

ASIA TRENDS

KEY INSIGHTS & ANALYSES - L'ASIE À LA SOURCE



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SPECIAL ISSUE – ASIA'S SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONAL EQUILIBRIUM
APEC VIETNAM SUMMIT 2017

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SPECIAL ISSUE – ASIA'S SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONAL EQUILIBRIUM APEC VIETNAM SUMMIT 2017

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THE CHINA FACTOR IN THE VIETNAMESE POLITICS

Benoît de Tréglodé

The Chinese issue is at the heart of Vietnamese domestic and foreign policy. Vietnam has always had an emotional relationship with China, even before the economic and strategic dimensions of the bilateral relationship dominated. With China, Vietnam is dealing with a complicated and constrained historical relationship. Even regarding the current tensions in the South China Sea, the SRV has to maintain a policy of balance; the Vietnamese do not have the opportunity of choosing between Beijing and Washington.

CHINA'S NAVAL POWER AND THE CHANGING ASIA PACIFIC EQUILIBRIUM

Yves-Heng Lim

Over the last two decades, Chinese naval forces have undergone a rapid modernization, which has turned the PLA Navy into a modern, powerful force in the Western Pacific. This rise of China's naval power fundamentally alters the balance of power in the region, as Peking acquires the means to impose its dominance over the near seas, creating a sense of vulnerability among regional players and fueling the risk of a possible naval arms race.

TOWARDS GROWING MILITARY CYBER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Candice Tran Dai

There is currently an ongoing global trend to leverage cyber capabilities as a force multiplier for physical military forces and as a build-up against cyber threats and cyber insecurity. The Asia-Pacific region is no exception to this growing trend, and this article looks specifically at military cyber developments in the Asia-Pacific Region. The first section gives an overview of the evolution of the policy and

strategy of several countries in the region, laying out the foundations for a deeper involvement of the military in cyberspace. The second section replaces this current trend within the regional security context of the region and argues that the lack of acknowledged cyber norms may be challenging as the countries in the region do not have a common framework for how, why, and when to use proactive – if not offensive – military cyber capability.

ASEAN AND SECURITY ISSUES:
DESTABILIZING FOR THE ANALYSIS,
STABILIZING FOR THE SOUTHEAST ASIANS
Eric Frécon

Although ASEAN is turning 50, the Association has not experienced any middle-life crisis. The feeling is that it is only now getting to a mature age. Indeed, commentators enjoy criticising the weak achievements – and the key impediments – regarding the way ASEAN deals with both traditional (mainly in South China Sea) and non-traditional security (mainly the Rohingyas crisis and the Islamist terrorism). However, in the long term, there will be a path to optimism, due to the specificities of regional cooperation. To appreciate this very slow tendency, it takes a larger perspective, a diversity of sources, and to understand the historical and pragmatic point(s) of view of the member States, especially regarding China.

THE INDIA-JAPAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP:
IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL SECURITY
Isabelle Saint-Mézard

On the occasion of their fourth summit meeting, held on 13-14 September 2017, Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Narendra

Modi confirmed their resolve to work together towards ensuring peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region. To this end, Tokyo and New Delhi have recently engaged in an ambitious, multi-layered partnership, aimed at promoting bilateral and multilateral defence cooperation, as well as critical infrastructure in India and the larger Indian Ocean Region.

AMERICA WHERE? THE TRUMP
ADMINISTRATION'S FLEDGING ASIA
STRATEGY

Ashley Townshend

Donald Trump's "America first" approach to foreign policy has fueled anxieties across the Indo-Pacific about a US retreat from regional leadership. While the administration remains committed to the region, its attitude towards allies, the rebalance, China, and Asia's liberal international order risk making America's strategic presence more brittle. In the absence of an integrated Asia strategy, this dynamic will continue.

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ROLE IN
REGIONAL SECURITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC
Yeo Lay Hwee

The European Union (EU), despite its strong economic presence in the Asia-Pacific, has been relatively absent with regards to its security role. Trade and investment have been key factors in shaping EU-Asia relations. However, as the security environment in the Asia Pacific becomes far more complex with growing strategic competition, the EU needs to become more aware of the security dynamics, and take on a more proactive role in the Asia-Pacific and strengthen its security engagement in order to secure its interest.

EDITORIAL

Current security trends across Asia are at the center of this autumn's international debates. The accelerating pace of North Korea's nuclear and missile programs is undoubtedly the most serious and pressing issue the region is facing. Between 3 July and 14 September 2017, the North Korean regime launched five missiles, including an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that flew over Japan, leading many observers to conclude that the various strategies adopted up to now have been a failure : United Nations Security Council's sanctions imposed on North Korean trade and companies, United States' military intimidations and South Korea diplomatic overtures have all been unable to convince Pyongyang to change course. As a result, tensions have remained very high. On the eve of his visit to South Korea and China, sticking to this harsh rhetoric, President Trump declared to Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe: "[the] era of strategic patience is over".

A range of other intra-regional critical tensions have fuelled deep concerns, including a Sino-Indian military border standoff in the Doklam area between June and the end of August, ongoing disputes in the South China Sea, and Taiwan-PRC cross-strait relations. Although an open military conflict appears for the moment inconceivable and tensions generally ease up ahead of major international meetings like the ASEAN Summit in July or the BRICS Summit in September, the security situation has remained fragile, since the main issues remain unsolved. Moreover, other traditional and non-traditional security issues, such as cyberattacks, terrorism, piracy, environmental disasters or ethnic tensions, are far from having receded, and constitute additional sources of instability in the region.

Given that large spectrum of regional uncertainties, some analysts have lamented a general erosion of common political and strategical trust among Asian states and the weaknesses of regional cooperation and security mechanisms. The difficulty to forge a strong consensus around common security norms is often seen as the result of asymmetrical relations between the regional actors, and a regional tendency to favour bilateral ties and informal channels of dialogue. Regional actors are also facing increasing pressure from a changing regional environment characterized by a China's rise and a

general American retrenchment. China's economic and military rise is more and more perceived as threatening the "rules-based order", promoted by the US and its allies. Many actors are increasingly dependent on China economically, continue to rely on the US for their security. Yet, they are engaged in various kinds of hedging strategies aimed at mitigating the risks and better protecting their interests. The evolution by the Trump Administration of a more narrowly self-interested policy also provides opportunities for middle regional powers to assume a bigger role and perhaps greater responsibilities in the region.

At first glance, the current Asian regional security environment appears as relatively bleak. Nonetheless, there are a few encouraging signs of growing cooperation. Firstly, some of the recent multilateral meetings have borne some fruits. For example, China and ASEAN ministers have adopted in August 2017 a framework for a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. Although the framework's effectiveness is questionable for the future (as the document is not legally binding), it represents a step forward in promoting dialogue and managing tensions in the South China Sea issue.

Secondly, the regional balance of power may not have changed as dramatically as some think. The ambiguity of the American strategy has been the subject of intense debates, some observers going as far as saying that the US policy might turn more interventionist than expected in the future. In that respect, President Trump's

visit to Asia from November 3 to 14, a visit that includes Japan, South Korea, China, Vietnam and the Philippines, has triggered high expectations, as many commentators regard it as an opportunity for the US to strengthen its security partnerships in Asia and further develop the Indo-Pacific strategy.¹ Moreover, the recent nomination of Randall G. Schriver as Assistant Secretary of Defense in charge of Asian and Pacific Affairs, has been particularly welcomed by observers. In picking up an expert in international business development and strategies in Asia, as well as someone known for his pro Taiwan inclination, the Trump administration may have allowed itself to move towards a more consistent Asia's strategy.

Thirdly, how powerful and threatening China is now? Obviously, China's ambitious military modernization plan and increased combat capabilities, as well as its recent build-up of artificial islands in South China Sea have stoked fears about the adoption by this country of a more aggressive strategic posture which could dramatically alter the regional stability. Xi Jinping's bombastic speech on the need for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to win wars at the opening of the 19th CCP Congress on October 18 has deepened these concerns. Some observers have even jumped to the conclusion that China is now ready to launch an armed conflict to gain dominance over the Asian Seas.

¹ See for instance : Richard Fontaine, « Trump's Asia Security Dilemma », *The National Interest*, 25 October 2017, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/trumps-asian-security-dilemma-22905>.

Nonetheless, this pessimistic scenario tends to overlook that such moves would represent huge risks for China. The Chinese government appears to be willing, instead, to continue to give priority to an active regional diplomacy that proposes so-called “win-win” solutions and to boost its own “stabilising” role in Asia. Moreover, any open conflict would dramatically erode China’s influence and great power’s image, as well as jeopardize the success of its Belt and Road Initiative.

The international community’s expectations both from Trump’s visit to Asia and the coming APEC summit are particularly high. Taking place in Da Nang City, Vietnam from 5 November to 11 November 2017, the APEC Economic Leaders’ Week could provide new cooperation and dialogue opportunities. The theme of this year’s APEC meeting is “Creating new dynamism, fostering a shared future”, indicating perhaps that while regional economic integration remains its core objective, the APEC can also contribute to regional stability.

This special issue of *Asia Trends* includes a contribution by Mr. Bui Thanh Son, Standing Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and seven articles, written by a range of international experts in geopolitical and strategic issues in Asia. These articles provide insights on some of the key dynamics of the Asia-Pacific region. This special issue does not pretend to be exhaustive, as its thematic scope is vast. For instance, the North Korean nuclear crisis, which is already the

subject of many relevant papers, as well as the role of some important actors in the region and other security issues such as environmental security or terrorism, are not covered in the issue.² However, this special issue addresses many important regional themes.

In his contribution, Mr. Bui Thanh Son, promotes the diplomatic ambitions of his country, highlighting the active role of Vietnam in contributing to ASEAN community building and deeper international integration in national defence and security.

Vietnamese strategy cannot be understood without taking into account what the French researcher Benoît de Tréglodé calls “the China factor” in the first article of this issue. The author explains that Vietnam has no choice but to maintain a balanced policy between China and the United States. While developing a diplomacy of multilateral openness and renewing its relationship with the US, Hanoi has recently reinforced his ties with Beijing, widening its cooperation areas with this capital – especially in the non-traditional security field – and outside of multilateral frameworks. Although the South China Sea dispute and Vietnam’s partnership with US remain a source of tensions, Sino-Vietnamese relations have on the whole improved. This evolution also confirms China’s dominant position in the South Asian Seas, as Vietnam has

² See the two last issues of *Asia Trends* : « The terrorism challenge », *Asia Trends*, n°1, Spring 2017 ; « Disaster risks management in Asia », *Asia Trends*, n°2, Autumn 2017.

de facto very little room for manoeuvre on the issue.

China's dominant position has fuelled deep concerns in terms of risks of military escalation. As Yves-Heng Lim demonstrates, the reinforcement of People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy combat capabilities, reflected in the recent development of power-projection platforms, unveils Beijing's ambitions to gain dominance over the East Asia Seas and also prevent other countries' naval power projection in the Western Pacific and in the Eastern Indian Seas. Although this development does not bring a dramatic change in the local balance of power, which already tips in China's favour, it equips China with an expanded range of deterrence options, increasing, for some observers, the risk of an arms race. However, it should be kept in mind that China's naval modernization is still facing important challenges. While the technical gap with its American counterpart may be gradually narrowed, the Chinese Navy still suffers from low force training and a lack of systems' integration. More fundamentally, an escalation of military tensions would represent a very risky option that Beijing does not seem to be willing to contemplate.

Military developments in the cyber security sector have also raised concerns. Cyberspace is becoming an essential tool of state power competition, and the Asia-Pacific region is no exception in the growing global trend of an increased militarization of cyberspace, as Candice Tran Dai shows. Deep heterogeneities between

states in terms of cyber maturity and high level of strategic distrust among regional actors result in a lack of acknowledged cyber norms and common framework to use military cyber capabilities in the region. However, many actors have expressed a willingness to work on regional norms, and efforts have continued to be made towards confidence-building measures and the establishment of a common framework in the cyber security field.

Eric Frécon also highlights the difficulties to create a regional order at the multilateral level, questioning ASEAN's ability to deal with security challenges and conciliate heterogeneous views and the national defence strategies of different actors. Indeed, the Rohingyas crisis or the South China Sea issue have revealed a high level of disunity between ASEAN members. Southeast Asian countries have preferred to rely on tools other than ASEAN, like Joint development agreements and what the author calls "the temptation to rely on a third actor" to deal with both traditional and non-traditional security issues. Nonetheless, the ASEAN dialogue could prove very fruitful in the future, as the organization appears more and more essential to frame the current trends of the region.

Bilateral relations still seem dominant in the regional architecture of cooperation in security issues. The India-Japan strategic relationship, analysed by Isabelle Saint-Mézard, provides an interesting example. Both countries have aligned their Indo-Pacific strategy to maintain a peaceful regional order in response to strategic uncertainties and security challenges,

especially China's growing assertiveness. They have increased their interactions in many strategic fields, such as naval forces and defence technology and equipment, but also in promoting their own connectivity plans in the region outside China's Belt and Road Initiative framework. Facing the growing uncertainty of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, they are also exploring the possibilities of filling the strategic void that Trump's administration could possibly leave.

In his article, Ashley Townshend blames the Trump Administration's inconsistent approach to Asian core security issues, an approach that so far has failed to reassure the regional actors about US strategic objectives in the region. In his opinion, one of the main problems is the Trump Administration's failure to articulate an integrated regional strategy. This failure stems from both a lack of general strategic vision and policy fluctuations due to the coexistence of conflicting ideological trends in the US Administration. Although Trump has rhetorically abandoned Obama's "rebalance to Asia", he has actually enhanced the military facet of this strategy. But continuous fluctuations between transactional and resolute policies, especially with China, and the lack of coordination in the Trump Administration's Indo-Pacific policy is dramatically affecting American presence in the region.

The European Union (EU) is also having difficulties articulating a coherent security and defence Asian policy, as Yeo Lay Hwee suggests in the last article of this

special issue. The EU has developed very strong economic ties with Asia. It has also established dialogue mechanisms with the region, such as the Asia Europe Forum meeting or ASEAN regional forum (ARF). Nevertheless, the EU seems to remain unable to adopt a common Asian security policy. As a result, it is not considered nor treated as an important security actor in Asia. For the time being, the EU tends to focus more on issues of environmental security, humanitarian assistance or disaster relief. In addition, most EU-Asia security dialogues and cooperation schemes are very broad and have remained at the stage of information exchange. The author therefore urges the EU to pay more attention to hard securities issues in Asia through a more active participation in various ASEAN-led security architecture forums, as its prosperity is directly linked with Asian security and stability.

Camille Liffra | Chief Editor

Prof. Jean-Pierre Cabestan | Associate Fellow
at Asia Centre

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION

VIET NAM'S INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATION AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEACE, COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC | **BUI THANH SON**

During these days, Viet Nam and other 20 members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) are together looking towards one of the most awaited events of the year 2017: The APEC Economic Leaders' Week in November 2017 in Da Nang City, under the theme of "Creating new dynamism, fostering a shared future". 2017 is also a year of many milestones in Viet Nam's international integration over the past decades. In addition to the honor of hosting APEC for the second time, Viet Nam also celebrates the 40th anniversary of its accession to the United Nations (1977-2017) and along with other members of ASEAN commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Association (1967-2017). Having made great efforts with enormous achievements throughout the thirty years of reform and international integration, Viet Nam has become an inseparable part of peace, cooperation and development in the Asia-Pacific.

From the very first days of independence, the earliest documents related to the guiding principle and foreign policy of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam have espoused the spirit of "being a friend to all countries" and international integration. President Ho Chi Minh announced on a number of occasions that "There is only one thing about the Government's foreign policy, and that is to be friendly to all democratic countries in the world for the sake of preserving peace". In the telegram addressed to the United Nations in December 1946, he asserted

that “Viet Nam stands ready to carry out a policy of openness and cooperation in all areas ... The Vietnamese State stands ready to participate in every international economic cooperation organization led by the United Nations.”

However, Viet Nam's foreign affairs and international integration encountered numerous difficulties and obstacles for quite a long time due to historical circumstances, mainly wars and bi-polar confrontation. It was not until the late 1980s that Viet Nam was finally able to advance the policy of international integration that President Ho Chi Minh had long expressed in his ahead – of- the -time vision.

Under the guiding principle of multi-lateralizing and diversifying foreign relations set out following the introduction of *Doi Moi* (reform) Viet Nam has established diplomatic relations with 187 out of 193 United Nations member states, including strategic and comprehensive partnerships with nearly 30 countries.

