in Xinjiang province and Hong Kong. Critics have been repressed and the regime has paid no attention to global reactions to such ideological and "security" offensives. The same goes for Taiwan, with a multiplication of PLA exercises in the Taiwan Strait over the period of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic.

As a consequence, rising tensions and Chinese hubris cannot be understood through the lens of "Great Power rivalry": rather, they must be seen as "survival strategies" essential to a Chinese communist regime that needs to support its legitimacy at all costs.[13] This security priority has been clearly defined by the leadership on numerous occasions. Regime change, and the fall of the Soviet Union, are the two main threats to China's way of thinking. The latter in particular made the Chinese realise that, contrary to Marxist belief in the linear progress of history towards socialism and communism, the regime was mortal. Nationalist references to China's "natural" hegemony in the region, and the assertion of Chinese power, are thus a way for the leadership to reassert the legitimacy and vitality of the Communist Party.

At the same time, China is also facing far more complex long-term difficulties. Economic slowdown, dating back to mid-2015, is a major problem now that the regime is also facing social challenges like aging, unemployment and the lack of social security. The Sars-CoV-2 pandemic has had consequences despite the apparently good performance of the Chinese economy in 2020. Social tensions and inequalities have not been

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[13] A. Su, "Dreams of a Red Emperor: The Relentless Rise of Xi Jinping", *Los Angeles Times*, 22 October 2020.

tackled and will lead to further uncertainties in the longer term. Last but not the least, the trade and technological wars launched by the United States under Donald Trump have demonstrated the PRC's vulnerabilities in terms of access to external markets and technology. Xi Jinping's references to dual-track growth and decoupling, focusing on China's domestic market, growing middle class and indigenous innovative capacity, are not new and have previously proved insufficient to support the ongoing economic growth and development essential to the country's stability.[14] They also clearly echo the Maoist slogan "Count on one's own force to rejuvenate" (自力更生), and serve as a mass mobilisation tool for ideological purposes.[15]

Beyond territorial claims and trade rivalries, Chinese hubris and the need for the regime to assert itself are actually at the heart of tensions in the region. Surrounding countries risk being trapped, not in the middle of growing and polarising rivalries between the United States and China, but in their own contradictions, between trying to take advantage of the Chinese economy's remaining opportunities, particularly if there is a long-term rebound after the end of the pandemic, and opposing Chinese military encroachments and coercive policy in the maritime domain with the support of the United States. With the election of Joe Biden, the temptation for some might be to hope for a return to a situation where the United States maintains engagement in the region as guarantor of strategic stability without asking regional powers to "take sides" and jeopardise their economic partnerships with China.

In this context, while Sars-CoV-2 has not been a game changer in the Asia-Pacific, it has played the role of a revealer and accelerator of tensions related to the nature of the Chinese regime. Any return to a strategy of unconditional engagement or appeasement with China could only lead to increased assertiveness and red line testing, augmenting the risk of

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[14] Wen Qing, "A Dual Track Approach", *Beijing Review*, 6 August 2020.
[15] B.R. Young, "From China to the US: the Self Reliance Slogan is Back", *The Diplomat*, 2 October 2020.

miscalculation and conflict in the region.[16] The consequences of this would have an incommensurable global fallout given that the Indo-Pacific remains at the heart of global economic growth and trade.

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[16] A. Xie, "How a Joe Biden Presidency Would Offer US-China relations a Brief Window of Hope", *South China Morning Post*, 22 October 2020.

3. Multilateral Competition: The Quad *vis-à-vis* China in the UN System

Shino Watanabe

The 2020 Sars-CoV-2 pandemic has had a profound impact on international relations and the current international order. It has intensified the United States-China rivalry and revealed the limits of multilateral cooperation when the entire world must work together to fight against coronavirus.

Japan, the U.S., Australia and India have enhanced coordination amid Sars-CoV-2. In October 2020 Japan hosted the second Japan-Australia-India-U.S. foreign ministers meeting in Tokyo. The four ministers – Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne, Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo – agreed to continue their cooperation in health and hygiene, rule-making in the digital economy and in enhancing practical cooperation in other areas, including quality infrastructure, maritime security, counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief and education and human resource development. They also agreed to work with more countries to promote a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific".[1]

It was the second round of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, also known as the "Quad", which was first held in New York in September 2019. It was created as a forum for

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[1] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "The Second Japan-Australis-India-U.S. Foreign Ministers' Meeting", 6 October 2020.

the four countries to discuss regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The fact that the Quad meeting was the first ministerial-level international conference hosted by Japan since the Sars-CoV-2 outbreak indicates its significance for Japan.

Responding to the Quad meeting, China did not hesitate to express its concern. On 6 October, a spokesperson of the Chinese embassy in Tokyo stated that any multilateral cooperation should not form "exclusive cliques", going against the interests of third countries.[2]

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi reiterated China's concern about the Quad. After meeting with Malaysia's Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Hussein in Kuala Lumpur on 13 October, he called the Quad "a so-called Indo-Pacific NATO". Wang also commented, "What it pursues is to trumpet the Cold War mentality and to stir up confrontation among different groups and blocs and to stoke geopolitical competition. What it maintains is the dominance and hegemonic system of the United States." He further warned, "this strategy is itself a big underlying security risk. If it is forced forward, it will wind back the clock of history".[3]

Meanwhile, China seeks to enhance multilateral cooperation based on international organisations. A series of pro-China remarks by the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr Tedros Adhanom Hebreyesus, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs in Ethiopia, amid the coronavirus pandemic became a wake-up call to the entire world. Taiwan's exclusion from the World Health Assembly (WHA), the highest decision-making body/mechanism of the WHO, in May 2020, despite Taiwan's successful containment of Sars-CoV-2, is another example of China's growing influence

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[2] Chinese Embassy in Japan, "A Spokesperson of the Chinese Embassy in Japan Answered Questions on the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's Interview with Japanese Media", 7 October 2020.

[3] B. Jaipragas and T. Sukumaran, "'Indo-Pacific Nato': China's Wang Yi Slams US-led 'Quad' as Underlying Security Risk at Malaysia Meeting", *South China Morning Post*, 13 October 2020.

within the WHO. In protest, the Trump administration submitted its notice of withdrawal from the WHO to the UN Secretary-General in July 2020.

China's proactiveness within international organisations is not a response to the Trump administration's reluctance to support international organisations that go against U.S. policies and interests. This chapter argues that it is a product of China's long-term preparation for increasing its influence within international organisations. At the same time, China's proactive attitude toward international organisations, particularly the United Nations and its relevant institutions, as a means for promoting multilateral cooperation, has become a part of Xi Jinping's strategy toward the current international order.

This chapter first explains the Xi Jinping administration's approach to the international order. Second, it describes how China's strategy for international organisations has evolved since China was founded in 1949. Contrary to its initial rejection of international organisations, China now obtains top leadership positions in many international organisations. The chapter then concludes by suggesting that competition over multilateral cooperation strategies between the Quad countries and China will likely be intensified in the post Sars-CoV-2 world.

The Xi Jinping Administration's Strategy for International Order

The Xi Jinping administration's stance on reforming the current international order has been evident since October 2017. Xi Jinping made it clear that China would proactively engage in global governance and lead the transformation of the international order in his report at the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (Party Congress):

> China follows the principle of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration in engaging in global governance. China stands for democracy in international relations and the

> equality of all countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor. China supports the United Nations in playing an active role in international affairs, and supports the efforts of other developing countries to increase their representation and strengthen their voice in international affairs. China will continue to play its part as a major and responsible country, take an active part in reforming and developing the global governance system, and keep contributing Chinese wisdom and strength to global governance.[4]

China's concrete approach to engaging in reforming global governance was announced at the 3rd Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference in June 2018. It was the first conference on foreign affairs after the 19th Party Congress, and the forum where Xi Jinping announced his diplomatic thoughts.[5]

After the conference, Yang Jiechi, a member of the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee and Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission Office, explained the background to Xi's diplomatic thoughts. In his account, China perceives the global governance system as being in a key phase of qualitative change, and thus should seize this opportunity in reforming it. China takes the lead in advocating the "democratisation of international relations" that reflects the will and interests of the majority of nations by increasing their representation and the voice of developing countries. Yang also emphasises the proactive role of the UN in the reform of global governance.[6]

Chinese leaders and major academics have repeatedly mentioned China's priority to the UN as the major platform

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[4] Xi Jinping, "Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era: Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China", 18 October 2017, p. 54.

[5] The second Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference was convened in November 2014.

[6] Yang Jiechi, "Yi Xijinpig Waijiao Sixiang Wei Zhidao Shenru Tuijin Xin Shidai Duiwai Gongzuo" ("Guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy, Deeply Promote Foreign Work in the New Era"), *Qiushi*, vol. 15, 1 August 2018.

for reforming global governance. Xi Jinping reiterated the need for the global governance reform with the UN at its core in his video message delivered at the annual General Debate of the 75th of the UN General Assembly in September 2020:

> Covid-19 reminds us that the global governance system calls for reform and improvement… We should stay true to multilateralism and safeguard the international system with the UN at its core.[7]

Qin Yaqing, one of the leading Chinese academics and President of China's Foreign Affairs University which trains future Chinese diplomats, proposes the "G20+1" model for rebuilding cooperation amid the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic. He argues that political leadership and advisory and implementation functions are necessary for multilateral cooperation today. He proposes a multilateral mechanism consisting of G20 countries and the UN, in which the former exercise leadership and the UN specialised agencies offer advice and implement policies in their relevant fields.[8]

The idea of the G20 assuming the leadership of multilateral cooperation would be an ideal situation for China. The G20, namely the Group of Twenty, is a forum of 19 countries and the European Union. In addition to the G7 countries, i.e., Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the U.S., the other members are BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), Australia, Argentina, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Turkey. China can feel comfortable with BRICS countries and major emerging markets and developing countries (EMDC) within the framework of G20.

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[7] "Full Text: Xi Jinping's Speech at the General Debate of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly", China Global Television Network (CGTN), 23 September 2020.

[8] Qin Yaqing, "Cooperation: An Iron Law for a Community with a Shared Future", *China International Studies*, vol. 82, 2020, p. 40.

China's Engagement with International Organisations

China's attitude to international organisations has gone through dramatic changes over the past seven decades. China initially refused to be involved in international organisations, but over time it has become an active participant and now seeks to play a leading role in them.

China's relations with international organisations from 1949 to 1971 were extremely limited. After it fought against the UN force while assisting North Korea during the Korean War from 1950 to 1953, China perceived international organisations mostly as tools controlled by U.S.-led capitalist states.[9] China opposed joining them and positioned itself as a "dissenter" or "rebel" within international society. The only exception were Beijing's efforts to join the United Nations by replacing Taiwan and taking over its seat.

Meanwhile, China sought to develop and strengthen its ties with non-aligned countries at multilateral conferences. The Principles of Peaceful Coexistence agreed by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was an outcome of Beijing's participation in the Geneva Conference in 1954.[10] Zhou's leading role at the Asian-African Conference in Bandung in 1955 extended China's presence in the Third World and beyond.

President Richard Nixon's surprising visit to China in February 1971 led to the U.S.-China rapprochement. Beijing's posture toward international organisations shifted from refusal to participate to cautious and ad hoc participation after

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[9] Li Hua, *Guoji Zuzhi Gonggong Waijiao Yanjiu* (*Study on the Public Diplomacy of International Organization*), Shishi Chubanshe (China Affairs Press), 2014, pp. 266-67.

[10] The five principles are mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and cooperation for mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence.

China joined the UN in October 1971, replacing Taiwan as representative of "China".

China's passive attitude at that time came mainly from its turbulent domestic politics. From 1966 to 1976 China was in the midst of the Cultural Revolution. Chinese leaders such as Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, who were labelled as "capitalist roaders", suffered from the political struggle against the Gang of Four, the group led by Mao Zedong's wife, Jiang Qing. China was not yet a full-fledged participant in international organisations.

Interestingly, China did use the UN for its political purposes, however. As Chairman of the Chinese delegation to the UN, Deng delivered a speech at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly in April 1974. It was an opportunity for Deng to appeal for his reinstatement as a Chinese leader. Deng had been purged in 1968, during the Cultural Revolution, but in the early 1970s he was restoring his power. He was appointed Vice Premier in March 1973 and was once again a member of the Political Bureau of the CCP in December that year.

In his speech entitled "Three Worlds", Deng stated that "the United States and the Soviet Union make up the First World," and "the developing countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other regions make up the Third World". Moreover, he said, "the developed countries between the two make up the Second World".[11]

In general, China had been a passive member of international organisations during the 1970s. Chinese leaders believed that Western developed countries controlled international organisations, and thus developing countries had limited influence. Mao Zedong intended to use international organisations to break its state of isolation and obtain diplomatic recognition from as many countries as possible with the assistance of the Soviet Union.[12] In light of this, China had

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[11] "Deng Xiaoping's "Three Worlds" Speech, April 1974.

[12] Li Hua (2014), p. 210.

been active in building good relations with developing countries within the Group of 77 (G-77) and Non-Aligned Movement.[13]

After launching the Open and Reform Policy in 1978, China began to join international organisations in some fields, such as economics, trade, finance, culture, science and technology, and actively participated in their activities.[14] China's entry into international economic organisations was mainly driven by its new focus on economic development, reflecting the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in December 1978.

China joined one international organisation after another and expanded the scope and depth of its engagement with international organisations. For example, it became a member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in 1980 and of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 1986, and received loans from them for building infrastructure in China.

Beijing regarded its membership as an unavoidable condition for China's development at that time.[15] China's strategy for international organisations during the rule of Deng Xiaoping was to create a favourable environment for developing its economy based on its acceptance of the existing international order.[16] Nevertheless, China still felt antipathy against multilateral institutions due to concerns that Western countries might use international organisations to punish and constrain China. At the same time, China's priority was to solve domestic problems, such as feeding China's large population and developing its economy. [17]

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[13] Zhihai Xie, "The Rise of China and Its Growing Role in International Organizations", *ICCS Journal of Modern Chinese Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2011, p. 86. The Group of 77 was a group of developing countries that signed the "Joint Declaration of the Seventy-Seven Developing Countries" at the first UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva in 1964. For more information on G-77, refer to the site of G-77 at http://www.g77.org/

[14] Ibid., p. 87.

[15] Li Hua (2014), p. 212.

[16] Ibid., p. 213.

[17] Ibid., p. 267.

China began to take the lead in some international organisations after the end of the Cold War in 1991.[18] China's engagement in international organisations became even more active and diverse and sought to proactively use them as a means for promoting its national interests.[19]

China's active stance toward international organisations during this phase was due to its isolation in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident in June 1989 and the rise of the "China Threat" thesis since the mid-1990s.[20] China finally joined the WTO in December 2001, a manifestation of China's full-fledged participation in the U.S.-led international economic system.

China's Growing Representation in the UN System

Strong dissatisfaction with the existing international order has been widely shared among Chinese policymakers and academics since the late 2000s. They tend to believe that China has not been granted an appropriate position commensurate with its growing strengths and is in an inferior position in the international order's rule-making processes. This is because the current order was formed by the U.S. after World War II and thus does not reflect the reality of power distribution in the international system.[21]

Pang Zhongying points out that there is a considerable difference between China's status as a major power today and its role within existing international organisations. Therefore, China seeks to strengthen its level of involvement within international organisations in order to gain a degree of influence commensurate with its growing economic power.

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[18] Zhihai Xie (2011), p. 85.

[19] Li Hua (2014), p. 213.

[20] Zhihai Xie (2011), p. 88.

[21] Zhimin Chen and Xueying Zhang, "Chinese Conception of the World Order in a Turbulent Trump Era", *The Pacific Review*, vol. 33, no. 3-4, 2020, p. 445.

China's efforts towards "reforms from the inside" include its promotion of governance reform within the IMF (by increasing its voting rights) and inclusion of the Chinese yuan (RMB) in the basket of special drawing right (SDR) currencies. In Pang's view, since such reforms within the current international system have limits, China simultaneously implements "reforms from the outside", as was seen in its initiative to establish the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).[22]

China's engagement with international organisations has evolved dramatically since the mid-2000s, with Beijing striving to gain power and influence within them. The first Chinese national to head a UN specialised agency was Dr Margaret Chan Fung Fu-chun as Director-General of the WHO in 2007.

China's attitude toward international organisations made qualitative changes in the late 2010s. Since then, China has increased the number of Chinese nationals serving as heads of key international organisations. As of October 2020, China has been successful in obtaining 4 top posts among the 15 UN specialised agencies: Mr. Houlin Zhao of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Dr Fang Liu of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Mr. Yong Li of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and Dr Dongyu Qu of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

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[22] Pang Zhongying, "Quanqiu Zhili de Zhongguo Juese: Fuza dan Qingxi ("The China Role in Global Governance: Complex yet Clear") *Frontiers*, August 2015, pp. 87-90.

Tab. 3.1 - Heads of the UN Specialised Agencies

Agency	Head	Name	Country	From	To
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	Director-General	Qu Dongyu	China	Aug. 2019	Jul. 2023
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)	Secretary-General	Liu Fang	China	Aug. 2015	Jul. 2021
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	President	Gilbert H. Houngbo	Togo	Apr. 2017	Mar. 2021
International Labor Organization (ILO)	Director General	Guy Ryder	U.K.	Oct. 2012	Sep. 2023
International Monetary Fund (IMF)	Managing Director	Kristina Ivanova Georgieva	Bulgaria	Oct. 2019	Sep. 2024
International Maritime Organization (IMO)	Secretary-General	Kitack Lim	South Korea	Jan. 2016	Sep. 2023
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)	Secretary-General	Zhao Houlin	China	Jan. 2015	Dec. 2022
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	Director-General	Audry Azoulay	France	Nov. 2017	Nov. 2021
United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)	Director General	Li Yong	China	Jun. 2013	Jun. 2021
World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)	Secretary-General	Zurab Pololikashvili	Georgia	Jan. 2018	Dec. 2021
Universal Postal Union (UPU)	Director General	Bishar Abdirahman Hussein	Kenya	Jan. 2013	Dec. 2020
World Health Organization (WHO)	Director-General	Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus	Ethiopia	Jul. 2017	Jun. 2022
World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)	Director General	Daren Tang	Singapore	Oct. 2020	Sep. 2026
World Meteorological Organization (WMO)	President	Gerhard Adrian	Germany	Jun. 2019	May 2023
World Bank Group	President	David Malpass	U.S.	Apr. 2019	Apr. 2024

Sources: Homepages of UN Specialised Agencies

We should note that these four Chinese top leaders share some things in their career paths. First, they are all former Chinese technocrats who have worked in China's central government and have expertise in their international institutions' particular fields. As it is rare for non-Communist Party members to assume high positions in the Chinese central government, it is natural to think that they are CCP members or have strong connections. Second, before assuming the current top posts, they gained long-term experience in top leadership positions, such as the board of directors or senior management team level, in their international organisations. Judging from their long-term career with expertise in their fields, they are qualified to lead these international organisations.

China is actually the only country with 4 of its nationals holding the UN specialised agencies' highest position. As Table 3.1 shows, the other 11 heads of the UN specialised agencies come from different countries: Togo, the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, South Korea, France, Georgia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Singapore, Germany and the U.S. In contrast, all of the 8 heads of the UN related organisations in Table 3.2 come from different countries: Burkina Faso, Argentina, Nigeria, Portugal, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Spain and Brazil.

In total, the United Kingdom has 2 heads, the Director-General of ILO and the Secretary-General of ISA, and Portugal also has two top leaders, UN Secretary-General Mr. Antonio Guterres and the Director General of IOM. However, both countries are still far behind China.

