

**Pacific Dream? The evolution of US strategic culture and alliances in the
Indo-Pacific, 2001-2022**

by

Mircea Alin Barbantan

First Supervisor: Dr. Tony McCulloch

Second Supervisor: Prof. Iwan Morgan

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Declaration

I, Mircea Alin Barbantan, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own.
Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signature: Mircea Alin Barbantan

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the evolution of US alliances in the Indo-Pacific region from the beginning of the George W. Bush presidency in 2001, until the middle of the Joe Biden presidency, in 2022. In doing so, it employs the concept of ‘Pacific Dream’, a political, economic, and security vision for Asia that the US has largely adhered to since the end of the Second World War and that was articulated by President Barack Obama’s Secretary of State John Kerry in an April 2013 speech in Tokyo. It views this ‘Pacific Dream’ primarily through the lens of strategic culture – a domain within international relations theory which assesses the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of a country’s foreign policy strategy. Adopting this approach, the thesis assesses the primary alliance network of the US in the Indo-Pacific, the ‘San Francisco System’, consisting of Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines and Thailand. It assesses whether this alliance network has aided the US in achieving the foreign policy objectives of the ‘Pacific Dream’ and the degree to which it has been superseded by the Quad and Quad Plus.

The thesis argues that US policy-makers have come to regard China as posing the greatest challenge to their worldview in the Indo-Pacific, and it explores notions of a ‘new Cold War’, and the ‘containment’ of China. It also examines the emergence of the Quad, an alliance between the US, Japan, Australia, and India, and the Quad Plus (encompassing, in addition, South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand), which are both aiming to compete with China in the Indo-Pacific. The thesis analyses the influence that US allies have had on US strategic culture, making the case that they have played a greater role in shaping the US Pacific Dream – and US strategic culture - than is usually credited.

Impact Statement

The analysis and insight provided by this thesis will have a positive impact both within and outside academia. Within academia, the thesis continues the line of scholarship exploring US alliances in Asia, moving into a contemporary period, by focusing on the years 2001 – 2022. To study this particular period using a predominantly historical approach will allow academics to discuss a contemporary time period in a different manner. The thesis will provide insight that will be of benefit to scholars of history and of international relations. The field of strategic culture will also benefit, due to the particular emphasis in the thesis on the Indo – Pacific.

Outside academia, the thesis' insights can shed light on the manner in which governments design policy, as well as the ways in which they deliver said policy. It can also be of use to the study of public discourse and its broader political effects. The thesis will also add details concerning countries' security culture and how it has evolved over time. The impact of this thesis can occur through dissemination through outputs such as a published book, journal articles, collaborations with academics and non – academics concerning public policy and public service.

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Terminology

The term used by the United States Government to refer to the region that this thesis analyses has changed over time. In the Cold War era the term ‘Pacific region’ was generally used, and subsequently the term ‘Asia-Pacific’, which was most common in the immediate post-Cold War years. Since 2017, during and after the Trump administration, the US Government has preferred to use the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ owing to the greater emphasis on the role of India in the region. It should be noted that there is no major difference between the three terms, and they are all used to define the region that, starting with India, moves eastwards to include China, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, North and South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines, as well as Australia and New Zealand, and across the ocean, Hawaii, San Francisco and the west coast of the United States. The official map of INDOPACOM (the US Indo-Pacific Command) on the next page conveys this definition of the region.

**Map of the Indo – Pacific as established by the United States Indo-Pacific Command
(INDOPACOM)**



Source: USINDOPACOM Area of responsibility¹

¹ USINDOPACOM, Area of Responsibility, March 2022

Abbreviations

ADIZ – Air Defense Identification Zone

AFP – Armed Forces of the Philippines

AIIB – Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

ANZUS – Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty

APEC – Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation

ARF – ASEAN Regional Forum

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ASPAC – Asia – Pacific Network on Science and Technology

AUKUS – Australia – United Kingdom – United States Security Pact

AUSMIN – Australia – US Ministerial Consultations

BJP – Bharatiya Janata Party

BRI – Belt and Road Initiative

CCP – Chinese Communist Party

CCCCP – Central Committee of the Communist Party

CFR – Council of Foreign Relations

COVAX – COVID – 19 Vaccine Global Access

COVID – 19 – Coronavirus disease 2019

CPTPP – Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership

DMZ – Korean Demilitarized Zone

DOD – Department of Defense

DPRK – Democratic people’s Republic of Korea

EAC – East Asian Community

EAS – East Asia Summit

EDCA – Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement

FDI – Foreign Direct Investments

FONOPS – Freedom of Navigation Operations

FRUS – Foreign Relations of the United States

FTA – Free Trade Agreement

GATT – General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

GOP – ‘Grand Old Party’, the Republican Party

HADR – Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Program

IMF – International Monetary Fund

IMT – International Monitoring Team

INC – Indian National Congress

INDOPACOM – United States Indo-Pacific Command

IPEF – Indo – Pacific Economic Framework

IPMDA – Indo – Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness

JMSDF – Japanese Maritime Self – Defense Force

JCG – Japan Coast Guard

JUSCANZ – Japan – US – Canada – Australia – New Zealand

LDP – Liberal Democratic Party of Japan

MDP – Major Defense Partner

MNNA – Major Non – NATO Ally

NAFTA – North American Free Trade Agreement

NATO – North Atlantic Security Treaty

NDS – National Defense Strategy

NEC – National Economic Council

NET – National Economic Territory

NIE – National Intelligence Estimate

NPT – Non-Proliferation Treaty

NSC – National Security Council

NSS – National Security Strategy

OPCON – Wartime Operational Control

PRC – People’s Republic of China

QDR – Quadrennial Defense Review

Quad – Indo – Pacific Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

RCEP – Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership

RIMPAC – Rim of the Pacific Exercise

ROC – Republic of China

ROK – Republic of Korea

SCS – South China Sea

SD – State Department

SDCF – Security and Defence Cooperation Forum

SDF – Japanese Self-Defense Force

SEATO – Southeast Asia Security Treaty

STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

THAAD – Terminal High Altitude Area Defense

TPP – Trans-Pacific Partnership

TSD – Trilateral Strategic Dialogue

UNCLOS – United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

USCIRF – United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

USMCA – United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement

USOM – United States Operation Mission

VFA – Visiting Forces Agreement

WH – White House

WMD – Weapons of Mass Destruction

WTO – World Trade Organization

Chapter 1

Pacific Dream? The evolution of US alliances in the Indo – Pacific, 2001 – 2022

‘Asia and the United States are not separated by this great ocean; we are bound by it.’

Barack Obama, Tokyo, November 14, 2009²

Introduction: The Pacific Dream

On 15 April 2013, at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, US Secretary of State John Kerry presented the audience with his vision of a ‘Pacific Dream’. Kerry’s argument was clear: the United States, through its bilateral alliances, had made itself part of an increasingly secure Asia-Pacific. As the decades had passed, the US and its allies had become steadily closer owing to a number of shared values. What Kerry announced in Tokyo was a call for ‘unprecedented security, economic, and social cooperation’. He outlined four main principles as the basis for this cooperation: strong growth (upholding the bilateral alliances), fair growth (open, transparent economies), smart growth (focusing on climate change), and just growth (democracy, rule of law, universal human rights, etc.). Claiming that the bilateral alliances of the United States had ‘underwritten the peace, stability, and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific’, Kerry added that the US and its allies were in a good position to counter the threats fostered in the 20th century.³

The fundamental premise behind Kerry’s rhetoric was the belief that the Indo-Pacific’s stability was threatened. Kerry listed the dangers of the 21st century: nuclear threats, maritime disputes, and climate change. The first two were indirect references to North Korea and

² Barack Obama, ‘Remarks in Tokyo’, 14 November 2009

³ John Kerry, ‘Remarks on a 21st Century Pacific Partnership’, 15 April 2013

China respectively. He then said that America and like-minded countries have a choice: ‘either stand still and see them as obstacles, or we can join together and move forward and see them as opportunities’. Even so, Kerry was not hinting at conflict, instead, by ‘opportunities’, he was talking about how the Pacific Dream could apply to other countries as well. He spoke of the need to ‘define our dream for the Pacific region, one in which nations and people forge a partnership that shapes our shared future’.⁴ That ‘shared future’ would be the result of shared values, and Kerry expanded on what they were: access to a good education, the dignity provided by a decent job, the need for safety in people’s neighbourhoods and security for their nations, as well as protecting people’s human rights. The universality of these values was viewed by Kerry as something more than simple ideology or political grandstanding; there was a certain humanism to his speech.

The Pacific Dream was presented as an attempt to transform those shared values into a security and economic vision for the Indo-Pacific. Kerry spoke of breaking ‘new ground in how we keep countries safe, help economies to mature, create new jobs and embrace partnerships for the future’. He added, interestingly, that ‘we can do it while empowering people to make these choices for themselves’. By saying this, Kerry set the ground for one of the most fundamental changes that would take place both within US foreign policy for the Indo-Pacific, and for the way in which it would interact with its rival, China: emphasizing that alignment with the US was a choice, not the result of coercion. Kerry insisted that what he was presenting was not ‘a static set of commandments’, but the ‘mutual recognition that we are all in this together’.⁵ That recognition would often be validated by the behaviour of US allies, analysed throughout this thesis, proving Kerry to be essentially correct.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Kerry's speech was a significant attempt by an American Secretary of State to articulate an American vision for the Asia-Pacific region. What Kerry was presenting was the US version of a 'Pacific Dream', a concept that is central to this thesis. The US Pacific Dream can be considered as a broader concept than traditional Presidential doctrines because it has spanned multiple presidencies and evolved over time. One way to understand the US Pacific Dream is through the lens of strategic culture, particularly through the three elements of 'beliefs, attitudes, and actions'. Rather than relying on traditional international relations theories such as Realism or Liberal Internationalism, this thesis analyses and assesses the Pacific Dream through the lens of strategic culture, as this approach is better equipped for assessing historical developments, since it is less rigid than the conventional theoretical frameworks of international relations and more accommodating to the inconsistencies, both apparent and real, in US foreign policy. Later in this chapter, a broader explanation of strategic culture, from its interpretation in international relations, to the analysis it brings from various regions will be made. An approach centred on 'beliefs, attitudes, and actions' allows for a broad and coherent analysis that encompasses the military strategy of the United States as well as its economic vision and its diplomatic pursuits. This focus on a 'military-political-economic' outlook advances the assessment of US policy beyond national security and enables a broader analysis of America's Pacific Dream and the evolution of the US alliance network in the Pacific region.

Of course, US involvement in the Pacific region and the American vision of how the region should be regarded did not begin with Kerry's speech or with the Obama administration's much-discussed 'Pivot to Asia'. The statehood of California in 1850,⁶ together with the strategically located San Francisco harbour, was an important milestone

⁶ National Archives, 'Document for September 9th: Compromise of 1850'

towards the US becoming a Pacific power and by 1889 Oregon⁷ and Washington had also joined as states.⁸ The acquisition of the Philippines following the War with Spain in 1898⁹ confirmed this trend as did the annexation of Hawaii, which had become a US territory by 1900.¹⁰ The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in Hawaii on 7 December 1941 brought the US officially into the Second World War and led to the military occupation of Japan until 1952.¹¹

It was in Hawaii, in December 1975, that President Gerald Ford presented what he called his 'Pacific Doctrine'. Speaking in the wake of the ignominious ending to US involvement in the Vietnam War seven months before, Ford, like Kerry some 40 years later, spoke of the US desire to move closer to a safe and prosperous Asia and, as with Kerry's principles, Ford had his own six premises. Ford spoke of how essential the US military presence in the Asia-Pacific was and how important the alliance with Japan had become. He wanted the normalization of relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC), and continued US engagement with the security of South East Asia. Calling for a resolution of all regional conflicts and disputes, he avowed that 'peace in Asia requires a structure of economic cooperation reflecting the aspiration of all the peoples in the region'.

Ford clearly viewed his doctrine as one of peace. While he was focused on building trust with allies he did not shy away from criticising past US mistakes, such as the colonization of the Philippines, an excessive focus on Western Europe, and past periods of isolationism. Ford also argued that in US alliances, America's allies were seeking 'self-reliance in their own future and in their own relations with us'. Ford clearly envisioned American leadership as something that would take form through increased consultation with allies, and not something

⁷ Oregon Secretary of State, 'Act of Congress admitting Oregon to the Union'

⁸ Benjamin Harrison, 'Proclamation 294—Admission of Washington Into the Union', 11 November 1889

⁹ University of Central Arkansas, 'United States/Philippines (1898-1946)'

¹⁰ State Department, 'Annexation of Hawaii, 1898'

¹¹ Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations, 'Japan, China, the United States and the Road to Pearl Harbor, 1937-41', FRUS

unilaterally decreed in Washington.¹² Ford's speech had the same ambitions as Kerry's a half-century later. Sometimes called the *Ford Doctrine*, it can be viewed as his attempt at presenting the US Pacific Dream, a vision broader than a national security doctrine would conventionally offer. Once again, strategic culture can be of help in assessing this vision, because Ford, like Kerry after him, established a coherent set of US beliefs, attitudes and actions.

Going back to the end of the Second World War, one can see signs of US attempts to establish the principles that would later be key tenets for Ford and Kerry. During the Truman and Eisenhower years, the US aimed at establishing a 'Pacific Pact', an agreement that tried to bring together countries allied with the US in the Asia-Pacific. Owing to mistrust of Japan, and a certain US indifference to the security environment in the region, the idea never came to fruition. Nevertheless, Secretary of State Dean Acheson gave a speech on Asia in 1950, in which he explained the core element of US security policy for the Pacific region: the disarmament of Japan. The disarmament had 'placed upon the United States the necessity of assuming the military defence of Japan so long as that is required, both in the interest of our security and in the interests of the security of the entire Pacific area and, in all honor, in the interest of Japanese security'.¹³

It was in this speech that Acheson identified the US 'defensive perimeter', from the Aleutian Islands to Japan, and then the Ryukyus, and to the Philippines, which is why it is often called the 'perimeter speech'. It could be argued that the US alliance network that followed was an attempt to institutionalise and formalise the defensive perimeter. In this sense, there is a clear foundational principle for US strategic culture both in Asia and everywhere else: inherently defensive and a means to operate as a buffer zone against the

¹² Gerald Ford, 'Address by President Gerald R. Ford at the University of Hawaii', 7 December 1975, Gerald Ford Presidential Library and Museum

¹³ Dean Acheson, 'Speech on the Far East', 12 January 1950, *Archive.org*

expansion of international communism, the dominant perceived threat of the time. Evaluating the speeches of Acheson, and then Ford and Kerry's, it becomes evident that American strategy in the Asia-Pacific is an attempt at safeguarding US security and its worldview. What changes over time is the extent to which US allies are able to contribute or withdraw from this network. To better understand the origins of the US alliance system, and the security perimeter presented by Acheson, a review of Douglas MacArthur's farewell address to Congress is useful.