From a multilateral diplomacy standpoint, few would expect that in a very short time, Viet Nam has risen to the occasion and established itself as an active member of more than 70 regional and international organizations. Immediately following its accession to ASEAN in 1995, Viet Nam played an active role in encouraging the Association to admit Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, thus realizing the dream of a big family consisting of the ten Southeast Asian countries. Having identified ASEAN the top priority in its foreign policy, Viet Nam undertook to “work together with ASEAN

countries to build the Southeast Asia into a region of peace, stability, cooperation and prosperous development”. Within ASEAN, despite being a late-comer, Viet Nam has managed to be an early finisher in many important criteria. Viet Nam is one of the ASEAN countries attaining the highest ratio of ASEAN Community building measures, at 93.5% versus the 90.3% average of all ASEAN member states.

The expansion of ASEAN to include all ten members, initiated by the “push” bearing the name Viet Nam in 1995, helped put an end to the division and confrontation that prolonged throughout the Cold War time in Southeast Asia. After the end of the Cold War, while many regions are still troubled by instability or even conflict, Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific as a whole has become a beacon of light in the world for its peace and prosperity. ASEAN has become one of the most successful regional organizations in the world, and been able to truly play a central role in the evolving regional architecture. These successes has been significantly attributable to Viet Nam's active contributions, particularly its chairmanship of ASEAN during the years 1998 and 2010.

From an economic perspective, compared to 1986 when Vietnamese commodities were only present in 33 markets, today Vietnamese exports can be found in more than 230 countries and territories. Following thirty years of *Doi Moi* reform, Viet Nam's GDP soared thirty-one folds. Viet Nam has to date attracted some 24,000 foreign direct investment (FDI) projects with a total registered capital exceeding

US\$ 307 billion. Viet Nam has also invested in 1,200 projects in 70 countries and territories worth US\$ 21.4 billion. Following the global crisis of 2008-2009, while the global economy and major economies have been recovering slowly, Viet Nam has managed to maintain a strong growth rate, double that of the world's average. Trade turnover between Viet Nam and major partners – China, the United States, Japan, Republic of Korea and the EU has been increasing steadily year on year. Viet Nam rose to the top place in ASEAN in terms of exporting into the United States market in 2014 and established itself as the largest trading partner of China in ASEAN in 2016.

These achievements have not only transformed the country's physiognomy, but also enabled Viet Nam to make significant contributions to the regional and global peace, cooperation and development. In agriculture alone, from being a food importer, Viet Nam has grown to become the world's second largest rice exporter, not only serving the domestic demand but also actively contributing to ensuring the global food security. The "Made in Viet Nam" rice has been available in many countries such as China, Indonesia and the Philippines as well as other countries in Africa and the Middle East. In APEC 2017, one of the four priorities put forth by Viet Nam, which is to enhancing food security and sustainable agriculture in response to climate change, has garnered the attention and support of not only APEC members but also other countries in the region.

By having officially joined 12 FTAs and negotiating four others, Viet Nam has now

placed itself at the focal point of the regional economic integration network comprising 56 partners, including 15 G-20 members, and accounting for nearly 90% of the global GDP and over 80% of the world's trade turnover. Amidst the emergence of protectionism around the globe, Viet Nam's efforts to join hands with other APEC member economies to maintain and boost the momentum for economic connectivity and regional integration have been recognized and highly valued by international friends. It is no coincidence that Viet Nam became the first APEC host to be invited to attend all major G20 meetings in 2017 and has been entrusted to host the 2018 World Economic Forum on ASEAN (WEF ASEAN).

At the same time, the process of international integration in national defense and security has also earned the country a higher status, enabling it to contribute further to maintaining international peace and security. In 2014, for the first time, Viet Nam participated in the United Nations' peacekeeping operations. Vietnamese peacekeepers in the United Nations Peacekeeping Missions have set foot on trouble spots in African countries like South Sudan and the Central African Republic. At important fora such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), the Shangri-La Dialogue, the Asia Future Conference, the World Economic Forum (WEF) on East Asia, the strategic views and visions of Viet Nam on maintaining peace, stability and development in the region are well received and actively supported by international friends. Viet Nam has also become a pioneer in Southeast Asia by

participating and ratifying seven out of the nine key UN conventions on human rights, joining the Convention on the Law of the Non – Navigational Uses of International Watercourses, and officially signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Viet Nam has made significant contributions during its membership of key United Nations agencies such as the UN Security Council for the 2008 – 2009 term, the Board of Governors for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for the 2013 – 2015 term, the UN Human Rights Council for the 2014 – 2016 term, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for the 2016 – 2018 term and the 2015 – 2019 UNESCO Executive Board. It can be said that these proactive and determined steps have demonstrated Viet Nam's sense of responsibility to strive for a brighter future of the region and the world.

Viet Nam's new standing and power after 30 years of reforms, as well as the success in international integration, have paved the way for the country to reach new heights. In the coming time, Viet Nam will not only strive to become a strong, fair, democratic and advanced country with prosperous people, but also actively contribute to resolving regional and global challenges. In the short term, the success of APEC Viet Nam 2017 will be another practical and meaningful contribution to maintaining the regional momentum for integration and cooperation for mutual benefits. In the long term, Viet Nam will continue to work together with other ASEAN member states to build a strong and united ASEAN

Community that plays a central role in the region, and promote the United Nations' centrality in addressing global challenges. With deepened friendship and cooperation with partners and friends, Viet Nam has every reason to believe in a brighter future for the country as well as peace, cooperation and development in the region and the world.

1

THE CHINA FACTOR IN THE VIETNAMESE POLITICS | **BENOÎT DE TRÉGLODÉ**

The Chinese issue is at the heart of Vietnamese domestic and foreign policy. With China, Vietnam is dealing with a complicated and constrained historical relationship. Even regarding the current tensions in the South China Sea, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) has to maintain a policy of balance, between Beijing and Washington. Vietnam has always had an emotional relationship with China. Beijing's growing role on the international scene in the last two decades has led Hanoi to develop a diplomacy of multilateral openness and, within this framework, to renew its relationship with the United States (all under China's watchful eye). In keeping with its policy of balance between the major powers, Vietnam continues to manage its foreign policy in the light of the future of its relationship with Beijing. Hanoi's concern is the attitude of Washington towards the South China Sea (Eastern Sea or *Biển Đông* in Vietnamese). At the same time, Hanoi is willing to implement new Defense and Security cooperations with Beijing. Following the leadership of Nguyễn Tấn Dũng (Prime Minister from 2006 to 2016) who welcomed the Asian shift in Obama's foreign policy, the new triumvirate (Président Trần Đại Quang, General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng and the Prime Minister Nguyễn Xuân Phúc) is more cautious than ever that its desire for good relations with the US and with China will continue to prevent it from leaving the ambiguity of muddied waters. Hanoi systematically keeps China informed of its policy in order

to prevent its northern neighbour from speculating about a global reorientation of its alliances, which could be perceived as hostile by China.¹

SRV's pragmatism and prudence

China did not hide its satisfaction at the closing of the 12th VCP Congress (January 2016) which brought to an end the era of Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. As usual in Vietnam, no leader is solidly "pro China" or "pro US". There are, however, significant differences in the strategies to be adopted to balance China and the United States. These appear as the main dividing line in the factional divisions structuring the political and administrative apparatus. The most conservative leaders tend to believe that the primacy of a relationship with China can help defuse crises, and that from this point of view, the approach chosen by the former Prime Minister was counterproductive for Vietnam. Architect of his country's entry into the WTO (2007) and the Transpacific Partnership (TPP), former Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung had initially sought a balance between China and the United States during his first mandate. However, during his second term, he forged closer ties with the West, and in particular the US, (especially following the crisis surrounding the Chinese oil rig Haiyang Shiyou 981 in May/June 2014).²

¹ « Tướng Hoàng nói về ông Trump và trật tự thế giới » (Colonel Huang speaks about Donald Trump and the world order), BBC, 3 February 2017.

² In January 2014, China's state-owned China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) moved an exploratory oil rig, Haiyang Shiyou 981 (HD-

In Vietnam, the question still persists about the weight of the Chinese influence on the political circles; if, indeed, it is so weighty as assumed.³ Nguyen Tan Dung had been outspoken in his criticism of China and has long seen the TPP not just as a trade agreement but as a strategic tool to keep the United States engaged in Southeast Asia. Ideologically closer to Beijing, and perhaps less ready for confrontation than his predecessor, current PM Nguyen Phú Trọng (without disapproving of the TPP and the rapprochement with Washington) has nevertheless chosen not to reinforce the links with China, insisting on a common history and socialist solidarity. Whereas under Nguyen Tan Dung, there were a growing number of economic technocrats in the Politburo ready to cope with the West, the VCP Secretary General Nguyễn Phú Trọng stated that in Vietnam the political control of the system by the party is the regime's first priority.

Drawing its strength from its institutional proximity to Vietnam, China has an excellent knowledge of Vietnamese political affairs. If the political leadership in Hanoi is closer to China, it is also because the history of the Sino-Vietnamese

981), worth an estimated \$1 billion, into waters within Vietnam's exclusive economic zone. The incident sparked a major bilateral crisis between the two countries. The event marked the start of China's attempts to change the status quo in the South China Sea by committing its civilian and non-military assets to disputed areas.

³ Trọng Nghĩa, « Nhân tố Trung Quốc vẫn tác động đến Đại hội Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam » (The Chinese factor still has an impact on the VCP congress), RFI (*tiếng việt*), 18 September 2015.

relationship is nurtured by a common past, questions of memory, popular culture and the political reflexes stemming from a "tributary system" that has proved its worth over the centuries, even to the point of tackling the taboos of a common history. Hanoi and Beijing, for instance, had always banned any commemoration of the February 1979 war, a joint attempt to erase a painful chapter in the history of the two communist countries. However, in 2017, a number of state-controlled media (*Thanh Nien, VietnamNet and VnExpress*) were allowed to discuss the conflict, although the country's major newspapers, including the *Nhân dân* (PCV organ), did not mention the anniversary. This particular calendar, however, corresponds to the one chosen by Xi Jinping to remind Vietnamese that China is ready to intervene in the markets to moderate the economic asymmetry between the two countries. In this, Beijing wishes to show its goodwill in order to turn the page on the painful episodes of a common history, a point on which Vietnamese people have difficulty living the use of this emotional lever by Chinese diplomacy.

Between China and Hanoi, it is clear that the preponderance of party-to-party relations (CCP-VCP) determines a different type of relations than state-to-state relations. In short, since the 12th VCP Congress held in Hanoi in January 2016, the relationship with Hanoi is seen as improving for the Chinese : official visits followed one another, on the ground, border cooperation was strengthened, especially in the field of non-traditional security and, above all, cooperation

areas were widened. Ultimately, although concerns remain about the strength of the bilateral relationship in terms of maritime disputes in the South China Sea,⁴ few people are genuinely concerned about open conflict. In this context, China is not worried that Vietnam will rebalance its relations with the United States. Thus, when Washington announced in May 2016 the lifting of its arms embargo with Vietnam, Beijing did not even bother to comment the event. It is of course not certain that the Chinese government will have the same appreciation if the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) buys large pieces of war material from the Americans (combat aircraft, tanks, missile defence systems, etc.). However, some will say that the lack of a formal response from Beijing is primarily linked to its new objectives in the field of defence cooperation with Vietnam, within the framework of its overall strategic partnership. Despite their maritime disputes, China understands Vietnam's need to modernize its military apparatus. In Chinese military circles, the issue of arms and military equipment sales in Vietnam is no longer a taboo issue, but also appears to be a new objective of the PRC in its relations with South-East Asian countries. This approach is intended to demonstrate the degree of confidence that characterizes China's ambitious

⁴ In June 2017, senior military officials from the two countries would have held a "fence-mending gathering" along the sino-vietnamese border. At the last minute the meeting was cancelled. It comes after a violent protest from the vietnamese government against Beijing as China continues to build artificial islands in the South China Sea, where the Chinese seek to expand their military influence at a time of uncertainty over President Trump's policies in the region.

new security architecture project in Asia currently discuss by its diplomats. Until now, China has sold few weapons to its neighbours, although this is changing, as evidenced by China's recent contracts in 2016 and 2017 with Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines. In Vietnam, the arms market is controlled by Russian interests (95%), but Beijing — convinced of the growing quality of its equipment and its advantages in terms of price interoperability and above all its political non-interference (as long as China's interests are not directly at stake) — has opened defence ministry discussions with Hanoi.

New areas of Sino-Vietnamese cooperation despite the tensions in the South China Sea

The alternation between the phases of tension, negotiations and diplomatic progress is a constant feature of relations between the two neighbouring states. The decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration on 12 July 2016 surprised the Vietnamese authorities. Such a strong position was unexpected in Hanoi. After an initial reaction that didn't hide a certain enthusiasm for the court's decision, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman, Hanoi tempered its position at Beijing's request. The episode shows Vietnamese people's limited room for manoeuvre on the issue. The SRV questioned its real need to go further in its protests. Hanoi was already getting a lot, including condemnation of the Chinese Nine-Dash line. Furthermore, in substance, the "determination of the status of emerging features" determined by the court, which does not give any

legal status to the island, has also direct and complicated consequences for Vietnam's own maritime interests in the area. The first question for the Vietnamese is therefore whether Beijing's ambitions could be crowned with success in the South China Sea if the United States withdraws gradually from the region. Recognizing the benefits to China of this period of uncertainty, China is working to negotiate quickly on the implementation of a Code of Conduct (COC). In August 2017, the Foreign ministers from South-East Asia and China gathered in the Philippines adopted the COC framework. But although Southeast Asian nations and China agreed to it, the outline's failure to make the pact legally binding and to have a resolution mechanism will made its effectiveness really questionable for the future. At this stage, we find the usual twofold step of Chinese diplomacy. On the one hand, the threats, with the opening at the end of December 2016 of regular civil airlines to Phú Lâm airport in the Paracels archipelago, hiding its military activities and the installation of missiles on the two disputed archipelagos; and on the other hand, the promise made to the ASEAN countries to negotiate as soon as possible a joint security framework. Beijing wants to move quickly and take the initiative, while remaining firm.

In the uncertain context of the American presidency, China is leading its administration to set up new types of instruments of affirmation of power, built around a multitude of sectoral cooperation with the countries of Southeast Asia. The Belt and Road Initiative provides an

essential leverage and framework for this cooperation. In 2017, China initiated a series of meetings to promote the initiative and its globalisation strategy. Cooperation mechanisms cover all sectors, fishing and hydrocarbons, but also in the field of safety (joint exercises between maritime police and coastguards) and especially in the environment (protection of corals, endangered animal species, etc.).⁵ First, this "cooperation diplomacy" is a way for China to re-launch its cooperative discourse with Vietnam on maritime security, as part of its "peripheral diplomacy" developed by its government since the 1990s. It is also an opportunity for the Chinese to test instruments of dialogue and gauge the resilience of its partners in the region, while mitigating the risks of disputes in the region generated by the Arbitration. Following Gulf of Tonkin agreement signed in 2000, China encourages the Vietnamese to discuss in a new maritime space outside the contested waters of the Paracels at the mouth of the Tonkin, and beyond. In September 2017, a Vietnam-China working group convened its eighth round of talks in Beijing, China, to discuss the sea area beyond the mouth of the Gulf of Tonkin, pledging to follow shared common perceptions agreed on by the two countries' leaders, including an agreement on basic principles guiding the settlement of sea-related issues towards demarcation and development cooperation in the area. The stakes are high and Xi Jinping regularly puts

forward China's "goodwill" when he is visiting South east Asia countries.⁶ If China accepts the idea of negotiating with Vietnam on new marine areas in the mouth of Tonkin, just a short distance from the contested waters of the Paracels, should it not be seen as proof of its goodwill towards its partners in South-East Asia? Beijing has invited Vietnam to use its research centres, NGOs and sports clubs, when its usual administrations (MOFA, MOD, etc.) are no longer able to hold the dialogue due to too deep political and historical divergences. China's control of the South-East Asian seas is known to be based not only on its military navy, but on a strategy that favours the use of civilian assets (coastguard, police agencies, militia and fishing vessels) rather than its traditional regalian instruments. Fishermen, sometimes without a flag or outfit, sometimes in uniform and bearing their flag, act for information, logistics or more aggressive manoeuvres. China and Vietnam (but also the Philippines, Malaysia or Indonesia in South-East Asia) are developing such strategies to support their political objectives in the region. These allow them to circumvent criticism and sanctions, but also international regulations. Another advantage is that China is delineating new areas of exchange and dialogue with Vietnam, outside multilateral organizations, as well as new channels of debate in which the United States is this time absent. In this part of the battle between Chinese

⁵ Nathalie Fau, Benoît de Tréglodé, *Mers d'Asie du Sud-Est. Coopération, intégration et sécurité* (South China Seas. Cooperations, integration and Security), Paris, CNRS éditions, 2018 (forthcoming)

⁶ Benoît de Tréglodé, « Maritime Boundary Delimitation and Sino-Vietnamese Cooperation in the Gulf of Tonkin (1994-2016) », *China Perspectives*, Hong Kong, n°107, 2016/3, p. 33-42.

and Americans in Asia, two visions of conflict resolution clash, but these new spaces for intra-Asian dialogue now place Beijing in a dominant position. In this general framework, Xi Jinping's Chinese diplomatic activism is more than ever a matter of seduction, cunning and force in order to keep the States of the region in its orbit, while continuing to unilaterally strengthen its positions in the South-East Asian seas.