Having Chinese nationals serving as heads of the UN specialised agencies does not automatically mean that their agencies are under China's influence. But China's political use of international organisations through its growing influence on the top-level decision-making process in these agencies might affect international organisations' existing practices and undermine the current international order.

Tab. 3.2 - Heads of the UN Related Organisations

Organisation	Head	Name	Country	From	To
Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO – Precom)	Executive Secretary	Lassina Zerbo	Burkina Faso	Aug. 2013	Jul. 2021
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)	Director General	Rafael Mariano Grossi	Argentina	Dec. 2019	Dec. 2023
International Criminal Court (ICC)	President	Chile Eboe-Osuji	Nigeria	Mar. 2012	Mar. 2021
International Organization for Migration IOM)	Director General	Antonio Vitorino	Portugal	Oct. 2018	Sep. 2023
International Seabed Authority (ISA)	Secretary-General	Michael W. Lodge	UK	Jan. 2017	Dec. 2020
International Tribunal for the Law Of The Sea (ITLOS)	President	Albert J. Hoffmann	South Africa	Oct. 2020	Oct. 2023
Organization for the Prohibition Of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)	Director General	Fernando Arias	Spain	Jul. 2018	Jul. 2022
World Trade Organization (WTO)	Director General	Roberto Azevedo*	Brazil	Sep. 2013	Aug. 2020

*Mr. Azavedo stepped down a year before the expiry of his mandate
Sources: Homepages of UN Related Organisations

China has prevented Taiwan from attending the World Health Assembly (WHA), the WHO's highest decision-making body since Dr Tsai Ing-wen became the President of Taiwan in 2016. The decision was made under the leadership of former Director-General Dr Margaret Chan, who held the post for ten years from July 2007 to June 2017.

China's efforts to increase its influence within international organisations are also seen in its efforts to send high-ranking

officials to these institutions. According to a report issued in April 2020 by the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, almost 30 Chinese nationals are in the top leadership positions in UN principal organs, UN funds and programs, UN specialised agencies, UN entities and bodies and international financial institutions, among others.[23] As Table 3.3 indicates, most high-ranking officials have experience of working in the Chinese central government or equivalent institutions in China. They are likely to be potential candidates for the top position in the international organisations in which they currently work.

Finally, China makes extra-special efforts to increase the number of Chinese nationals working in international organisations. Beijing has a unique human resource deployment system for sending Chinese government officials to international organisations. China's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MHRSS) selects a group of Chinese bureaucrats through a competitive examination and maintains a list of "reserved talents" for international civil servants. Upon request for a Chinese civil servant from international organisations, MHRSS sends a candidate from the list pool.[24] The traditional mechanism continues to serve China as an effective channel to send Chinese nationals who are "ideologically correct" to international organisations.

Besides this, in the past few years China has introduced a new procedure to send Chinese nationals to international organisations. Chinese universities such as the School of Public Policy and Management at Tsinghua University and the School of International Studies at Peking University have established Master's degree programmes for those seeking to work as international civil servants. This new route is reportedly more transparent and fairer because it offers open competition to qualified students all over China.

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[23] U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, pp. 4-18.
[24] Wei Liu, "China Wants More Chinese to Work in International Organizations"", *The Diplomat*, 24 August 2018.

TAB. 3.3 – CHINESE NATIONALS IN THE TOP LEADERSHIP POSITIONS OF MAJOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

ORGANISATION	POST	NAME	MAJOR POSITIONS WITHIN THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT IN CHINA
UN principal organs			
United Nations Secretariat	Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs	Zhenmin Liu	Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of China (2013-2017); Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of PRC to the UN Office at Geneva and Other International Organisations (2011-2013)
Senior management group	*Department of Economic and Social Affairs*		
United Nations Development Program (UNDP)	UN Assistant Secretary – General UNDP: UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director for the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support	Haoliang Xu	
International Court of Justice (ICJ)	Vice-President	Hanqin Xue	Legal Counsel of Foreign Affairs of China (2008-2010): Ambassador to the Netherlands (2003-2008)
UN Funds and Programs			
United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)	UN Environment Chief Scientist and Acting Director of the Science Division	Jian Liu	Deputy Director General of the Bureau of Resources and Environment, Chinese Academy of Sciences

Organization	Position	Name	Background
Senior management team			
United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-habitat)	Officer-in-Charge, Regional Programmes Division	Rong Yang	Director-General of the Department of Building Energy Efficiency and Science & Technology in the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China (2008-2016)
Senior management			
UN Specialised Agencies			
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	Associate Vice-President, Corporate Services Department	Guoqi Wu	Alternate Director for China at AIB, NDB, ADB; Chief of the G20/BRICS Division in the Ministry of Finance of China
Senior management			
World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)	Executive Director for Technical Cooperation and Services	Shanzhong Zhu	Vice-Chairman of the China National Tourism Administration
Secretariat			
World Health Organization (WHO)	Assistant Director-General Universal Health Coverage/ Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases	Minghui Ren	Director-General for International Cooperation at China's National Health and Family Planning Commission; 30 years of Public Health Experience at the Ministry of Health of China
Headquarters leadership team			
World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)	Deputy Director General – Brands and Designs Sector	Binying Wang	Managing Director, China's State Administration for Industry and Commerce
Senior management team			

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)	Assistant Secretary-General	Wenjian Zhang	Deputy Administrator of China Meteorological Administration (2006–2008)
Secretariat			
International Trade And Financial Institutions			
International Monetary Fund (IMF)			
Senior official	Deputy Managing Director	Tao Zhang	Deputy Governor of the People's Bank of China
Senior official	Secretary of the Fund and Director, Secretary's Department	Jianhai Lin	
Executive board	Executive Director for China	Dr. Zhongxia Jin	Director General of the People's Bank of China
World Bank			
Leadership–World Bank (IBRD&IDA)	Managing Director and World Bank Group Chief Administrative Officer	Shaolin Yang	Director General for International Economic and Financial Cooperation of the Ministry of Finance of China
Leadership–World Bank (IBRD&IDA)	Vice-President and Treasurer of the World Bank, Pension Finance Administrator of the World Bank Group	Jingdong Hua	
Board of Directors	Executive Director for China	Yingming Yang	Deputy Director General of the International Financial and Economic Cooperation Department and Deputy Director General of the International Department of the Ministry of Finance of China
Asian Development Bank			

Management	Vice-President Operations	Shixin Chen	Head of the Department of International Economic and Financial Cooperation at the Ministry of Finance of China (2016-2018)
Board of Directors	Executive Director for China	Zhijun Cheng	Deputy Director General of the Department of International Economic and Financial Cooperation at the Ministry of Finance of China (2014-2017)
Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank	President	Liqun Jin	Chairman of China International Capital Corporation, Limited; Vice-President of the Asian Development Bank; Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Finance of China
Board of Directors	Director for China	Wencai Zhang	Director General of the Department of International Economic and Financial Cooperation at the Ministry of Finance of China (since 2019)
Inter-American Development Bank	Governor	Gang Yi	Governor of the People's Bank of China (since 2018)
New Development Bank			
Senior management	Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer	Xian Zhu	worked at the Ministry of Finance of China until the late 1990s
Board of Governors	Governor	Kun Liu	China's Minister of Finance (since 2018)

	Position	Name	Description
World Trade Organization (WTO)			
Board of Directors	Director	Wencai Zhang	Director General of the Department of International Economic and Financial Cooperation at the Ministry of Finance of China (since 2019)
Secretariat	Deputy Director-General	Xiazhun Yi	Ambassador to the WTO; Assistant Minister and Vice-Minister of Commerce of China
Appellate body	Appellate Body Member	Hong Zhao	Vice-President of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation under the Ministry of Commerce of China
Other International Organisations			
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)	Deputy Director General Department of Technical Cooperation	Dazhu Yang	Director General for International Cooperation of the China Atomic Energy Authority and Minister-Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of China to the IAEA
Secretariat			
International Olympic Committee (IOC)	Vice-President	Zaiqing Yu	Vice-Minister of China's General Administration of Sport (1999-2011)
Executive board			
Organization For The Prohibition Of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)	Director, External Relations	Kai Chen	Career Diplomat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China
Technical secretariat			

Sources: U.S.-China economic and Security review commission "PRC representation in international organizations" (April 2020)

In essence, China has been spending significant resources to send qualified Chinese nationals to international organisations over the past decade. Having four Chinese nationals currently serving as the head of UN specialised agencies is the crystallisation of such efforts. More Chinese nationals are likely to be in the top leadership position in the foreseeable future. Qin Yaqing's "G20+1" model can be a feasible option for China to further cooperation.

Conclusions

During the last ten years China has achieved a strong position in the UN system by sending former Chinese officials and placing them in high-ranking posts. Approximately 30 Chinese nationals are already in the top leadership positions of major international organisations, and some of them might serve as head of their institutions in the future. As of October 2020, China has already signed a memorandum of understanding to support Belt and Road infrastructure projects with 30 international organisations and 138 countries.[25] China will continue to promote multilateral cooperation based on the UN system in the post-pandemic world.

Meanwhile, Quad countries seek to enhance cooperation in many fields, such as quality infrastructure, anti-terrorism and cybersecurity. The Quad dates back to the idea proposed by the first Abe administration in 2007, but the quadrilateral mechanism is still centred on ministerial meetings and has not yet achieved full-fledge institutionalisation. U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo launched the Blue Dot Network for quality infrastructure financing in November 2019 and the Clean

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[25] Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Guojia Fazhan he Gaige Weiyuanhui (National Development and Reform Commission, People's Republic of China), "Gongjian 'Yidai Yilu' 2020 Nian Zhongdian Gongzuo Tuijinhui Zan Fujian Quanzhou Zhaokai" ("The Key Work Promoting Meeting for the Joint Construction of the 'Belt and Road' in 2020 Was Held in Quanzhou, Fujian"), 14 September 2020.

Network program for safeguarding national assets in October 2020, but it is still too early to see any tangible results from these initiatives.

Competition over multilateral cooperation strategies between China and the Quad countries will intensify in the post-pandemic world. Given that China has been prepared to utilise the existing framework of the UN system as the platform of multilateral cooperation, Quad countries must act as swiftly as possible to deal with the challenge as to how they can ensure that their cooperation materialises and what kind of outcomes they can deliver beyond the talk shop.

4. North Korea's Reliance on Nuclear Weapons: Actors and Implications

Cristina Varriale

Since the 1990s, when North Korea first began to pose a nuclear proliferation problem to its region and the international community, nuclear weapons have become a key component of the North Korean state. Although diplomatic agreements have at times stalled North Korea's activities, responses have not prevented the country becoming a nuclear power. Under the leadership of Kim Jong Un, the focus on nuclear weapons has sharpened, providing many signals that he not only sees nuclear weapons as an important tool in safeguarding the regime, much like his father and grandfather, but has turned that vision into a much stronger reality. The growth of interest in nuclear weapons that began possibly as early as the 1960s[1] has, in the past eight years, become cemented as a capability at the core of the regime.

Yet, the development of nuclear weapons in North Korea does not exist in a vacuum and creates implications for the region and indeed globally. North Korea's nuclear weapons programme both influences and is influenced by the geographical context and the security and political relationships within it. Not only has the DPRK's development of nuclear weapons resulted in others within the region, primarily South Korea and Japan, investing in new conventional weapons systems and adapting

[1] J.D. Pollack, *No Exit, North Korea, Nuclear Weapons and International Security*, Oxford, Routledge, 2011, p. 51.

militarily to counter North Korea's nuclear threat, it has also influenced the regional presence of the U.S. and its alliances. These developments in turn impact other aspects of regional security, most notably in relation to China. The entanglement of North Korea's nuclear programme with broader regional security concerns is not just conceptual, but impacts policy responses such as efforts at diplomatic engagement and the implementation of sanctions in response to North Korea's proliferation activities.

  This chapter first explains North Korea's reliance on nuclear weapons and why this is likely to persist. It then considers how the entanglement of regional security issues influences two of the most common policy tools used to respond to North Korea's proliferation activities – diplomacy and sanctions – and whether the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic might impact their effectiveness.

North Korea's Reliance on Nuclear Weapons

North Korea's nuclear proliferation must be considered in the context of its broader goals and the priorities of state sovereignty and regime survival. For the regime, nuclear weapons have been understood as one tool through which these goals can be achieved.[2] In support of this, the North Korean state has bought into the logic of nuclear deterrence and developed nuclear weapons as a means to counter external threats to the regime. This has been driven by Pyongyang's perception of the need to redress the military imbalance between North Korea's aging conventional capabilities and the much more advanced South Korean and U.S. military capabilities that could be used to target and overthrow the regime. Furthermore, the lessons of Saddam Hussein's and Muammar al-Gaddafi's fall from power after relinquishing their weapon of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities are not lost on the Kim dynasty, and

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[2] V.D. Cha, "North Korea's Weapons of Mass Destruction: Badges, Shields or Swords", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2002, pp. 209-230.

can be understood as underpinning why the regime requires nuclear weapons for its own survival. Thus, the acquisition of nuclear weapons has been justified by the regime as a necessity to ensure the sovereignty and security of North Korea from external military threats.

Nuclear weapons have also become central to the North Korean regime's security through the implementation of its *Juche*, or self-reliance, ideology.[3] Although both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il perceived nuclear weapons as a capability that North Korea should acquire, and initiated activities in this regard, Kim Jong Un has been the leader who has established nuclear weapons as a core feature of the North Korean state. Nuclear weapons are a tool for demonstrating *Juche* in the political security context and for protecting national sovereignty; by developing nuclear weapons, North Korea has demonstrated to its own people and the international community that it is not a Chinese protégé reliant on Beijing for its security. Instead, nuclear weapons support Pyongyang's narrative that North Korea is a strong and powerful country able to protect its own people. Although at least partly driven by a paranoia rooted in Kim Il Sung's world view and in his determination to ensure that North Korea is not reliant on others for its security,[4] the need for self-reliance from a security perspective has continued to manifest itself today.

Since assuming leadership after his father's death at the end 2011, Kim Jong Un has cemented the role of nuclear weapons and demonstrated the importance of such a capability in several ways. Early on in his tenure, Kim Jong Un made clear the importance of nuclear weapons to the regime through the enactment of the *Byungjin* policy line. This promoted the parallel development of the economy and nuclear weapons as two key state priorities. In practice, this meant a significant ramping up of capability testing that peaked in 2016 and 2017, and

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[3] E. Howell, "The Juche H-bomb? North Korea, nuclear weapons and regime-state survival", *International Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 4, 2020, pp. 1051-1068.

[4] J.D. Pollack (2011).

allowed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to quickly progress the research and development stages of several new missile systems. These efforts sought to improve the survivability, and thus credibility, of the North Korean regime rather than provide Pyongyang with a bargaining chip with which to leverage economic concessions from the global community.[5]

In addition to improving technical capabilities, Kim Jong Un has also undertaken political changes to reflect the importance of nuclear weapons. In 2012, the North Korean constitution was reportedly changed to include reference to the country's status as a nuclear power. This was followed by the 2013 *Law on Consolidating the Position of Nuclear Weapons State*. Both changes recognise and legitimise North Korea's nuclear weapons status domestically.[6] This not only demonstrates to the outside world that North Korea is committed to maintaining nuclear weapons, but firmly establishes that capability as a national achievement while showcasing the power, strength, and success of the regime to domestic audiences.

As a result of these technical and political developments, in 2018 North Korea announced an end to the *Byungjin* policy, stating that the primary focus would now be on the other branch of that two-track policy: the economy and domestic growth. Pyongyang also declared a unilateral suspension of long-range missile testing and used explosives to collapse the tunnel entrances at its nuclear test site, supposedly demonstrating its closure. These actions were not about taking unilateral steps towards denuclearisation, or intended to signal a reduction in reliance on or in the value of nuclear weapons. Instead, they were a result of the established centrality of nuclear weapons and the regime's efforts to communicate confidence in its nuclear capability.[7]

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[5] T. Plant, *The Hanoi Summit: It is Not About the Economy, Stupid*, RUSI Newsbrief, 13 March 2019, pp. 1-4.

[6] L. Allard, M. Duchâtel, and F. Gode, *Pre-empting Defeat: In Search of North Korea's Nuclear Doctrine*, Policy Brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2017.

[7] C. Varriale, *A Long Road to Denuclearisation, Challenges to Security-Based Diplomacy*

Despite this shift in focus and a move away from intense testing since 2018, North Korea's narrative around nuclear weapons has remained one of ideological importance. Various state media articles, speeches, and reports have continued to highlight the strategic value this capability has. For example, in Kim Jong Un's 2018 New Years' address[8] and report from the Fifth Plenary Meeting of the Seventh Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea at the start of 2020,[9] nuclear weapons were referred to as essential for national security and self-defence. This conviction has also been continuously reiterated outside of high-level events and speeches; for example in 2019 a Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) article covering a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) test referenced "indispensable" nuclear capability and the "pre-requisite of strategic weapons for national security",[10] reiterating the enduring political value of nuclear weapons.

Notwithstanding efforts to alter North Korea's cost-benefit calculations around the acquisition and maintenance of a nuclear programme through a series of carrot and stick approaches,[11] it is clear that nuclear weapons will likely remain a central feature of the North Korean state. Despite Sars-CoV-2 concerns,[12] North Korea showcased several new nuclear-capable systems during a large military parade on 10 October 2020,

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with North Korea, RUSI Occasional Paper, 2018.

[8] National Committee on North Korea, 2018. Kim Jong Un's 2018 New Year's Address, [online] available at: https://www.ncnk.org/node/1427 [Accessed 29 October 2020].

[9] Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), Report on 5th Plenary Meeting of 7th C.C., WPK, 2020.

[10] Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), DPRK Academy of Defence Science Succeeds in Test-firing of New-type SLBM, 2019.

[11] E.B. Onyekachiand O.B. Hyginus, "North Korea"Tab.s Nuclearization Process and Threat to Global Security: Exploring the Carrot and Stick Approaches as Panacea", Journal of Current Issues in Arts and Humanities, vol. 6, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1-14.

[12] J. Panda and J. Kim, "What Does North Korea's Zero SARS-CoV-2 Claim Signify?", 38NORTH, 28 April 2020.

held to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Workers' Part of Korea. Not only did this demonstrate a certain level of confidence on the part of North Korea in its ability to control the pandemic within its borders,[13] it also reiterated the continuation of nuclear and missile development as objects of importance.

North Korea's nuclear weapons are a symptom of the nature of the regime. Because of the ideological driving forces behind the nuclear weapons programme and determination to ensure the longevity of the regime, the perceived need for nuclear weapons will likely persist, leading to an enduring nuclear weapons capability.

North Korea's Regional Context

Ideology and strategic goals of regime survival and sovereignty underpin North Korea's nuclear proliferation. Yet, North Korea – and indeed its nuclear programme – should not be considered as disconnected from the regional context. Instead, North Korea's nuclear challenge is better thought of as a node in an increasingly complex web of security issues in the region, that both influences and is influenced by the neighbourhood it operates in.

The most obvious regional relationship that demands consideration in this context is that between the two Koreas. It is across the demilitarised zone between North and South that the most serious risk of military conflict exists. Despite military conflict on the peninsula being in the interests neither

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[13] Given the number of military personnel involved in the parade and the gathering of Kim Jong Un and his elites, it could be assumed that the regime had high confidence that the risk of Sars-CoV-2 spreading amongst those attending the parade was low. This could be the result of extreme restrictions to manage the Sars-CoV-2 situation in North Korea, ensuring that the parade was able to go ahead in such a grand manner. Alternatively, the parade might have been considered of higher importance than managing the spread of the virus. From the perspective of regime preservation and security, the former seems more credible.

of either Pyongyang nor Seoul, occasional skirmishes coupled with limited military to military engagements increase the risk of miscalculation or unintended escalation.