MacArthur's speech, delivered on 19 April 1951, can be viewed as an example of a nascent Pacific Dream within US strategic culture. MacArthur argued that the US had to avoid being 'blind to the reality that the colonial era is now past and the Asian peoples covet the right to shape their own free destiny. What they seek now is friendly guidance, understanding, and support -- not imperious direction -- the dignity of equality and not the shame of subjugation'. He spoke of how Japan had transformed into 'an edifice dedicated to the supremacy of individual liberty and personal dignity; and in the ensuing process there has been created a truly representative government committed to the advance of political morality, freedom of economic enterprise, and social justice'. On the Philippines he said 'the existing unrest will be corrected and a strong and healthy nation will grow in the longer aftermath of war's terrible destructiveness. We must be patient and understanding and never fail them -- as in our hour of need, they did not fail us'. Korea, he said 'is the sole one which has risked its all against communism. The magnificence of the courage and fortitude of the Korean people defies description'. MacArthur was, in effect, describing a rough blueprint for a US alliance network in the Pacific:

The Pacific was a potential area of advance for any predatory force intent upon striking at the bordering land areas. All this was changed by our Pacific victory. Our strategic frontier then shifted to embrace the entire Pacific Ocean,

which became a vast moat to protect us as long as we held it. Indeed, it acts as a protective shield for all of the Americas and all free lands of the Pacific Ocean area. We control it to the shores of Asia by a chain of islands extending in an arc from the Aleutians to the Mariannas held by us and our free allies. From this island chain we can dominate with sea and air power every Asiatic port from Vladivostok to Singapore -- with sea and air power every port, as I said, from Vladivostok to Singapore -- and prevent any hostile movement into the Pacific.¹⁴

Both Acheson's speech, as well as the opinions of MacArthur, can be viewed through the lens of the US Pacific Dream. They go further than traditional strategic planning: they make room for allies and partners, they take into account economic wellbeing outside the traditional framing of free trade, and they speak of freedom from tyranny in language that is not wooden. These speeches all point towards a US worldview as applied to the Pacific Dream. That vision, the Pacific Dream, would undergo a series of changes over time, but the endurance of certain basic principles sustained the coherence of the vision. By analysing American beliefs, attitudes, and actions in shaping policy towards the Pacific region this thesis assesses just how far the US has come in achieving its Pacific Dream. It could be said that the US had a 'dream' about how the Asia-Pacific would develop since the end of the Second World War, in a manner similar to its vision of European integration, although due to the political and military realities of the Pacific region, the development of this vision was considerably slower. That does not take away from the fact that what MacArthur, Acheson, Ford, and Kerry presented was a coherent, dynamic, and adaptable vision that helps to explain US policy in the Indo-Pacific today. The American Pacific Dream can also be contrasted with Xi Jinping's 'China Dream', which he employed after becoming President in

¹⁴ Douglas MacArthur 'Farewell Address to Congress', *americanrhetoric.com*, 19 April 1951

2012, although the contrast should not necessarily imply an inevitable clash. The Pacific Dream under Kerry especially was an attempt to give a more idealistic shape to America's Asia strategy, moving beyond the militarism of the past.¹⁵

To summarize, the American Pacific Dream is a vision articulated by John Kerry, Gerald Ford, Dean Acheson and other US policymakers since the end of the Pacific War in August 1945 of how the Pacific region should be defended, navigated, shared, and governed – a vision drawing upon US strategic culture as applied to the Asia-Pacific, or the Indo-Pacific as it has become known in Washington DC. Central to this strategic culture since the Second World War is a commitment to finding and working with reliable allies and partners in the region, and preferably democracies, however imperfect, that purport to share the same 'beliefs, attitudes and actions' – in other words the same 'norms and values' – as the United States.

A case can be made that US strategy in the post-Cold War Asia-Pacific is an attempt to return to Warren I. Cohen's concept of 'an empire without tears'. In his chapter for *US Leadership in a World of Uncertainties* titled "'We will remain a Pacific Power": America's Self-Proclaimed Destiny in the Asia-Pacific Region', Robert McMahon advances the notion that US plans for the Asia-Pacific had always lacked an enforcement mechanism, and whatever ambition the US might have for the Pacific in the future, it will be tied to the extent of resources it can commit to the region.¹⁶ As the current thesis argues, the US and its allies have correlated their ambitions to such an extent that they are working towards a viable 'enforcement mechanism'.

¹⁵ Fu Mengzi, 'Pacific Dream, US' Ideal Diplomacy', *China-US Focus*, 8 May 2013

¹⁶ Robert McMahon, "'We will remain a Pacific Power": America's Self-proclaimed Destiny in the Asia-Pacific Region' in Stricof, Michael, Vagnoux, Isabelle, *US Leadership in a World of Uncertainties*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, 29-49

US alliances in the Indo-Pacific

In the chapters that follow, this thesis will advance three main arguments. Firstly, it will argue that the US alliance network in the Pacific region has evolved significantly since 2001. In chapter 2, the historical background chapter, it will advance the notion that the San Francisco System was designed to be a bilateral alliance network, largely because US policy-makers considered that its members were not sufficiently aligned with the US, or with each other, in terms of ‘norms and values’. The main body of the thesis, from chapters 3 to 6, will analyse how that situation changed between 2001 and 2021, resulting in the formation of the Quad and the Quad Plus.

Secondly, the thesis will examine these developments through the lens of strategic culture, as conveyed by the notion of an American ‘Pacific Dream’. By studying the evolution of American strategic culture, it will be easier to understand key shifts and developments than it would be with traditional international relations theories. Strategic culture is more accommodating of a holistic, historical analysis of American diplomacy, and it does not bind research to the prescriptions that are typical of international relations theory.

The third argument, which runs through the analysis in every chapter, is that the US has gradually been required to allow greater agency to its key allies, both in terms of alliance contributions and in terms of alignment with the US and its other allies and partners. As American allies have democratised and become more financially capable, and as China has evolved into a more sophisticated threat, the only way in which the US has been able to safeguard its ‘Pacific Dream’ and its worldview has been by ensuring that it finds common ground with the objectives and capabilities of its allies. The extent of that integration of purpose will be central to any future competition with China.

This thesis will build its arguments around the US attempts to pursue a ‘Pacific Dream’, the security successes that came with the aforementioned ‘dream’, as well as the economic and political challenges presented by it. Historically, from the end of the Second World War, the US negotiated a series of bilateral defence treaties in the Pacific region that formed a rough security architecture. These defence treaties were signed with Japan in 1951, Australia and New Zealand also in 1951, in the ANZUS treaty, the Philippines in the same year, South Korea, Thailand, and Taiwan in 1954, and South Vietnam in 1956. Of these countries, the relationship with Taiwan was downgraded following Nixon’s visit to China in 1972, and South Vietnam ceased to exist following the US defeat in the Vietnam War in 1975. This series of bilateral agreements has been labelled by academics the ‘San Francisco System’ or the ‘hub – and – spokes’ system, owing to US centrality and the fact that the 1951 defence treaties were signed in San Francisco. Although the system has endured throughout the Cold War and after, US policy-makers were always reluctant to formalize and institutionalize it, preferring to refer to ‘allies and partners’ or ‘allies and friends’ in the region. This was partly due to disagreements between these ‘allies and partners’, for example, Japan and South Korea, and partly due to US unwillingness to signal the need for an all-encompassing defence structure, due to the possibility of provoking China. The failed experiment of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) also made the US reluctant to pursue NATO-like structures.

Key developments after 2001

The year 2001 marked an important turning point in US strategy in the Indo-Pacific, not only because of the inauguration of George W Bush as the US President, and the events of 9/11, which directed the focus of his administration away from the region and towards the Middle

East, but also because of the admission of China into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) three months later, on 11 December 2001. The 2008 financial crisis was also important because it marked a key moment in Chinese strategy, when there was a clear impression that the US and the western world had begun to decline, and Chinese foreign policy changed to one of assertively challenging US primacy. The 2017-2022 period was another key period, since it marked a change in stance by the US, a response to the earlier change in stance by China. The US National Security Strategy (NSS) of October 2022 was a culmination of these changing trends. The 2022 NSS framed the US as being in a competition with both China and Russia, one shaped by a battle between democracies and autocracies.¹⁷ It also went further than many previous US NSS strategies in emphasizing the need to work together with allies. It called US alliances the ‘most important strategic asset’ in the attempt by the United States to ensure stability in the Pacific region and presented the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as America’s ‘most consequential geopolitical challenge’.¹⁸ It also highlighted diplomacy as a means to achieve goals, moving away from the strong focus on military power and promised to uphold the ‘Free and Open Indo Pacific’ (FOIP), a concept that had gained popularity during the George W. Bush administration.

Along similar lines, Michael Mandelbaum published an article in *Foreign Affairs* in February 2019 entitled ‘The New Containment’, where he expanded on the need for the US to contain China, Russia, and Iran.¹⁹ In 2020, in the same journal, Mira Rap-Hooper published ‘Saving America’s Alliances’, an article where she called for a coherent US non-military strategy to counter China and Russia. These opinion pieces gave expression to an adjustment in thinking in US government and academic circles. The question, in this case, was how the US vision for a Pacific Dream could take place in the context of increasing

¹⁷ White House, ‘National Security Strategy’, October 2022

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11

¹⁹ Michael Mandelbaum, ‘The New Containment’, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2019

securitization of the region, especially given the demands made of the US itself. The goal, this dissertation argues, would be one of preventing national security goals from clashing with economic and political objectives.²⁰

It is not just in the Indo-Pacific where belief in the US ability to lead has found a cautious post-Trump optimism. In Europe, with the Russian war in Ukraine, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has also found a new existential purpose. The war has allowed US allies from NATO's eastern flank, also known as the Bucharest Nine, to position themselves as opponents to the invasion of Ukraine. Tensions emerged in Europe between what Donald Rumsfeld had called 'Old Europe and New Europe', with Germany in particular, and France as well on some occasions, encountering difficulties in taking a strong position against Russia owing to their economic ties with it and their own geopolitical balancing objectives. Many western European countries, excluding the UK, have found the war in Ukraine troublesome in terms of their long-term strategy of finding a middle line between the US and Russia. The newfound voice of NATO's eastern flank reinforces the idea that America has allies which are gaining confidence and political clout and are making their voice heard on serious geopolitical issues. This suggests that both the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific are experiencing something of a reaffirmation of trust in America as a leader, with the caveat that the allies of the United States are making more effort to put their points across and to gain credible advantages.

Aims of thesis

The key research questions of the thesis can be summarised as follows:

²⁰ Mira Rapp-Hooper, 'Saving America's Alliances', *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2020

- What is the nature of the US Pacific Dream and how does it relate to US strategic culture in the Indo-Pacific?
- How has the US alliance network in the Pacific region evolved and to what extent has the San Francisco System been replaced by the Quad Plus?
- In what ways have US allies influenced the evolution of the US alliance network in the Indo-Pacific and the achievement of the US Pacific Dream?
- To what extent are the Pacific Dream and US strategic culture in the Indo-Pacific embodied in US National Security Strategies, especially Biden's 2022 NSS?
- How inherent is the containment of China to the US alliance network in the Indo-Pacific and is this alliance network fit for this purpose?

Original Contribution to the field

The Pacific Dream as a concept in American foreign policy has not previously been analysed in any depth. This is because most works in this field are heavily reliant on international relations framing and are very theoretical in their analysis of contemporary US foreign policy. The approach of this thesis is to analyse the Pacific Dream by using strategic culture as a lens. Doing this better enables analysis of US alliance policy, as strategic culture makes room for an overview of 'beliefs, attitudes, and actions'. This can be done in a security sense, by focusing on the evolution of the San Francisco System, and the emergence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (known as the Quad) as well as the Quad Plus (a looser, more trade-minded variation of the Quad), and other multilateral groups such as AUKUS (Australia, the UK and the US), as well as in a political and economic sense by evaluating trade agreements such as the TPP, and attempts to form political integration such as the East Asia Community or the East Asia Summit.

Secondly, the thesis traces and analyses the evolution of the ‘San Francisco System’ between 2001 and 2022 from a loose network of bilateral alliances without an official title into the Quad Plus. The works that analysed it tended to focus on territorial disputes, or general disagreements between the US and its allies which strengthened the impression that the alliance network was dysfunctional. This thesis approaches the San Francisco System differently, analysing how it compares to the Quad and the Quad Plus and assessing its potential role in the increasingly expansive political, economic, and security formats present in the Indo-Pacific. There have been very few works that link the San Francisco System and the Quad Plus so directly and that evaluate their historical evolution.

Thirdly, the role of US allies in developing the US alliance network in Indo-Pacific is analysed in detail and found to be more influential than is often supposed. For example, it was Japan’s ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ (FOIP) concept that became a key reference point in US strategy. Australia’s national strategy of relying on one superpower - be it Britain or America – to help in its defence, has paved the way for deeper cooperation not only with the US, but also with Japan and the Quad. It was the Philippines that took China to the International Court of Justice over its South China Sea border dispute, while South Korea and India both put forward national strategies, the ‘New Southern Strategy’ and the ‘Act East Policy’ respectively, that were designed to enable common ground not only with each other, but with the US and other allies as well. India’s border skirmishes with China in the Himalayas proved decisive in determining New Delhi to take a more supportive policy towards the Quad. Taiwan’s pro-democracy President, Tsai Ing-wen, never ceased to insist that US support for the Republic of China must remain steadfast. These are all examples of US allies in the region pressing and influencing US policy, in accordance with their own domestic agendas, national security concerns and strategic culture.

Fourthly, the thesis assesses the Biden administration's National Security Strategy (2022), as well as earlier NSS documents, especially since 2001, in terms of their positioning of the US alliance network in the Indo-Pacific and their relationship with the US Pacific Dream and US strategic culture in the region. This has not been done before and it aligns the thesis as far as possible with a developing strategic environment. Analysing NSS strategies also enables an examination of the importance of the San Francisco System during different presidential administrations. For example, some National Security Strategies have separated the Philippines and Thailand from Japan, Australia, and South Korea, while others have treated them as one category. The changing US view of the degree of threat posed by China since 2001 is also reflected in the NSS documents – especially the Biden NSS published in October 2022.

Fifthly, and finally, the thesis makes the claim that US-China rivalry is happening as a competition of values. The two countries have embarked upon an increasingly conflictual stance, resembling a new Cold War. This thesis analyses the challenges and successes the US side has had in establishing its own rules aimed at shaping the Indo-Pacific region. Ultimately, the Indo-Pacific is undergoing a battle between two visions or 'dreams', one put forward by China, and one presented by the US. Both visions are evolving with time; but the nature of this competition raises questions about the validity of observing the Pacific region through the lens of traditional containment. It also invites a judgement as to how far the US alliance network in the Pacific is strengthening the US position *vis a vis* China both within the region and globally.

Methodology / Strategic Culture

The research method used in this thesis is primarily historical analysis based on primary sources and informed by the twin concepts of the American Pacific Dream and US strategic culture more generally. The research process, through employing secondary sources, also contextualises why the decision-makers pursued the paths they did, with attention being given to economic, political, military considerations. The thesis aims to balance what the primary sources reveal with the wider context in which key decisions and developments have been made. The emphasis on an historical approach allows for a better understanding of the evolution of American strategic culture in the Pacific region. How American strategic culture has evolved has considerable implications for US national security policy, and thus, for its alliances, not least in the Asia-Pacific. Every presidential administration leaves its mark on US strategic culture, as the Bush administration did with the Iraq War. Toby Lauterbach defines strategic culture as being ‘concerned with the role of cultural influences, influences on how political entities judge the proper time to employ force, ways of using force during a conflict, and ways of determining the best time to terminate conflict’.²¹

This definition suits the structure of the thesis, since it allows for an assessment of how political entities, such as the Presidency, the Defense and State Departments, as well as the similar agencies of US allies shape alliances. A constructivist understanding of strategic culture, focusing on ideology and national identity, prioritizes norms, which again is important for the thesis, since the US has made ‘shared norms and values’ a key point of its strategic culture and its alliances, as shown in the Pacific Dream. The concept of strategic culture also raises the question of how much difference there is between the strategic culture of the US and that of China, its main challenger in the Indo-Pacific.²² David Haglund makes the case for strategic culture in his 2014 article ‘What Can Strategic Culture Contribute to

²¹ Toby Lauterbach, ‘Constructivism, Strategic Culture, and the Iraq War’, *ASPJ Africa & Francophonie*, 4th Quarter 2011, 61-87

²² Kerry Longhurst, ‘On Strategic Culture’, *Germany and the use of force*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004

Our Understanding of Security Policies in the Asia-Pacific Region?’ In this he advocates the use of strategic culture as a way of understanding international relations, including in the case of the Indo-Pacific, and he supports the contribution of the ‘strategic culture toolkit’ in providing a better understanding of the region.²³

One of the most helpful sources on the issue of strategic culture and the Indo-Pacific for the current thesis is the *Contemporary Security Policy* Volume 35, Issue no. 2 of 2014, on ‘Strategic Cultures and Security Policies of the Asia-Pacific’. This collection assesses strategic culture in Japan, China, Australia, South Korea, the Philippines, and the US, and represents one of the strongest recent efforts to connect strategic culture with the Indo-Pacific. Haglund favours ‘path dependence’ as one of the best ways of employing strategic culture. Path dependence, a social science concept whereby past events are seen to determine the direction of future actions, has considerable value in understanding the strategic culture of the US and its allies in the Pacific. It is similar to the approach of the historian in establishing the chronological background and wider context of an event in order to explain its origins, evolution and outcome. The strong emphasis on history rather than international relations theory has been an aspect of strategic culture that has been applauded by Haglund and others and is adopted in the current thesis.