2

CHINA'S NAVAL POWER AND THE CHANGING ASIA PACIFIC EQUILIBRIUM | **YVES-HENG LIM**

Over the last decade, China's naval build-up – together with the rise of China's assertiveness in the maritime domain– have become the object of much interrogations and concerns. Though the Chinese naval modernization continues to be visible across the board, evolutions in the type of platforms that are developed and deployed by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy seem to mark a slight change in the balance of China's naval 'outlook', with regional power projection from the sea seeming to gain a higher level of priority. The rapid modernization of the PLA Navy has two major consequences. From a broad regional perspective, China's increasing capacity to prevent naval power projection in the Western Pacific and the Eastern Indian Oceans, as well as to gain dominance over East Asian seas radically alters the regional military balance, and seems to reinforce the collision course between Beijing and the US, Japan and India who remain committed – to various degrees – to the implementation of an open, rules-based order in the Asia Pacific. From a narrow issue-based perspective, China's newfound naval power carries the distinct risk of increased aggressiveness against Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia, who all remain entangled in direct territorial and/or maritime disputes in the East Asian seas.

China's naval development

The development of the Chinese naval forces is a mix of change and continuity. The most significant recent evolution in China's naval modernization is probably the rapid surge in the development and production of power-projection platforms –as opposed to sea denial and sea control platforms– such as amphibious ships and aircraft carriers. Chinese shipyards launched a fifth 20,000-ton *Yuzhao* LPD in June 2017, and are working on the new 30-40,000-ton Type 075 helicopter carrier/amphibious assault ship¹. Dwarfing its Japanese counterpart –the *Izumo*-class LHD–and roughly the same size as USS *Wasp*-class LHD, the Type 075 will accommodate at least thirty attack helicopters –most likely the Z-10. This massive shipbuilding program accompanies the decision in March 2017 to dramatically expand the PLA Marine forces to 100,000 men – from 20,000 today²– possibly marking a critical turn in China's naval 'outlook'. This trend toward naval power projection is also visible in China's reported choice to replace the "ski jump" deck with a catapult system on its next carrier, a choice very likely designed to build up the PLANavy's capacity to conduct power projection from the sea onto land.³

¹ Dave Majumdar, "China's New Amphibious Assault Ship: A Big Waste of Time?", *The National Interest*, 31 March 2017, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/chinas-new-amphibious-assault-ship-big-waste-time-19961>.

² Gabriel Dominguez, "China plans to vastly expand size of marine corps, says report", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 15 March 2017, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/jdw65009-jdw-2017>.

³ Andrew Tate, "China's third aircraft carrier

The rapid development of naval power-projection capabilities has not come at the expense of existing programs. Chinese sea denial capabilities continue to grow at a high pace. The PLANavy launched no less than three new *Yuan* SSK at the end of 2016, while the second batch of *Shang* SSN has been redesigned to carry cruise missiles.⁴ At the same time, China is completing the sensor/guidance architecture supporting its Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile systems⁵ –DF-21D and possibly DF-26. The PLA Navy is also improving its technological capacity to control the seas. Chinese destroyers and frigates have long been equipped with area air defence systems (HHQ-9 and HHQ-16). China is addressing its historic weakness in anti-submarine warfare (ASW) by pouring resources in the addition of variable-depth sonars, ASW helicopters (Z-18F) and rocket-assisted torpedo systems (CY-5) to its major surface combatants, while the Y-8Q provides

likely to be fitted with catapults", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 4 August 2016, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/jdw62732-jdw-2016>.

⁴ Andrew Tate, "China resumes production of Yuan-class submarines", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 4 January 2017, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/jdw64259-jdw-2017>; Richard D. Fisher, "Image shows new variant of China's Type 093 attack submarine", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 23 June 2016, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/jdw62278-jdw-2016>.

⁵ Andrew S. Erickson, "Chinese Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile Development and Counter-intervention Efforts", Testimony before U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 23 February 2017, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Erickson_Testimony.pdf; Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities –Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS Report RL33153, 18 September 2017, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33153.pdf>.

the PLANavy with a land-based long-range ASW capability.⁶ New pride of the Chinese navy, the multi-mission *Renhai*/Type 055 destroyer/cruiser, launched in June 2017 exemplifies the PLANavy's success in developing multi-role platforms designed for sea control.⁷

Consequences for Asia-Pacific stability

Current trends in the development of Chinese naval forces have a potentially transformative impact on the balance of power in –and the stability of – the Asia-Pacific region. The impact of China's naval modernization can best be understood by looking at it through the prism of the two island chain systems that Chinese naval strategists have mentioned since Liu Huaqing defined China's maritime vision three decades ago.⁸ The two “rings” created by the island chains correspond to different stages in the evolution of Chinese naval forces,⁹ but they also presently correspond to two complementary sides of China's naval strategy.¹⁰ Chinese efforts to develop a capacity to deny the US

Navy command of the sea hundreds of kilometers away from the Chinese coast is a *sine qua non* condition to increase China's ability to extend its control over the “near seas”¹¹, and project power regionally, therefore holding the upper hand in the East Asian “seascape”¹² from the sea.¹³

Beyond the first island chain –running from the Kuril Islands to Borneo and then roughly matching the nine-dash line in South China Sea–China is increasing its capacity to hold US power projection assets at risk. Chinese publications have long discussed “multidimensional” and “saturation” attacks, which new platforms and weapons make increasingly possible¹⁴. China's anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) has already been described as a potential “game changer”,¹⁵ a qualification that also applies to the long-

⁶ Kelvin Wong, “Undersea dragon: Chinese ASW capabilities advance”, *Jane's International Defence Review*, 3 August 2017, https://janes.ih.com/Janes/Display/FG_593782-IDR.

⁷ Andrew Tate, “Assessing the capabilities of China's Type 055 destroyer”, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 7 July 2017, <https://janes.ih.com/Janes/Display/jdw66480-jdw-2017>.

⁸ Liu Huaqing, *The Memoirs of Liu Huaqing* (刘华清回忆录), Peking, Press of the People's Liberation Army, 2007, p. 435.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Xiao Tianliang (肖天亮) (ed.), *On Strategy* (战略学), Peking, National Defense University, 2015, p.339.

¹¹ Nan Li, “The Evolution of China's Naval Strategy and Capabilities: From ‘Near Coast’ and ‘Near Seas’ to ‘Far Seas’” in Phillip C. Saunders, Christopher D. Yung, Michael Swaine, and Andrew Nien-Dzu Yang (eds.), *The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles*, Washington, National Defense University Press, 2011, pp. 109-140.

¹² Robert D. Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific*, New York, Penguin Random House, 2015, p. 5.

¹³ For a debate on the balance between sea denial and sea control in China's naval strategy, see Timothy A. Walton and Bryan McGrath, “China's Surface Fleet Trajectory: Implications for the U.S. Navy” in Peter Dutton, Andrew S. Erickson, and Ryan Martinson (eds.), *China's Near Seas Combat Capabilities*, Newport, Naval War College, 2014, pp. 119-131.

¹⁴ James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2013

¹⁵ O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, *op. cit.*, p. 71

range anti-ship cruise missile (ASCM) –YJ-62 and possibly CJ-10¹⁶– that China has already deployed. Launched in successive salvos, these missiles would constitute a potent threat and rapidly deplete a carrier groups’ air defences, as the US Navy does not currently have the ability to replenish vertical launch systems at sea.¹⁷

For projected forces in the Western Pacific, the potential threat also comes from below the surface. New *Shang* SSNs are reported to be on a rough par with the US *Los Angeles* class in terms of quietness¹⁸ and – in waters closer to the first island chain – they could be joined by the very quiet Air Independent Propulsion-equipped *Yuan*.¹⁹ Carrying the YJ-18 (an extended-range Chinese version of the Russian *Klub*),

each of the deployed platforms potentially poses a threat to surface forces within a radius exceeding 500 kilometers.²⁰ These new capabilities do not, of course, allow the PLA Navy to envision any degree of sea control in the “far seas”²¹ as its surface forces will remain highly vulnerable to air and subsurface attacks in the foreseeable future. They do, however, increasingly allow the PLA Navy to efficiently deny US forces control over the Western Pacific.

What holds true for the United States and the Western Pacific holds equally true for any other power trying to project forces in China’s close neighborhood. On the Western side of the regional chessboard, India’s growing naval forces can hardly hope to play a role in the East Asian game should Beijing decide to use the PLA Navy to oppose India’s ambitions. This applies in an even stronger way to intra-regional dynamics. China is already capable of opposing and preventing any power projection attempt by Japan into the South China Sea by denying access to the sea by striking Japanese forces en route and/or blockading the straits around the semi-enclosed sea.

The ability to deny command of the sea beyond the first island chain is, however, not an end in itself. It is one of the key preconditions for the PLA Navy to be able to gain a certain degree of sea control

¹⁶ Office of Naval Intelligence, *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21st Century*, 2015, http://www.oni.navy.mil/Portals/12/Intel%20agencies/China_Media/2015_PLA_NAVY_PUB_Print_Low_Res.pdf?ver=2015-12-02-081233-733; Xu Luming, “这就是长剑-10巡航导弹真容” [So this is what the CJ-10 really looks like?], *Huanqiu*, 18 March 2013, <http://mil.huanqiu.com/photo-china/2013-03/2686083.html>.

¹⁷ Mark Gunzinger and Bryan Clark, *Winning the Salvo Competition: Rebalancing America’s Air and Missile Defenses*, Washington, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, 2016, http://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA6173-PGM2_Report_WEB_2.pdf.

¹⁸ Jerry Hendrix cited in Dave Majumdar, “Why the US Navy Should Fear China’s New 093B Nuclear Attack Submarine”, *The National Interest*, 27 June 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/why-the-us-navy-should-fear-chinas-new-093b-nuclear-attack-16741>.

¹⁹ Office of Naval Intelligence, *The People’s Liberation Army Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics*, 2009, <https://fas.org/irp/agency/oni/pla-navy.pdf>.

²⁰ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2017*, https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017_China_Military_Power_Report.PDF?ver=2017-06-06-141328-770.

²¹ Nan Li, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-133.

over the near seas. The latest edition of *On Strategy* (战略学), published by the National Defense University, is in fact remarkably explicit about the PLA Navy's objective in the near seas. "In the near seas, [the PLA] would use multiple services to conduct joint warfare [...] in order to seize and preserve command of the air and command of the sea in the near seas maritime region."²² Within the first island chain, China benefits from a "home field" advantage. Provided that China could keep the US Navy –and other external powers– at bay, the PLA Navy constitutes an increasingly dominating force in the East Asian region, which could deploy "as many as 351 submarines and missile-equipped surface ships in the Asia Pacific".²³ This does not constitute a dramatic change, as the local equilibrium already clearly tips in China's favour. Naval power projection will nonetheless provide China with an expanded range of military deterrence options and escalation dominance in all possible scenarios. In the South China Sea, large amphibious capabilities provide China with the means to rapidly expel other claimants from the islets and reef they control, creating a *fait accompli* on the ground. China can also employ a "hybrid warfare" strategy –mixing civilian, coast guard and military assets– to coerce them out of the new

²² (在近海, 将是多军兵种联合作战[...]夺取与保持近海海域制空权与海空权)" *On Strategy* (战略学), *op. cit.*, p. 338.

²³ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2014 Report to Congress*, November 2014, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/annual_reports/Executive%20Summary.pdf.

"gray zone" –where norms of sovereignty can be bent.²⁴ In the East China Sea, such a strategy would be more difficult by an order of magnitude, but the same capacity to quickly seize one of the islets before Japan could oppose the initial one, could make a *fait accompli* strategy attractive.

This is not to say that Chinese naval ambitions will necessarily go unopposed. Regional players have been ramping up their own efforts to acquire sea denial capabilities to the point that many observers have evoked the risk of an arms race.²⁵ The Indonesian navy is most prominent among Southeast Asian naval forces, and intends to acquire no less than twelve submarines and a "minimum essential force of 274 ships,"²⁶ while its Vietnamese counterpart has taken delivery of six Kilo-class submarines.²⁷ But beyond the obvious problem that using these capabilities against PLA Navy assets means

²⁴ James Stavridis, "Maritime Hybrid Warfare Is Coming", *Proceedings Magazine*, 142/12/1,366, December 2016, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2016-12-0/maritime-hybrid-warfare-coming>.

²⁵ Felix Heiduk, "An Arms Race in Southeast Asia?", *SWP Research Paper*, August 2017, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2017RP10_hdk.pdf.

²⁶ Geoffrey Till, "Indonesia as a growing maritime power: possible implications for Australia", *Soundings Papers*, May 2015, <http://navalinstitute.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/soundings4.pdf>.

²⁷ Gabriel Dominguez and Ridwan Rahmat, "Vietnam commissions last two of six Russian-built attack submarines", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 1 March 2017, <https://janes-ihs-com.simsrad.net.ocs.mq.edu.au/Janes/Display/jdw64867-jdw-2017>.

starting a shooting war with China,²⁸ Beijing is also engineering ways to “deny denial” and consolidate its capacity to maintain sea control. China is engaged in the building of a large-scale “Underwater Great Wall”, which “reportedly integrates mobile towed sonars from surface platforms with the fixed hydrophone arrays of the Cold War-vintage Sound Surveillance System (SOSUS)²⁹” in the East and South China Seas. Such a system could ultimately make these waters if not transparent, at least much less hospitable for enemy submarines. In other words, China seems to have put on its head the logic of “bastion”³⁰ that some analysts saw at work in the development of China’s sea-based nuclear deterrent. China does not seem to be interested in simply transforming the near seas into a defensive buffer anymore, but to exert control over these waters, from which it will be able to dominate the East Asian “seascape”.

²⁸ For nations with a nascent submarine force, Jan Joel Andersson has also demonstrated that there were technical, personnel and training challenges that will be difficult to overcome; see Jan Joel Andersson, “Submarine Capabilities and Conventional Deterrence in Southeast Asia”, *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 36, n°3, 2015, pp. 473-497.

²⁹ Richard D. Fisher, “China proposes ‘Underwater Great Wall’ that could erode US, Russian submarine advantages”, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 17 May 2016, <https://janes.ihc.com/Janes/Display/jdw61882-jdw-2016>; Catherine Wong, “China plans undersea observation system ‘for science and national security’”, *South China Morning Post*, 29 May 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2096066/china-plans-undersea-observation-system-science-and>.

³⁰ Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, “China’s new undersea nuclear deterrent: Strategy, Doctrine and Capabilities”, *Joint Force Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2008, pp. 31-38.

Conclusion

Over the last two decades, China’s naval modernization has radically transformed the Asia Pacific landscape. Chinese achievements in such a short time span are, in many ways, fascinating. It would however be a mistake to understand them as an end state for Chinese naval forces. As the founding father of the contemporary PLA Navy argued, “[a]s China’s level of economic and technological [development] continuously improves, the power of our navy will progressively increase, and its area of naval operations will gradually expand in the Northern Pacific up to the second island chain”.³¹ Some important areas of uncertainty continue to exist, nonetheless. How the PLA Navy would exactly perform in a conflict remains debatable, as it is not clear whether the Chinese navy has entirely solved important problems in terms of system integration, force training, and joint warfare doctrine.³² In this sense, in spite of the spectacular growth of the Chinese naval forces, an attempt to upset the existing Asia-Pacific order through military means would still represent a very risky gamble for Peking.