As North Korea's nuclear programme has developed, so too has South Korea's advanced conventional military capability. Yet, military advances by South Korea are also driven by factors other than North Korea's nuclear proliferation. Although the primary military target for these acquisitions is obviously North Korea, these acquisitions have, arguably, also been driven by South Korea's national interest in achieving the transfer of wartime Operational Control (OpCon) from the U.S. back to its own forces. This has led to technical acquisitions and policies that respond directly to North Korea's nuclear developments and demonstrate that South Korean forces have achieved the necessary capabilities to secure OpCon transfer.[14] These advancements and policies are not solely for the benefit of deterring and defending against North Korea, but also support a liberal agenda for more independent security. However, advancing conventional military assets in South Korea inevitably aggravate North Korea's threat perceptions and thus the high value placed on nuclear weapons.

The inter-Korean security relationship is further complicated by the regional role and presence of the U.S. Although not geographically part of the region, the U.S. has numerous military bases in East Asia and its Pacific territory of Guam and maintains nuclear alliances most notably with South Korea and Japan. The United States extended nuclear deterrence provisions not only seek to deter regional adversaries, but also form part of the U.S.' non-proliferation toolbox; offering nuclear protection to both South Korea and Japan discourage their respective governments from seeking nuclear arsenals of their own.

These efforts to stem proliferation in South Korea and Japan, though, have undoubtedly contributed to North Korea's

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[14] J. Kim, *Military Considerations for OPCON Transfer on the Korean Peninsula*, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), 20 March 2020; Seol, In-hyo and Lee, Jang-wook., US-ROK Deterrence Architecture, Asan Special Forum, 27 February 2018.

justification for nuclear weapons development. In ongoing efforts to reassure its allies that the U.S. remains steadfast in its commitments despite a changing security context,[15] Washington has sent increasingly advanced conventional military equipment to the Korean Peninsula. The U.S. stopped basing nuclear weapons in South Korea as a sign of its commitment to the alliance in the 1990s, but has provided additional conventional military assets in the region to provide the necessary reassurance.[16] This, however, helps drive the perceptions that underpin North Korea's reliance on nuclear weapons as a tool to counter the military threat to which U.S. activities in the regime contribute.[17] This has trapped North Korea, South Korea and the U.S. in a classic security dilemma.[18]

In addition to the relevance North Korea's nuclear weapons obviously have for security on the Korean peninsula and regional alliances with the U.S., Pyongyang's nuclear proliferation has broader implications for East Asian security too. North Korea is not the only state in the region to possess nuclear weapons, and many countries also hold security concerns about China, its military growth and assertiveness. Two clear examples demonstrate how North Korea's nuclear programme is entangled more broadly in regional security dynamics: China's response to the deployment of a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery in South Korea; and Japanese threat perceptions *vis-à-vis* China and the possibility of removing the U.S. military presence from the Korean peninsula.

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[15] As North Korea's nuclear and missile capability have advanced and missiles with intercontinental ranges have been showcased, questions over whether the U.S. would sacrifice Washington for Seoul or Tokyo have become less theoretical.

[16] C. Varriale (2018).

[17] A. Berger, "A Downward Spiral", *The RUSI Journal*, vol. 159, no. 1, 2014, pp. 68-76.

[18] C. Varriale, "Connecting the Dots: US Extended Nuclear Deterrence and Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" in B. Unal, Y. Afina, and P. Lewis (Eds.), *Perspectives on Nuclear Deterrence in the 21st Century*, London, Chatham House, 2020, pp. 19-22.

In 2016, Washington and Seoul agreed to deploy a THAAD battery in Seongju, South Korea in response to North Korea's ongoing missile tests. THAAD is designed to intercept short, medium and intermediate range ballistic missiles in their terminal phase of flight. The deployment was not just about ensuring the presence of a technical capability able to respond to North Korean missile launches; it also provided additional assurance to South Korea that the U.S. remained committed to its security in the face of North Korea's advancing nuclear capabilities. This deployment, however, was perceived by Beijing as having negative implications for Chinese security and its nuclear balance *vis-à-vis* the U.S.[19] China's nuclear stockpile is significantly smaller than that of the U.S. (and Russia), and Beijing therefore perceives a need to maintain a certain level of opacity concerning its nuclear forces in order to minimise vulnerability. According to the Chinese argument, THAAD would increase its vulnerability as the radar capability on the THAAD battery would have the ability to detect Chinese military movements, thus putting the desired opacity at risk. Furthermore, such military deployments are perceived by China to be a gross over-assertion of the U.S. regional military presence, and therefore understood to have motives extending beyond North Korea.[20]

The second example of how the North Korean nuclear issue impacts broader regional security followed the diplomatic engagements between the U.S. and DPRK in 2018. After his first summit with Kim Jong Un in Singapore, U.S. President Trump announced a suspension of military exercises between

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[19] J. Sankaran and B.L. Fearey, Missile defense and strategic stability: Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in South Korea, Contemporary Security Policy, 38(3), 2017, pp. 321-344; B.-K. Jun, "China's Sanctions on North Korea After Its Fourth Nuclear Test. Pacific Focus", *Inha Journal of International Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2017, cit. p. 219.

[20] M. Paul and M. Overhaus, "Security and Security Dilemmas in Sino-American Relations", in B. Lippert and V. Perthes (Eds.), Strategic Rivalry between United States and China, SWP Research Paper, pp. 20-24, 2020, cit. p. 22.

the U.S. and South Korea.[21] Not only did this raise concerns about military readiness on the Korean peninsula and defence and deterrence capabilities in relation to North Korea, it was recognised has having implications for regional security too.[22] Given Japan's threat perceptions *vis-à-vis* China,[23] removing or reducing the U.S. military presence in South Korea was considered to negatively impact Japanese security, as the first line of defence *vis-à-vis* China would be diminished or lost. As with the THAAD deployment discussed above, this result of military developments and U.S. alliances is not exclusively related to the threats and risks posed by North Korea. From this perspective, efforts to reduce military tensions and nuclear risks in relation to North Korea were viewed as negatively impacting the balance of other regional security concerns, especially in relation to China.

Managing North Korea's Nuclear Risk and the Implications of Sars-CoV-2

North Korea has shown, especially over the last eight years, that nuclear weapons are considered a vital aspect of the state and its security. As a result of this, convincing North Korea to completely relinquish its nuclear programme and weapons stockpile is likely an impossible task, at least in the near term. North Korea's nuclear programme has also become intrinsically woven into the region's security architecture. This situation is complicated by the fact that some of the actions and activities that drive North Korea to consider nuclear weapons necessary are also believed to be important for maintaining security and stability *vis-à-vis* other regional security issues, such as balancing the growth of

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[21] Press Conference by President Trump, Press Briefings, 12 June 2018.

[22] C. Varriale (2018).

[23] N. Katagiri, "Between Structural Realism and Liberalism: Japan's Threat Perception and Response", *International Studies Perspectives*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2018, pp. 325-43.

China and preventing nuclear proliferation elsewhere in the region. North Korea's nuclear proliferation, rather than being an issue that needs to be solved, has become instead one of many factors to consider in balancing security concerns in East Asia. Because North Korea's nuclear programme is so entangled in regional security considerations, the effectiveness of efforts to respond to the nuclear risks presented by the DPRK must be considered in an extended context.

Diplomacy is considered by far the preferred approach to responding to North Korea's nuclear proliferation, and will likely remain a high priority in relation to mitigating the challenges posed by North Korea's nuclear programme, in theory if not in practice. Nevertheless, the pitfalls and challenges of diplomacy are well recorded.[24] North Korea's reliance on nuclear weapons and the unlikelihood of this changing creates a political problem for stakeholders committed to what is often defined as the Complete, Verifiable, Irreversible, Denuclearization (CVID) or the Final, Fully Verified, Denuclearization (FFVD) of North Korea – i.e. the verified reduction and elimination of North Korea's nuclear capabilities. In the past, many diplomatic agreements have attempted to balance nuclear limitations with offers of energy, food aid, and sanctions relief to North Korea.[25] Although these overtures are acceptable to the regime, they are not considered of equal or greater value to nuclear weapons in ensuring North Korea's security. Where efforts have been focused more explicitly on conventional military security issues, other security challenges have arisen, as in the case of Japanese threat perceptions *vis-à-vis* China, noted above. This creates a diplomatic dichotomy that, although not insurmountable,[26]

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[24] C. Killough, *Begun is Half Done, Prospects for US-North Korea Nuclear Diplomacy*, Ploughshares Fund, Ploughshares Fund Study Report no. 4, February 2019

[25] C. Varriale (2018).

[26] For example, see J. Kim, "Calculating Pyongyang's Next Steps and Coordinating A Response: A South Korean View" in P. M. Cronin (Ed.), *Pathways to Peace: Achieving the Stable Transformation of the Korean Peninsula*, Washington DC, Hudson Institute, 2020, pp. 25-33.

is often a prominent factor in frustrating diplomatic solutions to the situation. Difficulties are compounded by the fact that working level engagements between North Korea, the U.S. and other regional governments and militaries are sporadic or non-existent. This not only hampers the effectiveness of diplomacy but sustains the deficit of trust and confidence that underpins the negative security perceptions surrounding the North Korean nuclear question.

In addition to the well-known challenges that result from an imbalanced approach to diplomacy and lack of security considerations, the short-term impact of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic could further increase barriers to engagement. North Korea has insisted that the country does not have any Sars-CoV-2 cases and state media has given significant attention to domestic preparedness efforts. North Korea already seemed to be focused on domestic issues, even earlier in the year,[27] and the need for Sars-CoV-2 response measures has only aggravated this inward-looking agenda. This may result in reduced capacity and appetite for nuclear diplomacy in Pyongyang. Furthermore, one of the measures that the DPRK has put in place in response to Sars-CoV-2 has been to restrict the entry of foreign visitors. This has had implications for the operations of several embassies in Pyongyang, with missions including those of the UK and Sweden having to temporarily close. This removes a possible line of communication with North Korea in lieu of ongoing diplomatic efforts. The pandemic could therefore impact the nuclear issue in the short-term by forming an additional barrier to re-engagement and to broader opportunities for trust and confidence building.

It is worth recognising that even beyond the implications of Sars-CoV-2, North Korea's appetite for diplomacy might well be small. Since its decision to significantly reduce the number of nuclear and missile tests, and the brief spell of

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[27] C. Varriale, What North Korea Is Not Telling Us about Denuclearisation in 2020, RUSI, Commentary, 2 March 2020.

diplomatic engagement with the U.S. and South Korea in 2018 (and to a lesser extent 2019), North Korea has been in the advantageous position of being able to continue developing its nuclear and missile programmes without significant military tensions and without rigorous sanctions enforcement from its main trading partner, China. Though the ability to continue military developments with little international attention is likely to be complicated by the pandemic taking up time in other governmental agendas, there seems to be little incentive for North Korea to seek change right now. Thus, although Sars-CoV-2 will likely complicate diplomacy in the short term, it is only contributing to challenges that would already exist rather than causing a change of course.

A similar observation might also be true for the role of sanctions as a tool for responding to North Korea's proliferation activities. Since North Korea carried out its first nuclear test in 2006, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has passed nine sanctions resolutions in response to Pyongyang's provocations in advancing its nuclear capability.[28] Yet, the lack of robust sanctions implementation is well recorded.[29] Although weak implementation can stem from limited capacity or from lack of effective domestic enforcement regulations, it is also the result of strategic choices made by certain governments who have calculated it is not in their interests to strive for robust implementation. China's position on sanctions against North Korea is a case in point.

Given Beijing's security interests in maintaining stability in North Korea,[30] China avoids strict sanctions enforcement and consistently allows sanctioned goods to flow between it and

[28] UNSCR 1718 (2006); UNSCR 1874 (2009); UNSCR 2087 (2013); UNSCR 2094 (2013); UNSCR 2270 (2016); UNSCR 2321 (2016); UNSCR 2371 (2017); UNSCR 2375 (2017); UNSCR 2379 (2017).

[29] A. Berger, *A House Without Foundations, The North Korea Sanctions Regime and its Implementation*, RUSI Whitehall Report 3-17, June 2017.

[30] C. Meyskens, "Chinese views of the nuclear endgame in North Korea", *The Nonproliferation Review*, vol. 26, no. 5, 2019, pp. 499-517.

North Korea.[31] Analysis has suggested that at the height of the 2017 military tensions driven by DPRK nuclear and missile testing, Chinese support for sanctions against North Korea increased, evidenced by China's (and to a lesser extent Russia's) support for the passing of UNSCRs (UN Security Council Resolutions) applying increasingly stringent limitations on DPRK trade.[32] This was most likely because North Korea's nuclear and missile testing resulted in military tensions unfavourable to China tipping the balance of Beijing's strategic interests in support of enhanced sanctions, at least on paper, as a way of signalling displeasure to the DPRK and avoiding a regional military confrontation that would directly involve the U.S. Yet support in theory did not translate into practice; as 2018 diplomatic efforts progressed and DPRK nuclear and missile provocations lessened, sanctions enforcement remained weak.[33] Unless North Korea returns to a testing schedule that becomes destabilising to the region, increasing military tensions and risking military conflict (intentional or otherwise), the level of China's sanctions enforcement is unlikely to improve. This is the direct result of competing political priorities and strategic concepts in the region. As noted above, China is reluctant to contribute to instability within North Korea that would result from the domestic economic impact of full sanctions enforcement, as the repercussions of this – such as an increased U.S. military presence in the region – would not be in Beijing's interests.[34]

The Sars-CoV-2 pandemic is likely to see support for sanctions enforcement remaining weak. The economic impact

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[31] J. Byrne, G. Somerville and H. Macdonald, *The Billion-Dollar Border Town*, RUSI, Project Sandstone, no. 7, 2020; J. Byrne, G. Somerville and H. Macdonald, *The Phantom Fleet*, RUSI, Project Sandstone, no. 6, 2020.

[32] B.-K. Jun, "China's Sanctions on North Korea After Its Fourth Nuclear Test", *Pacific Focus*, Inha Journal of International Studies, vol. 32, no. 2, 2017, pp. 208-231.

[33] J. Byrne, G. Somerville and H. Macdonald, *The Phantom Fleet...*, cit.

[34] S. Dingli, *North Korea's Strategic Significance to China,* China Security, Volume Autumn, 2006, pp. 19-34; B.-K. Jun (2017), p. 223 .

of the health crisis may have constrained the DPRK economy in an unprecedented way. Early in 2020, just as the virus was beginning to spread globally, satellite imagery caught North Korea's fleet of vessels returning to its port in Nampo.[35] North Korea relies heavily on this fleet being active for its illicit access to resources that are assumed to provide funds for the nuclear programme and for the country's economy and regime more broadly. It could be argued that if the desire and need for sanctions relief was high pre-Covid, the economic restrictions resulting from Sars-CoV-2 response measures may well have exacerbated the situation. This in turn could make a diplomatic compromise on freezing part of the nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief more appealing to Pyongyang, even if only temporarily. However, it should also be recognised that the negative economic impact directly caused by Covid response measures may not be as harsh as initial evidence suggested. To avoid Sars-CoV-2 having a more substantial and enduring impact on the North Korean economy, and because of their desire to avoid domestic instability in the DPRK, Chinese authorities will be unlikely to reverse the trend of poor sanctions enforcement. The implementation of sanctions by China was already weak, but the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic will likely weaken it further. As a result of China's strategic and security interests in the region, robust enforcement of sanctions against North Korea is not likely to happen.

Despite the growth and advancements of North Korea's nuclear capability, regional and international policy responses will continue to be marred by competing security perceptions and complex relationships. As with most of the world, North Korea, and indeed the nuclear issue, are not free from the effects of Sars-CoV-2. However, the impacts of the global pandemic in this context are not likely to alter regional security trends and may instead merely contribute to compounding existing challenges.

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[35] Project Sandstone, *Rickety Anchor: North Korea Calls its Illicit Shipping Fleet Home amid Coronavirus Fears*, RUSI, Commentary, 27 March 2020.

Conclusions

North Korea's nuclear weapons have evolved over the past three decades, and especially in the last decade, to become a key aspect of the North Korean state and thus of regional security too. Given the ideological driving forces underpinning the perceived need for nuclear weapons, it is unlikely that the presence and role of such a capability in North Korea is going to significantly change, especially in the near term.

Efforts to manage North Korea's proliferation and mitigate the risks associated with the possession of nuclear weapons, and even more so with their use are, however, subject to regional challenges that stem from varying threat perceptions. This makes it difficult for key regional governmental stakeholders and the U.S. to tackle the drivers of North Korea's proliferation without impacting their response to and management of other regional security concerns.

The evolution of North Korea's nuclear programme, and indeed regional and global efforts to respond, have been impacted by and in turn impact other security considerations in East Asia. Where sanctions have been a tool of interest, their robust implementation is hindered by China's broader concerns around ensuring stability in North Korea and by the U.S. presence in the region beyond the North Korean nuclear issue. Where diplomacy has been utilised, efforts to provide North Korea with concessions of energy and aid fail to acknowledge the security based drivers behind Pyongyang's proliferation, and thereby fail to address one of the key factors North Korea perceives as justifying actions. Where diplomacy has sought to consider the conventional-nuclear security balance, efforts have negatively impacted the balance of other regional security concerns.

The challenge of using sanctions and diplomacy in response to North Korea's proliferation are not new. However, they may be compounded by the Sars-CoV-2 health crisis, especially in the short term. The pandemic is limiting opportunities to

engage with North Korea directly, to build trust and confidence and to promote discussions around denuclearisation; it may also be decreasing China's interest in robust sanctions enforcement. Sars-CoV-2 is not likely to be a game changer in this context but may add additional complexities to the existing challenges associated with addressing North Korea's nuclear proliferation.

5. Securing Asia's Sea Lanes: Balancing Military and Trade Applications

Abhijit Singh

Asia's economic development over the past four decades has been closely related to seaborne trade, the cheapest and most effective mode of transporting large volumes of cargo over long distances.[1] The dependence of Indian Ocean and Pacific nations on trade for national development has implied a growing reliance on the sea lines of communication (SLOCs), the key maritime passageways that facilitate heavy shipping traffic volumes. As peace-time commercial trading routes, the SLOCs are seen by many as strategic highways that give nations access to resources in distant locations. This is particularly true for oil and gas shipments, the vast majority of which are transported via the sea. Consequently, SLOCs security has come to be seen as an essential precondition for sustained economic growth.[2]

Yet, Asia's sea-lanes today are fraught with risk. There is, to begin with, a prevalence of criminal activity in the littorals,

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[1] As the backbone of international trade and the global economy, around 80% of global trade by volume and over 70% of global trade by value are carried by sea and are handled by ports worldwide. See, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *Review of Maritime Transport*, United Nations Publications, New York, 2018.