The *Contemporary Security Policy* article by Brice Harris on US strategic culture in the Indo-Pacific takes a somewhat different approach from that employed in the present thesis but is mentioned here as one of the very few attempts to analyse US policy in the Indo-Pacific in terms of strategic culture.²⁴ Harris focuses on the American prioritisation of technology within its strategic culture, making the broader point that this focus actually hurts

²³ David Haglund, ‘What Can Strategic Culture Contribute to Our Understanding of Security Policies in the Asia – Pacific Region?’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.35.2, 2014, 310-328

²⁴ Brice Harris, ‘United States Strategic Culture and Asia – Pacific Security’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.35.2, 2014, 290-309

US ambitions, since it detaches Washington policymaking from understanding allies and rivals in a cultural sense. The narrow focus on technology by Harris is not adopted in the present thesis which approaches strategic culture through a political and diplomatic lens, and argues that it is key political figures in the US and allied countries, that define their nations' strategic cultures. Harris also argues that America's 'pivot' to Asia is a sign of historical continuity but while it is true that the US has regarded itself as a Pacific power since at least 1898, the present thesis makes the point that it was only after 'the pivot' that the Indo-Pacific became the main strategic priority for the US, after decades of being the second, or even third, area of interest for America.

The *Contemporary Security Studies* volume also provides other articles that have informed the analysis of the Indo-Pacific in this thesis, both in terms of US allies, and the perception of China as a challenger. Alex Burns and Ben Eltham's article makes the point that Australian strategic culture outlasts any one political administration, and that Australia has been one of the most consistent allies of the US. They also argue that there is a difference between Australia's national security aspirations, and the reality of its military capabilities, whereas this thesis takes the view that Australia's cooperation with the US and allies has led to a palpable improvement in Australian security through its alliances with the US and the UK.²⁵ As regards Japan, Andrew Oros argues that Tokyo is in its fourth wave of strategic culture, one that aims to move beyond the pacifism of the Cold War. This thesis argues that, in both a diplomatic and military sense, Japan is well on the way to developing a more militarised posture.²⁶

²⁵ Alex Burns, Ben Eltham, 'Australia's Strategic Culture: Constraints and Opportunities in Security Policymaking', *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.35.2, 2014, 187-210

²⁶ Andrew Oros, 'Japan's Strategic Culture: Security Identity in a Fourth Modern Incarnation?', *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.35.2, 2014, 227-248

Jiyul Kim's article on South Korea's strategic culture finds three pillars: prosperity, defence against North Korea, and maintaining a strong relationship with the US. Kim uses the ideas of shared historical memory to advance the notion that South Korean strategic culture is both unique and a source of clues for analysis that can then be applied to other case studies. Kim's points play out well with this thesis, as a number of American and Korean politicians have pointed to their countries' historical alliance, resulting from the Korean War, as a source of continuity in the security ties between the two. What Kim does not account for, however, is the value of groupings like the Quad Plus, and their effect on South Korea's security options, in offering more autonomy while remaining in alignment with the US.²⁷

Renato Cruz de Castro's article examines the Philippines' strategic culture in the context of the increasing competition between the US and China and argues that it is showing signs of moving from an inward focus, centred on the threat posed by insurgency, to an outward one, focusing more on China. Castro's point is that the Philippines' strategic culture has been more consistent than it would appear, and that expectations of a greater role in the deterrence of China are overblown. Castro's insight is valuable, and contributes to the broader assessment made by this thesis as to whether the Philippines can find a helpful position within the American security infrastructure, especially given the splintering of the San Francisco System that has been taking place with the emergence of the Quad and the Quad Plus.²⁸

Regarding China, Andrew Scobell has made the case that China is operating on the basis of two myths: firstly, the myth of China's perception of its own actions, and secondly, the myth of how it perceives the policies and actions of its rivals. Scobell claims that this leads to

²⁷ Jiyul Kim, 'Strategic Culture of the Republic of Korea', *Contemporary Security Strategy*, Vol.35.2, 2014, 270-289

²⁸ Renato Cruz De Castro, 'Philippine Strategic Culture: Continuity in the Face of Changing Regional Dynamics', *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.35.2, 2014, 249-269

a dissonance, whereby the actions of China are viewed as always well-intentioned and positive, and the actions of its rivals are always viewed with suspicion, a development which adds to the region's security dilemma, since the US tends to think the same way about its own actions, as well as the actions of its rivals. Scobell's approach supports the argument made by this thesis that China's outlook is defined by a marked lack of confidence in the US worldview, and that its approach to foreign affairs is transactional. Nevertheless, Scobell does not fully explore the potentially harmful implications of Chinese strategic culture on its neighbours, as he focuses mainly on relations with Japan and the US. This thesis adds to that discussion by presenting a fuller picture of how US allies have acted, and are acting, to safeguard their security in the light of their own perception of, and reaction to, Chinese doubts and mistrust.²⁹

Strategic culture itself has a series of subcultures, such as security identity, a topic which is also of value to this thesis as not only the US and its allies but also China can go back to history and use path dependence to make the argument that they have a security identity which makes their behaviour more predictable and easier to analyse - a point made by Haglund when discussing Australian, Japanese, and Korean security identities. Similarly, Huiyun Feng and Kai He's 'A dynamic strategic culture model and China's behaviour in the South China Sea' discusses China's approach to its territorial disputes in the South China Sea, assessing whether it shows that realpolitik or traditionalism is at work.³⁰

Gregory Raymond's 2020 article 'Strategic Culture and Thailand's Response to Vietnam's Occupation of Cambodia, 1979–1989: A Cold War Epilogue' examines an historical episode through a strategic culture lens. The focus on Thailand is particularly useful

²⁹ Andrew Scobell, 'China's Real Strategic Culture: A Great Wall of the Imagination', *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.35.2, 2014, 211-226

³⁰ Feng Huiyun, He Kai, 'A dynamic strategic culture model and China's behaviour in the South China Sea', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol.34.4, 2021, 510-529

for this thesis, since the country has been a member of the San Francisco System and is now part of the Quad Plus network.³¹ Jordan Becker and Edmund Malesky explore strategic culture and NATO, with a focus on burden sharing, in their article for *International Studies Quarterly*, especially the coexistence of ‘Atlanticist’ and ‘Europeanist’ strategic cultures.³² Similarly, Frederik Doeser and Joakim Eidenfalk discuss strategic culture as a means of understanding expeditionary operations, with a particular focus on Australia and Poland’s missions against the Islamic State.³³ All of these are examples of how the strategic culture approach can be employed to analyse specific historical episodes and international relations concepts such as the Pacific Dream.

Chapter Structure

- ❖ Chapter 1 – *Introduction* - includes the key research questions, the main elements of originality in the central argument of the thesis, an indication of the primary sources used, the literature review, and a methodology section focusing on strategic culture.
- ❖ Chapter 2 – *The emergence of the San Francisco System 1951 – 2001* - provides historical context regarding the evolution of the San Francisco System from the end of World War II until 2001.
- ❖ Chapter 3 – *George W. Bush and Quad 1.0* - analyses the emergence of a perceived threat to the US and its allies by terrorism, the normalization of relations with India, and the evolution of US bilateral alliances in the context of an increased focus on security.

³¹ Gregory Raymond, ‘Strategic Culture and Thailand’s Response to Vietnam’s Occupation of Cambodia, 1979–1989: A Cold War Epilogue’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol.22.1, Winter 2020, 4-45

³² Jordan Becker, Edmund Malesky, ‘The Continent or the “Grand Large”? Strategic Culture and Operational Burden-Sharing in NATO’, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 61, 2017, 163-180

³³ Frederik Doeser, Joakim Eidenfalk, ‘Using strategic culture to understand participation in expeditionary operations: Australia, Poland, and the coalition against the Islamic State’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.40.1, 2019, 4-29

- ❖ Chapter 4 – *Barack Obama and the ‘pivot’ to multilateralism* - analyses the attitude of the Obama presidency towards China, the pivot to Asia, and US efforts to enhance multilateralism within the San Francisco System.
- ❖ Chapter 5 – *Donald Trump and Quad 2.0* - looks at the changes brought about by the Trump presidency, including a move away from multilateralism, a more aggressive stance on China, and the void created by US strategic ambiguity.
- ❖ Chapter 6 – *Joe Biden and Quad Plus* - analyses the policy of the Biden presidency until the publication of the 2022 National Security Strategy, as well as the 2022 midterms and their implications. It also assesses the extent to which the Biden administration’s Indo-Pacific policy, the emergence of the Quad Plus, and the 2022 NSS have affected US alliances and strategic culture in the region.
- ❖ Chapter 7 – *Conclusion. The Pacific Dream Revisited* – presents a summary of the analysis and reflections on the main findings of the thesis.

Primary Sources

Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the primary sources consulted for this thesis had to be accessed online. Nonetheless, as the thesis focuses mainly on a contemporary topic, many of the most important primary sources are online. These have been supplemented by a wide range of contemporaneous newspaper and journal commentaries.

For documents related to statements from US Presidents, the American Presidency Project hosted by the University of California, Santa Barbara has been of great help. All the Presidency Project documents are available online, and sources were consulted from George W. Bush to Joe Biden. For documents from State Department officials, the archived version of the State Department website from the George W. Bush administration to the Donald

Trump administration has been used. For the Joe Biden administration, the current version of the US State Department website has been consulted. All sources consulted were available online. For documents from US Defense Department officials, the same approach was used, archived versions of the Defense Department websites were consulted until the Biden administration, where the current version of the Defense Department website was consulted. For US Congressional testimony, the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee website has been consulted, as well as the House Foreign Affairs Committee website. Some strategy documents were consulted on the White House website, both in its archived and current versions. The *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* collections have provided very valuable information for the historical background chapter, as well as insight into key themes that have continued since 2001. Sources from the Truman administration to the Clinton administration were consulted, in order to map the evolution of US grand strategy. The *FRUS* collections are available online, at the Office of the Historian website.

The website of the US Indo-Pacific Command has also been consulted for primary sources concerning military and strategic affairs. INDOPACOM sources have covered all the administrations from Obama to Biden. Memoirs from US Presidents, such as Barack Obama, as well as memoirs from former US policy makers such as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have also been consulted. As regards primary sources concerning US allies, the website of the Japanese government, the Kantei, has been consulted to obtain speeches by various Japanese Prime Ministers. In addition, the website of the Japanese Foreign Affairs Ministry has been consulted. All sources were available online. The Japanese Defense Ministry website has also been consulted with relation to Defense White Papers and other strategy documents. With regards to South Korea, the same approach was used, the website of President, along with those of the Foreign Affairs Ministry were consulted for speeches and strategy documents. For Australia, aside from the Prime Minister's website, a specific website called PM

Transcripts, which belongs to the Prime Minister's cabinet has been used in order to consult previous speeches by Australian Prime Ministers. As was the case with the other allies, the Foreign Affairs and Defense Ministry websites were also consulted for speeches and strategy documents.

Literature Review

The literature review is divided into four sections. The first section will make a short review of the international relations concept of 'soft power', as this is the main area from the field of IR which can be of use to the analysis of this thesis. The second section analyses significant works on the evolution of the US-China relationship, while the third examines scholarship on the San Francisco System, including works on the relationship between the US and its allies in this network - Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand. There is also a sub-section on India, as a member of the Quad. The fourth section reviews the growing literature regarding the US and the Quad, consisting of the US, Japan, Australia, and India, as well as other more loosely affiliated countries, such as South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand and New Zealand in the Quad Plus.

The Indo-Pacific and 'soft power'

In international relations, the way in which states act can be labelled in a number of ways. One popular approach is to use the terms 'coercive' and 'co-optive'. The coercive approach is sometimes called 'hard power', because it is a process through which a country uses tools such as economic sanctions or military operations to determine other states to behave in accordance with the stronger state's interests. Alternatively, 'soft power' is used as to define the approach where culture, history, and diplomacy represent the main avenues through

which states try to convince others to align their behaviour and pursue similar goals. The term has been popularised by Joseph Nye in his 1990 book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*.³⁴ The Indo-Pacific, the San Francisco System, the Pacific Dream, they all can be analysed through the lens of soft power. They are means through which the US tries to influence allies and like-minded countries to reach common ground with Washington's vision without relying on the possibility of war, economic sanctions, or similar methods. As Nye would add in his 2004 work on soft power, in the information age, public diplomacy has become key. And for success in public diplomacy, soft power is the best means.³⁵ This thesis also analyses aspects such as multilateral cooperation and diplomatic forms of self-praise and criticism of others. These are all well-established concepts that Nick Cull examines in his article for *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*.³⁶

The US-China relationship

The literature on US-China relations is central to understanding the emerging rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. There are a number of subsections in this literature. Some works can be classified as part of what might be termed the *cautionary* school, warning of China's evolution from a poor country to a powerhouse. This has evolved over time into the *threat* school, where China is presented as an already transformed challenger to the US. The threat school has become more outspoken over time and culminated in the *New Cold War* school, one of the most hawkish manifestations of the US-China literature. Two counter currents emerge at the same time: the *China decline* school, which argues that China has passed its peak and is entering a period of weakness, and the more dovish *compromise* school, which

³⁴ Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, New York: Basic Books, 1990

³⁵ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004

³⁶ Nick Cull, 'From soft power to reputational security: rethinking public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy for a dangerous age', *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 18, 18-21

argues that, regardless of PRC or US flaws, both need to find common ground, or else a war will break out. Before the analysis section begins, a note needs to be made of the nature of great power competition. In her book, *Eisenhower and American Public Opinion on China*, Mara Oliva argues that the cold relations between Washington and Beijing in the 1950s gave little attention to public opinion, and American policy with regards to China remained at the discretion of the President and Secretary of State. This is a reminder that US-China competition is designed by policymakers, and thus, this thesis' analysis of public diplomacy is even more important.³⁷

One of the earlier works on the cautionary school was written by Warren Cohen and Akira Iriye in 1989, *The United States and Japan in the postwar world*. The China section expanded on the flaws of US policy towards China and provided insight into the traditional balancing act undertaken by Japan at a time when China was not perceived as geostrategic threat.³⁸ Another early work that asked for caution in expectations on the US side came from Elizabeth Economy, along with Michel Oksenberg and Lawrence Korb. Their book, written for the Council of Foreign Relations in 1998, was entitled '*China Joins the World: Progress and Prospects*'.³⁹ The book urged prudence on the US side in order to prevent Chinese dissatisfaction with the US-supported world order. Mark Haas' *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics*,⁴⁰ written in 2005, explored the rifts in the Sino-Soviet alliance, and how the US capitalized on that division. He offered considerable insight into the Chinese perspective on American power, claiming that, while China saw a clash with America as being inevitable, there was a difference between the issues that scared China and those that

³⁷ Mara Oliva, *Eisenhower and American Public Opinion on China*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018

³⁸ Warren Cohen, Akira Iriye, *The United States and Japan in the postwar world*, Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1989

³⁹ Elizabeth Economy, Michael Oksenberg, Lawrence Korb, '*China Joins the World: Progress and Prospects*', Council of Foreign Relations, Washington DC: Council of Foreign Relations, 1998

⁴⁰ Mark Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005

western powers believed acted as drivers for China's impulses. The book also laid out how important historical grievances are in defining Chinese foreign policy, outlining how they pushed China away from both the US and the Soviet Union, and set it on a relatively independent path. In this sense, Haas added to the cautionary literature by pointing out the underlying strategy within China towards the United States.