³¹ Liu Huaqing, *The Memoirs of Liu Huaqing*, op. cit.

³² For a general overview of these issues for the PLA, see You Ji, *China’s Military Transformation*, Cambridge, Polity, 2016.

3

TOWARDS GROWING MILITARY CYBER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION? | CANDICE TRAN DAI

One of the major characteristics of cyberspace is the multiplicity of actors that make it up. States are a part of it and have understood that they can use it to defend their national sovereignty and project their national power. Cyberspace is actually becoming an essential tool for states to achieve political, economic and national security objectives. Furthermore, there is an increasing recognition that cyberspace is a domain for military operations together with the four traditional domains of land, sea, air, and space. As a consequence, there is a growing global trend of an increasing militarization of cyberspace. The Asia-Pacific region is no exception to this ongoing trend.

In the information age, there is no doubt that cyber capabilities constitute one of the major components of the current benchmark for state power assessment and competition. Keeping in mind that cyber capabilities refer primarily to computer network defense, computer network attack and computer network exploitation, we may note that, during the last decade, the vast majority of countries in the Asia-Pacific region have been focusing on the need to address cyber threats from a policy, legal and organizational point of view. What is more recent is the expressed will, as well as the overt announcement of the development and/or the possession of offensive capabilities in the cyber domain. Additionally, several countries in the region have been gearing up towards the institutionalization of dedicated cyber units within

their Army and/or Defense organizations. As part of overall modernization of military forces – a heavy trend in the region driving military expenditure upwards¹ – the countries which are focusing on military cyber capabilities in the region are the following: Australia, China, Singapore, South Korea, followed by other countries which are willing to expand their capability in this area such as India, The Philippines or Thailand. The use of cyber capability by North Korea has become prominent in recent years and is of particular concern in the region. It is generally acknowledged that the North Korean regime has gained the ability to conduct cyber operations and that the military is largely involved, hence showing that the regime is putting strategic value in cyberspace.

Australia and China are two interesting – though different– cases of countries putting efforts into militarizing the response to cyber(in)security. Following the launch of Australia's new Cyber Security Strategy in April 2016, as well as Australia's new Defense White Paper 2016, published in February 2016, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull made the announcement that the country had offensive cyber capabilities.²

¹ According to SIPRI report « Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2016 », April 2017, "Between 2007 and 2016, East Asia had the largest [military spending] increase of all subregions, raising spending by 74 per cent. [...] Five of the top fifteen global spenders in 2016 are in Asia and Oceania: China, India, Japan, South Korea and Australia (in ranked order)".

² « Cyber deterrent: PM talks up Australia's offensive capabilities », *Computer World*, 21 April 2016, <https://www.computerworld.com.au/article/598443/cyber-deterrent-pm-talks-up-australia-offensive-capabilities/>.

More recently, in June 2017, the Australian government announced the establishment of a new information warfare division to be established within the Australian Defence Force, which is tasked with "launching offensive cyber strikes on foreign forces, while also defending Australian military targets from online attacks".³ Moreover, the Australian Signals Directorate will be given expanded powers to counter foreign criminal networks, i.e. to deter organized offshore cyber criminals targeting Australia. While Australia is well on the path of assuming and reinforcing its offensive military cyber capabilities, it is worth mentioning that this move is not yet accompanied by a full-fledged doctrine reflecting the country's overall defensive thinking on cyber capability.

China on the contrary has developed and conceptualized a sophisticated military cyber doctrine that mainly rests upon the idea of "Integrated Network Electronic Warfare" that is guiding the employment of computer network attack and electronic warfare by coordinating the use of cyber operations, electronic warfare, space control, and kinetic strikes with the aim of creating "blind spots" in an adversary's C4ISR systems. This strategy has to be put in parallel with the People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) doctrine for "Winning Informationized Local Wars", articulated

³ « Cyber warfare: Australia launches new military information unit to target criminal hackers », *News Corp Australia Network*, 30 June 2017, <http://www.news.com.au/national/politics/cyber-warfare-australia-launches-new-military-information-unit-asd-to-target-criminal-hackers/news-story/9e60e30a3ce9deef51b8e7cbf9e8b0a1>.

in the 2015 Defense White Paper (*China's Military Strategy*), which stresses the application of information technology in all aspects of military operations⁴. Furthermore, China has been consistently reframing its cyber forces position within the PLA's Strategic Support Force (SSF), a new force introduced in December 2015, which is to play a leading role for strategic-level information support to PLA operations, including intelligence and technical reconnaissance, and going far beyond the restricted area of genuine information warfare⁵. Other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, which are moving towards the military aspects of cyberspace tend to primarily focus on the reorganization of their cyber defense workforces within traditional Defense organizations. We may for instance refer to Singapore with the announcement in March 2017 of the creation of a Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) command to coordinate the running of the military's networks and response to cyber attacks.⁶ The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is following the same path, as it is to soon complete a Cyberspace Strategic Plan to upgrade the country's military

capability in cyberspace.⁷ Malaysia has been working for some time on the creation of a Malaysian Armed Forces Cyber Defense Operations Center (ATM CDOC),⁸ which shall to date already be operational. Japan is an interesting case as it is integrating its strategy with the United States, i.e. with the extension of the US cyber defense umbrella over Japan, but it has also been working on enhancing the role of the Japan Ministry of Defense (JMOD) and Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in countering cyber threats. Within the framework of the Mid-Term Defense Program (FY2011–FY2015) and the decision to elaborate a cyber defense doctrine, Japan has explicitly recognized cyberspace as an operational domain, which would hence encompass its right for self-defense.

Although it definitely remains difficult to gain a clear picture regarding the real intention and scope of cyber capability acquisition by states, these few examples are nevertheless indicative of an ongoing trend in the Asia-Pacific region, where regional militaries are to play a stronger and more active role in cyberspace. As a matter of fact, and as it is the case for most militaries in the world, modern military doctrine is increasingly relying on the ability

⁴ M. Taylor Fravel, "China's New Military Strategy: 'Winning Informatized Local Wars'", *China Brief Volume*, vol. 5, n°13, 2 July 2015.

⁵ For a detailed presentation of the SSF, refer to: John Costello, "The Strategic Support Force: Update and Overview", *China Brief Volume*, vol. 16, n°19, 21 December 2016.

⁶ « New SAF command to coordinate running of military networks and cyber defence", *Straits Times*, 30 June 2017, <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/new-saf-command-to-coordinate-running-of-military-networks-and-cyber-defence>.

⁷ "Armed Forces of the Philippines to build a 'cyber military' unit", *GCIO Asia*, 10 July 2017, <https://www.gcio.asia/gcio/security/armed-forces-of-the-philippines-to-build-a-cyber-military-unit/>.

⁸ Prashanth Parameswaran, « What's Next for Malaysia's Cyber War?", *The Diplomat*, 25 January 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/whats-next-for-malysias-cyber-war/>.

to use cyber means, and is at least trying to leverage cyber capabilities as a force multiplier for conventional military forces. What is more, the asymmetric advantage conferred by cyberspace may certainly be appealing to weaker states that can resort to cyber means to leverage their position beyond the traditional combat power framework. Countries and aspiring powers seeking legitimacy at regional and/or the global stage can also fully seek to exploit cyberspace to achieve parity, or at least to compete with states with proven diplomatic strength, modernized armies and strong economies.

Considering this broader context, the intrinsic factor in the Asia-Pacific region lies in the deep heterogeneity of states in terms of cyber maturity, which translates into differentiated perceptions of cyber threats and therefore different stages of development of cyber capabilities. Furthermore, when considering the cyber strategies of Asia-Pacific countries, local geopolitics and geo-economics have to be put in perspective. As it is commonly known, the region is characterized by strong fundamentals, which still influence the dynamics of the region, including: the wide diversity of political systems, the prevalence of strong nationalisms, regional construction processes, the issue of the Korean peninsula and the North Korean factor, China-Taiwan relations, China's assertion as a regional power, the emergence of India as a power that counts, the role and the presence of the United States, the role of Russia, the dynamics of growth and commercial development together with economic competition, the

issue of ethnic separatism, and not to mention ongoing territorial and maritime disputes.

Moreover, high levels of strategic distrust among the countries in the region, together with heightened anxiety about China's intentions as a regional military power – but also its overt ambition to become a cyber power, as well as increasing levels of defense spending – have built up a very specific context for Asia-Pacific cyberspace. We may actually infer that it is not surprising the region has witnessed increased military cyber developments in recent years. What becomes uncertain is to what extent the countries which are most vocal about developing and acquiring cyber military capabilities may be willing to draw the “cyberline”, and whether and when countries primarily focusing on cyber defense initiatives may be willing to switch to cyber offensive initiatives, if not developing both capabilities at the same time. In the tense geopolitical context of the Asia-Pacific region, the key is to prevent low impact cyber incidents and low intensity cyber operations from turning into large-scale military actions. The lack of acknowledged cyber norms in the region may be challenging as the Asia-Pacific countries do not accordingly have a common framework as to when, how and why use proactive, if not offensive, military cyber capability.

One of the key issues as per military implication in cyberspace revolves around the objectives of military use of cyber means. The evident assumption would favor military response in case of tangible threats to national security, hence

reaffirming the prevailing role of the military as the nation defender. The problem is that the very nature of cyberspace involves non-military actors and dual-technology weapons, hence the intense international debate about rules of engagement and the qualification of an act of “cyber”-war from the angle of the international law regarding the conduct of war. Another issue has to do with the case of a cyber attack on critical national infrastructures – the sectors that are considered vital for the life of a nation – where it has to be reminded that most parts of it are in the private sector’s hands. In light of these specific issues that add up to the very complexity of cyberspace, the level and the scope of implication of the military in cyberspace, as well as in the national cybersecurity strategy, has to be clearly defined by countries. As far as the Asia-Pacific region is concerned, another critical issue is that the lack of transparency and the ongoing strategic distrust among most countries of the region do not favor the establishment of solid de-escalation mechanisms for potential cyber conflict.

The picture is, however, not totally gloomy, as several countries in the region have recently expressed their willingness to work on regional cyber norms, which could set up the framework for state behavior in cyberspace. We may for instance refer to ASEAN, which seeks to develop confidence-building measures, more particularly promoted in regional multilateral meetings, such as the Regional Forum ASEAN (ASEAN Regional Forum, ARF). Moreover, in May 2016, the 10th ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM), held in Vientiane, Laos, adopted the Philippines’

proposal to establish a cybersecurity working group within the enlarged meeting of ASEAN Defense Ministers (ADMM+); the ADMM-Plus Experts’ Working Group on Cyber Security. This working group could become a formal platform for the exchange of expertise and knowledge as well as the promotion of operational cooperation in the field of cybersecurity.

The Asia-Pacific remains a region where strong nationalism as well as strong commitment to preserving and respecting national sovereignty prevails. In this context, the elaboration of cyber norms, which would define proper state behavior in cyberspace in conformity with a set of collective expectations, will obviously depend on the Asia-Pacific countries’ true political will to engage in this work. It thus remains to be seen as to what extent political willingness of the Asia-Pacific countries will translate into tangible action and results.

4

ASEAN AND SECURITY ISSUES: DESTABILIZING FOR THE ANALYSIS, STABILIZING FOR THE SOUTHEAST ASIANS¹ | ERIC FRÉCON

A short anecdote to set the scene: somewhere in Pasir Ris, Singapore, during a football tournament organised by the local Member of Parliament, an angry coach suddenly runs onto the pitch, punches the referee and breaks his brow bone. Immediately, the convenors stop the game and call all the staff together. There is a long talk on the pitch, and then the whistle is blown. Everybody comes back and the game restarts with the same referee, while the angry coach remains on his bench. Nothing really changes and no sanctions are issued after the interruption and long discussion. But at least, (almost) everybody enjoyed playing. Now, imagine the same story but with new actors: no more coach versus referee, but coast-guards and navies *versus* fishermen and immigrants; there were no more convenors, but the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Does this anecdote give a sense of what states can expect from ASEAN?

¹ The author thanks warmly (by alphabetical order), Dr Collin Koh, Frédéric Puppatti, Dr Alban Sciascia and Tuty Raihanah Mostarom, among others, for their pre-reading and their useful comments. He also thanks Dr Tang Siew Mung (head of the ASEAN Studies Centre in Singapore), Dr Bhubhindar Singh, Professor See Seng Tan (co-editors of *From 'Boots' to 'Brogues': the rise of Defence Diplomacy in Southeast Asia*, Singapore, RSIS Monograph, n°21, 2011.) and Termsak Chalermpananupap (former senior official within ASEAN) for their detailed answers on this topic, via informal emails, in January 2017. The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own.

Taking the reflection a step further, let's ask, 'Can ASEAN deal with traditional and non-traditional security?' Initially, the purposes of the Association were mainly economic and/or, for the newly-established governments to get (*via* the regional scene) legitimacy on the domestic scene: the "detour via outside" as David Camroux explained.² The Cambodian "impetus" in December 1978 and the retreat of both American and Russian forces respectively from Philippines in 1991 (Clark Air and Subic Bay Naval Bases) and Vietnam (Cam Ranh Naval Base) from 1993 to 2002, pushed ASEAN to explore and to consider security issues. But the diplomats have never been at ease with these threats, according to a Malaysian scholar.³ Leonard Sebastian follows-up: due to their "inward-looking focus", rooted in the fights for independence, the Southeast Asian armed forces were "not configured to address [these] changed security circumstances". This historical reluctance to regionalism in military affairs explains the tendency to "bilateral arrangements outside the ASEAN framework" as the "appropriate form of military-to-military cooperation".⁴ A Thai colleague echoes that security, economic and socio-cultural concerns – *i.e.*, the three pillars of the new community – have always been treated equally within ASEAN, without any priority given to security issues in spite of the critical

² David Camroux, « Un détour par l'extérieur : unité nationale et politique étrangère en Malaisie », *Les cahiers du CERJ*, n°11, 1994. Interview via emails with Dr Tang Siew Mun in January 2017.

³ Interview via emails with Dr Tang Siew Mun in January 2017.

⁴ Leonard Sebastian, "Defence ties at the heart of Singapore-Indonesia partnership", *The Straits Times*, 7 September 2017.

challenges (e.g. Haze from Sumatra and Borneo, piracy, terrorism, and territorial disputes).⁵ Academics have lamented how the ASEAN Political Security Community has not been more aggressively pursued by the various member governments. Similarly, no government really supported and took over Manila to reinforce the new ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR) that was launched in December 2013. Finally, the Secretary-General is doing his best from Jakarta by publishing the *ASEAN Security Outlook* as well as the *APSC Blueprint 2025*, but he cannot compete with the rotating chairs of the Association, which coordinate the summits in accordance with their own interests. Based on this first overview, the answer regarding the ability of ASEAN to deal with security concerns is quite pessimistic.

"You are calling ASEAN. Hold the line..."

Alas (from an ASEAN point of view), the last trends do not help ASEAN's reputation and the Association's credibility struggles to be taken seriously.

Firstly, every ASEAN member state follows its own way. On the Rohingya issue, for example, Malaysia stated that it "would like to disassociate itself" from a statement issued by ASEAN on the situation in Myanmar's Rakhine state, as "the statement omits the Rohingyas as one of the affected communities".⁶ This is

⁵ Interview via emails with Dr Termsak Chalermphanupap in January 2017.

⁶ "Malaysia disassociates itself from ASEAN statement on Myanmar's Rakhine state", *Channel Newsasia*, 24 September 2017.

the same disunity as seen with the South China Sea: we are not only talking about all the various toponyms used within ASEAN (the “East Sea” in Hanoi, the “Western Philippine Sea” in Manila, and for a while, partly, the “North Natuna Sea” in Jakarta). All the ASEAN governments seem to be more or less vocal, and to a certain extent in favour of a binding Code of Conduct, and scattered along a continuum of diplomatic options stretching from strict, brave and stubborn balancing, to pure, discreet and passive bandwagoning, *via* different degrees of hedging.⁷ To make it more complex and more diverse, hypothetical and so-called national Grand strategies are most of the time inconsistent. For instance, the Indonesian Defence White Paper published last year was largely qualified as blurry and opaque; it was more the reflection of the ministry’s ideology, which focused on internal enemies (including terrorists, communists and homosexuals), rather than a practical document. In short, not only is there no regional consensus – e.g. between Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, especially in Kunming in 2016, as the big issue to finalise the joint statement showed – but there is no national consensus as well.