[2] The SLOCs is a dual-edged concept. In peacetime, it denotes the umbilical cord of a state's economy and the arteries of a region's economic health. In war, these routes are considered strategic pathways to keep the war machine fully oiled. See V. Sakhuja, "Indian Ocean and the Safety of the Sea Lines of Communication", *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 25, no. 5, 2018, pp.689-702.

especially in the Western Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, where a recent rise in the incidents of piracy has caused worry among regional watchers. More conspicuous, and perhaps more consequential, are the rising geopolitical conflicts between world powers that threaten peace and stability in the littorals. The United States and China are at odds in the Western Pacific, with tense contests in the South China Sea. India has been suspicious of China's presence in the Eastern Indian Ocean, especially in the Bay of Bengal, where Indian analysts discern a Chinese attempt to encircle India through regional alliances and naval bases evocatively dubbed as the "string of pearls".[3]

China's rising assertiveness in the South China Sea and expanding footprint in the Western Indian Ocean have also caused disquiet in Europe, where there is growing wariness over Chinese attempts to securitise the littorals.[4] In a recent development, the United Kingdom, France and Germany submitted a *Note Verbale* to the United Nations challenging the legality of China's expansive maritime claims in the South China Sea. The three European countries have underlined the importance of "unhampered exercise of the freedom of the high seas, in particular the freedom of navigation and overflight, and of the right of innocent passage enshrined in UNCLOS, including in the South China Sea".[5] France, an important Indian Ocean power, has sought to enhance cooperation with India and Australia and strengthen multilateralism to hedge against the possibility of Chinese aggression in the region.[6]

The strategic environment has been further complicated by the advent of Sars-CoV-2. Since the virus first appeared

[3] D. Brewster, "Silk Roads and Strings of Pearls: The Strategic Geography of China's New Pathways in the Indian Ocean", *Geopolitics*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2016, pp. 269-91.

[4] J. Webber, "China's expansion in the Indian Ocean calls for European engagement", *MERICS*, 11 October 2019.

[5] "France-UK-Germany submit joint note in UN against China's South China Sea claims", *Economic Times*, 20 September 2020.

[6] D.R. Chaudhury, "First trilateral meet between India, France and Australia to counter Chinese growing presence", *Economic Times*, 9 September 2020.

in late 2019, the pandemic has triggered a collapse in global trade flows, disrupting air and sea transport, causing a massive fall in the demand for consumer and investment goods.[7] In the first 6 months of 2020, cruise ship companies have seen business come to a halt, with even bulk carrier and container shipping firms struggling to turn a profit. Amidst reports of a nascent recovery of trade in the 3rd quarter of 2020, analysts fear maritime commerce could yet be undermined by a new wave of infections.[8]

Meanwhile, an economic "cold" war between China and the United States is heightening geopolitical discord in littoral-Asia, with major implications for maritime trade. Since 2018, when U.S. President Donald Trump imposed tariffs and other trade barriers on China to counter the latter's "unfair trade practices", relations between Washington and Beijing have been highly fraught.[9] A deal in January 2020 attempted to strike a partial truce, but it is unclear if China intends to honour the agreement.[10]

The most important issues concern the long-term security of the SLOCs. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, there are questions about the capacity and willingness of Asian states to underwrite security in the maritime commons. Analysts and policy planners wonder aloud if businesses and the shipping industry have the incentives and security assurances to expand activity in a post pandemic world. More pertinently, will Indo-Pacific powers be able to overcome mistrust and strategic suspicion to strike a balance between commercial and military uses of the SLOCs, committing to a regime of free passage in the contested littorals?

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[7] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), "Global trade continues nosedive, UNCTAD forecasts 20% drop in 2020", 11 June 2020.
[8] "COVID second wave would slam ocean shipping", *Hellenic Shipping News*, 12 June 2020.
[9] For a detailed examination of the U.S.-China trade war see Tao Liu and Wing Thye Woo, "Understanding the U.S.-China Trade War", *China Economic Journal*, Special Issue on Forty Years' Economic Reform in China, vol. 11, no. 3, 2018.
[10] "US, China to Discuss 'Phase-1' Trade Deal amid SARS-CoV-2 Disruption", *News 18*, 15 August 2020.

This chapter carries out a region-wide assessment of threats in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite fast changing political and economic circumstances, it argues, sea lane security remains critical for Asia's big and small powers. Consequently, even as they compete for strategic advantage in the littorals, regional states are likely to be willing to cooperate in the interests of regional peace, stability and economic prosperity. The chapter surveys the security situation in the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific, identifying critical hurdles that might impact the flow of maritime traffic in the Asian sea lanes.

The Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has some of the world's most important trading routes, connecting the Middle East and Africa with South Asia, East Asia, Europe and the Americas. These are witness to some of the world's heaviest trading traffic, with more than 80% of the world's seaborne trade in oil (equivalent to about one-fifth of global energy supply) transiting through these sea lanes.[11] From a SLOCs security perspective, 3 regions in the Indian Ocean are of particular interest: the Persian Gulf/ Strait of Hormuz, the Horn of Africa, and the Eastern Indian Ocean.[12]

The Strait of Hormuz

With a daily oil flow average of over 21 million *barrels per day* (b/d), or the equivalent of about 21% of global petroleum liquids consumption, the Strait of Hormuz is a vital artery for Asian trade (Figure 5.1).[13] Close to one-fifth of the world's

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[11] J. Lee and C. Horner, "China Faces Barriers in the Indian Ocean", *Hudson Institute*, 11 January 2014.

[12] C. Jeffery, "The Indian Ocean Region May Soon Play a Lead Role in World Affairs", *The Wire*, 16 January 2019.

[13] "The world's most important oil transit chokepoint", *U.S. Energy Information*

crude oil supplied by Gulf countries traverses through the strait, which is only 21 miles wide at its narrowest point. In recent years, escalating tension between Iran and the United States has raised the prospect of a military clash in this vital waterway. Since May 2018, when the U.S. withdrew from a 2015 nuclear pact with Iran and 6 major powers, and re-imposed sanctions, Iran has threatened to block the Strait of Hormuz. Washington's designation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps – the Islamic Republic's most powerful military institution – a foreign terrorist organisation in April 2019 led Tehran to declare the U.S. a "state sponsor of terrorism". [14]

FIG. 5.1 - CRUDE OIL CONDENSATE AND PETROLEUM PRODUCTS
PASSING THROUGH THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ
(2014-2018, BARRELS PER DAY)
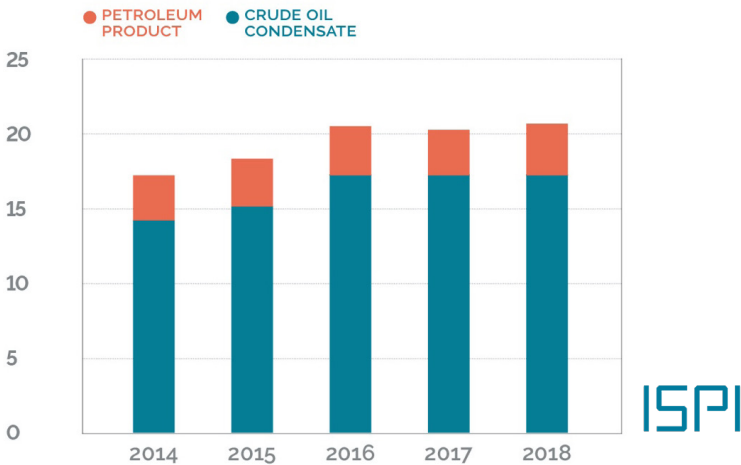
Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration

Administration (EIA), 20 June 2019.
[14] "Iran responds in kind to Trump's IRGC 'terrorist' designation", *Al Jazeera*, 8 April 2019.

The security situation in the Persian Gulf further declined after the U.S. accused Iran of orchestrating attacks on oil tankers in the region, and also targeting a Saudi Arabian oil facility.[15] In May 2020, the Donald Trump Administration ordered an airstrike in Iraq to kill Iran's top general, Qasem Soleimani – a move that led Iranian military commanders to renew their threat to close down the Persian Gulf, and target U.S. warships.

Iran has sought to negate key U.S. advantages in the Persian Gulf. Tehran has been modernising its arsenal of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD), and carried out regular military exercises near the Gulf of Hormuz. The Iranian Republican Guards navy has developed significant mine-laying capability, and deployed anti-ship missile weapons on Iran's coast to deter U.S. naval forces in the Persian Gulf.[16] In collaboration with China, Iran is also strengthening its joint intelligence collection capabilities in the region.[17] Under a bilateral strategic agreement signed recently, China has undertaken to invest US$400 billion in Iran's oil and gas and infrastructure sectors, including multiple projects along Iran's Gulf coastline.[18]

Meanwhile, regional moves to safeguard shipping in the Gulf region have acquired urgency. In July 2019 Washington announced plans to mobilise an international maritime force to protect vital shipping routes in the Persian Gulf.[19] *Operation Sentinel* is intended to increase surveillance of and security in key waterways in the Middle East and is supported by Australia, Bahrain, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The UK, supported by France, Italy, and Denmark, has also announced a European-led "maritime protection mission" to

[15] "U.S. blames Iran for Saudi oil plant attacks", *The Hindu*, 15 September 2019.

[16] S. Pasandideh, "Iran boosts A2/AD capabilities", *The Diplomat*, 23 May 2014.

[17] EyalPinko, Iran, China setting up joint base for collecting intelligence, *Israel Defence*, 17 September 2020.

[18] F. Fassihi and S. Lee Myers, "Defying U.S., China and Iran Near Trade and Military Partnership", *New York Times*, 12 July 2020.

[19] "U.S. Central Command Statement on Operation Sentinel", *United States Central Command*, 19 July 2019.

protect oil flows through the Strait and in other chokepoints and international shipping lanes.[20] India and Japan have deployed their own warships to escort country-bound crude oil carriers in the Gulf region. Needless to say, any disruption of oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz would have severe implications for the global economy. Even without a crisis, the increasing militarisation of the Persian Gulf could grievously impact maritime security and pose a threat to regional security and stability.

Horn of Africa

Located at the intersection of the Red Sea and the Western Indian Ocean, the Horn of Africa is another critical hot-spot in the Indian Ocean Region. Long a region of great competition for power, the Horn today is witness to new rivalries playing out on its shores.[21] The competition for influence centres on the Middle East's primary political fault lines – between Iran and Arab states, and among Arab states. Since 2014, when a Saudi Arabian-led coalition of African and Middle Eastern countries intervened in Yemen, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has sought to protect the Gulf States' western security flank. Following the war in Yemen, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia have allied against Iran, Turkey and Qatar in a game of brinkmanship that has threatened security across the Red Sea corridor.[22]

To enable military operations in Yemen, the GCC established a military base in Assab in Eritrea. The UAE has been constructing a military facility at Berbera in Somaliland, even

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[20] "UK to seek European maritime mission to counter Iran's ' illegal acts of piracy", *The Guardian*, 22 July 2019.

[21] For a detailed discussion on Arab politics in the Horn of Africa see N.J. Melvin, "The new external security politics of the Horn of Africa region", SIPRI insights on Peace and Security, April 2019.

[22] Ibid.

as the Saudis have pushed for a military facility in Djibouti. Together Saudi Arabia and the UAE have deployed naval forces in support of operations in Yemen, sending military forces to the Yemeni island of Socotra. Turkey has opposed these moves, and in concert with Qatar expanded its own presence in the Red Sea and the Horn region.[23] In January 2020, eight Arab and African states bordering the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden signed a deal to form a council to resolve disputes in their region of interest.[24] Unfortunately, the terms of engagement of this pact are unclear. Many regional states like Somaliland and Eritrea remain wary of the GCC's enormous influence in the region, and the Houthi-aligned government in Yemen has expressed strong opposition to being used as a tool of aggression by the Saudi-led coalition. There is uncertainty, then, about whether and how the pact will usher in long-term peace.

The lack of stability in the Horn of Africa has implications for maritime security and regional trade flows. The inability of African and Gulf States to resolve contentious issues, together with the growing militarisation of the Red Sea coast increases maritime security risks. China's establishment of a military base in Djibouti has added a knot to an already tangled security landscape.[25] It does not help that piracy around the Horn continues to linger. Despite a general decline in attacks in recent years, the number of suspicious approaches towards merchant vessels in the region continues to be high, indicating that the progress made on combating piracy off the coast of Somalia remains fragile and reversible.[26]

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[23] Z. Vertin, *The Gulf, the Horn, and the new geopolitics of the Red Sea*, Brookings Doha Center, August 2019.

[24] "Crossing the Red Sea: Where the new littoral-state council goes next", *Africa Times*, 21 January 2020.

[25] J.-P. Cabestan, "China's Military Base in Djibouti: A Microcosm of China's Growing Competition with the United States and New Bipolarity", *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 29, no. 125, 2012, p. 731.

[26] "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation with respect to piracy and armed robbery at sea off the coast of Somalia", United Nations Security Council, 2 November 2020.

There is also the threat of state-sponsored terrorism looming over the region. Recent reports of Iran's covert ties with the Somalia-based al-Shabab terrorist group have caused anxiety among regional watchers.[27] There is speculation that Tehran could use al Shabab to attack the U.S. military and other foreign forces in East Africa. Seemingly, it remains doubtful the region will ever be able to overcome its dependence on international taskforces for security in the littorals.[28]

The Eastern Indian Ocean

On the Eastern end of the Indian Ocean, there are other players but similar problems. The Andaman Sea has emerged as a potential flashpoint for conflict between India and China. In the aftermath of the India-China military clash in Northern Ladakh in June 2020, New Delhi has been looking at ways to firm its grip onthis sensitive space.[29] A vast majority of international East-West trade, including Chinese oil shipments, container vessels, and bulk cargo traffic approaches the Malacca Strait through the 10 degree channel between Andaman and Nicobar. Indian analysts have therefore been advocating an aggressive strategy aimed at deterring Chinese maritime operations in this space.

Growing tensions on the India-China Himalayan border have prompted New Delhi to expedite plans to refurbish military bases inthe Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI). This includes a proposal to construct additional facilities for warships, aircraft, missile batteries and infantry soldiers on the strategically-located islands.[30] Runways at existing naval air stations are being

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[27] M. Fraser-Rahim and M. Fatah, "In Somalia, Iran Is Replicating Russia's Afghan Strategy", *Foreign Policy*, 17 June 2020.

[28] N.J. Melvin (2019).

[29] S. Sinha, "Time to reset India's China policy", *Sunday Guardian*, 18 July 2020.

[30] R. Pandit, "LAC face-off: Ladakh triggers Andamans build-up plan", *The Times of India*, 4 July 2020.

extended to support operations by large aircraft, and additional infrastructure for surveillance is being set up.

The focus of Indian naval operations is the tracking of Chinese ships and submarines.[31] The Indian navy (IN) recognises China's "Malacca dilemma" and has concentrated forces along chokepoints on the Eastern edge of the Indian Ocean. P-8 is based in India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands regularly survey the near-seas, and the Indian navy has also carried out bilateral and trilateral exercises with the maritime forces of "Quad" nations, Japan, Australia and the U.S., as also the French navy.

In response, China has expanded its outreach to Bay of Bengal countries. Beijing has made significant inroads in South Asia via the Belt and Road Initiative, setting up what many see as dual-use civilian military bases.[32] China has also expanded its non-military activity in the Eastern Indian Ocean. In September last year an Indian warship expelled the *Shiyan 1*, a Chinese research vessel found intruding into the exclusive economic zone off the coast of India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands.[33] China's deep-sea mining vessels[34] and intelligence ships regularly visit the Indian Ocean – the latter often found operating in the waters of the Eastern Indian Ocean.[35] At a time when there's talk of a China-backed plan to construct a canal across the Thai isthmus[36] and a secret agreement for a Chinese naval base on the Cambodian coast, the rise in China's non-military activities in the Eastern Indian Ocean has caused worry in India's security establishment.[37]

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[31] "More Muscle for India's Andaman and Nicobar Defence Posts to Counter Hawkish China", *The Hindustan Times*, 26 August 2016.

[32] J. White, "China's Indian Ocean ambitions", *Brookings Report*, June 2020.

[33] "Navy expels suspected Chinese spy vessel from Indian waters", *India Today*, 3 December 2019.

[34] "India on alert as 'China deploys dozen underwater drones in Southern Indian Ocean", *Times of India*, 24 May 2020.

[35] "Spy planes spot China warship in south IOR", *DNA*, 19 September 2019.

[36] "Thailand's Kra Canal: China's Way Around the Malacca Strait", *The Diplomat*, 6 April 2018.

[37] "Deal for Naval Outpost in Cambodia Furthers China's Quest for Military

Amid apprehension over an India-China standoff in the Indian Ocean, there are growing fears that a wider conflict in the littorals could impact the flow of trade in the regional SLOCs. If India escalated from the land border to the maritime domain, where the Indian navy enjoys substantial advantages, the implications would not be limited to China's vital Indian Ocean trade, but also affect international traffic flows. Regional analysts worry over the prospect that China's "Malacca dilemma" could compel it to react in unpredictable ways.[38]

The Western Pacific

The seas of the Western Pacific region are the most contested in the Indo-Pacific realm. The region faces a host of maritime security challenges, including piracy, terrorism, territorial claims, jurisdictional disputes, criminal trafficking and illegal fishing. The differences between coastal and maritime user nations in terms of their interpretation of the provisions of the Law of the Sea Convention *vis-à-vis* navigation and military operations represent some of the most pressing challenges to SLOCs security in the Asian littorals.

South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca

No region is more representative of the challenges to sea-lane security in the Western Pacific than the South China Sea (SCS). The Strait of Malacca, which connects the SCS to the Indian Ocean, is the busiest, and arguably the most important sea lane in the world.[39] Over 25% of oil shipped between the


Network", *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 July 2019.

[38] You Ji, "Dealing with the Malacca Dilemma: China's Effort to Protect its Energy Supply", *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2017, pp. 467-89.

[39] Almost half of the world's total annual seaborne trade tonnage passed through the Strait of Malacca and the nearby Straits of Sunda and Lombok in 2010, See United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Review of

Middle East and Asia passes through the strait – a figure that has steadily increased as China and other regional powers have grown in population and wealth. In 2016, transits through Malacca were as high as 84,456 (over 16 million barrels/day) a large proportion of which were oil and gas shipments bound for China, Japan and South Korea (Figure 5.2).[40] Rich in oil and gas deposits, the SCS is a site of intractable sovereignty disputes, overlapping maritime jurisdictional claims and conflicts over historical rights.[41] Equally critical from a SLOCs security perspective are the Straits of Lombok and Sunda, other feeders into the South China Sea.

Fig. 5.2 – Crude oil and petroleum products transported through the Strait of Malacca (2011-2016, million barrels per day)
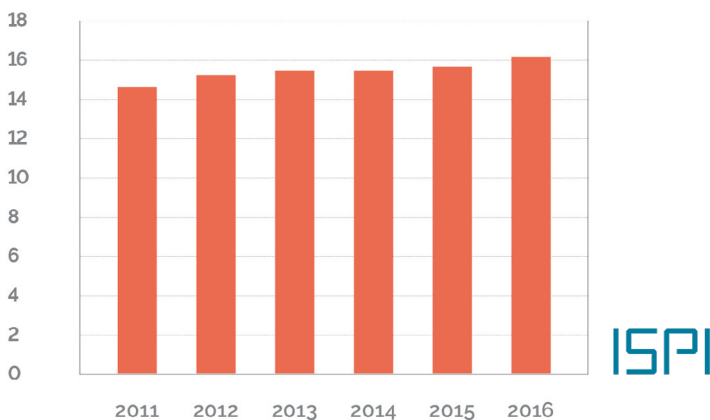
Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration

Maritime Transport, United Nations Publications, New York, 2011.
[40] "Malacca Straits VLCC traffic doubles in a decade as shipping traffic hits all time high in 2017", *Sea Trade Maritime News*, 18 February 2019.
[41] For a detailed exposition of security issues in South China Sea see, C. Rahman and M. Tsamenyi, "A Strategic Perspective on Security and Naval Issues in the South China Sea", *Ocean Development and International Law*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2020, pp. 315-333.