The evolution from caution to threat is observable in Yi Edward Yang and Xinsheng Liu's 2012 article that assessed US media coverage from 1992 to 2006.⁴¹ The article outlined the fact that China's military power, its increasing economic influence, and its ideological differences with the US all added to the 'China threat' narrative. The article also pointed out that threat perception tends to be strongly influenced by unanticipated events rather than predictable patterns, and that the perception of threat tends to linger in the US mindset. The China threat perspective has also been discussed by Steven Chan, in his book '*Looking for Balance – China, the United States, and Power Balancing in East Asia*' written in 2012.⁴² Using balance of power theories, Chan argued that China was not a threat to the US, while claiming that China's neighbours were not actively trying to push back against it, choosing to consolidate economic ties instead. Michael Mandelbaum's 'The New Containment',⁴³ published in *Foreign Affairs*, assessed China, along with Russia and Iran, as revisionist powers. Mandelbaum's work is one of the main articles on the China threat moment.

John J. Mearsheimer's book, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*⁴⁴ was also used as a reference for the ongoing US-China dispute. Mearsheimer updated his book with a special chapter on US-China relations. Mearsheimer presented his work through the lens of international relations theory, particularly Realism. He wrote as an Offensive Realist,

⁴¹ Yi Edward Yang, Xinsheng Liu, 'The "China Threat" through the Lens of US Print Media: 1992-2006', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol.21.6, 695-711

⁴² Steven Chan, *Looking for Balance-China, the United States, and Power Balancing in East Asia*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012

⁴³ Mandelbaum, 'The New Containment'

⁴⁴ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014

believing that countries seek to preserve their dominance through pre-emptive, maximalist behaviours. In this sense, his ‘tragedy’ of the Great Powers is one where a growing China will most likely challenge the US presence, and a panicked US will try to preserve its status as a leading power, a scenario which will lead to inevitable clashes. While Mearsheimer is correct in expecting this intensification of rivalry to occur, he suffers from a rather Euro-centric and America-centric outlook, placing the onus on the US to silently back down from most problematic issues, something which is not necessarily logical or correct. Mearsheimer excuses China’s behaviours as normal features of an expanding power and considers it best for the US to cede influence, regardless of what US allies believe, or the risks of conflict that would come with that.

One work that has gained considerable traction in the media concerning US-China relations is Graham Allison’s *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides’ Trap?*.⁴⁵ Allison applied the notion of Thucydides’ Trap – where one superpower becomes so wary of an emerging superpower’s challenge that its attempts to prevent war lead to war – to the US-China rivalry and argued that China’s pursuit of power and its rise as a global superpower are placing it on a collision course with the current hegemon, the US. Allison’s argument assumes that war is almost inevitable in spite of the severe economic distress an armed conflict would bring. The main issue of contention is Taiwan, with the US and China narrowly avoiding military conflicts a number of times. Comparisons with the Peloponnesian War and trying to draw parallels between US hegemony and Spartan domination of ancient Greece may also be considered far-fetched, especially making assumptions about the US-China rivalry by taking inspiration from a European conflict. Allison adds to the tendency in western literature to expect China to behave in a manner similar to a European country, in

⁴⁵ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides’ Trap?*, London: Houghton Mifflin, 2017

spite of considerable strategic differences. Both Mearsheimer and Allison represent the fatalistic side of the threat school.

The logical continuation of the threat school is represented by the *New Cold War* school. Here, a growing number of academics, policymakers, and officials claim that the ongoing US-China tensions increasingly resemble the US-USSR disputes of the past. Robert Kaplan in 2019 wrote in *Foreign Policy* on the imminence of a new Cold War.⁴⁶ This perspective can be contrasted with Michael O’Hanlon and Sean Zeigler’s *No, we aren’t on the brink of a New Cold War with Russia and China*,⁴⁷ also written in 2019 for the Brookings Institution, where the argument was that both Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump have been pursuing deterrence, and that fears of China as a threat are overblown, since the threat is non-ideological. It is the non-ideological element that can act as a double-edged sword, though. Mandelbaum himself outlined the decrease in traditional ideology when assessing China, Russia and Iran as threats, and interpreted this as a sign of their adaptability. This suggests that until the Trump administration the US lacked consensus on whether China was a threat.

Stephen Wertheim joined the debate in the same year and asked if it was ‘too late’ to stop the inevitable Cold War between the US and China. All these debates are quite recent, and they do not just reflect media momentum. Reviewing the literature, it is evident that China has been consolidating authoritarian powers into the office of the CCP General Secretary while the US under Trump has retreated from a series of international commitments relating to the Indo-Pacific, creating a power vacuum that China used to expand its influence in the region.

⁴⁶ Robert Kaplan, ‘A New Cold War Has Begun’, *Foreign Policy*, 2019

⁴⁷ Michael O’Hanlon, Sean Zeigler, ‘No, we aren’t on the brink of a New Cold War with Russia and China’, *Brookings Institution*, 2019

The emergence of the *China decline* school can be seen in works by Michael Beckley,⁴⁸ who warned of the risks posed by an enlarged and unsustainable Chinese economy. He claimed that China was becoming a power that lacks confidence, and that if its economy continued to slow down, it would act in an increasingly risk-taking manner. Jiwei Ci has painted a similar picture, hinting that China needs democratization, otherwise its development will decrease.⁴⁹ This is the ‘China has peaked’ side of the argument. A thesis that provided a welcome change in perspective came from Christina Lai, who observed China’s diplomatic strategy in the post-Cold War period, highlighting how the country had attempted an assurance strategy until 2010, with the goal of preventing its regional partners from turning against it. This approach is understood in international relations as the ‘responsible stakeholder’ theory, the belief that China was willingly adhering to US-led norms and values, only to inevitably transform into a free-market democracy, like Japan and South Korea did. Lai also pointed out that Realist theory does not provide enough flexibility for a proper analysis of all the nuances of the region.⁵⁰

One of the most important works on China, of great value to this thesis, is Rush Doshi’s *The Long Game*.⁵¹ Doshi, a member of the Biden administration, analysed the evolution of Chinese foreign policy from the end of the Cold War until present day, providing an accurate roadmap of how China chose to strategically align itself with western organizations in order to gain influence and legitimacy. Doshi’s book argued that the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, and the 2008 financial crisis were key moments in Chinese foreign policy. The first event consolidated the survival instinct of the Chinese Communist Party, and

⁴⁸ Michael Beckley, ‘The United States Should Fear a Faltering China’, *Foreign Affairs*, 2019

⁴⁹ Jiwei Ci, ‘Without Democracy, China Will Rise No Farther’, *Foreign Affairs*, 2019

⁵⁰ Christina Lai, ‘Talk is not cheap: China’s assurance and reassurance strategy in East Asia’, 2015, Georgetown University Press, 1-234

⁵¹ Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China’s Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*, New York: Oxford University press, 2021

the second event made it appear to Chinese elites that the US-backed world order was declining, and that there was a power vacuum that China could fill.

Doshi had consulted Chinese archives, and conducted interviews with key policymakers on the subject, in what is a very well-researched book that offers insight into the Chinese perspective with a depth that many western works on the subject lack. The book examined Chinese economic strategy and political objectives, and it expanded on the evolution of the Chinese military, and its internal domestic ruminations. What is striking is just how constant the dynamic between China and the US has been in Chinese strategic thinking. Doshi's book articulated a clear Chinese strategy of competition with the US. That is one of the key developments that this thesis underlines: that US primacy is being challenged. China usually goes for two objectives: maximizing its sphere of influence and consolidating its power in such a way that it can handle any potential coercion from the US. In that sense, the book has proven to be an important addition to this literature review and to the bibliography.

Aaron Friedberg can be viewed as a representative of the hawkish school, especially in his essay, 'An Answer to Aggression'.⁵² He has criticised the 'responsible stakeholder' strategy, claiming that it did little to weaken Xi Jinping or change his foreign policy outlook and called for more military spending, in order to counter China's revisionist goals. The US and its allies also need to regain the initiative in the defining narrative of the conflict, he argues. China has managed to advocate for its autocratic system at a time when the US and many western powers have done little to push back or advocate for their own systems. The solutions for Friedberg are simple - more military spending, more aggressive safeguarding of western principles like democracy and free societies, and some degree of economic disengagement with China, so that its growth is stifled.

⁵² Aaron Friedberg, 'An Answer to Aggression', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.99.5, September/October 2020

Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has joined the conversation, and he can be added to the dovish school. Rudd, a China specialist in his younger days, wrote ‘Short of War’, an article that explored how the US and China can avoid conflict despite their tensions. Rudd explained that China would have preferred Trump to continue into a second term, owing to his perceived incompetence, especially in domestic issues. According to Rudd, China believes that the US is in irreversible decline, and that Trump has accelerated that decline. In that sense, the election of Joe Biden is problematic for China, because there is acknowledgement that a Biden administration would be more competent, both at home and abroad, than a Trump one. Rudd’s solutions consisted of mutual de-escalation, notably fewer cyberattacks, less overt US support for Taiwan, and fewer Chinese military exercises in the South China Sea. The two should also look for the possibility of cooperation, in areas like climate change, denuclearization, and a more stable financial system. It would seem that Rudd’s expectations have been too optimistic to date.⁵³

Audrye Wong’s article ‘How Not to Win Allies and Influence Geopolitics’ aimed to review one of China’s biggest problems in foreign policy: its lack of alliances. In general, China’s lack of allies had been presented as an advantage – China has a free hand to create tension among other countries – but Wong’s article changed the tone of the conversation.⁵⁴ Her critique is on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and how there is a difference between how China presents the BRI as one of the greatest economic frameworks ever created, and how it actually functions. Wong claimed the BRI is a mechanism of economic coercion, and its coercive nature has reached a point where China is losing the support of countries it needs if it wishes to balance the US. She also argues that the US support for China entering the WTO has backfired in a strategic sense.

⁵³ Kevin Rudd, ‘Short of War’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.100.2, March/April 2021

⁵⁴ Audrye Wong, ‘How Not to Win Allies and Influence Geopolitics’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.100.3, May/June 2021

At the end of 2021, Hal Brands, along with John Lewis Gaddis, published an article in *Foreign Affairs* called ‘The New Cold War’, in which they argued that while the world is not in an identical scenario to that of the historical Cold War, it is increasingly finding itself in a similar, Cold War situation, and that both the US and China seemed to have accepted that reality.⁵⁵ In that case, the US and China would have come full circle, from an era of cordiality to the beginning of an era of competition. John Mearsheimer added to the debate in claiming that both the US and China are currently behaving in accordance with Realist logic, after a long period of US mismanagement of the China problem because of misguided adherence to liberal internationalism.⁵⁶

Overall, the literature on China has captured a transforming environment. A number of works are shaped by scepticism about China’s rise, and they warn of the dangers its challenge brings to the US’ status as a world superpower. There are counterpoints that focus on building consensus, aside from the already expansive literature on US decline and its implications in general. The emergence of works that focus on China’s peak and decline is also of note, since they confirm its status as a superpower and assess its ability to maintain this position. There have also been plenty of works that focus on adding valuable background to China’s own strategic concerns, which has strengthened the literature, since few pre-2001 works had focused on trying to understand China’s own strategy. The works that focus on Xi Jinping and his personalist rule have also added much needed nuance to understanding Chinese authoritarianism.

The San Francisco System

⁵⁵ Hal Brands, John Lewis Gaddis, ‘The New Cold War’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.100.6, November/December 2021

⁵⁶ John Mearsheimer, ‘The Inevitable Rivalry’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.100.6, November/December 2021

There are two types of literature concerning the San Francisco System: the post – Cold War works that focus on the group of alliances as a whole, and the Cold War era works that focus on the alliance members as case studies, without particular attention to the broader grouping. Both the writings that directly mention the San Francisco System and those that do not outline two common themes: the historical endurance of the bilateral alliance system, and Japan’s centrality in the US security architecture. Among the common negatives within both types of literature, there are the rise and endurance of nationalist sentiments in countries like China, Japan, and South Korea, as well as, again, Japan’s centrality, which makes cooperation among San Francisco System members harder. Most works on the San Francisco System tend to focus on territorial disputes and unsolved historical grievances between San Francisco System members as an impediment to further integration. While that is correct, the existing literature could do more to survey the alliance system’s weaknesses. For example, it could touch on the hierarchical structure of the system, and its tendency to splinter. It has become obvious since the early 2000s that both the Philippines and Thailand are regarded less and less by the US as key allies, and instead, they feature quite often within US planning for ASEAN. This is a downgrade, because US policy towards ASEAN is often vague and the group is not regarded by Washington as being high priority in terms of US ambitions for the Indo-Pacific.

On the San Francisco System as a whole, Kimie Hara’s edited book, *The San Francisco System and its Legacies, Continuation, transformation, and historical reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific*⁵⁷ discussed the territorial disputes between San Francisco System members, and added to a general point she has made through her scholarship, that the San Francisco System was poorly equipped for further integration owing to the difficulty of resolving these disputes. In 1999, she revisited the Cold War in the Pacific region in an article

⁵⁷ Kimie Hara (editor), *The San Francisco System and its Legacies, Continuation, transformation, and historical reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific*, New York: Routledge, 2015

for the *Pacific Review*.⁵⁸ She had previously focused on Japan's territorial disputes, in a 2001 article for *Pacific Affairs*,⁵⁹ as well as Japan and China's territorial disputes, in a 2004 article for the *American Journal of Chinese Studies*.⁶⁰ Hara's book tended to portray US endeavours in the region as imperialistic, as some chapters painted Japan as a compliant client state, for example the chapter by Gavan McCormack.

On the other hand, works such as Scott Snyder and Brad Glosserman's *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash, East Asian Security and the United States* have assessed public opinion in countries that are part of the San Francisco System and have gone into depth contextualizing the fact that, for example, the citizens of Japan were aware of the imbalance of power and did not take kindly the perception of their country as a free-rider.⁶¹ Aside from Hara, a number of scholars have also focused on the San Francisco System including Kim Beazley, who explained that only the lack of alternatives had made the San Francisco System the *de facto* alliance system for the US in Asia.⁶² Like Hara, Beazley acknowledged clashes between members of the network. In her assessment, the durability of the system was ultimately of far greater significance than the occasional clashes between network members.

Another scholar to have examined the origins of the San Francisco System is Kent Calder, who saw the San Francisco System as a clear result of the US-Japan peace treaty of 1951, and who described the system as a product of consecutive, but separate, US defence treaties with countries in the region.⁶³ For Calder, the 1950s served as the incubation period

⁵⁸ Kimia Hara, 'Rethinking the "Cold War" in the Asia-Pacific', *The Pacific Review*, Vol.12.4, 1999, 515-536

⁵⁹ Kimie Hara, '50 Years from San Francisco: Re-Examining the Peace Treaty and Japan's Territorial Problems', *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.74.30, 2001, 361-382

⁶⁰ Kimie Hara, 'The Post-War Japanese Peace Treaties and the China's Ocean Frontier Problems', *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, Vol.11.1, 2004, 1-24

⁶¹ Brad Glosserman, Scott Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash, East Asian Security and the United States*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2017

⁶² Kim Beazley, 'Whither the San Francisco alliance system?', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.57.2, 2003, 325-338

⁶³ Kent Calder, 'Securing security through prosperity: the San Francisco System in comparative perspective', *The Pacific Review*, Vol.17.1, March 2004, 135-157

for the San Francisco System. He went into detail when explaining the features of the system, seeing it as an asymmetric structure, based on one-way economic support from the US, with Japan as a regional centre. He also emphasized the endurance of the system, describing how the geopolitical and economic changes that ensued after the Cold War did little to alter the security infrastructure that the US had laid out decades before. Calder's framing was built on how the US envisioned its early role in Asia, especially regarding Japan's centrality.