Secondly, if by chance ASEAN manages to speak with one voice, the discourse is most of the time empty. This was the case in August 2017, when the ministers agreed to work on a “framework” for the future Code of Conduct in the South China

Sea. The price was quite high: ASEAN countries mainly ignored the July 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling on the South China Sea. They were forced to agree to prior conditions from China before proper negotiations, and there was eventually no timetable attached to the framework. There is no allusion to the previous militarisation of the rocks, reefs and islands – hence the Chinese *fait accompli* – while further militarisation by Southeast Asian littoral States is now forbidden – hence the inability to compete any more with China as the situation would be frozen. As Graeme Dobell said, it appeared like a “bone” for ASEAN: something for them to gnaw on and show off in the Southeast Asian capitals.⁸ Like the mouse of a computer, which has to move before the screen turns black, the diplomats regularly find new diplomatic gadgets to make the idea of an agreement still alive: “declaration” in 2002, “working group” in 2005, “guidelines” in 2011, “principles” in 2012, “working group” again in 2013 and “framework” in 2017.

This is much trickier for domestic challenges, because the non-interference motto means that nothing can be done or even planned – for example in Burma to protect the Rohingyas – except maybe a humanitarian operation, which would be still very challenging as it would target only one area and one specific ethnic group. Perhaps this is the reason why there has been no concrete step being taken beyond alarming calls in op-eds and discussions among ASEAN ministers on the sidelines

⁷ For more details, see: Christopher Roberts, “The South China Sea: Beijing’s Challenge to ASEAN and UNCLOS and the Necessity of a New Multi-tiered Approach”, *Working Paper*, RSIS, n°307, 29 August 2017.

⁸ “Fifty years of ASEAN: the China conundrum”, *The Strategist* (ASPI), 29 May 2017.

of a session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2017. Generally speaking, if security is seen according to its “human” definition, which includes political and sanitary securities among others, ASEAN does not attempt anything, as no leader intends to open ‘Pandora’s box for fear of a backfire effect on their own country. For example, Duterte, the current ASEAN chair, prefers to stay silent on Burma because of what is happening in South Philippines and in the anti-drug operations, as observers could easily compare the infringements of human rights by both the Burmese and Philippines law enforcement agencies.

By default, to deal with both traditional and non-traditional security issues, the governments prefer to rely on tools other than ASEAN. Regarding the traditional security and the territorial disputes, they can try to implement pragmatic Joint Development Agreements (JDA), like the one between China and Philippines, which is now under discussion. The idea is to exploit the resources instead of focusing only on unproductive and time-consuming negotiations. It can be used as a way to learn to work together and get to know one another. There is also the temptation to rely on a third actor: neither any big power (in order to preserve neutrality), nor ASEAN, (which is not consistent enough), but on a kind of *dei ex-machina*, like peripheral powers – namely India, Japan⁹ and Australia, (even France – and possibly even Canada – are becoming increasingly

present in the South China Sea). Tokyo, for example, is investing on the very strategic Natuna Island one year after the clashes with the Chinese coast-guards.¹⁰ Finally, besides JDA and foreign aid of external powers, penchant to bandwagoning (like Cambodia) or lonely balancing (like Vietnam today) would be still possible options, especially the later, due to the specificities of naval fighting in narrow seas and the actions of maritime militia, which could recall at sea the traditional guerrilla fighting on land.

Regarding the non-traditional security, governments usually have no other alternative but to rely on ‘minilateralism’ rather than regionalism, and this kind of *ad hoc* cooperation looks generally more successful and easier to set up. It started with the common threat of maritime piracy and armed robbery against ships in the Malacca Straits. Under the pressure of foreign interference, the littoral states initiated the Naval and Air Malacca Straits Patrols, respectively in 2004 and 2005. In 2015, to address the challenge of illicit Rohingyas migrants at sea, the littoral states intended to copy-paste what had been done to counter piracy at sea. In the wake of these initiatives, Singapore now hosts two centres in the Changi Naval Base: the first one, begun in 2009, has been dedicated to maritime security, while the second one, begun in 2014, has worked on HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief). These

⁹ For example, in Indonesia: “Japan agrees to help develop Indonesia’s outer islands, promote fisheries”, *The Japan Times*, 7 September 2017.

¹⁰ Indra Budiari, “Japan to help Indonesia monitor seas near Natuna”, *The Jakarta Post*, 7 September, 2017; Noel Tarrazona, “Australia, Japan, and India look to South China Sea”, *The Maritime Executive*, 26 September 2017.

centres are made up of international liaison officers, and are used to fuse information and to disseminate analyses. Lastly, in June 2017, Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines have set up naval Trilateral Maritime Patrols (TMP) in the Sulu Sea after a surge of attacks along the Sibutu Passage and growing activity of Abu Sayyaf and its affiliates at sea. Furthermore, Duterte has accepted American aid on land, while ASEAN members stay – officially – far from the frontline. In these cases, ASEAN has been bypassed, absent and ignored.¹¹

Sooner or later: the ASEAN

Nevertheless, “the grass is always greener on the other side”. In other words, all these alternate plans to take over ASEAN, like JDA and ‘minilateralism’, while giving the impression of promising solutions, are oftentimes not as successful as expected. At the end of the day, some JDA have been quickly cancelled, as key issues were still latent. For example, the Joint Maritime Seismic Undertaking (JMSU) with China, Philippines and Vietnam lasted only from 2005 to 2008, until old disputes resumed and because previous efforts did not last long enough. As a Filipino lawyer recently confided in an informal discussion with the author of the present article: “JDA between the littoral States in the South China Sea is always a possibility, but I don’t see it happening anytime soon, to be honest. To do that, they need to agree [on] the area to be subjected by the JDA, which at this point is highly unlikely.” Even the current

China-Philippines project, following the last summit in the summer of 2017, is heavily criticised and raises major concerns in Manila: JDA should be operated in disputed areas but the current project targets an area which is precisely considered as being already part of the Philippines, hence the feeling of giving too much concessions to Beijing.¹² Similarly, the trilateral agreements failed to contain immigrants from Burma and to fight piracy and armed robbery against ships, as new peaks off Singapore in 2014-2015 showed. Even in the Sulu Sea, beyond talks, meetings and hypothetical ‘hot pursuits’ across maritime borders, such operations have not yet been launched, e.g. from Tarakan on the Indonesian side.

Eventually, without any electoral constraints, by taking time and by building deeper ties, via regular meetings at various levels – including academics, officials and ministers – ASEAN is possibly the only one in tune with the regional and international contexts. Let us keep in mind that local people are used to attending long performances, about endless epic poems, rather than fast Hollywood shows. They are used to taking their time and balancing chaos and harmony, like in *Wayangkulit* theatre. However, there is less to do with any sort of cultural relativism than with the complexity of the current international relations. This regional situation echoes the more global idea of “peace-war” that General Beaufre (1902-1975) elaborated in *Revue des Deux-Mondes* about German military

¹¹ See the last initiative initiated by an Australian scholar: John Blaxland, “MANIS: the way to sweeten regional cooperation”, *The Strategist* (ASPI), 16 August 2016.

¹² “Joint development might legitimize China claim in West Philippine Sea: analyst”, *ABS CBN*, 31 August 2017.

operations across Europe in 1939, before the actual fights in France. Consequently, minds and institutions have to be flexible enough to support the various forces and tensions. What Elina Noor said for Malaysia works as well for ASEAN: “understanding of the Malaysian [or ASEAN] position requires a more nuanced inspection of detailed developments rather than an expectation of dramatic posturing”:¹³ In the same vein, Malaysian Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein called on all parties to “look beyond tired and childish notions of winners and losers”.¹⁴ Indeed, regarding ASEAN, on one hand, it is easy to make fun of all the opaque or discreet forums and conventions like, among others: ASEANAPOL and the ASEANPOL Database System (e-ADS 2.0), ASEAN Plan of Action to Combat Transnational Crime, ASEAN Maritime Forum, ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism (ACCT), ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM), ASEAN Coast Guard Forum, ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre), etc. On the other hand, all these channels can be used to spread messages, to test diplomatic options and, above all, to draw together external partners from all the Indo-pacific shores. It gathers all the actors involved along the continuum, joining peace

towards (Clausewitzian) war, and all the actors from all the countries involved in the traditional and non-traditional issues, like in the South China Sea, where navies, coast-guards, formal militias, informal flotilla and legal or illegal, and sometimes armed, fishermen interact. Moreover, as Dr Sam Bateman¹⁵ reported, unlike the recent thrust of suspicious papers out of the USA, the atmosphere between Chinese and ASEAN delegates in these meetings is quite positive and constructive – e.g. on law of the sea issues. The idea emerges that the last ASEAN-China discussions would have been “disappointing” only from an Anglo-Saxon point of view. Let us keep in mind that the main concern in the region is not to lose face. That’s why there would be a gap between, on one hand, the joint statement issued by Australia, Japan and USA after the ASEAN-China meetings in the beginning of August 2017, which addressed China directly, talking about “serious concerns”, “strong opposition” and calling for China and Philippines to abide by last year’s arbitral ruling and, on the other hand, the ASEAN countries, which are more or less fine with their new and non-belligerent relation with China. Besides, American military activities in the Southeast Asian Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) could be subject to debate. If, for example, you consider Article 58 of UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, signed in 1982), on the Rights and Duties of other States in EEZ, and if you redefine the real purpose of US naval drills or so-called ‘scientific missions’ at sea. Lastly,

¹³ Elina Noor, “Understanding Malaysia’s Approach to the South China Sea Dispute”, In M. Hiebert, G. B. Poling, C. Cronin (dir.), *In the Wake of Arbitration: Papers from the Sixth Annual CSIS South China Sea Conference*, Washington, CSIS, January 2017, p. 20.

¹⁴ “Hisham: Look beyond ‘childish’ notions to resolve South China Sea disputes”, *The Star*, 23 janvier 2017.

¹⁵ A former Commodore of the Australian Navy, currently senior fellow in Singapore and Wollongong.

as the next ASEAN chair and the current coordinator of the ASEAN-China Relations in the same time, Singapore intends precisely to boost China-ASEAN relations, via annual Defence ministers meetings and a possible joint-drill in South China Sea.¹⁶

(Temporary) conclusion

"*Eppur si muove*"... "And yet it moves"... Like Galileo (1564-1642), who was still convinced that Earth moved around the sun in spite of the beliefs and sarcasms at his time, let us emphasize that ASEAN is moving ahead, at its own speed. In the mid-term, experts within think tanks are keen to mix theory and policy making to set – sometimes rigid – boxes and typology in order to quickly describe governmental attitudes (cf. the above-mentioned bandwagoning, hedging and balancing). However, in the shorter term, leaders are more pragmatic. They have to deal with their own personal and domestic issues, like Najib and the 1MDB scandal or Joko Widodo and his costly or vague Global Maritime Fulcrum/Axis/Pivot (*Poros Maritim Dunia*). These constraints explain sudden and unexpected changes in the national diplomacies. What if we zoom out and consider the region in the longer term? There would be a kind of 'tectonic diplomacy', which would push irremediably towards more regionalism. ASEAN is going to be more and more necessary to frame the current trends. If it is not a top-down process, because of the electoral agenda or *coups d'état*, it will be a bottom-up

one. A new generation is emerging; a new "mutation" as Denys Lombard (1938-1998) would have said, as he incited to observe the regional and historical similarities – described in the *Carrefour javanais* – to survey Southeast Asia and ASEAN in the *long durée*.¹⁷ Like Georges Brassens' song *Les deux oncles* [The two uncles] tells the post WW2 story of two uncles, one pro-British and one pro-German, whose fights and discussions appeared quickly out-dated: the new generation would move softly to more connections, beyond the past disputes or rivalries. The students show the way by networking online, travelling and moving. Above all, the Singaporean playgrounds give also a sense of the future of ASEAN: maids of all the Southeast Asian countries interact happily beside Singaporean grandparents and children. These daily scenes 'double-confirm'¹⁸ the slow bottom-up process to build and to rely on ASEAN, especially on the security issues. More than economy or education, these traditional and non-traditional challenges, deeply attached to the national sovereignties, will be the ultimate test to check the strength, solidity and cohesion of the Association.

¹⁶ Lim Yan Liang, "Singapore will try to boost China-Asean relations", *The Straits Times*, 19 septembre 2017.

¹⁷ Denys Lombard, *Le Carrefour javanais – essai d'histoire globale – Volume III : l'héritage des royaumes concentriques*, Paris, EHESS, 1990, p. 15.

¹⁸ In the Singaporean *Singlish* language.

5

THE INDIA-JAPAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL SECURITY | ISABELLE SAINT-MÉZARD

Japanese Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and his Indian counterpart, Narendra Modi, held their fourth summit meeting on 13-14 September 2017 in the Western Indian state of Gujarat. The highlight of the summit this year was the laying of the foundation stone for the construction of India's first high-speed rail system between Ahmedabad and Mumbai. This 508-km long rail line, which will incorporate the Shinkansen technology, is part of the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), a mega-project that is partly funded by Japan. Both the Ahmedabad-Mumbai high-speed line and the DMIC reflect Japan's major role in the modernisation of India's infrastructures. With a pledge of 33 billion USD in investment between 2014 and 2019, Japan has indeed become a critical partner of India's current development plans.

However, economic cooperation is just one dimension – albeit a very important one – of the partnership between India and Japan. Significantly, at the end of their Summit meeting, Prime Ministers Abe and Modi issued a joint statement titled, “Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific” that dealt at length with the international situation and emphasised their common interest in maintaining a peaceful regional order.¹ As this paper will show, India and Japan have indeed increasingly

¹ “Toward a Free, Open and Prosperous Indo-Pacific”, India-Japan Joint Statement during visit of Prime Minister of Japan to India, 14 September 2017.

tried to shape their partnership as a response to the strategic uncertainties and security challenges affecting their regional environment.

The coming together of two Asian democracies

The rapprochement between India and Japan started with Prime Minister Mori's visit to India in 2000 and accelerated in 2005, when Prime Ministers Junichiro Koizumi and Manmohan Singh underscored the "Strategic Orientation of Japan-India Global Partnership".² The following year, the two countries decided to have annual Prime Ministerial Summits. Interestingly, these summit meetings have been held regularly, despite the high turnover of Prime Ministers in Japan between 2007 and 2012. In the course of their summits over the past decade, Indian and Japanese leaders have come to emphasize their common political values as the largest democracies in Asia, as well as their common strategic interests as strong advocates of an open, liberal regional order, based on the rule of law.

In this favourable context, the rise to power of Shinzo Abe has given an added fillip to Japan's India policy. As a longstanding advocate of a rapprochement with India, Mr Abe left his mark during his first mandate as Prime Minister (2006-07), when in a famous speech to the Indian Parliament, he urged India and Japan to jointly endorse the responsibility to ensure peace and prosperity in "broader Asia",

a concept that would be renamed as the Indo-Pacific from 2011 onwards.³ Since his return to power, in late 2012, Mr Abe has pushed his pro-India policy with renewed vigour. Two factors have helped him. First, China's growing assertiveness over various maritime disputes, including the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, has further convinced Japan of the need to look for close partners to complement its alliance with the US. This approach was formalized in the 2013 National Security Strategy, which identified the Republic of Korea, Australia, the ASEAN members and India as Japan's top partners behind the United States.

The second factor is related to Narendra Modi taking up office as India's new Prime Minister in May 2014. With Mr. Modi in power, Mr Abe has found his alter ego, i.e. a personal friend, with a somewhat similar positioning as a strongly nationalist and conservative leader. The personal and ideological affinity between the two leaders has imparted a more ambitious and global outlook to the Indo-Japanese partnership. On their first summit meeting, in September 2014, the two leaders made it a point to elevate the Indo-Japanese partnership to the level of a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership". Then, two years later, in November 2016, they made a major breakthrough with the conclusion of the Agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy. To settle this pending issue with India, Japan has accepted to make an exception to its rule of

² "Japan-India Partnership in a New Asian Era: Strategic Orientation of Japan-India Global Partnership", 29 April 2005.

³ "Confluence of the two seas", Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India, 22 August 2007.

not conducting nuclear trade with a country that has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In pushing this unique decision, Mr Abe has indeed gone to great lengths to accommodate India's interests.