As the world's largest trading nation and a country with the second most powerful navy, China is a critical player in the SCS. Beijing has aggressively asserted its territorial claims in the region, in blatant disregard ofthe norms and institutions of the rules-based order. In recent months, China's attempts to coerce and intimidate fellow claimants in Southeast Asia have grown stronger. The Chinese navy has been particularly aggressive in the waters off Vietnam and Malaysia. After the Chinese militia sunk a Vietnamese boat in December 2019, the Chinese Coast guard has aggressively marked its presence in waters close the Malaysian, Vietnamese, Philippine and Indonesian coasts.[42] Beijing's aggressive moves in the SCS have received pushback from the U.S. Navy, which has carried out a series of exercises with allies and partners in the contested waters, even deploying two aircraft carrier strike groups – the USS Nimitz and USS Ronald Reagan – for joint operations in April 2020.[43] U.S. naval warships have also carried out freedom of navigation patrols near the China-held Spratly and Paracel islands to challenge what Washington sees as the illegal claims of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the SCS.

Meanwhile, Southeast Asian countries have scaled up efforts to counter China. In December 2019, Malaysia approached the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf claiming waters beyond the 200-kilometre limit of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the northern part of the SCS[44] – a move prompted by China's extended presence in and around the Luconia Shoals. Indonesia deployed warships in the waters off the Natuna Islands to fend off Chinese fishing boats and coastguard ships, and Vietnam has officially remonstrated with the UN, protesting the sinking of a Vietnamese fishing boat

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[42] A. Ananthalakshmi and R. Latiff, "Chinese and Malaysian Ships in South China Sea Standoff", *U.S.News*, 17 April 2020.

[43] "Nimitz Strike Group Participates in Second Dual-Carrier Operation in a Week ", *United States Naval Institute*, 29 June 2020.

[44] United Nations, "Partial Submission by Malaysia in the South China Sea to CLCS", *Oceans and Law of the Sea*, 12 December 2019.

by a Chinese vessel near the Spratly islands.[45] Under Hanoi's chairmanship the ten-member ASEAN issued a statement in June, reaffirming their collective stand that "the 1982 UNCLOS is the basis for determining maritime entitlements, sovereign rights, jurisdiction and legitimate interests" in the SCS.[46] The moves and countermoves have created a sense of foreboding that many see as an ill-boding for security and stability in the SCS.

Meanwhile, growing instances of piracy in the Western Pacific have troubled regional watchers (Table 5.1). The Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) reported a total of 41 incidents from January through June of 2020 in Southeast Asia (as compared to 23 incidents in 2019).[47] The latest incidents are more in the nature of armed robbery and spread across the South China Sea, from the coasts of Indonesia and Vietnam, to the Philippines.[48] Particularly worrisome are the high numbers of attacks in the Singapore and the Malacca straits, critical for the movement of Asia's trade through the SLOCs. Although law enforcement agencies have in recent years honed their skills in fighting pirates and armed robbers, the sophistication of the recent attacks has surprised many officials.[49]

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[45] "South China Sea: Vietnam approaches UN against China", *Times of India*, 14 April 2020.

[46] "ASEAN finally pushes back on China's sea claims", *Asia Times*, 30 June 2020.

[47] A total of 51 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships were reported in Asia during January-June 2020 compared to 28 incidents during January-June 2019. See "Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia", Half Yearly Report, January to June 2020, RECAAP Information Sharing Center.

[48] "World-Wide incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships report from January to June 2020", The International Maritime Bureau (IMB), 19 July 2020

[49] J.V. Hastings, "The Return of Sophisticated Maritime Piracy to Southeast Asia", *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 93, no. 1, March 2020.

TAB 5.1 - LOCATION OF INCIDENTS (2017-2020)

AC ACTUAL AT ATTACKED	2017		2018		2019		2020	
	AC	AT	AC	AT	AC	AT	AC	AT
Indonesia	17	2	15	5	7	2	12	1
Malaysia	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	0
Pacific Ocean	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Philippines	8	0	1	0	2	0	6	0
SOMS	1	1	3	2	8	0	16	0
South China Sea	2	0	2	1	0	0	2	0
Sulu-Celebes	3	4	0	1	1	0	1	0
Vietnam	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0
TOTAL	**32**	**7**	**24**	**9**	**20**	**3**	**40**	**1**

ISPI

Source: Regional Cooperation Agreement on Cambating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP)

Securing the Sea Lanes

While sea lane security is the responsibility of regional maritime forces, those with capacity invariably take the lead. As the most capable military power, the United States has been at the forefront of the security mission in the Indo-Pacific region. The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), a U.S.-led naval coalition of 33 nations, has played a leading security role in the Gulf region, largely ensuring the safe passage of commercial shipping.[50] The CMF has been assisted in its endeavour by the European Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) Somalia,[51] and other regional maritime

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[50] The CMF's constituent Task Forces (CTF) 150 and 151 are responsible for Maritime Security Operations outside the Arabian Gulf, and for Counter Piracy respectively, See Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/

[51] European Commission, External Action, "EU NAVFOR Mission update: Cooperation and Partnerships", 5 April 2018

forces from India, Japan and China, especially in the counter piracy mission.

But the U.S. is rapidly decreasing its dependence on Middle Eastern oil. With the country turning into a net exporter of oil products recently, there is apprehension that Washington might reduce its security presence in the Persian Gulf.[52] Some believe this is an unlikely scenario. Given the high dependence of U.S. allies – Japan, South Korea, and Australia – on Middle Eastern oil, they argue Washington is not likely to dramatically cut down its naval presence in the Gulf region. Indeed, China's growing footprint in the Western Indian Ocean, as also the continuing importance of choke points for global trade, gives U.S. policymakers enough reasons to continue to deploy U.S. naval forces in the Persian Gulf.[53]

Yet, Indian Ocean powers like India are preparing for the contingency of reduced U.S. interests in the IOR. New Delhi is scaling up regional operations to protect regional sea lanes.[54] The Indian navy, a key security provider in the IOR has increased cooperation with other prominent regional navies from France, Australia and Indonesia to hedge against the possibility of falling U.S. interests in the affairs of the IOR.[55] Chinese assertive policies across the Indo-Pacific region have also revived the "Quad" – a multilateral group comprising India, the United States, Japan, and Australia. The four nations, which resumed dialogue after a decade-long hiatus in November 2017, have stepped up their efforts to counter Chinese dominance in the Indo-Pacific region.[56]

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[52] G. Bahgat, "The Emerging Energy Landscape" in K. Coates Ulrichsen (Eds.), *The Changing Security Dynamics of the Persian Gulf*, London, Oxford Printing Press, 2017, p. 70.

[53] H. Brands, "Why America Can't Quit The Middle East", Hoover Institute, 21 March 2019.

[54] A. Singh, "All out at Sea, India Engagement's in the Indian Ocean", *The Hindu*, 16 May 2019.

[55] D.R. Chaudhury (2020).

[56] "Quad nations to boost coordination to counter China in Indo-Pacific", *The Business Standard*, 6 October 2020.

Another significant security player in the IOR is the European Union, which has, through its Critical Maritime Routes Wider Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO) programme, sought to protect regional routes considered crucial to maritime trade and transport. The focus has so far been on capacity building (providing legal assistance and training), maritime domain awareness (MDA) and operational coordination among select East African and African archipelago states. Earlier this year, the EU took a step forward by announcing the CRIMARIO II initiative to support partner countries and organisations in securing SLOCs vital for international trade.[57] Among other things, the interventions have emphasised coast guard interactions and maritime law enforcement where threats have appeared more recently and the gap in capacity is high. France, the UK and Germany have also taken a hard line against Chinese aggression in the Western Pacific, with the French and Royal navy even conducting maritime operations in the SCS.[58]

In the Western Pacific, two multilateral groupings have contributed significantly to sea lane security: the ReCAAP and the Malacca Strait Patrol (MSP) Network.[59] Earlier this year, member states – Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand – revised Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to strengthen information-sharing linkages and enhance mutual understanding and collaboration. To their credit, ASEAN navies and coastguards have also demonstrated a keen willingness for integrated operations, which suggests an increasing understanding of the benefits of maritime coordination and cooperation.

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[57] I. Gachie Vinson, "Maritime Security: The EU CRIMARIO II Initiative Is Starting", CREMARIO.EU, 11 June 2020.

[58] Tuan Ang Luc, "Are France and the UK Here to Stay in the South China Sea?", *The Diplomat*, 14 September 2018.

[59] "Singapore Hosts 14th Malacca Straits Patrol", *Naval Maritime and Defence*, January 15, 2020.

Shifting Patterns of Trade

Even so, regional trends in crime, economics and maritime geopolitics are shifting, creating new realities. The first is the possibility of a reduction in global demand in a post pandemic world. In 2019, world merchandise trade had begun to decline in volume terms, weighed down by political tensions and protectionist measures.[60] Following the pandemic, there is fear that a further drop in demand could set off a reversal of globalisation. Already many regional governments, including many long-time advocates of global trade, are using the health crisis to erect barriers to commerce.

Secondly, in the aftermath of Sars-CoV-2, there are increasing attempts at restructuring supply chains, which could introduce shifts in the pattern of maritime trade. Donald Trump in the U.S. wants to bring supply chains home from China, and has even publicly floated the need for a group of friendly nations in Asia that could help produce essential goods.[61] While it may seem too radical a move, "economic decoupling" with China has broadsupport outside of the U.S., including among many Asian states. Governments want businesses to look outside of China to find alternative sources for partsof their supply chain to diversify concentration risk and minimise disruption. Some, like India, are espousing a model of self-reliance that could wall off entire segments of their economy from exposure to Chinese businesses.[62]

To be sure, decoupling from China is neither easy nor practical. Despite their keenness to diversify sourcing and production, global companies remain unwilling to abandon manufacturing in China. Those countries that see themselves as alternative sites for production, industry watchers say, do not yet have the population base and demographics to replace China

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[60] World Trade Organization, "World Trade Statistical Review 2020", 2020.

[61] H. Pamuk and A. Shalal, "Trump administration pushing to rip global supply chains from China", *Reuters*, 10 June 2020.

[62] "India set to erect a Great Wall against Chinese companies", *Economic Times*, 19 June 2020.

as an optimal location.[63] Even in the hypothetical case that regional states were able to shift value chains away from China, Beijing is not likely to respond with military force. Beijing is itself hugely dependent on Asian sea lanes for resources and energy, with a shipping industry that accounts for the largest share of the world's shipping fleet (at around 15%). With its energy requirements likely to more than double over the next two decades, Chinese dependence on regional sea routes is only likely to grow. This suggests a reduced likelihood on the part of China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to impede international traffic in Asia's sea lanes.

The reality for analysts and policymakers to consider is shifting geopolitics. From the Horn of Africa and the Persian Gulf to the Andaman Sea and the Western Pacific, rivalries are becoming sharper and more intense, causing stronger partnerships and alliances. Increasing pressure from the U.S. and its Southeast Asian allies could, for instance, prompt China to rethink its assertive posture in the SCS. If Sars-CoV-2 accelerated the changes already underway resulting in an exodus of lower-value manufacturing jobs from China, it is even possible that Beijing could cooperate with regional states to ensure freedom of navigation.

The fourth reality is climate change, and its impact on regional security capacities. Increasingly, it is environmental degradation, drought, overfishing, oil spills and extreme weather that present a bigger risk in the maritime domain than hard security challenges. In the Indo-Pacific region, with its many island states, climate change and related challenges have become an existential threat. This is stretching the security capacities of regional navies and coast guards. The willingness of Asian states to cooperate or compete with others in the maritime domain is then likely to depend on more than just political and geo-economic vectors. Any future framework for SLOCs security would need to

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[63] "India can't replace China at manufacturing, not without paying more", *The Print*, 4 July 2020.

consider environmental and capacity factors as well. If geopolitics is seen to be overtaking other crucial imperatives, such as the need for human security and development, the results could be vastly different.

Conclusions

It is evident the commercial and military uses of Asia's sea lanes are inextricably intertwined, and cannot be viewed as distinct from each other. While the dynamics of maritime security in a post pandemic world are likely to be fluid, the impulse to cooperate could well be driven by the imperatives of economics and national well-being. With growing demand for resources and energy, and declining capacity among regional states to police the SLOCs, stakeholders may have little option but to pool resources and collectively secure the maritime commons.

Growing contestation between world powers in the littorals will be a complicating factor, in particular the possibility of a U.S.-China conflict in the SCS. Even without a military conflict, a trade war between the two countries could result in a re-orientation of Asian value chains. A shift in supply lines away from China could restructure maritime trade in ways that might be detrimental for the regional security order. The pandemic could also lead other regional stakeholders to act in erratic ways, especially if the shifting patterns of trade and economics are found to favour particular countries. Sars-CoV-2, however, is a developing story; its end state is unknown, as is its future impact on Asian trade and regional stability. What is clear is that regional powers have a tangible incentive to cooperate in a post pandemic world.

For the moment, the threats to maritime trade in Asia remain largely unchanged, even if the capacities to provide security appear to be shrinking. An intensification of non-traditional security challenges could result in a strong regional drive towards cooperation. Yet, geopolitics is likely to rein supreme. Assuming favourable geopolitical trends, a coordinated approach in the maritime commons is the best way to deal with existing threats in the Asian littorals.

6. The Impact of Sars-CoV-2 on Terrorism in Asia: Preliminary Considerations

Giulia Sciorati

In the first few months of 2020, the Sars-CoV-2 crisis seemed to put everything on hold. Since the World Health Organization declared a pandemic in early March, international organisations and national governments have been facing an invisible threat that controlled attention and resources. Eight months later, as our management of the health crisis became more and more effective, so did our understanding of the extent of the impact of Sars-CoV-2. Indeed, aside from the economy and health, it has become clear that the pandemic kicked off a "domino effect" that influenced several forces and trends around the world. Terrorism is among them. As evocatively expressed by one political analyst in late September, the "pandemic has not flattened the terrorism curve".[1] Indeed, in certain parts of the world, preventive measures have fed into identity politics, damaging the social fabric of nations and heightening the risk of radicalisation among Muslim communities. This process was particularly striking in India, for instance, where members of the country's Muslim minority were repeatedly identified as "super-spreaders" by national authorities.[2]

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[1] D. Kamat, "Pandemic Has Not Flattened the 'Terrorism Curve'", *Asia Times*, 29 September 2020.

[2] J. Slater and N. Masih, "As the World Looks for Coronavirus Scapegoats, Muslims Are Blamed in India", *The Washington Post*, 23 April 2020.

As the second continent in the world by number of terrorist attacks, Asia is weakened by structural frailties that make it more prone to terrorism and radicalisation. Above all, major conflicts like the Afghan war and the clashes between Muslim minorities and national governments in South and South-east Asia traditionally exacerbated the risk that terrorism would spread around the continent.

This chapter builds on this premise and offers some insights on countries and sub-regions in Asia that are deemed to be more likely to experience increasing numbers of terrorist attacks in the short run, as a consequence of the effects that Sars-CoV-2 had on everyday life. In the first section, this chapter presents a comprehensive overview of terrorism in Asia, analysing violent events around the continent after the 2014 global peak in terrorism. The second section compares Asia against global terrorist trends, devoting particular attention to sub-regional and national anomalies. Lastly, the first part of the third section examines the pandemic-inspired digitalisation drive and its effects on terrorism in Asia. The second part considers the likelihood that a nexus between natural disasters and terrorism might emerge on the continent because of the pandemic. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the main findings and the implications for national post-crisis recovery plans.

The Statistics of Terrorism in Asia

After global terrorism peaked in 2014, few places in the world continued to be subjected to terrorist attacks on a regular basis. In 2018, Asia accounted for about 38% of the total number of terrorist attacks in the world, second only to the Middle East and North Africa (Figure 6.1). Of the 15 countries around the world that recorded more than 150 terrorist attacks per year, 5 were Asian countries: Afghanistan, India, the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan. Together, they accounted for over 35% of the total number of terrorist attacks worldwide and

about 50% of the global number of terrorist fatalities.[3]

Between 2014 and 2018, Asia experienced over 25,000 terrorist attacks, the majority of which were in South Asia (about 79%).

Fig. 6.1 - Contributions to global terrorism per world area

38.6
MIDDLE EAST
AND NORTH
AFRICA

38.1
ASIA

0.1
OCEANIA

15.9
SUB-
SAHARAN
AFRICA

2.3
AMERICA

5
EUROPE

ISPI
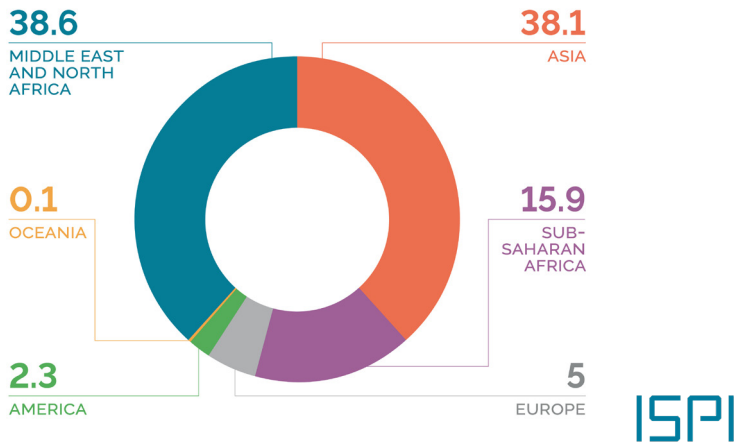
Source: Author's Elaboration of Data from the Global Terrorism Database (2019)

Even if Afghanistan – a country that has been at war for 19 years – was excluded from count, South Asia would still be the continent's most hit sub-region, registering around 11,000 attacks in total. Together with Afghanistan, the other worst-afflicted countries over the past 5 years were Pakistan and India, which experienced an average of 1,000 terrorist attacks per year. Bangladesh and Nepal followed suit, recording about 700 and 400 attacks respectively. In contrast with the rest of the sub-region, Nepal and Sri Lanka are the only countries showing a distinctive upward trend in the annual number of attacks between 2014 and 2018, with the latter recording around

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[3] All data are from the Global Terrorism Database (2019).

100 attacks in total. Lastly, the Maldives and Bhutan were the only two countries in South Asia not to show a particular susceptibility to terrorism. While Malé, in fact, experienced only 16 attacks (the majority of which occurred in 2014), Thimphu recorded only one. Even this single attack, though, has a stronger connection to India rather than Bhutan, as the main actor at play was the "National Democratic Front of Boroland", an armed separatist group that sought to obtain the secession of the "Boroland Territorial Region" from India's north-eastern state of Assam.[4]

In addition to South Asian states, the Philippines and Thailand were also among the countries that accounted for the largest share of global terrorism in 2018. Between 2014 and 2018, Southeast Asia was the second sub-region in Asia by number of terrorist attacks, which totalled at about 5,000, equating to approximately to a quarter of the terrorist attacks that occurred in South Asia in the same period. Manila and Bangkok, for instance, experienced an average of about 600 and 300 terrorist attacks per year. Conversely, Myanmar and Indonesia recorded a lower number of attacks in total (about 300 and 150, respectively), but they showed growing trends, with the former spiking in 2017 with 116 attacks. Malaysia's total number of attacks remained under 50, the most dangerous years being 2014 and 2016, when the Abu Sayyaf Group successfully conducted 15 attacks in the country.[5] Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam's totals remained under 10, with the former recording only a single, unsuccessful terrorist attempt in 2018, when several explosives were defused in Pailin province near

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[4] No motive was ever given for the kidnapping of Bhutanese citizens by the National Democratic Front of Boroland. Authorities agreed to consider it a money-making attempt, as a ransom was asked to one of the victims' families, see BBS, "Kidnapped Men Released After Paying Ransom", Bhutan Broadcasting Service, 7 September 2014.