Significant work on the US alliance system in the Asia-Pacific has also been produced by Victor Cha, particularly in his article, 'Powerplay: Origins of the US Alliance System in Asia',⁶⁴ which he would later expand in a book with the same name.⁶⁵ Cha generally adhered to the notion that the US desired some form of control over the region, and that the San Francisco System was not entirely the result of what was happening on the ground in Asia, but more of a strategic solution created in Washington. This point, while valid, is also not surprising: it is normal to expect the US to pursue avenues that suit it and do not fully reflect the reality on the ground. The US in the early years of the San Francisco System was trying to adjust the realities on the ground to its ambitions, with varying degrees of success.

The feasibility of a more integrated San Francisco System was examined by Youngshik Daniel Bong, in his article 'Past is Still Present: The San Francisco System and a Multilateral Security Regime in East Asia' for *Korea Observer*, where he outlined the main reasons why it would be very hard to create a multilateral structure in the Asia-Pacific owing to the difficult territorial disputes between the member states of the San Francisco System.⁶⁶ Bong went to considerable lengths to point out just how difficult Japan's foreign policy was, as it consisted of having to take contradictory positions on related issues simply because

⁶⁴ Victor Cha, 'Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia', *International Security*, Vol.34.3, Winter 2009/10, 158-196

⁶⁵ Victor Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016

⁶⁶ Youngshik Daniel Bong, 'Past is Still Present: The San Francisco System and a Multilateral Security Regime in East Asia', *Korea Observer*, Vol.41.3, 2010, 471-495

some of the lands it claims are under its control, while others are not. Bong discussed one of the most common themes pointed out by the literature when exploring the San Francisco System - that the members could not overcome historical and territorial grievances among themselves. The issue of territorial grievances in particular is enduring; but if one looks at the San Francisco System from a US viewpoint, the expectations of managing the disputes are different.

Leszek Buszynski also examined the San Francisco System, with particular focus on its contemporary perception, and gave insight into the numerous uses of the term, ranging from its meaning as a synonym for the US-Japan alliance, to the broader tendency of the US to engage with its multiple bilateral allies in the region.⁶⁷ Buszynski implied that the San Francisco System had no clear origin, and that multiple events that ranged from political to economic, had all played a role in developing the system as it was then. He then proceeded to narrate the history of the network, with emphasis on the changing manner in which the US and its allies perceived China, as it became increasingly assertive. Buszynski was correct in assessing that there was no grand plan behind the San Francisco System; but that should not invalidate the attempt at building a NATO-like structure, in the form of the Pacific Pact. An article by John Dower also offered a history of the San Francisco System, noting both its uses and its potential to inhibit long-term security development in the Asia-Pacific.⁶⁸ Dower made a review of the San Francisco System's flaws, ranging from nationalism and dealing with China, to the lack of a nuclear umbrella. Mason Richey of the Lowy Institute published his own 'five factors' that could prove decisive for the San Francisco System, raising questions

⁶⁷ Leszek Buszynski, 'The San Francisco System: Contemporary Meaning and Challenges', *Asian Perspective*, Vol.35, 2011, 315-335

⁶⁸ John Dower, 'The San Francisco System: Past, Present, Future in U.S.-Japan-China Relations サンフランシスコ体制 米日中関係の過去、現在、そして未来', *The Asia – Pacific Journal*, 2014, Vol.12.2, 1-41

about its values, about Trump's effect on the alliance, China's dominance, and the potential reasons for the collapse of the hub-and-spokes system.⁶⁹

An edited book by Oliver Turner and Inderjeet Parmar, *The United States in the Indo – Pacific, Obama's Legacy and the Trump Transition*, added usefully to the debate.⁷⁰ Examining Obama's approach to China, as well as India, it reviewed the US relationship with Japan, Australia, and the countries of ASEAN, and it also gave space for analysing the differences between the Obama administration's foreign policy, and that of the Trump administration. The book argued that the US has struggled to find a coherent China policy, and that it has tended to focus too much on militaristic solutions instead of credible economic alternatives.

Another work from Kent Calder examined an issue that indirectly affected the San Francisco System – free-riding. In his article, 'Beneath the Eagle's Wings? The Political Economy of Northeast Asian Burden-Sharing', Calder discussed the difficult choice Japan and South Korea have had to make when balancing diplomacy with military decision-making and emphasized that while the two countries do share common interests, there are considerable differences between them stemming from history.⁷¹ He also pointed out that the differences in the way in which their economies work have implications for the way in which they engage with the US, and how easy it is for them to fulfil their duties in the alliance network. John Ikenberry and Moon Chung-In's edited book *The United States and Northeast Asia* gave excellent historical insight into how the US decided to pursue a policy of economically developing Japan, and evaluated South Korea as a middle power.⁷² It also

⁶⁹ Mason Richey, 'Five factors will decide the survival of the US-led alliance system', *The Interpreter*, 2019

⁷⁰ Oliver Turner, Inderjeet Parmar, *The United States in the Indo – Pacific, Obama's Legacy and the Trump Transition*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020

⁷¹ Kent Calder, 'Beneath the Eagle's Wings? The Political Economy of Northeast Asian Burden-Sharing in Comparative Perspective', *Asian Security*, Vol.2.3, January 2007, 148-173

⁷² John Ikenberry, Moon Chung-in, *The United States and Northeast Asia*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008

assessed how US policy changed under the George W. Bush administration, thus addressing both the pre and post-Cold War considerations the US had to make.

Tsuyoshi Hasegawa's edited book, *The Cold War in East Asia*, undertook a similar review, with chapters ranging from the evolution of China in the early Cold War, to the consolidation of the US military presence in South Korea after the Korean War.⁷³ The book made the analysis of diplomatic endeavours between the powers of Northeast Asia its centrepiece. Xiaobing Li's work, *The Cold War in East Asia*, also provided an historical analysis of the region, over the same period of time, with particular focus on its economic transformation.⁷⁴ Hasegawa and Li's works complement each other quite well. The works do not talk about the alliance network per se, but they contribute pieces of a puzzle that can be used to better understand the dynamics of the region. Park Jae Jeok's article 'The persistence of the US-led alliances in the Asia-Pacific: an order insurance explanation' aimed to point out why the security infrastructure in the region had prevailed, especially after the end of the Cold War.⁷⁵ His argument was that as long as there was a perceived threat in the region, the San Francisco System would continue to exist.

To add to the historical background, an understanding is required of *why* there is no NATO-like structure in the Indo-Pacific. This topic was addressed by Christopher Hemmer and Peter Katzenstein.⁷⁶ They argued in favour of bilateralism, contrasting NATO and SEATO, and claimed that there was such an imbalance between the Pacific powers and the US that any multilateral framework would have resulted in a net loss for the US as the hegemonic power of the western world. The analysis had several strong points, but it did not

⁷³ Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The Cold War in East Asia 1945-1991*, Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011

⁷⁴ Li Xiaobing, *The Cold War in East Asia*, London: Routledge, 2018

⁷⁵ Park Jae-jeok, 'The persistence of the US-led alliances in the Asia-Pacific: an order insurance explanation', *International Relations of the Asia – Pacific*, Vol.13, 2013, 337-368

⁷⁶ Christopher Hemmer, Peter Katzenstein, 'Why is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism', *International Organisation*, Vol.53.3, Summer 2002, 575-607

sufficiently take into account the existing asymmetrical structure of the San Francisco System. They argued in favour of bilateralism, with the hub-and-spokes system serving as an example of that. This suggests that the San Francisco System's loose structure, combined with a reluctance in academic discourse to address it as a valid concept until recently, highlights a gap in the literature. For many historians, the lack of a formal recognition of the existence of a 'San Francisco System' invalidated the alliance network entirely, yet recent works have shown a shift in the discourse, viewing US alliances in the Asia-Pacific as more enduring.

A similar work by Kirsten Rafferty, entitled 'An Institutional Reinterpretation of Cold War alliance systems: Insights for alliance theory', examined the structural differences between the two alliances, NATO and SEATO. It argued that improper institutionalization made the SEATO alliance too loose, and that factor, combined with the fact that its members had different perceptions of what constituted a threat, eventually resulted in the alliance's termination.⁷⁷

Nicholas Anderson and Victor Cha analysed the pivot's effects from a systemic point of view and concluded that it was far from being a failure, but also needed considerably more effort to come across as a success.⁷⁸ Lai-Ha Chan evaluated the pivot's role in the developing of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank,⁷⁹ while Hugh De Santis assessed the pivot's effects as a means to deal with China's threat to US supremacy.⁸⁰ Kurt Campbell, who worked within the Obama administration, and would later be appointed by Joe Biden as his own 'Asia Czar', has written on the issue of the pivot and how the Obama administration

⁷⁷ Kirsten Rafferty, 'An Institutional Reinterpretation of Cold War Alliance Systems: Insights for Alliance Theory', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 2003, Vol.36.2, 341-362

⁷⁸ Nicholas Anderson, Victor Cha, 'The Case of the Pivot to Asia: System Effects and the Origins of Strategy', *Political Science Quarterly*, 2017, Vol.132.4, 595-617

⁷⁹ Chan Lai-Ha, 'Soft balancing against the US "pivot to Asia": China's geostrategic rationale for establishing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.71.6, 2017, 568-590

⁸⁰ Hugh De Santis, 'The China Threat and the 'Pivot' to Asia', *Current History*, Vol. 111.746, 2012, 209-215

viewed US strategy for the Indo-Pacific.⁸¹ Campbell has added insight into the central objective of the Obama administration: establishing a solid economic framework in the region, and how the culmination of that effort was the TPP. In view of the eventual failure of the TPP, partly at the hands of Donald Trump, Campbell's views on the Asia pivot inevitably appear in a different light.

A work that challenged conventional wisdom in the literature on US grand strategy was written by David Kang, *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century*.⁸² Instead of writing about the dangers the rise of China posed for US interests, Kang advocated that the rise of China was not only inevitable, but something that the US should accommodate with clearly and logically. He argued against the notion that the Pacific was becoming militarized and cast doubts on the triumphalist rhetoric from Washington policymakers that the US was achieving ground-breaking progress in its diplomacy with countries in China's periphery, such as Vietnam. Kang advocated a minimalist strategy for Asia, focused on developing economic ties, and he argued that the US must reconsider its tendency to approach problems from a national-security mindset. One could criticise Kang's tendency to downplay the militarization of Asia, nevertheless, his approach to US-Vietnam relations and emphasis on the economic realities of the Asia-Pacific, where the US was no longer the powerhouse, should be taken into account.

A book that reviewed the foreign policies of Indo-Pacific countries over the past decade, edited by Ash Rossiter and Brendon Cannon, called *Conflict and Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, New Geopolitical Realities*, focused on the US, Japan, Australia, and India in

⁸¹ Kurt Campbell, *The Pivot, The Future of American Statecraft in Asia*, New York: Hachette, 2016

⁸² David Kang, *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017

particular and assessed each country's foreign policy strategy, allowing for the observation of overlaps between the US and its allies.⁸³

Alexander Cooley and Dan Nexon argued that the US hegemonic system was encountering new and unique changes in their book, *Exit from Hegemony, the Unraveling of American Global Order*.⁸⁴ This work examined a range of issues, with particular focus on the challenges the US was facing: Russia and China's attempts to change the hegemonic order from the outside, the changing power dynamics between the US and countries it seeks to influence, and the risks posed by challenges from within the US itself. The book was timely in the sense that it came out in 2020, before the events of January 6, 2021 supported by Donald Trump in Washington DC.

A book that surveyed South Korea's transformation from the Korean War to the early 2020s and conveyed just how much the country has changed was written by Ramon Pacheco Pardo, entitled *Shrimp to Whale, South Korea from the Forgotten War to K-POP*.⁸⁵ Pardo underlined South Korea's increasing independence and newfound assertiveness following its democratisation, which has developed in largely positive terms for the US, as it has minimised conflict and allowed for better negotiation of sensitive issues.

Thomas Wilkins' article in 2022 for *Asian Affairs*, on how the San Francisco System has evolved to meet modern challenges, argued that among the recent developments there are better relations between the 'spokes', as well as new US-centric multilateral groupings. But his approach is heavily influenced by traditional international relations theory and relies on

⁸³ Ash Rossiter, Brendon Cannon, *Conflict and Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, New Geopolitical Realities*, New York: Routledge, 2020

⁸⁴ Alexander Cooley, Dan Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony, the Unraveling of American Global Order*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020

⁸⁵ Ramon Pacheco Pardo, *Shrimp to Whale, South Korea from the Forgotten War to K-POP*, London: Hurst, 2022

theoretical analysis such as observing the differences between alliances and alignment.⁸⁶ *Asian Politics and Policy*'s 2020 edition focused on the hub-and-spokes concept in the Indo-Pacific. Charmaine Misalucha-Willoughby examined the hub-and-spokes model in the region, arguing that the system is still enduring, in spite of clear signs of contestation.⁸⁷ A similar message of endurance came from Sarah Teo and Ralf Emmers, who argued that the San Francisco System will persist in a more diffused form, a development that will actually be more beneficial for US allies.⁸⁸ William Tow and Md Zaidul Anwar Hj Md Kasim have explored why the San Francisco System has endured, in spite of international relations theory arguments that the lack of a serious threat leads to alliance dissolution. They claimed that geopolitics, economics, and regional institutions will not allow the San Francisco System to disappear, although it would become harder for the US to manage it.⁸⁹

Among PhD theses, an orthodox analysis of the origin of the hub-and-spokes system was provided by David Capie, who argued that the San Francisco System followed a bilateral structure in order to prevent the risks posed by multilateralism.⁹⁰ He described the Pacific Pact as a manifestation against regional threats, pointed out the flaws of traditional Realist theory in explaining the emergence of the US security system, and presented a good historiographical review of why overtures from Korea and Taiwan served only to dissuade the US from closer relations. Concluding with the Bill Clinton administration, he also pointed out how the lack of a perceived threat and the tendency to safeguard existing institutions after the Cold War further consolidated the system. Capie's thesis is valid, but, being published in

⁸⁶ Thomas Wilkins, 'A Hub-and-Spokes "Plus" Model of US Alliances in the Indo – Pacific: Towards a New "Networked" Design', *Asian Affairs*, Vol.LIII.III, 2022, 457-480

⁸⁷ Charmaine Misalucha-Willoughby, 'Contesting the Hub-and-Spokes Model in Southeast Asia', *Asian Politics and Policy*, Vol.12.1, 2020, 57-70

⁸⁸ Sarah Teo, Ralf Emmers, 'The Future of the San Francisco System: Pressures and Prospects', *Asian Politics and Policy*, Vol.12.1, 2020, 1-13

⁸⁹ William Tow, Md Zaidul Anwar Hj Md Kasim, 'Why Has the San Francisco System Survived? Historical and Theoretical Perspectives', *Asian Politics and Policy*, Vol.12.1, 2020, 8-26

⁹⁰ David Capie, *Power, Identity, and Multilateralism, Regional Institutionalization in the Asia-Pacific*, York University, 2002

2002, it could not account for how the San Francisco System has evolved since then. The current thesis continues from where Capie's thesis ends, by focusing on the years 2001 to 2022—the period during which the San Francisco System has undergone its biggest changes.

Other PhD theses by Tatsuya Nishida⁹¹ and Lee Jeongseok⁹² have tackled a similar question: how the San Francisco System emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Both works mentioned the Pacific Pact, and its eventual failure. Lee presented this as a significant aspect of the literature, proving that American multilateralism was always an option, while Nishida tended to simply mention it in passing. The historical positioning *vis-à-vis* the Pacific Pact had been outlined by Ben Limb in *Foreign Affairs*, and Lee attempted to make an argument that Washington did consider some form of inclusive multilateralism, only to confusingly abandon the attempt.⁹³ In the end, the literature consensus on the topic was that Japan, as a potential member of a multilateral structure, was too dangerous, given its past, while Britain wanted to ensure that any US-centric alliance would have a Commonwealth element. The initial attempt of the Pacific Pact was therefore replaced by what is ANZUS today. Nevertheless, Lee and Nishida examined the hub-and-spokes system comprehensively, with particular attention given to the early 1950s and post-Cold War evolutions, concluding that the frail alliance infrastructure had endured under the principle of 'if it's not broken, don't fix it'.