Reinforcing the defence pillar of the strategic partnership

From an institutional point of view, India and Japan conduct their strategic partnership through a series of mechanisms that provide for a regular exchange of views at different levels of their politico-bureaucratic machinery. Of particular interest is the annual "2+2" Dialogue initiated in 2010. The mechanism has involved the Indian and Japanese Foreign and Defence Ministries, with a view to addressing crosscutting security and foreign policy issues such as maritime security, cyber security and space. The fact that Japan was able to create such a dialogue with India, where inter-ministerial cooperation is traditionally uneasy, stood as an achievement. This "2+2" mechanism is complemented by two distinct dialogues at the level of the Foreign and Defence Ministers.

In the defence arena, the two countries have increased their interactions over the years with the establishment of a Defence Policy Dialogue (2012), a National Security Advisers' dialogue (2014), and Service-to-Service staff talks at the Navy, Ground forces and Air forces level (in 2008, 2010 and 2016 respectively). Further evidence of Japan's interest in enhancing its defence relationship with India was the 2015 decision to post three defence attachés – instead of one previously – to its embassy

in New Delhi.⁴ Among the armed forces, the coast guards and naval forces of the two countries have been at the forefront of bilateral cooperation, with the former having regular exercises since 2000 and the latter since 2012. But as noted by Professor Shutaro Sano, "their ground forces and air forces need more opportunities to operate with one another through regular training and exercises".⁵

Finally, to strengthen the bilateral partnership, Prime Ministers Abe and Modi have decided to promote cooperation in defence technology and equipment. To this end, they quickly signed a succession of three agreements, aimed at providing the appropriate legal conditions for closer defence and security cooperation (the 2014 Memorandum on Defence Cooperation and Exchanges, and the two 2015 Defence Framework Agreements concerning the Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology and Security Measures for the Protection of Classified Military Information). They also set up a Joint Working Group on Defence Equipment and Technology Cooperation in March 2015. More recently, during the year 2017, the two countries held their first Defence Industry Forum (in Tokyo) and started technical discussion for future research collaboration in the area of Unmanned Ground Vehicles and Robotics.

⁴ Tomohiko Satake, "Japan: Expanding strategic horizons", *East Asian Strategic Review 2017*, May 2017.

⁵ Shutaro Sano, "Japan-India Security Cooperation: Building a Solid Foundation amid Uncertainty", *CSIS Japan Chair's Working Paper*, 2017.

On paper, cooperation in defence technology and equipment looks very promising. It coincides with Japan's 2014 decision to relax its arms export controls, on the one hand, and with India's need to upgrade its military capacities, on the other. However, despite this apparent convergence of interests, the two countries have found it more difficult than anticipated to finalise concrete deals. This is best illustrated by the protracted negotiations for the transfer of the Shin Maywa US-2 amphibious aircrafts from Japan to India, which have been dragging on for the past four years with no real prospect for a successful conclusion in the near future. In other words, it may take some time before the two countries finalise practical projects, especially if one considers that Japan is a new and somewhat hesitant entrant in the international arms' market and India still has very protracted acquisition procedures.

Joining forces for Asian stability

As outlined in their joint statement of September 2017, Prime Ministers Abe and Modi have recently sought to "align Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy with India's Act East Policy". In other words, the two partners have tried to find some synergy in their respective approach to the Indo-Pacific strategic order. In so doing, they have more specifically tried to coordinate their responses to China's growing assertiveness in the East and South China Sea, by repeatedly emphasizing the importance of freedom of navigation and over-flight in their joint declarations. In a veiled reference to China's behaviour, their declarations of 2015 and 2016 formally mentioned their

concern about the tensions in the South China Sea, calling all parties to avoid unilateral action and abide by international law. Moreover, India and Japan have also expressed their attachment to the multilateral security architecture developed by ASEAN, and reiterated their support to the principles of ASEAN's centrality and unity. They even launched an India-Japan Dialogue on ASEAN in March 2017, with a view to coordinating their efforts to support ASEAN-led institutions.

Prime Ministers Abe and Modi have also shown renewed interest in exploring minilateral, and, more specifically, in enhancing trilateral interactions with the US since 2015. On the diplomatic side, they have elevated the biennial US-India-Japan Strategic Dialogue from middle-ranking officers to Foreign Minister level. Then, on the naval side, India has finally agreed to include Japan's Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) as a permanent member in its annual exercises with the US since 2015. Until then, the JMSDF joined the Indo-US exercises only on an ad hoc basis, because New Delhi was afraid of raising China's suspicions. But under Mr Modi, India's foreign policy has taken a more self-confident turn, including vis-à-vis China's security sensitivities. New Delhi has even engaged in another trilateral format, this time with Japan and Australia (with senior officials from the Indian, Japanese and Australian Foreign Ministries having an annual meeting on regional affairs since 2015).⁶ These initiatives, however, have

⁶ Satoru Nagao, "The Japan-India-Australia "Alliance" as Key Agreement in the Indo-Pacific", *ISPSW Strategy Series*, n°375, September 2015.

been accompanied by a downward trend in Sino-Indian relations, which was best illustrated by the 10-week military standoff in the Doklam area in summer 2017. Interestingly, Japan was the only country to express support for India during this tense episode.

In pushing the strategic underpinnings of the India-Japan partnership, Prime Ministers Modi and Abe have been driven by the perceived need to meet the challenges raised not just by China's regional behaviour, but also by the growing uncertainty over the US Indo-Pacific strategy. In this respect, the Indo-Japanese strategic partnership has seemingly adopted a hedging dimension. Tokyo and New Delhi still regard the US as their priority partner as well as the mainstay of the security order in the Indo-Pacific region. As such, they continue to steer their bilateral partnership so as to support the US-led strategic order in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time however, the Indian and Japanese establishment have recently started discussing the possibilities of filling the strategic void that could potentially be left by an inward-looking US.⁷ Enhancing security cooperation with other like-minded partners in Asia has been one of the options with which they have started experimenting.

Developing strategic infrastructures and connectivity

China's massive campaign for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has brought to light the critical importance of infrastructure and

connectivity in Asia. But both India and Japan have had misgivings about China's mega-project (New Delhi even skipped the BRI summit of May 2017) and, in a far more discreet way than China, they have started pushing their own connectivity plans in the region. Through its Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) arm, Japan has undertaken connectivity projects in some strategically sensitive parts of India, such as the Northeast. Japan International Cooperation Agency, which coordinates ODA, has already earmarked funding for two highway projects in Meghalaya (a 400 km-long stretch) and Mizoram (150 km).⁸ But more projects may be in the offing given that, at the September 2017 Summit between Prime Ministers Abe and Modi, the two countries established an India-Japan Act East Forum to develop infrastructure projects in the Northeast, with Japan lending about 350 million USD. If Japan were to undertake more road projects in the Northeast, it could substantially contribute to India's long-drawn out efforts to develop this remote region into a land bridge to Southeast Asia.

Similarly, since 2016, India and Japan have started discussing the development of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands under the "smart islands concept". As a beginning, Japan is to undertake a modest project (to build a 15-megawatt power station) in South Andaman Island. The development is significant though, as New Delhi does not usually authorize foreign investments in this overseas territory. Moreover, Japan has

⁷ Yogesh Joshi, Harsh V. Pant, "Indo-Japanese Strategic Partnership and Power Transition in Asia", *India Review*, n°3, 2015.

⁸ Monika Chansoria, "Japanese Investments Are Instrumental to India's Act East Policy", *Asia-Pacific Bulletin*, 21 June 2017.

expressed its interest in contributing in a bigger way to the development of the chain island, which is strategically located at the mouth of the Strait of Malacca. All in all, with its recent investment forays in India's Northeast and Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Japan seems ideally poised to contribute to the Modi government efforts to develop India's "frontier regions".

Finally, Japan and India have recently tried to pool their expertise and resources to promote connectivity and infrastructures in third countries in the Indian Ocean. This attempt has led them to extend their potential outreach from Southeast Asia to East Africa and, eventually, to propose a mega-project concept, in the form of the Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC). The initiative, which was announced by Prime Minister Modi at the May 2017 African Development Bank meeting, is to be initially funded by a Japanese commitment of 30 billion USD and an Indian commitment of 10 billion USD. India and Japan have already developed a narrative based on the values of "quality infrastructure", "skill enhancement", decentralized management and local ownership of projects, as if to mark their difference with China's BRI, which they have deemed too unilateral and opaque.⁹ While it is too early to assess AAGC, which is still at a rather conceptual stage, this nascent initiative is a further proof of India and Japan's resolve to mutualize their efforts to maintain an open, balanced and rule-based order in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

⁹ Jagannath Panda, "The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor: an India-Japan Arch in the making?", *ISDP Focus Asia*, n°21, August 2017.

6

AMERICA WHERE? THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S FLEDGING ASIA STRATEGY | **ASHLEY TOWNSHEND**

Since Donald Trump entered the White House with an “America first” agenda, the shape of United States’ strategic policy in Indo-Pacific Asia has become a pressing concern for regional allies and partners. His administration’s performance over the past nine months has only partially allayed these anxieties. Trump’s rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and “rebalance to Asia,” along with his deep scepticism about the liberal internationalist aims of U.S. Asia policy, have stoked fears of a U.S. retreat from regional leadership. At the same time, the administration’s inconsistent approach to China and the North Korean nuclear crisis have failed to reassure the region that strategic challenges will be effectively managed. While there have been areas of welcome continuity—such as Trump’s early reiteration of support for America’s principal Asian alliances—it appears that the administration is pursuing a more narrowly self-interested Asia policy, making America’s strategic presence in the region more brittle.

President Trump’s first trip to Asia in November 2017 provides an opportunity to recalibrate policy. Arguably the core problem in the administration’s approach to Asia so far has been its failure to articulate an integrated regional strategy—one that links economic, diplomatic, and military policies around a clear set of U.S. strategic objectives in Asia. If Trump fulfils his promise to deliver a “vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific region” at the APEC Leaders’ Summit, he may start to reassure U.S.

partners that his administration has a plan for the region.¹ But this will not be easy. In the wake of Barack Obama's rebalance—which gave much-needed direction to Washington's Asia strategy, even as it failed to realise its full potential—the region was holding out for a stronger rebalance under Hillary Clinton.² Trump's "America first" agenda has not only dashed these hopes, it has also played into deeper structural questions about America's ability to sustain its regional position amid political dysfunction, defence budget shortfalls, military overstretch, and an increasingly competitive China.³ Only an administration

with a clear-eyed sense of America's strategic priorities in Asia will be able to muster the political will and resources to address these challenges.

An Asia team still in the making

Although there are several highly competent officials in Trump's national security team, it lacks a dedicated champion for Asia policy—someone with the vision and authority to develop a whole-of-government strategy for the region. By all accounts, Secretary of Defense James Mattis is committed to prioritising the Pentagon's role in a post-rebalance Asia strategy. As the most status quo figure in cabinet, Mattis supports the provision of economic and political assistance to vulnerable U.S. partners, opposes China's efforts to coerce its neighbours into a regional "tributary system", and holds an internationalist vision of America's security objectives in Asia⁴. But he is not in a position to deliver on the non-defence aspects of an integrated strategy. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson could play this role, but is marginalised within the administration and preoccupied with a major restructuring of

¹ Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement from the Press Secretary on President Donald J. Trump's Upcoming Travel to Asia", The White House, 16 October 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/10/16/statement-press-secretary-president-donald-j-trumps-upcoming-travel-asia>. The White House has not specified what it means by a "free and open Indo-Pacific region", but Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has recently used this phrase to refer to the protection of sovereignty, freedom of navigation, democracy, and a stable security environment that enables all countries to pursue economic prosperity. See Rex Tillerson, "Defining our Relationship with India for the Next century", Center for Strategic and International Studies, 18 October 2017, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/10/274913.htm>.

² For one example of the kind of rebalance many Asian countries were anticipating, see Patrick Cronin, "Sustaining the Rebalance in Southeast Asia: Challenges and Opportunities Facing the Next Administration", Center for a New American Security, May 2016, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/sustaining-the-rebalance-in-southeast-asia-challenges-and-opportunities-facing-the-next-administration>.

³ See Dougal Robinson, Brendan Thomas-Noone, and Ashley Townshend, "Trump, Congress and the 2018 Defence Budget: A Primer for Australia", United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, September 2017, <https://www.ussc.edu.au/analysis/trump->

[congress-and-the-2018-defence-budget-a-primer-for-australia](https://www.ussc.edu.au/analysis/global-congress-and-the-2018-defence-budget-a-primer-for-australia); and David Shear, "Peaceful Erosion? Trump, China, and the Dual Crisis in America's Asia Policy", United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, forthcoming October 2017.

⁴ Brendan Thomas-Noone, "Global Mattis: The New Secretary of Defense", United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, January 2017, <https://www.ussc.edu.au/analysis/global-mattis-the-new-secretary-of-defense>; and Chris Mirasola, "Water Wars: US Hits Reset Button in Asia Pacific", Lawfare, 10 February 2017, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/water-wars-us-hits-reset-button-asia-pacific>.

the State Department.⁵ In any case, while Tillerson supports conventional positions on U.S. allies – non-proliferation, freedom of navigation, and the TPP – it is not clear that he has an overall vision for Indo-Pacific policy.

This vision should come from Trump's Asia team—a constellation of about a dozen officials across the U.S. government who coordinate Asia policy beneath the Secretary-level.⁶ But the administration has yet to fill many of these positions. At the time of writing, key Assistant Secretary roles for Asia in State and Defense remain in the hands of acting career officials, owing to the White House's ban on Republican foreign policy staffers who signed “never Trump” letters and an unwillingness to accept departmental nominations.⁷ These gaps have stymied the development of a regional strategy. Indeed, Asia policy has been sculpted less by strategy than by the balance of preferences between two key camps in the administration. On one hand, “globalists” such as Mattis, Tillerson, White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, and Matthew Pottinger, Senior Director for

Asia at the National Security Council, have supported a muscular security presence and liberal internationalist agenda in Asia. On the other hand, “America firsters” like National Trade Council Director Peter Navarro, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, former chief White House strategist Steve Bannon, and Alexander Grey, one of Navarro's deputies, have all agreed on the robust military footprint, but rejected the liberal trade agenda and placed greater emphasis on allied “burden sharing”.⁸ This has led to a disconnect between the administration's economic and security policies in the region.

A transactional approach to allies and partners

Reflecting these conflicting interests, President Trump has adopted a supportive but transactional approach towards America's Asian allies and partners.⁹ In contrast to his election-era criticism of free-riding behaviour by Japan and South Korea,¹⁰ Trump has reiterated his “ironclad”

⁵ Nahal Toosi, “Haley Says She Doesn't Want to be Secretary of State”, *Politico*, 21 September 2017, <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/09/21/nikki-haley-secretary-state-242987>.

⁶ Ashley Townshend, “Work in Progress: Donald Trump's Asia Team”, United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, January 2017, <https://www.usssc.edu.au/analysis/work-in-progress-donald-trumps-asia-team>, pp. 1-2.

⁷ Josh Rogin, “Trump Should Name his Asia Team Before his Tour There”, *The Washington Post*, 18 October 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/josh-rogin/wp/2017/10/18/trump-should-name-his-asia-team-before-his-tour-there/?utm_term=.5555c60dd5fe.

⁸ Ju-Min Park and James Pearson, “South Korea says US Reaffirms it Will Pay THAAD Costs, Joint Drills Wrap Up”, 1 May 2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/south-korea-says-us-reaffirms-it-will-pay-thaad-costs-joint-drills-wrap-up-20170430-gvyyjq.html>.

⁹ Ashley Townshend, “America First: US Asia Policy under President Trump”, United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, March 2017, pp. 5-6, <https://www.usssc.edu.au/analysis/america-first-us-asia-policy-under-president-trump>.

¹⁰ David E. Sanger and Maggie Haberman, “Highlights From Our Interview With Donald Trump on Foreign Policy”, *The New York Times*, 26 March 2016. During the election, Trump also took aim at the ostensibly unfair terms of the treaty between Washington and Tokyo—ridiculing

support for the Article 5 commitments in each nation's defence treaty with America—including against North Korean aggression and China's growing presence near the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.¹¹ The administration has also reaffirmed its commitment to the U.S.-Australia alliance, vowing to deepen interoperability and defence cooperation;¹² and demonstrated continuity with the Obama administration by enhancing strategic ties and defence cooperation with India.¹³ As these alliances

and partnerships are manifestly in U.S. interests, it is unsurprising that Trump's national security team has succeeded in guiding the president to status quo commitments. Leaders in Tokyo, Seoul, Canberra, New Delhi, and Singapore have taken comfort in the stewardship of U.S. security partnerships by Mattis and Tillerson, including during their visits to regional capitals this year.