[5] To expand on the impact of the Abu Sayyaf Group on terrorism in Malaysia, see L. Steckman, "The Abu Sayyaf-ISIS Nexus: Rising Extremism and its Implications for Malaysia", Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses, vol. 8, no. 5, 2016, pp. 16-21.

Thailand's border. No group claimed responsibility for the failed attack, but geography alone suggests that the attack might have been more connected to Thai terrorism than Cambodia's domestic security issues.[6] No terrorist attacks have been recorded in Brunei, East Timor and Singapore since 2014. Nonetheless, data collection on Brunei and Singapore – a totalitarian and an authoritarian regime, respectively – remains biased by incomplete media reporting.[7] The same is true for Laos and Vietnam, which are also known as major "media black holes" in the sub-region.[8]

China and North Korea play a similar role in East Asia. Due to data unavailability on the North Korean regime, in fact, the latter was excluded from the count. East Asia, as well as Central Asia, has been generally spared from terrorist attacks, especially by comparison with the rest of the continent. During the five years under analysis, East Asia recorded fewer than 100 terrorist attacks in total, about 80% of which occurred in China.[9] Japan and South Korea, in contrast, experienced a total of 17 and 3 attacks respectively. While China and Japan have been on a decreasing trend since 2014, South Korea continued to experience few, random terrorist attacks, mostly connected to anti-American sentiment. Two out of the three violent episodes recorded in South Korea, in fact, have targeted American national symbols, such as the U.S. Ambassador and the embassy.[10]

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[6] K. Sarom, "Explosives Found in Pailin", *Phnom Pehn Post*, 13 July 2018.

[7] On authoritarian regimes and terrorism, see E. Pokalova, "Authoritarian regimes against terrorism: lessons from China", *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2013.

[8] The term "media black hole" applies to countries where privately-owned media are forbidden and journalists mostly relay government's propaganda (RSF Reporters Without Borders, "Asia-Pacific", 2020, https://rsf.org/en). To expand on media freedom in the Asia-Pacific region, see RSF (2020).

[9] The terrorist attacks that occurred in Taiwan were included in the China category.

[10] J. Kim, "U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Slashed in Face by Assailant", *Reuters*, 4 March 2015; and S. Cho and S. Park, "Korean-Canadian caught for

When it comes to terrorism, figures for Central Asia are similar to East Asia's. In the five years under analysis, in fact, the sub-region only experienced a total of 30 terrorist attacks. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were the two worst-hit countries, accounting for about 80% of the total number of attacks in the sub-region. They were also the only countries in Central Asia to record at least 1 attack per year. Indeed, data for Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan suggest isolated episodes of violence. The three attacks recorded in Kazakhstan, for instance, were part of a single, coordinated outbreak, which occurred on the same day in different parts of Aktobe, a city in the north-west of the country.[11] While most of the violent attacks in Central Asia boiled down to domestic grievances, China and the United States were also targeted: incendiary weapons were used to damage the U.S. embassy in Uzbekistan in 2015 and the Chinese embassy in Kyrgyzstan was bombed in 2016.[12]

Despite the 2014 global peak, terrorism continues to be an everyday reality in many Asian countries. South and South-east Asia remain the worst-hit sub-regions, accounting for about 79% and 29% of the number of terrorist attacks around the continent respectively, while East and Central Asia combined account for just under 1%. Quantitative data are a useful starting-point to determine the extent of terrorism in Asia, but they are limited by incomplete reporting, as most media outlets continue to enjoy low levels of media freedom, especially in those areas that show a growing tendency towards terrorism.

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botched Molotov cocktail attack on US embassy in Seoul", National, *The Korea Times*, 12 February 2018.

[11] "Gunmen Launch Series of Deadly Kazakhstan Attacks", *Al-Jazeera*, 6 June 2016.

[12] To expand on terrorism and radicalisation in Central Asia, see J.R. Pottenger, "Islam and ideology in Central Asia", in N. Lahoud and A.H. Johns (Eds.), *Islam in World Politics*, London, Routledge, 2012.

A Partial Alignment with Global Trends

By examining terrorism as a global phenomenon, two main trends were detected. First, since the 2014 global peak, the annual number of terrorist attacks has been steadily declining. Indeed, the total number of attacks worldwide decreased by about 43% in five years, from 17,000 per year in 2014 to 9,600 in 2018. Second, the reach of the Islamic State (IS) has been extending. Mozambique, the Netherlands and Sri Lanka, in fact, joined the total number of countries worldwide that experienced IS violence, taking the total count to 57. Despite these generally recognised trends, regional variety is still prominent.[13]

Consistently with the first global trend, Asia has been showing a general decline in the annual number of terrorist attacks. Having recorded 6,100 attacks in 2014, the continent sustained 4,200 in 2018, representing an average decrease of 8% per year. Due to the rebound effect of the 2014 peak, 2015 was the year that recorded the steepest annual decrease in global terrorism in the period under analysis, amounting at about 16%. East Asia saw the largest average fall (33%). At the national level, Pakistan was the only country in Asia where occasional spikes did not interrupt the decrease, from 2,151 attacks in 2014 to 480 in 2018. Sri Lanka, however, is the region's major exception, in view of the growing annual number of terrorist attacks perpetrated there (Figure 6.2). In 2019, Colombo experienced the world's deadliest series of attacks, when 7 bombs went off around the country, claiming the lives of over 250 people.[14] Terrorism has also been on the rise in Nepal and Myanmar in recent years, with spikes in 2017 of 247 and 116 attacks respectively. Nonetheless, attacks in both countries

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[13] E. Miller, *Global Terrorism Overview: Terrorism in 2019*, Background Report, College Park, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, University of Maryland, July 2020.

[14] R. Abeynayake, "In Sri Lanka, Rising Islamic Militancy Was the Elephant in the Room", *South China Morning Post*, 27 April 2019.

decreased the following year. India also shows a minor increase in the annual number of attacks, passing from 860 in 2014 to 888 in 2018. The country registers a spike in 2016, when terrorism peaked at over 1,000 annual attacks. Indonesia, by contrast, saw a more significant increase in the annual number of attacks, with a rise of about 19% over the whole period. In 2018, in particular, Indonesia's annual number of terrorist attacks spiked, registering a total of 43 attacks. Jakarta recorded the lowest number of annual attacks in 2016, when the country only experienced 19 episodes.

Fig. 6.2 - Most consistent upward and downward trends in Asian terrorism
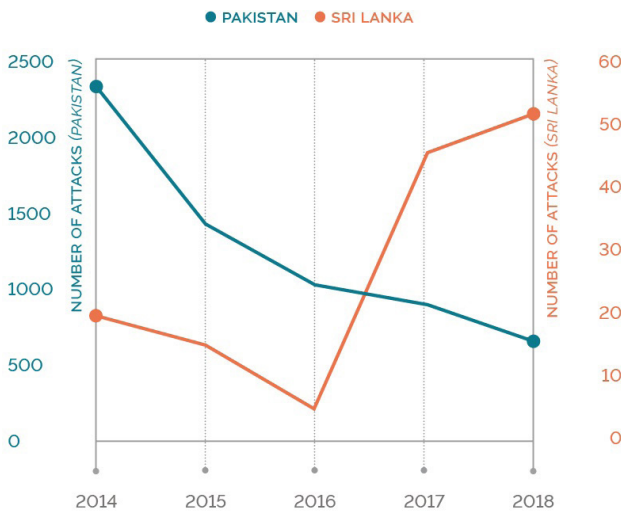
Source: Author's elaboration of data from the Global Terrorism Database (2019)

The second trend identifies an extension in the global reach of IS. Between 2014 and 2018, a total of eight Asian countries suffered from IS terrorism.[15] While Pakistan was the sole country in the region to experience IS terrorist attacks in 2014, the number of countries where IS operates has been rapidly increasing: attacks, in fact, also occurred in Afghanistan and Bangladesh in 2015, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines in 2016, India and Kyrgyzstan in 2017 and Tajikistan in 2018. An estimated 550 IS attacks were recorded in Asia in the last five years. This total is certainly not exhaustive, as the number of attacks perpetrated by lone individuals may have had links to IS terrorism that remained undetected. Nonetheless, even by merely considering claimed or assigned attacks, data indicate deepening IS permeation across the continent. This process is even more striking as IS violence in Iraq has been decreasing.[16] IS attacks in Asia primarily occurred in Muslim-majority countries, with the exception of the Philippines and India. The latter, in particular, was still rocked by internal clashes involving the country's Muslim minority.[17] Since 2015, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan were the only three countries to experience at least one IS attacks per year, while the rest of Asia, especially India and the Philippines, recorded attacks only in the last two or three years. Afghanistan still accounts for the highest share of attacks in Asia (63.5%). Despite the growing number of Asian countries where IS is active, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan,

[15] According to the Global Terrorism Database, attacks were perpetrated by the Khorasan Chapter of the IS, the IS in Bangladesh and the East Asia Division of the IS. For a comprehensive overview of the impact of the IS in Asia, see A.S. Hashim, *The Impact of the Islamic State in Asia*, Singapore, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSiS), Nanyang Technological University 2015.

[16] E. Miller (2020).

[17] On the relations between the Muslim minority in India and the national government, see L. Maizland, *India's Muslims: An Increasingly Marginalized Population*, New York, Council on Foreign Relations, 20 August 2020; and E. Mangiarotti, "Kashmir: Covid-19 and the Politics of Enforced Isolation", in G. Sciorati (Ed.), *Where the Pandemic Hits the Hardest: Fragility, Conflict and Covid-19 in Asia*, ISPI Dossier, Milan, 30 May 2020.

Malaysia and Tajikistan experienced single episodes, thus suggesting that IS's reach in Asia remains largely limited to traditional strongholds like Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Despite sub-regional variety, Asia generally confirms the two major trends characterising global terrorism today: a decrease in the annual number of terrorist attacks and the extension of IS reach in the continent. Nonetheless, some countertrends can also be detected, when looking at Asia from a country-specific viewpoint. Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Nepal, for instance, all show an increase in the annual number of terrorist attacks. Moreover, although IS expanded in the Philippines, the group remains mostly active in neighbouring countries around South Asia.

How did Sars-CoV-2 Maximise Risks in Asia?

At the time of writing (November 2020), Sars-CoV-2 is still raging around the world, and Asia has reached a total of over 11 million cases since the outbreak started. India is the country that has been worst hit at the regional level so far, reaching 9 million cases, followed by Indonesia, Bangladesh and the Philippines, each reporting over 400,000 cases.[18]

Although the international community is still coming to terms with the impact of Sars-CoV-2 on our way of life, the notion that the pandemic accelerated some latent forces and trends has been proposed by many international observers.[19] The security realm is no exception. Over the past year, many dormant issues have in fact escalated in Asia: above all, the China-India border skirmishes and the Thai protests.[20] Around the world, terrorism is falling into similar trends, as new attacks

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[18] Data are from the World Health Organization.

[19] Above all, W. Hague, "Coronavirus Has Accelerated Eight Mega-Trends That Will Transform Everything", *The Telegraph*, 20 April 2020.

[20] See, for instance, G. Robinson, M. Macan-Markar and S. Turton, "Thai Protests Build as Pandemic Fuels Unrest Across Southeast Asia", *Nikkei Asia Review*, 21 October 2020.

in Europe have painfully shown.[21] Asia, for its part, now risks heading in the same direction.

The Global Digitalisation Drive

As argued in a recent report by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee, Sars-CoV-2 has emphasised certain aspects of our life and downplayed others.[22] Education and interpersonal relations, for instance, have mostly shifted into the digital realm, as national governments adopted preventive measures that have limited mobility and in-person meetings. In practical terms, these restrictions increased the number of unsupervised children and young adults spending prolonged time on the Internet, either attending school through online classes or turning to social media in search of surrogate frameworks of sociability. Such a phenomenon is particularly threatening, as previous studies on radicalisation have shown that the digital realm and, more specifically gaming platforms, are effective channels for extremist messages to be conveyed to the youngest and most responsive segments of the population.[23] Before preventive measures were imposed, Asia was still the first continent in the world by number of Internet users, with 2.3 billion people in 2019, primarily located in China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand.[24] Asia was also the largest global gaming market, generating revenues of around US$80 billion in 2020. In comparison, the North American and European markets combined produced only US$78 billion.[25]

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[21] N. Onishi, C. Méheut and L. Foroudi, "Attacks in France Point to a Threat Beyond Extremist Networks", *The New York Times*, 6 November 2020.

[22] UNCTED, *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Terrorism, Counter-terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism*, United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, 2020.

[23] For a comprehensive review on the Internet-terrorism nexus, see M. Conway, "Determining the Role of the Internet in Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Six Suggestions for Progressing Research", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2017, pp. 77-98. doi: 10.1080/1057610X.2016.1157408.

[24] Data from Internet World Stats.

[25] Ibid.

India is one of the two countries in Asia that runs the highest risk from the impact of the Sars-CoV-2 digitalisation drive on everyday life. This is partly due to the size of its population, as India has the world's second highest number of Internet users, after China, amounting to about 560 million people.[26] The majority of India's population, moreover, is under 24 years old, thus including a large number of people who are potentially more receptive to extremist messages. In the last 5 years, India has recorded growing annual numbers of terrorist attacks, which peaked two years after the 2014 global peak, when New Delhi recorded 1,026 attacks. The general trend in the number of terrorist attacks in India in this period is broadly flat, however, with only a 3% increase, despite the fact that the country has experienced IS attacks every year since 2016.

As the fourth nation in the world by number of Internet users (about 171 million) and an age pyramid mimicking India's, Indonesia also needs to be taken into consideration with regards to the Sars-CoV-2 global digital drive. Jakarta is in fact among the top 30 countries in the world that were worst hit by the pandemic, recording 463,000 cases and 15,000 deaths.[27] Terrorism in Indonesia has also been growing, with the annual number of attacks experienced by the country peaking in 2018. Like India, Indonesia was also a theatre for IS terrorism, although the country experienced only a single attack in 2016, when a suicide bomber detonated near the Indonesian National Police headquarters in Surakarta, a city in Central Java.[28] Despite the fact that the permeation of IS remains limited, the Sars-CoV-2 digitalisation drive remains particularly threatening for a country like Indonesia, where Islam is professed by the majority of the population, the country's population is young, the number of Internet users is vast and the annual number of terrorist attacks has been growing.

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Data are from the World Health Organization..., cit.

[28] F. Rizki and N. Nangoy, "IS-Linked Suicide Bomber Attacks Indonesia Police, Wounding One", *Reuters*, 5 July 2016.

The Nexus between Natural Disasters and Terrorism

In addition to digitalisation, Sars-CoV-2 is connected to an element that has proven to be responsible for facilitating radicalisation in the past – that is, the construction of narratives linking natural disasters to shortcomings in national religious life.[29] In this regard, the Maldives is a crucial example. Shortly after the 2004 tsunami, in fact, the Maldives – a country where Islam is imposed by law – experienced a surge in radicalisation, which may be reflected in the fact that Maldivians now account for a large portion of foreign fighters in Syria, Iraq and Pakistan.[30] Indeed, the official narrative treated the disaster as a consequence of a general "lack of religiosity and un-Islamic behaviour" in the country.[31] Another striking case in Asia is that of Pakistan, where a similar narrative emerged after the 2005 Kashmir earthquake: many Islamic leaders, in fact, identified the disaster as divine retribution.[32]

The pandemic now risks inspiring similar narratives in other parts of Asia. Indeed, the continent comprises about 40% of the global Muslim population and, in the last few years, Islam has become a divisive issue between Muslim communities and national governments around the continent. The Rohingya crisis in Myanmar and the Mindanao conflict in the Philippines are prime examples.[33]

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[29] C. Berrebi and J. Ostwald, *Earthquakes, Hurricanes, and Terrorism: Do Natural Disasters Incite Terror?*, Working Paper, RAND Corporation, 2011; and C. Berrebi and J. Ostwald, "Exploiting the Chaos: Terrorist Target Choice Following Natural Disasters", *Southern Economic Journal*, vol. 79, no. 4, 2013, pp. 793-811.

[30] Dharmawardhane, "Maldives", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2015, pp. 63-69.

[31] L.T. Waha, "Covid-19: Harming Health and Social Cohesion in the Maldives?" in G. Sciorati (Ed.), *Where the Pandemic Hits the Hardest: Fragility, Conflict and Covid-19 in Asia*, Milan, ISPI, May 2020.

[32] A. Wilder, *Perceptions of the Pakistan Earthquake Response: Humanitarian Agenda 2015 Pakistan Country Study*, Medford, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2008.

[33] Among others, see F.B. Zakaria, "Religion, Mass Violence, and Illiberal Regimes: Recent Research on the Rohingya in Myanmar", *Journal of Current Southeast*

Moreover, maritime Asia is among the areas in the world that were most strained by the effects of climate change, deforestation, pollution and shrinking biodiversity.[34] These issues made extreme weather phenomena like floods and typhoons more common and, as a consequence, civil society more receptive to these challenges. In Indonesia, for instance, shortly after lockdown measures were suspended, people went as far as protesting against the relaxation of the country's green policies proposed by the government to stimulate economic recovery.[35]

Previous studies on the nexus between natural disasters and terrorism have shown that a positive correlation between the two phenomena is more prone to emerge when low- and medium-income countries are involved.[36] In the case of Sars-CoV-2, in addition to income levels, several other elements, such as the severity of the crisis, the percentage of the population that professes Islam, the level of the terrorist threat in the country and the reach of IS terrorism, facilitate the adoption of a narrative that links the health crisis to non-religious behaviour. When all these elements are taken into consideration, Indonesia and the Philippines emerge as the two countries in Asia that are now most exposed to the effects of the nexus between natural disasters and terrorism.

Both are in fact middle-income countries, according to data from the World Bank, with Indonesia gaining the status of upper-middle income country in July 2020.[37] Although the

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Asian Affairs, vol. 38, no. 1, 2019, pp. 98-111. doi: 10.1177/1868103419845583; and N. Ochiai, "The Mindanao Conflict: Efforts for Building Peace through Development", *Asia-Pacific Review*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2016, pp. 37-59. doi: 10.1080/13439006.2016.1254364.

[34] UNDP, "Climate Change in Asia and the Pacific. What's at Stake?", United Nations Development Programme, 28 November 2019.

[35] F. Firdausand and R. Ratcliffe, "Indonesia Mass Strikes Loom Over Cuts to Environmental Safeguards and Workers' Rights", *The Guardian*, 5 October 2020.

[36] C. Berrebi and J. Ostwald (2013).

[37] "Indonesia Is Now an Upper-Middle Income Country, World Bank Says", *The Straits Times*, 3 July 2020.

Philippines was expected to follow in Indonesia's footsteps, the pandemic jeopardised the country's endeavour and Manila has so far remained among lower-middle income countries. While Indonesia hosts the world's largest Muslim population (estimated at about 225 million people), the Philippines account for just over 6 million, representing only 6% of the country's population.[38] Nevertheless, given the country's geography, Muslim minorities in the Philippines are located in specific areas, such as the island of Mindanao or the Sulu and the Palawan archipelagos. As maintained by Anushka D. Kapahi and Gabrielle Tañada (2018), the location of Muslim minorities and their identitarian bond contributed to developing a sense of separation from the rest of the country.[39] This separation eventually manifested in the Mindanao conflict, during which Muslim minorities came together supporting secessionist claims. Eventually, the conflict led to the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in 2019, under which Muslim minorities were granted self-administration rights. The BARMM, however, now risks separating Muslim minorities even further from the rest of the population. Indeed, although the establishment of the autonomous region was considered a victory for the secessionist fringe, the BARMM has so far proven incapable of maintaining stability, as terrorist attacks occurred in the summer of 2020, accompanied by calls for full independence.[40] Since 2016, moreover, IS had also established its "East Asian Emirate" in the area, thus signalling a stronger presence of the group around the country.