The Quad and Quad Plus

⁹¹ Tatsuya Nishida, *Incomplete Alliances: A Comparative Analysis of the Hub-and-Spoke System in the Asia-Pacific*, Harvard, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009

⁹² Lee Jeongseok, *Hub and Spokes: Explaining the Origins and Persistence of the US Bilateral Alliance System in the Asia-Pacific*, Princeton, 2019

⁹³ Ben Limb, 'The Pacific Pact: Looking Forward or Backward?', *Foreign Affairs*, July 1951

This literature review has established that a significant feature of US strategy for the Indo-Pacific is Japan's position at the centre of the US security infrastructure. It has also established that this strategy has put other San Francisco System members in a difficult position, due to the fact that Japan and countries like South Korea have not fully overcome their historical animosities. In this sense, the Quad can be seen as having another useful role, providing a platform that features Japan heavily, but also allowing an opt-in for South Korea, via the Quad Plus, moving the discussion away from trying to 'fix' the San Francisco System. Since 2017, the Quad has re-emerged in light of the fact that its members have all encountered a heightened security risk from China. Since the re-appearance of the Quad a number of works examining it and the Quad Plus directly or indirectly have appeared, and this section reviews the most important ones.

Some of the most important works outlining the evolution of the Quad have come from Tanvi Madan, whose article in *War on the Rocks*, 'The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the "Quad"', has provided valuable background on Quad 1.0, and raised questions on the reasons why the first iteration of the Quad was side-lined.⁹⁴ Her *Foreign Affairs* article, along with Dhruva Jaishankar, 'How the Quad Can Match the Hype', subsequently examined the development of the Quad during the Trump and Biden presidencies, essentially Quad 2.0, and the way in which it was becoming increasingly significant.⁹⁵ However, although the Quad became more organised over time, doubts persisted. For example, Kishore Mahbubani's article in *Foreign Policy* argued that the Quad would fail to contain China as long as Beijing remained patient because all the Quad members, Australia especially, and Japan to a lesser extent, were vulnerable to taking a hard line against China owing to their economic ties with Beijing.⁹⁶ Mahbubani claimed that the Quad would fail to find a unifying set of values and

⁹⁴ Tanvi Madan, 'The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the "Quad"', *War on the Rocks*, 16 November 2017

⁹⁵ Dhruva Jaishankar, Tanvi Madan, 'How the Quad Can Match the Hype', *Foreign Affairs*, 15 April 2021

⁹⁶ Kishore Mahbubani, 'The New Anti-China Alliance Will Fail', *Foreign Policy*, Spring 2021

that, in the end, economic ties would bring the Quad members back to being more accommodating towards China.

An edited book by Jagannath Panda and Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell, entitled *Quad Plus and the Indo-Pacific* has assessed the evolution of the Quad in its engagement with countries and organisations that are outside it, especially South Korea, New Zealand, ASEAN, the United Kingdom, France, and Canada.⁹⁷ This edited work has provided a thorough review of the growing number of countries that are associating themselves with the Quad, and its analysis of the Quad Plus was a welcome one, especially because there are very few works that examine it in any detail, because of doubts about its long-term viability. This thesis aims to explore the Quad Plus concept, because the Quad itself, despite attempts to broaden its purpose, is becoming increasingly institutionalised so that its members and their foreign policy beliefs are being signalled more clearly. As a result, should any country wish to associate closely with the Quad, it would be making a big commitment, whereas the Quad Plus has an increasingly economic-centric format, which is loose and less institutionally formalised. It could therefore provide a more suitable platform for countries like South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand, because they have been pursuing a less bellicose foreign policy towards China in the past decade.

Conclusions / Gaps in the literature

There are several gaps in the literature on US strategy in the Indo-Pacific that this thesis seeks to address. Firstly, with regard to the dynamics between China and the US alliance network overall, most works have focused on a US-China duality and assumed that third party countries will either pick a side or avoid controversial issues. Nonetheless, there is room for

⁹⁷ Jagannath Panda, Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell, *Quad Plus and the Indo-Pacific*, New York: Routledge, 2022

more nuance. Has the US been consistent in its attitude towards allied opinions, during and after the Cold War? Does democratisation play a part? Is the US becoming more worried that it might lose allies to China? Now that China has become a strong economy, why is it that the San Francisco System endured, given the growing economic ties US allies themselves have with China? The current thesis adopts an original approach towards these issues by examining them through the lens of strategic culture and the aspirations of the US Pacific Dream.

Secondly, this thesis moves beyond the existing literature on the San Francisco System by viewing it in the context of the emergence of new multilateral organisations in the form of the Quad (the US, Japan, Australia, and India), the QUAD Plus (with South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand) and AUKUS (Australia, the UK, and the US). There are as yet no works that analyse the evolution of the US alliance network in the Indo-Pacific, and the transition from the San Francisco System to the Quad and Quad Plus, and there are few works that look at the future of the US alliance network in the Pacific. Even if organisations like the Quad and AUKUS push US strategy beyond the original purpose of the San Francisco System, that transition needs to be identified and analysed, and this is one of the main aims of the current thesis.

Thirdly, there is a lack of detailed investigation as to how much US allies have contributed to the San Francisco System and its successors. The alliance network in the Pacific is usually analysed as an exclusively US-supported construct, and while that is a valid approach, it would be wrong to assume that every development within the San Francisco System and the Quad, etc, has been initiated by the US, with its allies simply having to choose whether they comply or not. One example is the ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ strategy, which was a Japanese idea that has been adopted in full by the US. Another example is the importance of India’s deteriorating relationship with China which has led India to embrace

alignment with the US, without which the Quad and Quad Plus would not be viable structures. India has also rejected joining China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which is another blow to China's apparent goal of integrating Asian economies within its own rulebook. The increasing military cooperation between South Korea and the US, Australia and the UK, is also an example of US allies taking the lead in transforming the region's security infrastructure.

Fourthly, the National Security Strategies, and similar documents, produced by each US presidential administration, have tended to be underused, but they are a very valuable primary source when analysing US policy in the Pacific region - a gap in the literature that the current thesis intends to rectify by evaluating each of the National Security Strategies since 2001, especially the Biden NSS published in October 2022.

Fifthly, there is more research to be done on the nature of the rivalry between the US and China and the extent to which there is a 'new Cold War' in the Pacific, in which the American 'containment' of China has been aided by its allies in the region. A good example of this would be the Biden policies that aimed to restrict China's ability to develop semiconductor chips, and to improve the US' own chip infrastructure. This required a common front to be made by the US with South Korea and Taiwan to pursue export controls that restrict China's ability to develop semiconductor chips - the microchips (essentially computer chips) that play a key role in items such as missiles, supercomputers, and smartphones.

Chapter 2. The emergence of the San Francisco System, 1951 – 2001

‘The peoples of Asia are so incredibly diverse and their problems are so incredibly diverse that how could anyone, even the most utter charlatan, believe that he had a uniform policy which would deal with all of them’

Dean Acheson, 12 January, 1950⁹⁸

One of the key points of this thesis is the focus on the historical evolution of the San Francisco System. This chapter analyses how America’s bilateral alliances evolved over a period of 50 years, from the initiation of the San Francisco System in 1951, until 2001 when the US enabled China to join the WTO. Between 1951 and 2001 it is quite easy to observe the ‘hub-and-spokes’ system at work. There was also a notable absence of any attempt by US policymakers to attach an official title to the loose set of alliances referred to by scholars as the San Francisco System. Throughout this period, the Pacific Pact of the 1940s, along with SEATO, emerged as the only attempts by Washington to actively name and promote multilateral alliances in the Pacific region. The failure of both those groupings may have inhibited successive US administrations from presenting the San Francisco System as anything more than a bilateral alliance network. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that academic commentators have been the main group to try to label the alliance network in any way. The American thinking behind this bilateral structure has been suggested by Victor Cha in his article ‘Powerplay Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia’. Cha argued that the US wanted a good economic relationship with its allies, along with a bilateral approach in

⁹⁸ Dean Acheson, ‘Speech on the Far East’, *Archive.org*, 12 January 1950

order to ensure that it would avoid any quagmires while remaining an essential security player.⁹⁹

This does not mean that the San Francisco System did not have a pronounced diplomatic and military footprint throughout this period. On the contrary, this chapter shows that the US constantly urged members of the San Francisco System to develop their militaries, both for their own security and to reassure the US that it would not have to shoulder their entire defence burden. Still, there was a difference in the US approach towards its allies depending on whether they were democracies or not. The eventual democratisation of all the members of the San Francisco System by the end of the 1980s would pave the way for a more fundamental change of the San Francisco System in the decades to come. With more democratic allies in the 1990s, the question arose as to how the San Francisco System might progress, although it was not until the George W. Bush administration that the possibility of a more coherent alliance network emerged.

NATO vs. the San Francisco System

The US had been very efficient in establishing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 with eleven other founding members – Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and the UK. Greece and Turkey joined in 1951 and West Germany in 1955. If the initial stage of NATO was consolidated between 1949 and 1955, the same cannot be said for the US security architecture in Asia. On 30 August, 1951, the US and its former colony, the Philippines, signed a security treaty. On 8 September 1951, effective 1952, the US and Japan signed the Treaty of San Francisco, thus normalizing their relationship. The same day, the US and Japan

⁹⁹ Victor Cha, 'Powerplay Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia', *International Security*, Vol.34.3, Winter 2009/10, 158-161

signed their own Security Treaty, which would last until a new and improved version was agreed upon in 1960. On 1 October, 1953, the US and the Republic of Korea (ROK) signed their own mutual defence treaty. On 2 December, 1954, the US and the Republic of China (ROC) signed their own security treaty. Finally, in March 1962, through the Thanat-Rusk Communique, the US and Thailand signed a security treaty built upon their previous Treaty of Amity and Commerce established in 1833. It can be said that the San Francisco System was formed over a period of 11 years, between 1951 and 1962, almost twice that needed for NATO's consolidation.

The US had thus established what is sometimes called the hub-and-spokes system, an informal bilateral alliance network whose defence clauses resembled NATO's Article V. The process the US needed to establish this system was lengthy, yet the system was also notable for its reliance on US centrality (the hub). This was a hierarchical structure, which inhibited inter-alliance cooperation and demanded more pronounced US intervention in alliance affairs. Indeed, the United States often avoided complications pertaining to the mutual defence clauses of its very own treaties, and repeatedly alternated between trying to disengage militarily with its allies, and engage, by offering more support. As Kent Calder would explain, this network of alliances had six key features: bilateralism, the 'hub-and-spokes' layout, an asymmetric structure (its members were ranked below the US in influence, and some members were more important than others), Japan as a regional centre (the Asian core of the alliance), reduced participation from Western Pacific nations (the alliance had an increasingly East Asian focus), and extensive US economic support for its members.¹⁰⁰

No shared norms and values

¹⁰⁰ Kent Calder, 'Securing security through prosperity: the San Francisco System in comparative perspective', *The Pacific Review*, Vol.17.1, March 2004, 138-139

In the late 40s and early 50s, there was an attempt to build an Asian equivalent to NATO in the form of the Pacific Pact. The membership for this group was always in flux. The countries most often considered were Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Taiwan. For various reasons, the attempts to establish the Pacific Pact failed. Among them, there was a belief that it would be difficult for the US to enact a charter of shared values and objectives. The Pacific Pact had Australian and British origins. Diplomatic cables between the British Ambassador to the US and the US Secretary of State hinted that it would be difficult to find a group of countries in the Pacific with ‘common interests and ideals’. There was also a belief that, with the exception of the Philippines, the countries of Asia would not be capable of ‘continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid’.¹⁰¹ The US tacitly supported some form of regional integration as long as it was based ‘upon the consent of their people and should move at whatever pace is possible toward an increasing degree of constitutional processes reflected in individual liberties, representative government, free elections, and the due process of law’.¹⁰²

There were two major principles that took shape throughout the Cold War, and that would become important to the US from the 1990s onwards. The first one was *democracy*, which sometimes took the form of self – determination, and opposition to British and French imperialism, and the second one was *free markets*, which largely meant a country’s willingness and openness to trade with the US first and foremost. Free markets were the main requirement that allowed the US to rebuild countries it considered vital to its security. Democratization was something that had to manifest within the allied country, it didn’t seem genuine if it was dictated from Washington.

¹⁰¹ Douglas to State, 29 March 1949, FRUS/VII(2):318

¹⁰² Rusk, 8 September 1949, FRUS/VII(2):382

The US Director of the Office for Far Eastern Affairs believed that the Atlantic security pact was a product of unique circumstances and that the conditions in the Pacific, with diverse security risks, did not allow for a more coherent approach.¹⁰³ The US was aware of attempts by Taiwan and the Philippines to establish a Pacific Pact, but it was reluctant to play a major role in it, due to fears that the Pact would be seen as an American venture.¹⁰⁴ State Department memorandums further emphasized the point that not only was the US worried about being viewed as a ‘sponsor’ for this alliance, but that openly supporting it would give Asian countries false hope of US economic assistance.¹⁰⁵

The National Security Council assessed that US policy was incoherent and it prioritised Northeast Asia far more than South Asia. The NSC concluded that an alliance would be welcomed by Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines due to the security guarantees, but India would oppose such an alliance also due to the implied security guarantees, since India was non-aligned and was thus sceptical of a too strong American defensive alliance network.¹⁰⁶ By 1951, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that establishing a Pacific Pact would be a welcome idea, as long as it consisted of the *first island chain*, namely, Australia, Japan, the Philippines, the US, and possibly Indonesia.¹⁰⁷ This decision was part of a broader shift of perception, driven by the likes of General Douglas MacArthur, who did not enjoy seeing US policymakers assess the Pacific as a secondary theatre. He criticised the movement of troops from the Pacific to the Atlantic as an attempt to ‘scuttle’ the Pacific.¹⁰⁸ A memorandum by John Foster Dulles gave further insight into how the US was planning to draft a potential Pacific Pact: Indonesia’s presence was viewed as not imperative, and the US introduced language to prevent intra-party attacks. This was done to

¹⁰³ Butterworth, 8 April 1949, FRUS/VII(2):321

¹⁰⁴ Acheson, 25 July 1949, FRUS/VII(2):351

¹⁰⁵ Bishop to Rusk, 24 August 1949, FRUS/VII(2):376

¹⁰⁶ McGhee to Rusk, 4 November 1949, FRUS/VII(2):385

¹⁰⁷ Allison to Jessup, 4 January 1951, FRUS/VI(1):32

¹⁰⁸ Bishop, 16 February 1949, FRUS/VII(2):28

ease fears concerning the risk of pact members being attacked by Japan. The Pact was designed as a 'recommendatory' body in order to bypass the need for Senate ratification.¹⁰⁹ The Draft of the Security Treaty,¹¹⁰ along with Dulles' comments on it, added further information: Australia and New Zealand were reluctant to join an alliance with Japan.¹¹¹ The Treaty's Article IV borrowed from the Monroe Doctrine to bind countries to *act* in case one of them is attacked, without *committing* to any side in particular. This was designed so that the US could disavow its obligations to allies should it see fit.

The speeches of key US Secretaries of State gave insight into how the US established its strategy for Asia. One of the most important addresses given on early US Asia strategy came from Dean Acheson, in his 1950 Speech on the Far East.¹¹² Acheson built on the existing divergences of norms and values, as well as the existing differences of threat perception in claiming that the 'peoples of Asia are so incredibly diverse and their problems are so incredibly diverse that how could anyone, even the most utter charlatan, believe that he had a uniform policy which would deal with all of them'. Acheson did outline two unifying factors for East Asia: the 'revulsion against the acceptance of misery and poverty as the normal condition of life', and the 'revulsion against foreign domination'. These two *revulsions* did influence US strategy to a considerable extent. For the entirety of the Cold War, the US pursued policies aimed at improving the economies of its allies, and, in the early stages of the Cold War, until the Korean War, it was very sensitive to being perceived as an imperial power. The revulsion against foreign domination could also be interpreted as a sign that the US was willing to entertain democratization within its allies.