But Trump has rebranded these partnerships in transactional terms and appears intent on extracting economic "wins" for America as an indirect trade-off for strategic ties.¹⁴ In pursuit of its "reciprocal" trade agenda, the administration has vowed to reduce deficits with Japan (\$54.9 billion), South Korea (\$17 billion), and India \$24.3 billion); and is reviewing deficits with lesser developed partners such as Vietnam (\$32 billion), Thailand (\$18.9 billion), Malaysia (\$24.8 billion), and Indonesia (\$13.2 billion).¹⁵ Trump has repeatedly criticised Tokyo for

the fact that the United States has to "use the full force" of its military to defend Japan in an attack, whereas Japan "doesn't have to do anything" in the reverse situation. See Jesse Johnson, "Trump Rips US Defense of Japan as One-Sided, Too Expensive", *The Japan Times*, 6 August 2016, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/08/06/national/politics-diplomacy/trump-rips-u-s-defense-japan-one-sided-expensive/>.

¹¹ Lesley Wroughton and Roberta Rampton, "Trump Tells Abe US Commitment to Japan Security 'Ironclad': Whitehouse", *Reuters*, 28 January 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-japan-whitehouse-idUSKBN15C0NB>; Choe Sang-Hun, "Trump Tells South Korea that Alliance with US Is 'Ironclad'", *The New York Times*, 30 January 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/30/world/asia/trump-north-korea-south.html>; and Donald Trump and Shinzo Abe, "Joint Statement from President Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe", The White House, 10 February 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/02/10/joint-statement-president-donald-j-trump-and-prime-minister-shinzo-abe>.

¹² U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement AUSMIN 2017", 5 June 2017, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/06/271560.htm>.

¹³ Ashley Townshend, "Prosperity Through Partnership: US and India Talk Up Economic and Strategic Ties", United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney, 28 June 2017, <https://www.ussc.edu.au/analysis/prosperity-through-partnership-us-and-india-talk-up-economic-and-strategies>; and Donald Trump and Narendra

Modi, "United States and India: Prosperity Through Partnership", The White House, 26 June 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/06/26/united-states-and-india-prosperity-through-partnership>.

¹⁴ Townshend, "America First", *op.cit.*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁵ H.R. McMaster and Gary Cohen, "The Trump Vision for America Abroad", *The New York Times*, 13 July 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/13/opinion/the-trump-vision-for-america-abroad.html?mcubz=3>; Kirkland and Ellis, "Trump Administration Sets 'America First' Trade Agenda in Motion", Kirkland and Ellis, 6 April 2017, https://www.kirkland.com/siteFiles/Publications/Trump_Administration_Sets_America_First_Trade_Agenda_in_Motion.pdf. For deficit figures and details, see Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, "Countries and Regions", 2016, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions>.

its automotive exports, agricultural tariffs, and overvalued yen, and is threatening to withdraw from the so-called “horrible” Korea-U.S. Free Trade Deal unless Seoul agrees to more favourable terms.¹⁶

Adopting a confrontational approach to deficit reduction with security partners risks upsetting close strategic ties for an inward-looking and unpopular trade policy. Doing so while other parts of the administration are trying to reassure and work with these partners on responding to North Korea’s nuclear program sends a worrying message about the administration’s regional priorities. In any case, it is not clear that leaning on security partners will pay economic dividends. Although Japan was able to put together a \$450 billion U.S. jobs package to build goodwill for Shinzo Abe’s meeting with Trump, and while India ordered 100 aircrafts from Boeing in the lead-up to Narendra Modi’s visit to Washington, not all partners will be able or willing to play this transactional game and enter into profitable contracts with U.S. firms.¹⁷ Given the low level of public support

¹⁶ Kyodo, “Trump Prods Abe to Shrink U.S.-Japan Trade Imbalance”, Japan Times, 9 July 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/07/09/national/politics-diplomacy/trump-prods-abe-shrink-u-s-japan-trade-imbalance/#.Weg-xBOCzj>; and Jacob M. Schlesinger, Michael C. Bender, and Jonathan Cheng, “Trump Administration Weighs Withdrawal from South Korea Trade Pact”, *Wall Street Journal*, 3 September 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-administration-weighs-withdrawal-from-south-korea-trade-pact-1504375312>.

¹⁷ Mitsuru Obe, “Abe to Tout Japan’s US Investment Plans in Trump Meeting”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 February 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/abe-to-tout-japans-benefits-to-u-s-in-trump-meeting-1486373098>; and Townshend,

for Trump in most Asian nations, this hard-line approach to trade could make wider aspects of bilateral relationships with the U.S. more difficult to manage.¹⁸

A military-focussed rebalance to Asia

Although the Trump administration has rhetorically cancelled Obama’s “rebalance to Asia”, it has so far maintained—and even increased—the military aspects of this strategy.¹⁹ This much is welcome news for America’s regional partners. The Pentagon has stepped-up forward presence, deterrence, and readiness efforts, increasing exercises and patrols in the Korean Peninsula and South China Sea, and launching four freedom-of-navigation operations in the last six months. As the most functional part of the administration, the Office of the Secretary of Defense appears to have had a long leash in shaping its operational tempo and deployments in line with pre-existing Asia policy.²⁰

But the military rebalance has so far been emphasised at the expense of other elements of America’s regional footprint,

“Prosperity Through Partnership”, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ Richard Wike et al., “U.S. Image Suffers as Publics Around World Question Trump’s Leadership”, PEW Research Center, 26 June 2017, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/06/26/u-s-image-suffers-as-publics-around-world-question-trumps-leadership/>.

¹⁹ Townshend, “America First”, *op.cit.*, pp. 8-9

²⁰ See Kristina Wong, “Trump’s Pentagon Plan to Challenge Chinese Claims in South China Sea”, *Breitbart*, 20 July 2017, <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2017/07/20/trump-pentagon-south-china-sea-plan/>.

adding to concerns that Trump is adopting a reductionist approach to Indo-Pacific leadership. Trump's rejection of the TPP has not only removed Washington from the rule-making debate for 36.6 percent of the global economy; it has also crippled a major geo-economic initiative designed to compete with low-standard Chinese alternatives—and which many nations saw as a litmus test of America's staying power in Asia.²¹ The administration has also pared back the liberal aspects of U.S. strategic partnerships. While Obama grew these partnerships to become liberal order enhancers—supporting goals like free trade, climate change action, development assistance, and internet freedom—joint statements between the U.S. and Australia, Japan, Singapore, and to a lesser extent South Korea this year have almost exclusively focussed on defence and economic policy.²²

Failing to advance the United States' diplomatic, economic, and developmental investment in the Indo-Pacific is likely to make Washington's regional position more

²¹ Cronin, "Sustaining the Rebalance in Southeast Asia", *op.cit.*, pp. 8-10.

²² Compare, for example, the language used by Barrack Obama and Shinzo Abe in their joint statements, including statements on global partnership issues with Trump and Abe's joint statement that omits global partnership issues, see Trump and Abe, "Joint Statement from President Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe" and Barrack Obama and Shinzo Abe, "US-Japan Joint Statement: The United States and Japan: Shaping the Future of Asia Pacific and Beyond", The White House, 25 April 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/04/25/us-japan-joint-statement-united-states-and-japan-shaping-future-asia-pac>.

brittle. Asian nations are already hedging when it comes to balancing their economic and security ties with the U.S. and China. While more powerful players, like Japan and India, are looking for ways to offset China's mega-regional economic projects with their own initiatives, a large number of Indo-Pacific countries are calibrating their policies towards Chinese initiatives like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.²³ This will strengthen Beijing's geo-economic influence over time. A failure to build capacity and resilience in Southeast Asian nations – which includes deep and ongoing engagement with multilateral organisations like ASEAN – will diminish U.S. influence and leave the region more vulnerable to foreign interference. Although it remains to be seen if the administration will revive these elements of U.S. statecraft during Trump's November visit to Asia, success will require more than a robust military commitment.

Inconsistencies on China and North Korea

Regarding America's two most competitive relationships in the region, the administration has yet to exhibit a consistent approach. On China, the administration has oscillated between transactional and resolute policies, leading to regional concern about U.S. objectives. Believing that he can use inducements to

²³ Matthew Goodman, Scott Miller, and Amy Searight, "U.S. Economic Strategy in the Asia-Pacific: Update and Recommendations", Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 2017, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/171010_Goodman_US_EconomicStrategyAsiaPacificUpdate_Web.pdf?sSZOM_hesktuvl1hBrWlRqsQaP4VkmB, pp. 4-5.

leverage Chinese cooperation on North Korea, Trump has frequently tweeted that China will get a better deal on trade if it pressures Pyongyang over its nuclear program.²⁴ To sweeten the pitch, he has refrained from imposing major export tariffs on Chinese commodities, praised President Xi Jinping for his “tremendous” support on sanctions so far, and sought to woo the Chinese leader by calling him a “talented” and “very good” man.²⁵ Trump has also avoided criticising China’s increasingly coercive behaviour in maritime Asia, including its direct threats against Hanoi over gas extraction in Vietnamese waters this year.²⁶ Meanwhile, Secretary Tillerson’s affirmation of Beijing’s “new model of major power relations” in March caused some alarm about an overly

conciliatory China policy.²⁷ While he has since condemned Beijing’s behaviour in the South China Sea and other actions that are “undermining the international, rules-based order”, Asia watchers remain uncertain about Tillerson’s coherence on China.²⁸

A more assertive current in the administration’s China policy is also discernible, reflecting the views of more hard-line China hands in Trump’s Asia team.²⁹ After rejecting several requests by U.S. Pacific Command, the White House approved a freedom of navigation campaign in May that has seen more regular and robust naval patrols through the South China Sea than what typically took place in the Obama years.³⁰ In June, the State Department named China as one

²⁴ Mark Landler, “Trump Says China Will Get Better Trade Deal if It Solves ‘North Korean Problem’”, *The New York Times*, 11 April 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/11/world/asia/trump-china-trade-north-korea.html>; Fred Imbert and Javier David, “Trump Hints at Stopping Trade with Countries that Do Business with North Korea After Nuclear Test”, CNBC, 3 September 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/09/03/trump-hints-at-stopping-trade-with-countries-doing-business-with-n-korea.html>.

²⁵ Tim Hains, “President Trump Praises China for Ordering Banks to Halt Business with North Korea: Tremendous”, *Real Clear Politics*, 21 September 2017, <https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2017/09/21/president-trump-praises-china-for-ordering-banks-to-halt-business-with-north-korea-tremendous.html>; Christine Wang, “Trump Praises Xi Soon After Death of Chinese Dissident”, CNBC, 13 July 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/07/13/trump-praises-xi-soon-after-death-of-chinese-dissident.html>.

²⁶ Bill Hayton, “The Week Donald Trump Lost the South China Sea”, *Foreign Policy*, 31 July 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/07/31/the-week-donald-trump-lost-the-south-china-sea/>.

²⁷ Hannah Beech, “Rex Tillerson’s Deferential Visit to China”, *The New Yorker*, 21 March 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/rex-tillersons-deferential-visit-to-china>.

²⁸ Gardiner Harris, “Tillerson Hails Ties With India, but Criticizes China and Pakistan”, *The New York Times*, 18 October 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/18/us/politics/tillerson-india-china-pakistan.html>; U.S. Department of State, “Joint Statement AUSMIN 2017”; Ely Ratner, “The State Department Is Tilting Dangerously Toward China”, *Foreign Policy*, 24 August 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/08/24/the-state-department-is-tilting-dangerously-toward-china/>.

²⁹ Townshend, “Work in Progress”, *op.cit.*, pp. 2-4; Ashley Townshend, “The Post-Bannon White House Will Still be Tough on China”, *Lowy Interpreter*, 25 August 2017, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/post-bannon-white-house-will-still-be-tough-china>.

³⁰ Mark J. Valencia, “Trump’s Troubling South China Sea Policy”, *The Japan Times*, 14 May 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2017/05/14/commentary/world-commentary/trumps-troubling-south-china-sea-policy/#.WdQx-WiCzD4>.

of the world's worst offenders on human trafficking, and approved a \$1.4 billion arms sale to Taiwan despite formulaic Chinese opposition.³¹ The Treasury has imposed two rounds of secondary sanctions on Chinese entities in violation of United Nations' trade restrictions on North Korea,³² while the U.S. Trade Representative has launched a Section 301 investigation into Chinese intellectual property theft, which, over time, could provide Trump with options for retaliatory measures.³³

³¹ Gardiner Harris, "China Is Among Worst Human Trafficking Offenders, State Dept. Says", *The New York Times*, 27 June 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/27/world/asia/china-human-trafficking.html>; David Bruntrom and Arshad Mohammad, "U.S. Plans to Sell Taiwan About \$1.42 Billion in Arms", *Reuters*, 30 June 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-taiwan-arms/u-s-plans-to-sell-taiwan-about-1-42-billion-in-arms-idUSKBN19K2XO>.

³² U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Acts to Increase Economic Pressure on North Korea and Protect the U.S. Financial System", 29 June 2017, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/sm0118.aspx>; Demetri Sevastopulo, "Trump Places Sanctions on Russian and Chinese Companies over North Korea", *Financial Times*, 23 August 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/dd950c34-8754-11e7-bf50-e1c239b45787>.

³³ United States Trade Representative, "USTR Announces Initiation of Section 301 Investigation of China", Office of the United States Trade Representative, 18 August 2017, <https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2017/august/ustr-announces-initiation-section>; Julia Horowitz, "Trump Moves to Slap Duties on Chinese Aluminium Foil", *CNN Money*, 9 August 2017, <http://money.cnn.com/2017/08/08/news/trump-aluminum-tariffs/index.html>; aMaytaal Angel and David Lawler, "Despite Delay, US Expected to Impose Steel Tariffs", *Reuters*, 15 August 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-steel-tariffs/despite-delay-u-s-expected-to-impose-steel-tariffs-idUSKCN1AV10R>.

There is nothing wrong with engaging China on certain issues and pushing back on others. In fact, the administration should walk and chew gum when it comes to the world's most consequential major power relationship. The problem is that Trump does not appear to have an overall framework for how his administration will manage U.S.-China relations.³⁴ Seeking to leverage Chinese cooperation on North Korea by going soft, for example, on Beijing's unfair trade practices or coercive maritime behaviour, risks unnecessarily deprioritising broader strategic goals in U.S. China policy. It is unlikely that Beijing will place sufficient pressure on Pyongyang to have a decisive effect on its nuclear program.³⁵ This deal-making approach also worries Asian partners about what other regional interests might be compromised for a Trump priority or "grand bargain" with China.³⁶ Although the administration

³⁴ Mira Rapp-Hooper and Alexander Sullivan, "Trump's Team Has No Idea What It's Doing on China", *The Diplomat*, 5 April 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/04/05/trumps-team-has-no-idea-what-its-doing-on-china/>; Ratner, "The State Department Is Tilting Dangerously Toward China", *op.cit.*

³⁵ Evan Osnos, "Why China Won't Pressure North Korea as Much as Trump Wants", *The Atlantic*, 19 September 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/why-china-isnt-ready-to-put-pressure-on-north-korea>.

³⁶ Javier Hernandez, "Trump's Mixed Signals on South China Sea Worry Asian Allies", *The New York Times*, 10 May 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/10/world/asia/trump-south-china-sea-allies.html>; James Woolsey, "Under Donald Trump, the US Will Accept China's Rise — As Long as it Doesn't Challenge the Status Quo", *South China Morning Post*, 10 November 2016, <http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2044746/under-donald-trump-us-will-accept-chinas-rise-long>.

has recently appeared to ratchet-up the more resolute strands of its China policy, these moves need to form part of a comprehensive regional strategy that places Chinese adherence to the rules-based order at the heart U.S. policy.

A lack of coordination is also evident in the administration's approach to the North Korean nuclear crisis. Having inherited years of "collective policy failure" at a time when Pyongyang is making rapid advances towards a functioning inter-continental ballistic missile, Trump's policy of "maximum pressure and engagement" appear to be reasonable.³⁷ But it is being undermined by poor implementation. While Tillerson has been overseeing backchannel talks with North Korean officials, Trump and Vice President Mike Pence have repeatedly stated that negotiations are futile—sending mixed messages to Kim Jong-un and potentially undercutting the value of this engagement.³⁸ Inconsistencies about the aims of U.S. policy are also sowing confusion. In August, CIA Director Mike Pompeo hinted regime change could be

[it-doesnt?utm_source=&utm_medium=&utm_campaign=SCMPSocialNewsfeed](https://www.cia.gov/newsroom/record/doi-oesnt-utm_source=&utm_medium=&utm_campaign=SCMPSocialNewsfeed)

³⁷ Euan Graham, "Trump Comes to Asia", *The Diplomat*, 1 October 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/trump-comes-to-asia/>.