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[38] "Factsheet on Islam in Mindanao", Philippine Statistics Authority (Region XI - Davao Region), 28 September 2017.

[39] A.D. Kapahi, and G. Tañada, "The Bangsamoro Identity Struggle and the Bangsamoro Basic Law as the Path to Peace", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, vol. 10, no. 7, 2018, pp. 1-7.

[40] B.S. Baraguir, *Philippines: The Security Conundrum in Sulu*, ISPI Commentary, 9 September 2020.

Indonesia (and to a lesser extent Malaysia) is following a similar trajectory, although the country experienced only a single IS attack in the last five years. As well as suffering growing numbers of terrorist attacks, Indonesia and the Philippines are among the world's 30 countries worst hit by the crisis, the second and fourth countries in Asia by number of cases and the second and third by number of deaths.[41] These elements make Jakarta and Manila prime candidates for the adoption of narratives linking the pandemic to non-religious behaviour, thus increasing the susceptibility of civil society to violent extremist messages.

Nonetheless, as the pandemic is still spreading, definite conclusions on how Sars-CoV-2 is impacting terrorism in Asia cannot yet be drawn. Preliminary observations, though, indicate that some countries and sub-regions in the continent risk becoming more vulnerable than others to terrorism in the near future.

Conclusions

This chapter presented some preliminary considerations on the countries and sub-regions in Asia that are more prone to experience spikes in terrorism in the short-term because of the impact of Sars-CoV-2 on the continent.

Two elements were mainly taken into consideration: first, the fact that the pandemic sent the world into a digitalisation drive, inspired by the need to contain the diffusion of the virus, thus limiting mobility and personal relations. Second, the fact that among Asia's Muslim communities the pandemic – a health crisis that is comparable to a natural disaster – risks inspiring narratives based on the notion that Sars-CoV-2 is a punishment for un-Islamic behaviour and lack of religiosity.

India and Indonesia are the two Asian countries that are potentially most sensitive to the effects of the first element,

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[41] Data are from the World Health Organization..., cit.

the global digitalisation drive, especially in light of their young populations and the vast number of Internet users. Indonesia, moreover, together with the Philippines, also is one of the countries in Asia where the nexus between natural disasters and terrorism is most likely to emerge. Indeed, Islam is particularly entrenched in both countries, IS has increased its presence and civil society is exceptionally sensitive to issues relating to nature. With regards to the impact of Sars-CoV-2 on terrorism, Indonesia thus emerges as one of the countries in Asia that has the most at stake in the short-run. Although South Asia continues to be the sub-region where most terrorist attacks occurred after the 2014 global peak and the area where IS has been able to extend its presence the most, South-east Asia is consolidating its second place.

The full extent of the pandemic's impact on the international system remains to be seen. As the continent that first experienced the health crisis, Asia has been on the frontline of adopting effective response mechanisms, planning successful economic recovery plans and "competing" in the global vaccine race. In the last year, traditional and non-traditional security challenges have been put aside to focus on tackling the pandemic. De-radicalisation and counter-terrorism objectives, however, should now be included in the post-crisis recovery strategies of national governments, especially by those countries in Asia, such as Sri Lanka, that have experienced steadily growing annual numbers of terrorist attacks since the 2014 global peak, and countries facing social currents that make processes of radicalisation under Sars-CoV-2-constraints more likely, such as India, Indonesia and the Philippines.

7. The EU and Europe in the Indo-Pacific Region – Finally Getting on Board?

Axel Berkofsky

This chapter is about something that has yet to happen: visible and sustainable EU and European involvement in the Indo-Pacific region, including the presence of European naval forces in the Indian and Pacific Oceans and even in the disputed areas of the East and South China Seas.

There can be virtually no doubt that the EU's and Europe's on-paper commitment to show the flag more effectively in the Indo-Pacific, as discussed below, is almost entirely motivated by China's highly assertive (i.e. aggressive) policies and actions in support of its territorial claims in the disputed waters. Policymakers in Brussels and EU member states' capitals confirm that Europe is increasingly interested in helping to keep Asian maritime lanes of communication free and safe from the Chinese elephant in the room. China, for its part, seems to think it can sit all of this out. In March 2020, Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, dismissed the Indo-Pacific concept as an "attention-grabbing idea that will dissipate like ocean foam". Unfortunately for him, it has not yet done so. On the contrary, analysts increasingly conclude that China has been put on notice and must expect a reaction to its territorial ambitions and claims from within and outside the Indo-Pacific. Thanks to Beijing's aggressive interference in Hong Hong's political and judicial affairs, its treatment of the Uighur minority in the province of Xinjiang in what Beijing refers to as "re-education

camps"[1] and the continuing construction of military facilities (i.e. bases) on disputed islands in the South China Sea, over the last two years a new realism has set in in Europe. In fact, inside EU institutions in Brussels, China has been referred to as a "systemic rival" since early 2019 and one no longer hears many official voices promoting attempts to engage politically with the Chinese. On 16 September 2020, the UK, Germany and France jointly submitted a *Note Verbale* to the United Nations, reminding the international community (and more importantly China) of the 2016 verdict issued by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague. The court pronounced that China's historic territorial claims in the South China Sea are obsolete as they do not comply with international law and violate the provisions stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).[2] To be sure, Beijing has not and will not adjust, let alone reduce, its territorial claims in response to a European reminder that it is breaching international law. Unfortunately, this is simply not in the cards.

A Matter of Definition

Certain geographical, geoeconomic and geopolitical considerations are in order if we are to appreciate the importance of the Indo-Pacific. The region comprises the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, hosts nearly 33% of the world's population and accounts for 50% of world maritime trade 50% of the container traffic and 70% of the global trade in oil and gas travel through the Indian Ocean.[3] The Straits of Malacca in

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[1] Which in reality are detention camps, detaining up to one million Uighurs, brainwashing them into becoming 'real' Chinese as opposed to remaining 'separatists' and/or terrorists).

[2] See C.M. Ramos, "UK, France, Germany refute China's expansive South China Sea claims", *Inquirer.Net*, 18 September 2020.

[3] For further details and data see also P. Saha and A. Mishra, *The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative: Towards a Coherent Indo-Pacific Policy*; Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Occasional Paper no. 292, December 2020. Also A. Cainey, The

the east and Hormuz in the west are some of the most strategic choke points in a region that hosts 64% of the world's oil trade and movement The Indian Ocean is also home to 40% of the world's offshore petroleum and mineral deposits.

The term "Indo-Pacific", Frederic Grare[4] writes, implies the inclusion of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Unfortunately, boundaries are defined differently by different states according to their own interests. For France, by way of example, the Indo-Pacific space extends from the shores of East Africa and Southern Africa to the coasts of North, Central, and South America. For France's Ministry of the Armed Forces, Grare adds, the Indo-Pacific is "a security continuum which extends from Djibouti to French Polynesia". For the U.S., the Indo-Pacific region is smaller, stopping at India's shores.[5] Alan Gyngell from the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA) agrees that the Indo-Pacific is a

> framing device, not a geographical reality – its proponents shape it around their different interests. Each country has its own 'Indo-Pacific'. Like the Asia-Pacific region or Asia itself, the Indo-Pacific is simply a way for governments to define an international environment suited to their policy objectives in particular circumstances.[6]

India's version of the Indo-Pacific is an extension of its Look East policy for Southeast Asia and a defence of its sovereignty within its maritime surroundings.[7] For Tokyo under former Japanese Prime

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Geopolitics of Indo-Pacific Trade, RUSI Commentary, 25 November 2020; F. Heiduk and G. Wacker, From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific, SWP Research Paper 2020/RP 09, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, July 2020.

[4] Former French Ministry of Defence official and currently Nonresident Fellow, South Asia Programme at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

[5] See F. Grare, *France, the Other Indo-Pacific Power*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21 October 2020.

[6] See A. Gyngell, *To Each their own Indo-Pacific*, EastAsiaForum, 23 May 2018.

[7] For details and analysis of India's Indo-Pacific strategy see e.g. R. Mukjerjee, "Looking West, Acting East", *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2019, pp. 43-52; for an official Indian explanation of the country's Indo-Pacific Policies see H. Siddiqui,

Minister Shinzo Abe, its policies towards and in the Indo-Pacific Region were always primarily about China (like they continue to be under Japan's current Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga).[8]

Terminology and semantics vary in other ways too. When Tokyo talks about "free and open" in the context of "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" policy, it – like the U.S. – means not only problem-free access to maritime routes in the Indo-Pacific but also cooperation and coordination among democratic and liberal democracies, as practiced and promoted under the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) initiated by the Japanese Prime Minister in 2007: in other words, cooperation and coordination in Indo-Pacific security between the U.S., Japan, India and Australia.

What Elephant?

The EU, Mohan writes, is the largest trading partner of many countries in the Indo-Pacific and the EU's 27 member states ship over 35% of their exports to the region. 90% of these exports pass through the Indian and Pacific Oceans.[9] Mohan also points out that European and Indo-Pacific countries share the same geopolitical concerns: finding themselves in the middle of U.S.-China rivalry and balancing or hedging an assertive or aggressive China. For countries like Japan, India or Australia the latter term is probably much more relevant. Tokyo, India and Canberra made up their minds some time ago: hedging and indeed countering China's aggressive policies – alone or jointly – is very much on the menu and becoming entangled in U.S.-Sino rivalry is an acceptable price to pay.

India's Concept of Indo-Pacific is Inclusive and Across Oceans, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 8 November 2019.

[8] For details of Japan's current and future Indo-Pacific policies see *Free and Open Indo-Pacific*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 7 August 2020.

[9] G. Mohan, *A European Approach to the Indo-Pacific?*, Global Public Policy Institute, 20 August 2020.

In 2019 and 2020, China was the undisputed champion of disruptive action in Asian territorial waters. As in previous years, Beijing continued to build civilian and more importantly military facilities on disputed islands in the South China Sea. Satellite pictures published by the European Space Imagery back in March 2018 provided unambiguous evidence that China has built military bases on the disputed Spratly Islands.[10] Furthermore, Beijing continues to challenge the legitimacy of Japanese control over islands in the East China Sea (the Senkaku Islands which have been *de facto* part of Japanese territory since 1895[11]), and is also sailing too close for comfort for India into the Indian Ocean, building economic and military relations with countries India either has problems with (Pakistan) or considers part of its geopolitical and geoeconomic "background" (Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, The Maldives and others).

Here Comes Europe, a Little Bit

It now seems that Europe and the EU want a piece of the action, albeit with the usual delays and timidity. In recent months the EU member states Germany and the Netherlands have issued their individual Indo-Pacific strategies.[12] France for its part has

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[10] See D. Bishton, "Spratly Islands Military Bases Revealed", *Spatial Source*, 6 March 2018. The images showed a deep water port, completed aerodomes, hangars, military barracks , communications infrastructure and a 2.7 km long runway on the Subi and Mischief reefs – all you need for a fully equipped military base. See also J. Griffith, "China Beijing May Have Built Bases in the South China Sea, but that Doesn't Mean it can Defend Them, Report Claims", *CNN*, 7 December 2020.

[11] A group of islands Japan annexed after its victory in the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894/1895. China claims until today that the islands (which are called Diaoyu Islands in China) have always belonged to China while Tokyo insists that they were "terra nullius" when Tokyo annexed them. The Senkaku Islands were formally returned to Japanese sovereignty in May 1972. Together with Okinawa, the Senkaku Islands were under U.S. administration since the adoption of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1952.

[12] The Dutch Indo-Pacific guidelines (issued in November 2020) will not be

had an official Indo-Pacific strategy since 2018 while the UK is reportedly planning to issue one soon. The EU's External Action Service (EEAS) is due to publish its own Indo-Pacific strategy some time during 2021.

So, from now on, will Europe be flying the flag in the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and East China Sea, patrolling disputed Asian territorial waters, and helping like-minded countries (Japan, India and Australia) to keep Chinese territorial expansionism and ambitions in check? Not yet, evidently, because the EU – unlike Japan, India and most recently Australia – has not yet given up on the idea, however unrealistic and unlikely it might be, of engaging with China politically.

Brussels can have very few remaining illusions that the EU and China can jointly address and solve issues in international politics and security, if only because China is more often than not part of the problem rather than the solution. Beijing, of course, knows this, but evidently believes that trade and investment ties, which took centre-stage again at the very end of 2020, will convince Europe to bother (even) less with Asian politics and focus on the money. On 30 December, the EU and China signed their long-awaited bilateral trade and investment agreement (the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment or CAI, under negotiation since 2014[13]). Whether, in the months and years ahead, this deal will have an impact on how ready Brussels and EU member states' governments will be to order their naval forces to challenge China's illegal territorial claims in the South China Sea remains to be seen.

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dealt with in this chapter, but for details see e.g. S. Strangio, "Following France and Germany, the Netherlands Pivots to the Indo-Pacific", *The Diplomat*, 18 November 2020. See also L. Louis, "The Outlines of a European Policy on the Indo-Pacific", *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 26 November 2020.

[13] For details see e.g. J. Brunsden, M. Khan, and M. Peel, *EU Hails China Deal despite Risk of Conflict with Biden White House*, Report, *Financial Times*, 30 December 2020. Also see J. Brunsden, M. Peel, and S. Fleming, "Human Rights Questions Remain over Brussels-Beijing Pact", *Financial Times*, 31 December 2020.

For now, at least, the bilateral trade agreement is all but unambiguous evidence that Brussels has decided to listen to the deal's cheerleaders and lobbyists and go for the trade and money, taking at face value Chinese assurances that they will respect international labour rights. (Beijing's refusal to abide by such standards had been the agreement's last stumbling block until its signing in December).

According to the chair of the EU Parliament's delegation for relations with China, Reinhold Bütikofer, Brussels has allowed itself to be fooled into believing that Beijing will actually do something about labour rights in China too. He calls the agreement a "strategic mistake" and said it was "ridiculous for the EU side to try to sell as a success commitments that Beijing has made on labour rights in China".[14] He certainly has a point, not least as the agreement merely stipulates that Beijing will "make continued and sustained efforts" to ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) workers' protection conventions. A commitment is no guarantee, and such a clause is essentially a free pass for China to drag its feet as long as it wants.[15] Now that the deal is signed, however, the EU and those member states who are to profit most from it – Germany above all – are likely to take as low a profile as possible on territorial disputes involving China in the years ahead, hiding behind the hackneyed phrase that economic engagement will favour and promote political engagement. In reality, this strategy has never worked with China in the last ten years or so, as EU policymakers and officials are well aware. Berlin calls its approach "change through trade". While this may sound visionary, it has no real meaning. Those who claim otherwise are typically unable to cite any empirical evidence that increased trade and economic

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[14] From the German Green Party cited in the aforementioned *Financial Times* article. Indeed, there is sample evidence that China 'employs' Uighur Muslims imprisoned in detention camps in the Chinese province of Xinjiang as forced labourers.

[15] See T. Mitchell and K. Mason, "Xi's Trade Deal with the EU Rings Alarm Bells in US", *Financial Times*, 2 January 2021.

engagement with China has ever encouraged, let alone obliged, China to address EU's theoretical concerns about human rights, the oppression of minorities, freedom of speech and expression (or lack thereof) etc.

The fact that the agreement was signed when Germany held the EU presidency might be a coincidence but is probably not. More than 50% of EU exports to China are from Germany and German multinational companies with a large presence in China have been pushing for the trade pact to be adopted for some time.[16] One can be excused for suspecting that Berlin had a very open ear to business' request to adopt the agreement in the final hours of its EU Presidency.

France Went First

Let us rewind to 2018, the year Paris published its Indo-Pacific strategy, emphasising France's right and indeed obligation to defend its sovereignty in the region, extending over the islands of Mayotte and La Réunion, the Scattered Islands and the French Southern and Antarctic Territories in the southern part of the Indian Ocean. France also has territories in New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia and Clipperton Island. In short, France considers itself a "resident power" and/or an "island state in the Indo-Pacific", though this idea is arguably a left-over of French colonialism. Roughly 1.6 million French citizens (or citizens with French passports) live in the Indo-Pacific region and about 8,000 French soldiers are permanently based there. However, France's relations with its overseas territories are anything but problem-free and some could well seek to free themselves from their former colonial masters in the future. French sovereignty is already being contested in New Caledonia and in French Polynesia, and both Mauritius and

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[16] German carmaker Volkswagen e.g. generates close to 50% of its revenue in China and German petrochemical giant BASF has in 2019 initiated a US$10 billion investment project in China.

Madagascar contest French sovereignty over Tromelin Island and the Scattered Islands respectively (both part of France's Southern and Antarctic Lands). The French Indo-Pacific strategy will therefore only be successful, Frederic Grare claims, "if France's overseas territories redefine their relations with the metropolis to become vectors of political, diplomatic, military, economic, and cultural influence". Given France's colonial past in the region and elsewhere, that is unlikely to happen. The country's overseas territories, Grare seems to suggest, need to align their policies with those of France, facilitate and promote them. Such an approach smells of French colonialism and will probably not meet with much enthusiasm in the overseas territories, to put it mildly.

France's Ministry of Defence points out that scientific and technological progress has led to new risks and sources of conflict in the region. Access to deep underwater resources, the expansion of military power projection capabilities, anti-access and area denial capabilities (meaning China's capabilities) as well as technologically more advanced cyberspace and satellite capabilities are all challenges for the region, Paris warns.[17] In order to meet them, the ministry is planning to expand France's strategic partnerships with countries like Australia, India, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Indonesia and Vietnam. Among others, over the last two-three years, Paris has stepped up multilateral cooperation in the region through the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) which, in addition to the ten ASEAN member countries, brings Japan, the U.S. and even China to the table to discuss regional security, though in a very informal manner, and usually leading to the issue of a very generic statement. (Of course, the argument can be made that it is better to talk to rather than talk about each other).

The French troops referred to above are stationed in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Djibouti. Six *Rafale* fighter jets

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[17] For details see also "France and Security in the Indo-Pacific", Ministère des Armes France, May 2019.

are also based in the UAE and complement four *Mirage-2000* fighters deployed in Djibouti. In the southern Indian Ocean, French troops are stationed on La Réunion and the Mayotte islands and are supported by 2 surveillance frigates with 1 helicopter each, 1 supply and support vessel, 2 patrol vessels and 2 tactical transport aircraft. In the Pacific Ocean, French forces are stationed in New Caledonia and French Polynesia and operate 2 surveillance frigates with 1 helicopter each, 3 patrol vessels, 2 multi-mission ships, 5 maritime surveillance aircraft, 4 tactical transport aircraft and 5 helicopters. Paris also has 18 resident and non-resident defence attachés stationed in 33 countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Finally, France is engaged with regional centres dedicated to the surveillance of maritime spaces and lines of communication in the Indo-Pacific. Paris has deployed three naval officers to the Information Fusion Center in Singapore (IFC), the Regional Centre for the Fusion of Maritime Information (CRFIM) in Madagascar and the Information Fusion Center – Indian Ocean Region located (IFC-IOR) in New Delhi.