¹⁰⁹ Dulles to Jessup, 4 January 1951, FRUS/VI(1):33

¹¹⁰ Draft of Security Treaty, 17 February 1951, FRUS/VI(1):54

¹¹¹ Dulles to Macarthur, 2 March 1951, FRUS/VI(1):56

¹¹² Acheson, 'Speech on the Far East'

John Foster Dulles' speech at the signing of the San Francisco Peace Conference on 5 September, 1951, also could be of use to understand how US strategy had evolved.¹¹³ Dulles emphasized that, with the occasion of the peace, and the outcome of the war, it was the US' duty to take the initiative and shape the peace. Dulles pointed out that the treaty was indeed designed to be non-punitive to Japan, underlining the US priority to see Japan re-emerge as an economic and political force. The reason for this was the belief that Japan would transform into a country that would be normatively-aligned with the US. He refuted assertions that the terms of the peace coerced Japan into becoming a US protectorate. Dulles strongly affirmed that Japan had a high degree of flexibility in terms of choosing its development strategies.

The US and China

With the end of WWII, the US, under Franklin Delano Roosevelt, made efforts to include China in its global order. Roosevelt spoke of the 'four policemen' that would provide global order: the US, UK, USSR, and China. Unfortunately for US ambitions, the China it was supporting, led by Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist faction, the Kuomintang, was defeated by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the 1945-1949 Chinese Civil War. The Kuomintang retreated to Taiwan, and the CCP would *de facto* control mainland China. Thus, two Chinas emerged, and for initial US interests, the Kuomintang, or the Republic of China, was what represented the 'true' China.¹¹⁴

Until the mid-1960s the US assessment was that the CCP would still struggle to consolidate its power, and it would have no foreign policy aspirations. China's growing population, poor technology, and ideological rigidity would all hinder its growth and it was

¹¹³ John Foster Dulles, 'Speech at the San Francisco Peace Conference', *Database of Japanese Politics and International Relations*, 5 September 1951

¹¹⁴ Richard Van Alstyne, 'The United States and Russia in World War II', *Current History*, Vol.19.111, November 1950, 257-260

regarded as a country bound to struggle economically in the future.¹¹⁵ The Americans were aware that two poles of communist power were emerging, one Russian and one Chinese. By 1964, the US believed that the Sino-Soviet rift had ‘no chance of reconciliation’ and they expected armed conflict. The perception of China as a counterweight to the USSR was becoming increasingly important to the Americans.¹¹⁶ The US believed Chinese foreign policy objectives were threefold: firstly, ‘eject’ the west from Asia, and diminish its global influence, secondly, increase the influence of communist China in Asia, and thirdly, increase the influence of China in the undeveloped world. The US believed that China viewed it as its primary enemy, due to both ideological and nationalistic reasons. Sentiments of rivalry with the USSR persisted as well.¹¹⁷

By early 1966, the US assessed that China would avoid economic collapse following the Great Leap Forward. The war in Vietnam had little effect on the Chinese economy. The US still expected the economy to grow slowly.¹¹⁸ A Special State-Defense Study Group assessed the China threat in mid-1966. The biggest problem was that China had objectives of regional hegemony and world revolution. These clashed with US objectives of preventing one single power dominating Asia and maintaining a democratic international system. The US outlined three strategies for dealing with the China threat: disengagement, containment, and showdown. Disengagement was considered a betrayal of US allies, and an early showdown was viewed as not producing the desired effects of changing China, quite the opposite. The containment strategy would be the preferred option.¹¹⁹ Given Mao Zedong’s

¹¹⁵ National Intelligence Estimate, 28 January 1964, FRUS/XXX:9

¹¹⁶ NIE, 10 June 1964, FRUS/XXX:34

¹¹⁷ NIE, 5 May 1965, FRUS/XXX:85

¹¹⁸ NIE, 13 January 1966, FRUS/XXX:118

¹¹⁹ Study Prepared by the Special State-Defense Study Group, June 1966, FRUS/XXX:161

Cultural Revolution, the US assessed that there was room for incremental diplomatic and economic reform.¹²⁰

During the Nixon years, the US estimated in 1969 that China was not very successful in its attempts to establish dominance in South and East Asia. This was due to Maoism, the domestic costs of the Great Leap Forward, and the breakdown with the USSR. China obtained nuclear weapons in 1964, and this added to Washington's anxiety, nevertheless, the US believed the threat from China would take the form of insurgency, and it would not be very effective.¹²¹ Memorandums between National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger and President Richard Nixon further emphasized the idea that the Sino-Soviet split, particularly the border tensions between the two, determined the US to capitalize on the crisis, by easing economic controls against China.¹²² The US eventually realised that, because of its sheer size, it would be inevitable for China to become a global power, and it would want a seat at the UN Security Council. It did not believe China was capable of achieving those objectives in the late 60s. The US was also aware that most of its dealings with other states in Asia had to account for the China factor. Over the next decade, the US took into consideration the possibility that China might become more belligerent. This was due to Nixon's Kansas City Doctrine, where he outlined five global power centers – the US first, Western Europe second, Japan as the third power centre, and the Soviet Union and China as the fourth and fifth. Nixon made the point that the US could not afford to isolate China, given its economic potential¹²³. The US concluded that, should China become a more moderate and pragmatic power, there would be short-term losses and long-term gains, especially in terms of stability

¹²⁰ Rusk to Johnson, 22 February 1968, FRUS/XXX:302

¹²¹ Special NIE, 6 March 1969, FRUS/XVII:9

¹²² Kissinger to Nixon, 11 July 1969, FRUS/XVII:17

¹²³ Richard Nixon, 'Remarks to Midwestern News Media Executives Attending a Briefing on Domestic Policy in Kansas City, Missouri', 6 July 1971

in East Asia.¹²⁴ A memorandum from Secretary of State William P. Rogers to President Nixon explained that the reason behind the US easing of economic sanctions on China was the attempt to confuse the USSR.¹²⁵

US assessments in late 1970 confirmed that China was indeed transitioning to a more moderate stance, even though domestic problems persisted, and China's actions externally would be limited by the greater diplomatic clout of the USSR.¹²⁶ The Nixon Doctrine, which stipulated that the US would move away from supporting its allies through ground troops, and it would instead prefer economic and military aid as the means of support, was expected to have positive and negative impacts on China. On one hand, a smaller US military presence would ease tensions, on the other hand, China had reservations about the hardened, anti-communist stance of US allies post-US troops reduction. Japan was very worried about the pace of reductions. South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, and South Vietnam made peace with the idea as long as US material assistance would strengthen. The Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand were open to improving ties with communist countries as a means of easing tensions.¹²⁷ As of mid-1971, the US noticed that China's behaviour changed from one that was nationalistic and combative to one focused on diplomacy, with the goal of improving China's international status.¹²⁸ Kissinger's impression was that a balanced approach to both the USSR and China would have positive effects on Moscow. He thought US allies like Japan or Taiwan could be easily reassured. He was very much tempted by the historical prospects of normalization.¹²⁹ During a conversation with Nixon in February 1972, Kissinger told the President about China: 'I think, in a historical period, they are more formidable than the Russians. [...] For the next 15 years we

¹²⁴ Response to National Security Study Memorandum 14, 8 August 1969, FRUS/XVII:23

¹²⁵ Rogers to Nixon, 2 December 1969, FRUS/XVII:49

¹²⁶ NIE, 12 November 1970, FRUS/XVII:95

¹²⁷ Draft Response to National Security Study Memorandum 106, 16 February 1971, FRUS/XVII:105

¹²⁸ Response to National Security Study Memorandum 124, 27 May 1971, FRUS/XVII:129

¹²⁹ Kissinger to Nixon, 14 July 1971, FRUS/XVII:144

have to lean towards the Chinese against the Russians. We have to play this balance of power game totally unemotionally. Right now, we need the Chinese to correct the Russians and to discipline the Russians'.¹³⁰

An October 1975 meeting between Kissinger and the CCP Foreign Minister clarified US policy towards China for the foreseeable future. The Chinese insisted on two principles: they would not pursue hegemony and would continue a policy of self-reliance. Kissinger, insisting as he often did on how impressed he was with the Chinese reception, and relying on considerable hyperbole, would claim that 'there is no relationship to which the United States assigns greater significance than its ties with the People's Republic of China'.¹³¹ Later on, in a speech by Kissinger, in November 1975, at the Economic Club of Detroit, he spoke of how the lack of US engagement with the PRC for the previous 20 years was a form of 'isolation'.¹³² Three principles were present throughout Kissinger's entire speech: strong global markets, better relations with China, and a more pronounced role for Japan in global affairs. Kissinger presented the US as a 'Pacific power', and mentioned the US bilateral alliances, however, it was Japan that often stood out by itself.

During a March 1976 statement to the House of Representatives International Relations Committee, Kissinger spoke of a dedication to 'maintain and continually revitalize our relations with allies and friendly countries with which we share values and interests'. On one hand, he emphasized the 'norms and values' philosophy; on the other hand, the language was so vague that it allowed even China to meet the criteria for cooperation. Kissinger also emphasized that 'the foundation of our foreign policy is security'. East Asia was the biggest recipient of US security assistance programs, with \$496 million for fiscal year 1977,

¹³⁰ Nixon to Kissinger, 14 February 1972, FRUS/XVII:192

¹³¹ Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, digital version of documents in Box 26, folder State Department – Kissinger Speeches and Statements (1), Ron Nessen Papers

¹³² Ibid., Kissinger, Henry, 'Building an enduring foreign policy', 1-8

accounting for 12 per cent of the program, and surpassing Europe, with \$448 million, and 11 per cent of the money.¹³³

Normalisation with China did come with a broader problem: the fate of Taiwan, and the implications for the first island chain. President Jimmy Carter had continued the path of cultivating good relations with Beijing, inviting Chinese President Deng Xiaoping to Washington DC, where they exchanged views about the future of their countries, views that were well-received by Deng.¹³⁴ US recognition of the PRC during the Carter administration meant that Taiwan would need another legal designation. In 1979, the US Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act which renewed the US commitment to Taiwan despite the recent change in stance with regards to China. Particularly significant was the wording that the US ‘shall provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character and shall maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or social or economic system, of the people of Taiwan’.¹³⁵ By doing so, the US ensured that it kept all options on the table should China attempt to annex Taiwan by force. This diplomatic status has continued up to the present day.

The election of Ronald Reagan as US President brought a change in how the US viewed its status as an economic superpower. The US and China had finalised establishing formal diplomatic relations during the Carter administration. A series of visits by high ranking US officials, such as Secretary of State Alexander Haig, had convinced Jimmy Carter that the Reagan administration would succeed in continuing the diplomatic path he set out in the late 70s.¹³⁶ This was in spite of the Reagan administration’s decision to sell more arms to Taiwan, a decision that Carter described as compatible with the 1978 accords, and justified

¹³³ Ibid. Henry Kissinger, ‘Statement by The Honourable Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State, Before the House International Relations Committee’, 29 March 1976

¹³⁴ Deng to Carter, undated, FRUS/XIII:212

¹³⁵ H.R.2479, ‘Taiwan Relations Act’, 10 April 1979

¹³⁶ James Sterba, ‘Carter Finds Chinese Reassured by Reagan on Ties’, *New York Times*, 29 August 1981

given that the weapons were defensive in nature.¹³⁷ Reagan met with Chinese leaders in October 1981, and during those talks he expressed optimism concerning the future of US-China relations, pointing out that a poor nation's problems can be best solved by 'the magic of the marketplace'.¹³⁸ In 1982, Reagan sent his Vice President, George Bush, on a trip to China, in what was viewed at the time as gesture of goodwill, and a tacit acknowledgement of the Chinese view of the 'One China principle'. The topic of selling arms to Taiwan was weighing heavy on the Reagan administration, and thus, visits to reassure Taiwan took place.¹³⁹

On his way to a 1984 trip to China, Reagan declared before departure that his goal was to 'strengthen Chinese-American friendship, open new markets for American trade and establish a foundation for "opposing expansionist aggression"'.¹⁴⁰ Under Reagan, during the mid-1980s, the US still did not perceive China as a threat, and was focused on the USSR and triangulation with China. Reagan also pushed for more trade, acknowledging that diplomacy and commerce often combined their interests, and that trade was the main vehicle for improving ties with China.¹⁴¹ Reagan remained consistent in this philosophy; one year later he signed a deal with China for the selling of US nuclear reactors and nuclear technology.¹⁴² By 1988, most Reagan administration officials supported the selling of US commercial satellites to China.¹⁴³ The Reagan administration came to an end on 20 January 1989, three months before the Tiananmen protests began. Nonetheless, Reagan gave comments on the

¹³⁷ James Sterba, 'Carter Says Reagan's China Policy is "Compatible" with '78 Accords', *New York Times*, 28 August 1981

¹³⁸ Howell Raines, 'Reagan Meets with Chinese and Mexican Leaders', *New York Times*, 22 October 1981

¹³⁹ *New York Times*, 'One China for Mr. Reagan, Too', *New York Times*, 13 May 1982

¹⁴⁰ Steven Weisman, 'Reagan Lists his Goals for China Trip', *New York Times*, 25 April 1984

¹⁴¹ Steven Weissman, 'Reagan to Press China on Trade', *New York Times*, 20 April 1984

¹⁴² Henry Giniger, Milt Freudenheim, Richard Levine, 'The World, Reagan Seals a China Deal', *New York Times*, 28 July 1985

¹⁴³ Michael Gordon, 'Most Reagan Officials Back Satellite Exports to China', *New York Times*, 9 September 1988

event, and made it clear that Tiananmen took place due to endemic problems within the communist ideology.¹⁴⁴

Tensions between China and the US eased during the George H. W. Bush administration. Following Tiananmen, the US halted weapons exports to China, however, by 1992, the Bush administration restarted them.¹⁴⁵ Tiananmen also determined the US to give more attention to the issue of human rights in China, and, from 1990, the Bush administration started a dialogue with China concerning the issue. By 1992, human rights had already become weaponised as a topic, with China halting talks over political prisoners as a way to signal its displeasure to US administrations.¹⁴⁶ The House of Representatives had voted 418-0 to condemn Beijing in 1989 after Tiananmen, and Congress imposed sanctions. The sanctions package did not have the support of Bush, but still Congress pushed ahead. There was no threat of a veto.¹⁴⁷

The Bush administration tried to reshape US trade strategy in Asia, fuelled by US fears of Japanese economic dominance. Numerous barriers in trade with China had been lowered, and an impending trade war between the two had been avoided, as the US gave up its policy of punitive tariffs.¹⁴⁸ Trade between the US and China boomed in the early 90s, despite Washington expressing frustration that its diplomacy concerning human rights was not yielding results.¹⁴⁹ In July 1991, the Senate attempted to impose conditions on trade with China – the measure passed 55-44. Lacking a two thirds majority to pass the filibuster, it did not become law, and the failure was regarded as a win for the Bush administration.¹⁵⁰ Bush vetoed the legislation, which would have imposed conditions on China's status as most

¹⁴⁴ Associated Press, 'Turmoil in China, Reagan Optimistic on China', *New York Times*, 11 June 1989

¹⁴⁵ Keith Bradsher, 'U.S. WILL RELEASE WEAPONS TO CHINA', *New York Times*, 23 December 1992

¹⁴⁶ Nicolas Kristof, 'Chinese Apparently Halt Rights Talks With U.S.', *New York Times*, 25 November 1992

¹⁴⁷ Martin Tolchin, 'HOUSE, BREAKING WITH BUSH, VOTES CHINA SANCTIONS', *New York Times*, 30 June 1989