³⁸ Caitlyn Gribbin, "North Korea and US Having 'Advanced' Back Channel Talks, Julie Bishop Says", ABC News, 13 October 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-13/north-korea-us-having-advanced-back-channel-talks-bishop-says/9047074>; Kelsey Davenport, "U.S. Policy on North Korea: More Pressure, But Where's the 'Engagement'", *Arms Control Association*, 7 August 2017, <https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2017-08-07/us-policy-north-korea-more-pressure-where-engagement>.

Washington's ultimate goal, an idea Mattis and Tillerson have expressly rejected and which no other cabinet official has publically entertained.³⁹ Likewise, while Mattis, Kelly, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joseph Dunford have worked to calm global fears about unilateral strikes, Trump has continually undermined their efforts by threatening to "totally destroy" North Korea, including during his first address to the United Nations in September.⁴⁰ If this had not already convinced Pyongyang that negotiating with Trump would be futile, his decision to decertify the Iran nuclear deal on 13 October will make Kim even less likely to trust and negotiate with the administration.

Conclusion

The Trump administration still has a long way to go if it wants to reassure its Indo-Pacific partners that America will remain committed to stable, inclusive, and multi-faceted regional leadership. This will require more than reaffirming alliances, maintaining forward-deployed forces, and selectively turning up at multilateral summits. Rather, the president—and his future Asia team—will need to implement an

³⁹ Eli Watkins, "CIA Chief Signals Desire for Regime Change in North Korea", *CNN*, 21 July 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/07/20/politics/cia-mike-pompeo-north-korea/index.html>.

⁴⁰ Demetri Sevastopulo, "North Korea Accuses Trump of Making Declaration of War", *Financial Times*, 26 September 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/f43863bc-a20e-11e7-9e4f-7f5e6a7c98a2?mhq5j=e7>; Peter Heinlein, "Trump Threatens 'Total Destruction' of North Korea in First UN Speech", *Voice of America*, 19 September 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/trump-calls-for-world-action-against-north-korea-iran-venezuela-/4035239.html>.

integrated regional strategy that increases Washington's diplomatic, economic, and strategic investment in Asia, and places U.S. policy on China and North Korea in this wider context. Failing to do this will make America's regional presence more brittle.

Asia trip will help inform which of these futures is most likely to arise.

In the meantime, it is unclear what a hiatus in American leadership will mean for the region. On one hand, there is an opportunity for capable middle powers like Japan, Australia, India, and Singapore to assume a greater role in bolstering regional rules, building collective prosperity, and hedging against coercive uses of Chinese power.⁴¹ At the Shangri La Dialogue, Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull made a plea for this future, noting that Asia can no longer rely on great powers for security and must begin "sharing the burden of collective leadership".⁴² This will require reinvigorated networking among likeminded partners to build military, economic, and political resilience. On the other hand, it may be that the spectre of a less committed U.S. administration makes some nations disinclined to contribute to regional security. Those most vulnerable to Chinese economic coercion and political interference might wager that the uncertain benefits of regional balancing are not worth the risks. In this scenario, the U.S.-backed regional order could begin to erode. Trump's performance during his upcoming

⁴¹ Townshend, "America First", *op. cit.*, pp. 12-14.

⁴² Malcolm Turnbull, "Keynote Address 16th IISS Asia Security Summit", Shangri La Dialogue, Singapore, 2 June 2017, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/2017-06-02/keynote-address-16th-iiss-asia-security-summit-shangri-la-dialogue>.

7

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ROLE IN REGIONAL SECURITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC | YEO LAY HWEE

Introduction

The European Union (EU) published its very first strategy paper towards Asia in 1994. The EU's New Asia Strategy started off with the premise that it needs to accord a higher priority to Asia because of the latter's rising economic weight, with the imperative to "strengthen the Union's economic presence in Asia in order to maintain the Union's leading role in the world economy".¹

From the New Asia Strategy until now, the EU has indeed become an indispensable economic player in the Asia Pacific. It is now one of the top three trading partners of all major Asian countries and regions – China, Japan, Korea, India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It is also a leading investor in all these countries.

Despite such strong economic ties, the EU has not had a strong security presence in the region. The desire and aspirations to be taken seriously as a political and security actor in Asia evolved slowly despite its professed Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). As a post-national entity that eschews classic realpolitik and without any serious military capability, the EU was also never taken seriously as a security actor in Asia. While

¹ Communication from the Commission to the Council "Towards a New Asia Strategy" Brussels, COM (94), 314 final, 13 July 1994.

the EU sees security from a human rights perspective and focuses more on issues of human security, in Asia, security is seen more in the traditional sense concerning sovereignty and territorial integrity. Hence, despite the fact that the EU has acceded to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, it has not been formally invited by ASEAN to join the East Asia Summit (EAS) – a summit level meeting of ASEAN leaders and leaders of key Indo-Pacific or Asia-Pacific powers (US, China, India, Russia, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand). However, as the security environment in the Asia Pacific becomes far more complex and challenging with increased geopolitical risks emanating from competitive nationalisms, it may be time for the EU to review its security strategy and role in the Asia-Pacific.

Current Political and Security Engagement

Of the ten strategic partners that the EU identified in 2008, four are in Asia – China, India, Japan and South Korea. And while the EU likes to see itself as a global actor, the truth is that the EU pays very little attention to the power competition and the attendant strategic and security issues in Asia. Since 2001, following the 9/11 attacks in the US, and with rising terrorist threats, it has paid much more attention to security issues and has increased dialogue on terrorism and maritime piracy. However, much of the political and security engagements are still focused more on the soft security issues, such as environmental security, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance.

The EU has been a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) since 1994 – a forum initiated in the early 1990s by ASEAN to provide a platform for dialogue and consultation on political and security issues. From the primary objective of addressing the strategic uncertainties in the post-Cold War security environment through dialogue, the ARF has expanded its range of activities to facilitate cooperation in non-traditional security issues, from counter-terrorism and transnational crimes, to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The EU, also through its participation in Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP), has been active in supporting the Working Group on Preventive Diplomacy. While CSCAP is only a Track II dialogue of the ARF, it has played an important role in initiating dialogues and proposing new areas for cooperation. The Working Groups in CSCAP now covered issues such as Non-proliferation and Disarmament, Maritime Environmental Protection, Energy Security, and Nuclear Energy and Safety issues.

Besides the ARF and CSCAP, the EU is also an active member of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) forum. In fact, both ASEAN and the EU have been instrumental in getting the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) off the ground. Within the ASEM dialogue framework, one of the three pillars of ASEM activities is the political pillar, encompassing dialogue and cooperation in human rights, counter-terrorism, and broader regional and global goals of supporting multilateralism and global institutions such as the UN and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

While on surface it may seem that the EU and Asia are quite engaged on security issues, the reality is that most of these dialogues and cooperation are very broad and generally still at the stage of information-exchange and keeping up with the developments in the respective regions. Most Europeans understandably remained more preoccupied with security challenges in their own neighbourhood, especially after the crisis in Ukraine and the conflicts in the Middle East, and North Africa and the ensuing refugee crisis. As such, while aware of the potential hotspots in the Asia Pacific, the EU has not been engaged strategically to be of relevance to its Asian partners.

Ian Bond noted that Europeans tend to “see Asia mostly as a continent of economic opportunities, rather than of political and security risks”.² He further argued that the EU should start to pay more attention to security issues in Asia as the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) rightly recognised that “there is a direct connection between European prosperity and Asian security”.³ On this note, I would like to use the next section to further elaborate on what the EU can do to step up engagement with Asian countries, take a more proactive interest in the security dynamics in the region and see how it can contribute to regional security in the Asia-Pacific

² Ian Bond, “European Policy in Asia: Getting past mercatorism and mercantilism”, Insights, Centre for European Reform, 7 September 2017.

³ “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy”, June 2016 (also known as the EU Global Strategy – EUGS)

Securing EU’s interest and enhancing EU’s role in the Asia-Pacific

The EU’s interest and integration with the Asia-Pacific economies have expanded since its first Asia strategy in 1994. The EU’s top trading partners (China, Japan, Korea and ASEAN) in Asia account for more than 30% of its global trade, and the EU is also a major investor in Asia. For its own sustained economic recovery, the EU needs to look toward the growth areas in Asia. A rising middle class in Asia looking for quality goods and services would offer immense opportunities for European businesses.

The growing importance of the Asian region for European businesses and the ensuing economic interdependence between Asia and Europe means that the EU has a strategic interest in developments in the Asia-Pacific. The political and security risks in the region has unfortunately risen in recent months with increasing geopolitical competition between major powers in the region, and with the sabre-rattling seen in the Korean peninsula. As global and regional politics become more unpredictable with an America First Trump’s US, and an increasingly assertive China, what can the EU do to secure its interest in the region and to contribute to the security in the Asia-Pacific?

The EU despite its ambitions in developing its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and attendant Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), still faces challenges in articulating a coherent security and defence policy. The different strategic cultures of member states within

the EU, different threat perceptions and worldviews, and the inter-governmental structure of decision making in this policy area, make it difficult for the EU to reach a consensus on its foreign policy and relations with external partners.

The EU's defence is also closely intertwined with NATO as 22 out of the current EU 28 members are NATO members. Faced with Brexit, the EU also stands to lose one of its strongest security and defence actors. The United Kingdom, as one of the permanent member of the UN Security Council, contributes to 25% of the EU "defence" budget, and is the most military-capable for the projection of power. However, at the same time, the unreliability of Trump and Brexit have pushed the EU towards taking its own security and defence integration more seriously. Political rhetoric and ideas on how to improve the EU's defense set-up have flourished. In November 2016, the EU defence and foreign ministers agreed on a new level of ambition for security and defence which focuses on three priorities: "enabling the EU to respond more comprehensively, rapidly and effectively to crises, helping to make our partners stronger when it comes to their security and defence and strengthening the EU's capacity to protect its citizens".⁴

The EU also adopted a European Defence Action Plan calling on Europe to invest in its strategic capabilities.⁵ The Defence Action

Plan noted that collectively, the EU is the world's second largest military spender but unfortunately suffers from inefficiency in spending due to duplications, a lack of inter-operability and technological gaps. Hence it calls for the launch of a European Defence Fund to finance collaborative defence research projects and to develop joint defence capabilities agreed on by Member states.

Big member states such as France and Germany have also begun to talk more openly of deeper integration in defence, and the possibility of a European army. As a first step, a new military planning office has been set up in Brussels to help better coordinate the EU's CSDP missions.

However, despite these efforts, it is also clear that the EU's defence and security priorities are in its own neighbourhood. It did not articulate clearly a security role in the Asia Pacific and in fact, in the EU Global Strategy, reiterated that the EU's strength in Asia lies primarily on its economic prowess. It was in an earlier paper on EU's relations with ASEAN, "Partnership with a Strategic Purpose" that the EU envisaged working with ASEAN as a way to contribute towards security in the Asia-Pacific.

Working through various ASEAN-led security architecture such as the ARF is indeed one of the main avenues for the EU to become more comprehensively engaged with Asia, and for the EU to step up security cooperation.

⁴ EU Security and Defence Package, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/16693/EU%20Security%20and%20Defence%20package.

⁵ European Defence Action Plan, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/com_2016_950_f1_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en_v5_p1_869631.pdf.

[eeas.eu/sites/eeas/files/com_2016_950_f1_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en_v5_p1_869631.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/com_2016_950_f1_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en_v5_p1_869631.pdf).

ASEAN is in an unenviable position – indeed like the EU it is facing a set of challenges threatening its internal unity and cohesiveness. The geopolitical tensions arising from China’s challenge to the US primacy in Southeast and East Asia, and the overlapping territorial claims in South China Sea and East China Sea has threatened to divide ASEAN. The EU, however, has been a steadfast partner in building capacities in ASEAN towards deeper integration and greater coherence. The EU should continue its efforts to build a more institutionalized ASEAN that can be an effective convenor in bringing all the key players in the Asia Pacific to craft a more predictable regional order. As the EU itself has acknowledged in the 2015 Joint Communication, “A strong, cohesive and self-confident ASEAN proceeding with its own integration is good for regional stability, prosperity and security and creates new opportunities for cooperation on regional and global challenges”.⁶

Beyond this broad remit, there are more specific actions that the EU should actively pursue to contribute to security and development in the region that would in turn secure the trade and investment links crucial to the prosperity of both regions.

- The EU should proactively engage with the ASEAN Institute of Peace and Reconciliation to address ethnic and religious conflicts in Southeast Asia, and build up an early warning system together

with a set of preventive diplomacy tools to prevent the further spread of extremism that allows terrorist groups such as the Islamic State to gain a foothold in the region

- Through the EU-ASEAN dialogue, the EU should focus on issues of maritime piracy and security. Bringing its experience from Operation Atalanta to tackle piracy and provide navigational safety in the Gulf of Aden, the EU can share with ASEAN its comprehensive toolbox in addressing piracy, which is also becoming increasingly intertwined with terrorism.
- The EU should use its diplomatic experience from crafting the Iranian nuclear deal and draw lessons from its participation in the now defunct Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO) to engage the North Koreans at the ARF, and through its member states with diplomatic representation in Pyongyang, to help the North Koreans understand the risks of miscalculations and the need for dialogue.
- Through the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the EU can work with different partners to help China multilateralise its Belt and Road initiative and link it to the goal of ASEM Connectivity, setting up working groups to ascertain the impact, sustainability and feasibility of projects in ASEM countries.
- Until the EU defence integration plans can bear fruit, the EU should continue to focus on the soft security issues in which

⁶ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, “The EU and ASEAN: A partnership with a strategic purpose”, JOIN (2015), 22 final, Brussels, 18 May 2015.

it does best. The EU should also find ways to embrace and support the initiatives of key EU member states such as France in their bilateral efforts to ensure a balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region. For instance, at the 2016 Shangri-la Dialogue, then French defence minister proposed that “European navies ensure a presence that is as regular and visible as possible in the maritime areas in Asia”. The EU could help to coordinate such a presence with those member states that are willing and able to deploy their navies to the South China Sea and beyond. Keeping the sea lanes of communication open in South China Sea and the Malacca Straits is of key importance since so much of the EU’s trade with Asia passes through these waters.

interest and priorities of other major players in the region – whether it is India, China, Japan or the US – would also require the EU to become more strategic in its approach to the region. The EU would also need greater coordination with its own member states to craft policies in the region that are multi-layered and multi-faceted, utilizing the different strengths and instruments that the EU and its member states possess.

Conclusion

The EU has to realize that it can have significant influence in the region through the strong economic ties it has with many of the Asian countries. With its economic growth tied to the continued peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, the EU needs to become more active in its engagement with key Asian partners to help shape perspectives on important security issues and if possible, also shaping the policy responses to these issues. Working closely with ASEAN, increasing the latter’s capability would be an important contribution to strengthening the ASEAN-led regional architectures. The EU needs to be creative and flexible in working with ASEAN and its member states through the different forums to amplify its role in the Asia-Pacific. Understanding the intentions,

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SPECIAL ISSUE

ASIA SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONAL EQUILIBRIUM

On the occasion of APEC leaders summit, which opened on November 5 in Da Nang, Vietnam, Asia Centre dedicates a special issue of its analysis review Asia Trends to security issues in the Asia Pacific region. This special edition presents seven articles written by a range of international experts in geopolitical issues in Asia, providing analytical and strategic insights on current security trends in the region. As the security environment in Asia raises many uncertainties, whether it be North Korean nuclear issue or the various tensions related to sea and land borders disputes, the debate on the new regional equilibrium has been particularly intense. Although the current regional balance seems to shift in favour of China's rising role as a global and regional leader, at the expense of an American policy considered by many observers if not incoherent, at least ambiguous, the outlines of this new regional equilibrium appear quite uncertain. The last events unveiled latent oppositions and profound disagreements among the different regional actors. They also fuelled critics on cooperation and dialogue mechanisms deficiencies in the region. Nonetheless, those same mechanisms remain one of the best option to foster tensions easing. Key meetings of November 2017, starting by President Donald Trump visit to Asia from November 3 to 14, generate very high expectations on that matter.

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7. THE EUROPEAN UNION'S ROLE IN REGIONAL SECURITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

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