Finally, throughout the year 2018 French President Emmanuel Macron gave a series of speeches on France's role in the Indo-Pacific Region.[18] In those speeches, he spoke of the challenge posed by China's military rise, Sino-U.S. rivalry and tensions and, probably most importantly, what he defined as an "axis of cooperation between Canberra, Delhi and Paris". In September 2019 then Macron positioned France as a "balancing power" in the Indo-Pacific, a positioning Beijing at the time was less than (very) happy about, to put it this way.[19] While this sounds good and forward-looking, in reality it does not mean that France is or will ever be such a power. It is in

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[18] See e.g. Emmanuel Macron, "Discours à Garden Island", Base Navale de Sydney; Élysée, 3 May 2018.

[19] For details see on China's reaction see e.g. N. Swanström, J. Panda, and M.N. Dugal, *Balancing China in the Indo-Pacific: France Joins Hands with India and Australia*, Issue Brief no.2, Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP), November 2020.

no way clear how France will "balance" between Washington and Beijing nor what such "balancing" would entail or lead to. There is certainly no evidence of France having performed such a "balancing" act in the recent past.

The German Indo-Pacific Guidelines: Talking the Talk without Walking the Walk

Back in November 2019, Berlin announced the deployment, in 2020, of a frigate to the Indian Ocean and potentially to the South China Sea.[20] Due to the global pandemic, however, that did not happen and the frigate Hamburg is now due to be deployed sometime in 2021. Berlin also revealed that the vessel could also be deployed to the South China Sea but has cautioned that it would not sail within 12 nautical miles (nm) of Chinese-claimed territories in the South China Sea. According to UNCLOS, all states have the right to establish what is defined as "territorial sea" extending up to 12 nautical miles from the coast.[21] Within this zone, coastal states exercise sovereignty over the air space above the sea, the seabed and the subsoil. By confirming that it would not sail within 12 nautical miles of Chinese-claimed islands in the South China Sea, Germany has *de facto* recognised Beijing's illegal territorial claims there, making the entire mission pointless through an excess of caution not to anger Beijing. In practice, Germany will limit itself to what is referred to as "innocent passage" in international territorial waters. UNCLOS defines that "passage is innocent so long as it is not prejudicial to the peace, good order or security of the coastal State. Such passage shall take place in conformity with this Convention and with other

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[20] See B. Müller, "Marine Plant die Entsendung einer Fregatte in den Indo-Pazifik", *Pivot Area*, 26 November 2019.

[21] The territorial sea extends to a limit of 12 nautical miles from the baseline of a coastal state.

rules of international law".[22] In dismissal of UNCLOS and international law, China, however, does not recognize and grant other countries the right to "innocent passage" through territorial waters in the South China Sea claimed by itself. Furthermore, and here it becomes more complicated and more controversial, by calling a passage "innocent", the passage implicitly acknowledges that the waters are part of what a state (here China) (since 2016 "illegal") claims is part of Chinese territory. In other words, while the intention is to make a point that the passage is taking place in international waters, China could see itself confirmed that the islands it claims are part of Chinese national territory and *de facto* acknowledged as such by those who exercise their right to "free passage" when sailing through those waters.

In the past, the U.S. navy has conducted so-called "Freedom of Navigation Operations" (FONOPs) in the South China Sea, challenging Chinese territorial claims that have been officially illegal since 2016. U.S. navy vessels have sailed inside the aforementioned 12-nautical-mile zones around Chinese-claimed islands, making Beijing less than happy. The German navy, on the other hand, has excluded conducting any such FONOPs in the South China Sea, stating instead that its frigate would navigate on a zig-zag course around the Chinese-defined 12 nautical miles zones. The U.S. navy has asked naval vessels of other countries to join U.S. FONOPs exercises, but so far without success. To be sure, this might change in future, possibly within the framework of the Quad. U.S., Japanese, Indian and Australian naval vessels conducting joint manoeuvres in disputed waters in the South China Sea might, to put it bluntly, remind Beijing that international law cannot be dismissed as irrelevant without consequences.

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[22] See United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 10 December 1982; https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_overview_convention.htm. For further details see e.g. S.O. Williams, "Maritime Security: The Concept of Innocent Passage", *The Maritime Executive*, 17 December 2014.

On the subject of the German contribution to freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific, it should not go unmentioned that, due to a lack of resources and ships that can be deployed to the Indo-Pacific, the German frigate Hamburg (if and when it will be deployed in 2021) will not be joined by any other German navy vessels. It will remain a symbolic contribution. It could, of course, become more than this if the German navy decides to cooperate with other navies in the Indo-Pacific. This, however, is a big "if".

In August 2020, when Germany issued its Indo-Pacific policy guidelines, they were hardly a big bang contribution to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.[23] They refer to increased security engagement in the region through port calls, joint exercises and the protection of global maritime trade routes. They also call for the "diversification of partnerships in the region beyond China" without, however, providing any details in that regard. Furthermore, they refer numerous times to an ASEAN-centric security architecture, to which Germany is planning to make additional contributions. Unfortunately, the record shows that ASEAN's relevance to conflicts or potential conflicts in the region, especially territorial ones, is extremely limited if not non-existent. The German guidelines also remain vague as to what exactly Germany's security contributions to the allegedly ASEAN-centric security architecture might or will be. Either way, any talk of ASEAN-centric security architecture must be seen against the background of how ASEAN has even failed to react to Chinese economic blackmailing of one of its own member states in the recent past. ASEAN's reaction to China suspending banana exports from the Philippines in June 2016 is a typical example. Beijing temporarily stopped importing bananas due to falsely asserted "health reasons" after a Philippine warship confronted Chinese fishermen in waters around the Scarborough Shoal. The shoal is cluster of

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[23] See "German-Europe-Asia. Shaping the 21st Century Together", Federal German Foreign Office, Berlin, August 2020.

small islets and coral reefs and is located roughly 140 miles off the northern coast of the Philippines – within a 200-nautical mile "exclusive economic zone" belonging to the Philippines according to UNCLOS.[24] China halted banana imports from the Philippines for six weeks but ASEAN neither reacted nor backed up the member state whose territorial integrity had been clearly violated. Germany in the meantime seems to have concluded that the Code of Conduct agreed between China and ASEAN (adopted in 2002) can effectively resolve tensions and territorial disputes in the South China Sea.[25] In reality, nothing could be further from the truth, if only because, as far as Beijing is concerned, there are no territorial disputes to be resolved. Roughly 95% of the South China Sea, Beijing has decided unilaterally, is part of Chinese sovereign territory as defined by the so-called Nine-Dash Line which dates back to 1949 (and the foundation of the PRC). Consequently, from a Chinese perspective, there is nothing be negotiated between China and ASEAN. Since Beijing has long concluded that there are effectively no disputes to resolve, it has decided all by itself ASEAN countries' territorial claims as obsolete.

The German guidelines emphasise multilateralism and talk about NATO expanding ties with countries like Japan and South Korea, though how exactly this should be done is not explained. The same applies to many of the policy initiatives listed in the guidelines' 70 pages. They envision partnerships with India and ASEAN numerous times (India gets mentioned 57 and ASEAN 66 times) but focus on non-traditional security issues and collaboration (as opposed hard/military security cooperation).

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[24] See A. Higgins, "In Philippines, Banana Growers Feel Effect of South China Sea Conflict", *The Washington Post*, 6 October 2012; next to the Philippines, the shoal is also claimed by Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan. Beijing for its parts insists that – based on Chinese maps dating back to the XIII century – the shoal (like pretty much the rest of the South China Sea) is part of – Chinese territory.

[25] For a very critical assessment of the German guidelines see also A. Fulda, *Germany's New Policy Paper for the Indo-Pacific: Some Change in Tone, Little in Substance*, RUSI Commentary, 11 September 2020.

Climate change, environmental security and public health are listed in this context. To sum up, the guidelines are so high on rhetoric and low on substance that Germany's priorities, at least under business-friendly Chancellor Angela Merkel, could hardly be clearer. Coby Goldberg of the Washington-based Center for a New American Security Asia-Pacific Security Program provides evidence in that respect.[26] On the occasion of the virtual EU-China Leaders' Meeting on 14 September 2020, Angela Merkel (on behalf of the EU Presidency) talked for 5 minutes about issues related to the then ongoing negotiations for the EU-China trade agreement but spent only 10 seconds on China's policies towards Hong Kong and minority rights (or lack thereof).

Conclusions: Not on the Same Page?

In a recent policy brief, Mathieu Duchâtel and Garima Mohan argue that France and Germany are pursuing Indo-Pacific strategies with contrasting focuses. While the French approach to the Indo-Pacific is, they argue, compatible with that of the U.S. (albeit the one adopted by President Donald Trump), the German approach is not (or not fully so).[27] Comparing the French Indo-Pacific policy strategy paper with the one issued by the U.S. State Department in November 2019, they conclude that the French and U.S. approaches are well aligned because they both prioritise a coercion-free and open Indo-Pacific and adherence to international law, including freedom of navigation in international territorial waters. The German strategy, they argue, reflects Berlin's refusal to align itself with the U.S. approach (again, the one adopted by Trump – we shall find out in 2021 whether the Biden approach differs). In this context,

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[26] C. Goldberg, "Germany's Indo-Pacific Vision: A New Reckoning With China or More Strategic Drift?", *The Diplomat*, 15 September 2020.

[27] M. Duchâtel and G. Mohan, *Franco-German Divergences in the Indo-Pacific: The Risk of Strategic Dilution*, Institut Montaigne, 30 October 2020.

Duchâtel and Mohan cite Berlin's repeated refusal to choose sides between Washington and China as (alleged) evidence for their conclusion. However, in recent years, especially since Trump launched his *de facto* trade war with China, not only German policymakers but those of other interested countries too have shown determination not to become entangled in U.S.-Sino conflicts over trade and security.

While the German guidelines fail to provide details on other possible bilateral or multilateral partnerships, the French explicitly propose expanding bilateral, trilateral and multilateral ties with Australia, India and Japan, as the authors point out. Of course, talking about expanding French bilateral or multilateral security ties in the Indo-Pacific is not tantamount to doing so, and it should never be forgotten that these guidelines are written by policymakers and bureaucrats. There are obviously no operational, let alone legal, obligations to follow up or implement what is written in them.

The German Indo-Pacific guidelines, Duchâtel and Mohan point out, are clear in their concern about China unilaterally altering the territorial status quo and accuse the country of "calling into question existing rules of the international order". In this context, they cite various disputes with Chinese involvement, such as the border dispute with India in the Himalayas. To counter Chinese policies and territorial expansionism, the German guidelines go on to call for closer cooperation between like-minded countries and democracies in the region. The authors wonder how this fits in with calling for a more "inclusive" Indo-Pacific and the possibility of working with China on selected areas such as climate change. This, however, is neither unusual nor exceptional: it is very much in line with the overall EU approach towards China, which is to express concerns (albeit to no avail and without convincing Beijing to modify any of its policies) about a steadily increasing number of Chinese regional policies while at the same time not abandoning the hope of cooperating with China in more "uncontroversial" areas like climate change.

Unfortunately for the EU, and all other countries dealing or negotiating with Beijing, from a Chinese perspective, the number of controversial and "sensitive" issues is growing constantly. In fact, almost everything on China's domestic and foreign policy agenda has become "sensitive" and Beijing warns those who want to make money with and in China to refrain from commenting, let alone criticising. The EU, at least so it seems, is playing ball with this: the aforementioned EU-China trade agreement is a reminder that Brussels and EU member states are prepared, as they have always been, to put geopolitical and geostrategic interests and ambitions on the back burner in return for problem-free access to the Chinese market and the country's 400 million middle-class consumers. Business over principle EU-style. What else can I say?

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations for the EU

This Report offers clear insights into the extent to which the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic may affect Asian security in the short term. It identifies trends current at the time of writing, when the global pandemic has not yet been defeated, that will be crucial to understanding the continent's post-pandemic security landscape. All contributors to this report in essence agree in placing systemic and geopolitical competition between China and the United States at the heart of these trends. Sars-CoV-2, which originated in China (though Beijing has yet to fully acknowledge this) has not increased bilateral cooperation under the auspices of and within the framework of the World Health Organization (WHO), at least not under Donald Trump's presidency. This is to a large extent because the WHO has more than once been accused (and not only by the U.S.) of having responded too slowly to the global pandemic, and of taking Chinese assurances that the country was able to contain the virus at face value. Records do indeed show that for months the WHO failed to critically verify or monitor Chinese data and crisis management. While for now it seems that Asia has been more successful and efficient in containing the virus, democratic and authoritarian states have used different methods and instruments to do so. The differences between the ways in which the virus has been contained in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan on the one hand and in China on the other are stark.

China's lockdowns in Wuhan and around the country enabled Beijing to declare a premature victory over the pandemic. In contrast, the U.S. under Trump could not have handled the crisis in a more disastrous fashion, though that did not prevent the president from playing a blame game and calling Sars-CoV-2 the "Chinese virus". Throughout this period, China has continued to build military bases on disputed islands in the South China Sea. In fact, Beijing has undoubtedly considered the ongoing global pandemic as an opportunity to speed up the construction of facilities on islands that, from a Chinese perspective, belong to China and China only. Washington under Trump has largely stood by while Beijing has been quick and efficient in filling the regional (and global) leadership vacuum left by a disastrous U.S. regime.

This Report also shows that Sars-CoV-2 has exacerbated the reliance of Asia's most fragile countries on China. Several countries in South and South-east Asia have become used to relying on China for their developmental needs since the Belt and Road Initiative was implemented. During the acute phase of the health crisis, these countries have also grown accustomed to Chinese aid and many have now assumed debts with Beijing to ensure a supply of vaccines in the future. As the post-Sars-CoV-2 economic crisis looms over the region, these nations may be drawn even more towards Chinese investments and developmental programmes in an effort to relaunch their economies. This overreliance introduces a serious risk that the region's balance of power might shift in the short term, leading to greater support and a more central role for China even within the framework of regional organisations like the "Association for South-East Asian Nations" (ASEAN). The recently adopted "Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership" is a case in point. The security ramifications of such an occurrence would be extensive, particularly in the South China Sea, where finding common ground between China's claims and those of other contestants has become more and more difficult: lines of maritime communication

may be radically modified to accommodate contrasting interests among regional powers.

In addition to the destabilising effect of China-U.S. competition and the risks associated with Beijing's growing regional influence and economic clout, other security issues, like the continuing isolation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and a new wave of Islamic terrorism in the region, will remain security challenges in post-Sars-CoV-2 Asia. In light of the above and based on the authors' contributions to this work, we can put forward the following recommendations for European Union policy on post-pandemic regional security in Asia.

a) Work towards a comprehensive EU policy for the Indo-Pacific region instead of relying on bilateral agreements

EU interest in the Indo-Pacific region has been confirmed by the negotiation and establishment of several bilateral free trade agreements with regional actors from Japan to Vietnam. At the same time, an increasing number of EU countries have been developing their own national Indo-Pacific strategies, signalling growing interest in the region at the national level too. However, the fragmented approach taken so far by EU institutions operating almost exclusively on a bilateral basis, aimed at engaging with countries in the region individually, has little chance of countering China's influence and impact. Therefore, if the EU is serious about becoming a real security actor in the region, it should seek not only to publish an EU Indo-Pacific strategy as early as possible in 2021 but should also work out and explain how such an EU strategy can be reconciled with and complemented by existing French, German and Dutch Indo-Pacific guidelines. Given the limited resources available, duplication must be avoided at all costs. Furthermore, an EU Indo-Pacific policy must have a clear and limited focus and must establish where its priorities lie and how policy and strategy proposals can be implemented on the ground. All too often, EU policy and strategy papers list far too many issues and areas that Brussels would like to address and tackle, usually

with very few resources and tools. This approach has never worked in the past and will not work in the future. Therefore, "less is more". Brussels needs to identify its priorities in the Indo-Pacific: EU policy guidelines must not be allowed to read like a "shopping list" of unresolved security issues in the region.

b) Identify the differences between the U.S. and the EU approaches to security in Asia

As mentioned above, all contributors to this report have identified U.S.-China competition and rivalry as the most pressing short-term issue for Asian security. As noted by a variety of observers, the counterbalance to Chinese power presented by the U.S.-EU alliance has been weakened by structural differences between the approaches of the two partners. While the EU has mainly been working bilaterally, the U.S. has attempted to build alliance-like frameworks, the "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue" being the latest example. The EU needs to address the contradictions that characterise these two approaches and find common ground if it is to foster a complementary regional policy. Furthermore, there would be nothing wrong with exploring the possibility of the EU moving towards the Quad either informally or even institutionally. The British are already considering the establishment of operational cooperation with the Quad and there is little doubt that the EU and the four Quad countries can refer to each other as "like-minded". This is imperative in light of the fact that – to put it bluntly – the gloves are off in the Indo-Pacific and China is challenging the status quo in territorial waters. While conflict is not inevitable, it is nonetheless time to deter threats to peace and stability in the region. Finally, Brussels and Washington must pick up the pieces of EU-U.S. cooperation in Asia that Donald Trump has smashed over the last four years, and collaborate again without the ill-fated threat of tariffs on European exports. The EU's adoption of a trade and investment agreement with China at the very end of last year might not therefore have been the most effective move. The fact that Beijing refers to the EU's readiness to sign such an agreement as "evidence

of strategic autonomy" does not improve the prospects for rapid improvement in EU-U.S. cooperation in Asia in general, and with regard to China in particular.

c) Build more EU-led dialogues in which policy discussions can be conducted outside China's sphere of influence

The Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) is a prime example of an EU-led multi-stakeholder initiative aimed at maintaining an independent framework within which policy debates can be conducted free from China's influence over multilateral institutions. Global institutions have become a strategic tool in China's rise, as the country's government envisions them as frameworks for the development of common rules tailored to China's national standards, especially in the technology sector. In order to contrast this trend, the EU needs to foster GPAI-like initiatives in the security domain too, especially involving those Asian partners most exposed to China's growing power in the wake of Sars-CoV-2.

d) Strengthen the EU humanitarian assistance network to support the DPRK in countering the health, food and economic crises

One of the main potential impacts of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic on Asian security concerns North Korea. The health emergency and restrictions to international mobility have further restricted access to the DPRK. The country therefore risks becoming even more isolated from the international community (if that is at all possible) and focusing exclusively on nuclear militarisation. Since the mid-1990s, the EU has been providing aid to selected communities in the DPRK, especially with regard to food security. The EU should strengthen the network through which European teams traditionally offer humanitarian assistance to North Korea in order to help the country respond to the dual effects of economic sanctions and the pandemic-driven health and economic crises. By doing so, the EU may succeed in limiting DPRK's isolation.

e) Support national digital literacy programmes in South and South-east Asia to counter Islamic radicalisation

Sars-CoV-2 has forced Asia and the world into a digitalisation drive. In the case of South and South-east Asia, this process has occurred in countries experiencing rising levels of Islamic terrorism and political violence. Given the connection between digitalisation, the online diffusion of violent extremism and youth radicalisation, digital literacy programmes need to be included in national recovery strategies. The EU's Development Cooperation Instrument, which already finances the Regional Multiannual Indicative Programme for Asia and the Erasmus+ programme, could be employed to expand EU-Asia cooperation in higher education and to devise programmes specifically aimed at offering young people viable tools for navigating a Sars-CoV-2-inspired digital world.

To conclude, the main impact of Sars-CoV-2 on security in Asia has been to re-focus the spotlight on the connection between traditional and non-traditional security in the region. While this issue has long characterised Asia, the pandemic has brought it to the fore. Indeed, traditional security is bound to become ever more closely tied to other vectors of human security in the short run, leading to a shift in the concepts and paradigms that have distinguished the continent until now.

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