¹⁴⁸ Steven Greenhouse, 'China Will Lower Barriers to Trade In Accord With U.S.', *New York Times*, 10 October 1992

¹⁴⁹ Robert Pear, 'BUSH DISTRESSED AS POLICY FAILS TO MOVE CHINA', *New York Times*, 11 March 1990

¹⁵⁰ Keith Bradsher, 'SENATE RESTRICTS TRADE WITH CHINA; BUSH VETO LIKELY', *New York Times*, 24 July 1991

favoured trading nation, in March 1992.¹⁵¹ During a May 1991 speech, Bush outlined his approach to China, and it reflected Republican orthodoxy, claiming that he refused to punish China economically due to a belief that through free trade and dialogue China would change its behavior.¹⁵²

The Clinton administration did not consider foreign policy its main priority, and Bill Clinton came to power at a moment when the US had the impression most of its geopolitical worries were minor, due to the fall of the USSR and the lack of a clear threat. Bill Clinton made it clear he would still be tough on China concerning human rights, while, at the same time, he also made it clear the door was open to more economic cooperation, a continuation from the Bush years.¹⁵³ China did not progress on human rights, but Clinton was reluctant to penalise China economically for those faults.¹⁵⁴ Clinton's policy on China was one of engagement, which he defended in 1997, claiming that isolating China would be 'unworkable, counterproductive and potentially dangerous'. Clinton's conciliatory approach to China brought criticism from Nancy Pelosi, who called Clinton's 1997 China speech 'masterful in its craftiness in whitewashing China's record'.¹⁵⁵ Clinton visited China in 1998 and his remarks then were some of his most optimistic. He claimed the arrival of democracy in China was inevitable, acknowledged key differences between the US and China, yet also supported the idea that only through economic liberalisation can China transform.¹⁵⁶

The US role in Asia after the Cold War

¹⁵¹ Keith Bradsher, 'Bush Vetoes Conditions on Trade Status of China', *New York Times*, 3 March 1992

¹⁵² NYT, 'Excerpts From Bush's Remarks on China', *New York Times*, 28 May 1991

¹⁵³ Douglas Jehl, 'CLINTON STRESSES CHINA RIGHTS GOAL', *New York Times*, 25 March 1994

¹⁵⁴ Elaine Sciolino, 'CLINTON REJECTS PENALIZING CHINA', *New York Times*, 26 March 1994

¹⁵⁵ John Broder, 'Clinton Defends Engagement With China', *New York Times*, 25 October 1997

¹⁵⁶ John Broder, 'CLINTON IN CHINA: THE OVERVIEW; CLINTON OPTIMISTIC ON CHINA'S FUTURE AS HE HEADS HOME', *New York Times*, 4 July 1998

In the 1987 National Security Strategy, the US outlined three principles that it would abide by: freedom, peace, and prosperity. The US also made it clear that it would support its alliance partners and uphold the moral distinctions between totalitarianism and democracy.¹⁵⁷ The US considered that its policies for the past few decades of supporting its allies and ensuring their economic development were a success, and thus expected its allies to play a bigger role in burden-sharing.¹⁵⁸ The NSS made a point of connecting *democratization* with *free trade*. The 1987 NSS also cemented the US desire for ‘unimpeded’ access to oceans, which would become another enduring principle in the post-Cold War period. The US continued the Nixon/Kissinger philosophy of working with the PRC. The NSS made it clear that the US saw the USSR as its main adversary, and China was a state that it could cooperate with in order to balance Moscow.¹⁵⁹ The 1987 NSS also described the US as a ‘Pacific power’, and outlined the hierarchical nature of the San Francisco System, with Japan clearly presented as the main ally, and the bilateral alliance with South Korea a close second.¹⁶⁰ The five treaty allies of the San Francisco System were always mentioned on an individual, case-by-case basis, further outlining the US hub-and-spokes approach. The US emphasized the antithetical approach to alliances it had with China: the PRC’s lack of alliances was viewed as a major weakness.¹⁶¹ The 1988 NSS largely adhered to the same principles.¹⁶²

By March 1990, the US had made it clear that after WWII, its burden of rebuilding allied countries had ended, and it was expecting more balanced relationships. Secondly, the US also re-stated that it would seek a stable military balance of power in regions where other countries might seek regional dominance. There was no clear mention of China, but this policy design made the US-China clash an observable possibility. Thirdly, the US made it

¹⁵⁷ US National Security Strategy, January 1987, The White House, Washington DC

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 3

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 6

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 15-20

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 20

¹⁶² NSS, January 1988, The White House, 4-32

clear that its alliances and networks were not only successful, they also fundamentally altered the shape of East Asia and tied-in the US to it. The US described its own security as resting on ‘an unprecedented structure of harmonious relations’, with the US-Japan alliance as the most important one.¹⁶³

On 24 August 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (CCCP). By December 1991, the USSR had collapsed, and with it, the biggest threat to US primacy. The US National Security Strategies of August 1991 and January 1993 highlighted the struggles that would come with the disappearance of Soviet communism. The 1991 NSS made the point that the collapse of the USSR meant that the US should continue to use alliances as a means to promote democracy. The US expressed a renewed interest in the US-Australia alliance, and also claimed that the loss of Clark Air Base in the Philippines did not fundamentally alter the meaning of the alliance with the Philippines.¹⁶⁴ The 1993 NSS, published in January that year, allowed the US to state its strategy more clearly for the post-Cold War era. By having no clear adversary, the US lacked strategic clarity, and began a process of focusing on narrower threats. The 1993 NSS made democracy promotion key, and it also made it clear the US saw the end of the Cold War as a victory for democracy and multilateral organisations. The focus for the coming years was on economic integration. For Asia, the US outlined five objectives: maintain its status as a Pacific power, expand market access, bilaterally and multilaterally, balance China in a manner that protects US interests, play a critical role in the peaceful unification of the Korean peninsula, and normalize relations with Indochina, as well as expand ties with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ NSS, March 1990, The White House, 2-15

¹⁶⁴ NSS, August 1991, The White House, 1-14

¹⁶⁵ NSS, January 1993, The White House, 1-8

The Clinton administration tried to establish new objectives for US foreign policy in the 1990s. The 1994 NSS was built around two pillars: more economic engagement and consolidating the military overseas presence. It placed strong emphasis on the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). One of the more striking developments was that the US delinked China's most favoured nation trading status with its human rights record. The July 1994 NSS stressed its support for the New Pacific Community, an attempt to consolidate democracies in Asia.¹⁶⁶ The 1995 NSS marked the submission of the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the convention which codified US ambitions concerning sea lanes.¹⁶⁷ Ironically, the US Senate never ratified UNCLOS. In the 1996 NSS the US gave 'democracy with Chinese characteristics' a way in, by making the statement that 'each nation must find its own form of democracy'.¹⁶⁸ The May 1997 NSS mentioned that the US expected China to cooperate with the multilateral economic bodies that it viewed as successful in Asia, such as APEC, the ARF, and the Northeast Asia Security Dialogue. The NSS avoided touching on the issue of human rights in China, and when it did, it invited constructive dialogue.¹⁶⁹

The 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) outlined the alliances with Japan and South Korea as 'critical to US security'. Forecasting for the period until 2015, the QDR expected that 'more than one aspiring regional power will have both the desire and the means to challenge US interests militarily', with the security environment being 'marked by the absence of a "global peer competitor" able to challenge the United States militarily around the world as the Soviet Union did during the Cold War'. After 2015, there was an expectation that China or Russia could emerge as competitors, but the US believed that by cooperating

¹⁶⁶ NSS, July 1994, The White House, 3-23

¹⁶⁷ NSS, February 1995, The White House, 2-4

¹⁶⁸ NSS, February 1996, 3-41

¹⁶⁹ NSS, May 1997

with China, it would slow down its military development.¹⁷⁰ In the October 1998 NSS, the US confirmed that it would not reduce its 100,000-troop military presence in Asia. It also referred to its bilateral alliance network as the ‘foundation for America’s security role’. The US claimed it would be difficult to amass support among its allies for a hard line on China. The US was also proud of its achievements in working with China to combat piracy of intellectual property. For Thailand, the US concluded that, given the country’s democratic difficulties, it would be best to ‘lessen the financial burden of military programs, including decreasing the scope of military contacts such as visits and exercises, and looking for ways to reduce the impact of the crisis on security assistance programs’.¹⁷¹

The December 1999 NSS was used by the US to cement ‘democratic ideals and values’ as a means of international leadership and power. Democracy and human rights were tied not only to US values, but also to US security and prosperity. One hallmark of the NSS was the praise offered to China for joining the US in criticising India and Pakistan for conducting nuclear tests, and joining the US in asking them to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.¹⁷² The last NSS of the Clinton administration, published in December 2000, was largely similar to the previous ones, with the caveat of adding Japan as a key partner to the sections that deal with denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.¹⁷³ The September 2001 QDR called the international system ‘fluid and unpredictable’, and proclaimed that relations with other countries were ‘often characterized both by competition and cooperation’. The QDR acknowledged that Asia was ‘emerging as a region susceptible to large-scale military competition’, and noted that the ‘East Asian littoral - from the Bay of Bengal to the Sea of Japan - represents a particularly challenging area’. It also emphasized the US needed to ‘take account of new challenges, particularly anti-access and area-denial threats’, a tacit

¹⁷⁰ Quadrennial Defense Review, May 1997, 3-5

¹⁷¹ NSS, October 1998, 41-47

¹⁷² NSS, December 1999, 4-37

¹⁷³ NSS, December 2000

acknowledgement of China's new military capabilities. It asked for a more flexible and pronounced US military presence in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific.¹⁷⁴ Another sign that the outgoing Clinton administration had a strategy of integrating China was the support from Bill Clinton on bringing Beijing into the WTO. His March 2000 speech on the China Trade Bill emphasised that not only would the PRC's entry into the WTO be beneficial to the US, but that, quite frankly, the US was in no position to stop it, as the agreement would 'move China in the right direction. It will advance the goals America has worked for in China for the past three decades'.¹⁷⁵

Finding shared norms and values

This chapter established that the early post-WW2 era was marked by a US belief that its allies in the San Francisco System lacked the required set of norms and values that would facilitate deeper integration. One change that happened throughout the Cold War and culminated in the early post-Cold War years was the emergence of some degree of normative alignment between the US and its allies.

US bilateral alliances

Now that it has been established that the US decided to pursue a security format under the hub-and-spokes principle, an analysis of the evolution of bilateral policy is key. Each individual section will assess how the bilateral relationships were influenced by attempts to consolidate shared norms and values, and threat perceptions.

¹⁷⁴ QDR, September 2001, 3-27

¹⁷⁵ Bill Clinton, 'Full Text of Clinton's Speech on China Trade Bill', *New York Times*, 9 March 2000

US-Japan relations

Concerning relations with Japan, the main US objectives after WWII consisted of attempting to reintegrate Japan in global affairs, and ensuring that it was committed to building a robust defence. Both these objectives took a considerable amount of time to come to fruition. Eisenhower expressed frustration that the US was inefficient in guiding a new Japanese nationalism into a more militaristic philosophy. According to NSC assessments in 1955, Japan was not in a position to regain global status or a strong military, it was mainly interested in economic reconstruction. Japan was very pacifist, and the US had the impression it pushed too hard for militarization. The main worry was economic stability.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, by late 1955, the US was considering some troop reduction – from 117,000 to around 90,000 – in order to further determine Japan to play a more active role in its self-defence.¹⁷⁷ The Japanese elections of the mid-50s brought a considerable amount of socialists to power and thus the US assessed that its plans for rearmament would not be able to pass the Japanese Diet. US officials also decided to move United Nations (UN) command from Japan to Korea, in order to remove the idea that Japan is ‘occupied’, claiming that if ‘we could not succeed in destroying this idea, we stood to lose our entire position in the Japanese islands’.¹⁷⁸ The US also attempted to address Japanese sovereignty by affirming that it did not seek permanent control of the Ryukyu Islands.¹⁷⁹ A conversation between General MacArthur and President Eisenhower, among others, further emphasised the point that the US felt Japan had reached a certain degree of diplomatic normalization, and was thus very open to the idea of disengaging militarily to a high extent, as long as that would determine Japan to also normalize in the

¹⁷⁶ National Security Council Memorandum, 7 April 1955, FRUS/XXIII(1):26

¹⁷⁷ NSC Memorandum, 15 November 1955, FRUS/XXIII(1):60

¹⁷⁸ NSC Memorandum, 12 July 1956, FRUS/XXIII(1):82

¹⁷⁹ Briefing Paper Prepared in the Office of the Operations Coordinator, 29 May 1957, FRUS/XXIII(1):164

terms of defensive organization. The Americans were worried that if they would not retreat from Japan to a certain degree, they would run the risk of losing Japan as an ally.¹⁸⁰

During the Kennedy administration, the US wanted to establish a United States-Japan Committee on Trade and Economic Affairs, modelled after the US-Canada version. The US believed this would ease Japanese worries that its primary economic interests are in Western Europe,¹⁸¹ since Japan's growth in the last decade had been due to access to US technology contracts, as well as US equity investments.¹⁸² During the Johnson administration, the forecast for Japan throughout the 1960s and into the 70s was that it would become 'increasingly strong, confident, and nationalistic'. The Americans expected conservative and socialist factions to alternate being in power. The expectation was that the alliance would become less important in the long term due to Japan carving its own path. The US was expecting Japan to play a more assertive foreign policy role at some point in the 70s, preferably by contributing to UN peacekeeping missions.¹⁸³ Until the mid-60s, the US assessment was that while trade frictions and the war in Vietnam could embolden the Japanese socialist faction, the security treaty would endure largely unchanged.¹⁸⁴

In the late 1960s, with the beginning of US-USSR détente, Japan developed anxieties concerning its role in the US security architecture. Japan wanted China to be not strong enough to challenge it, but also strong enough to not be dominated by the USSR.¹⁸⁵ A memorandum in August 1967 from McNamara to President Johnson emphasized that with the US reversion of the Ryukyus ownership to Japan, the US approach should be based on the US unwillingness to 'stand alone' in the Pacific, and that even though reversion would happen, the US saw its military installations as both aiding the defence of Japan and the

¹⁸⁰ Memorandum of a Conference With the President, 18 June 1957, FRUS/XXIII(1):177

¹⁸¹ Rusk to Kennedy, 9 June 1961, FRUS/XXII:329

¹⁸² Position Paper, 26 November 1962, FRUS/XXII:360

¹⁸³ Department of State Policy Paper, 26 June 1964, FRUS/XXIX(2):15

¹⁸⁴ NIE, 26 November 1965, FRUS/XXIX(2):64

¹⁸⁵ Rostow to Johnson, 1 March 1967, FRUS/XXIX(2):84

defence of the US itself.¹⁸⁶ A memorandum from Rusk to Johnson in September 1967 emphasized that the US wanted Japan as an ally, not a rival. Yet, this did mean that Japan needed to share more of the military burden. Japan regaining the Ryukyus and Bonin islands should not deter the US from its own defensive commitments in Asia.¹⁸⁷ A US assessment of Japan's foreign policy trends in 1968 concluded that while Japan was developing economically quite well, it would still rely on the US for security, and it would be reluctant to directly 'contain' communism. The Americans believed there was some openness from Japan in accepting some security responsibility in Northeast Asia. The US assessed that Japan saw China as a long-term competitor, nevertheless, it would work with it to develop trade, while also trying to increase its influence in South Korea and Taiwan.¹⁸⁸

Under Nixon, the first problem that came at hand was the reversion of control over Okinawa. The US assessed that should there be no agreement before the 1969 general election, the US-Japan relationship would deteriorate considerably. The issue was political, not logistical. The Americans also believed the Japanese leaders saw the security treaty as a very advantageous element, and expected them to persist in being reluctant to share the burden on security issues.¹⁸⁹ The issue for the US was that while losing Okinawa would not present a major problem for day-to-day operations, it would degrade US nuclear capabilities. On both Okinawa and the Ryukyus, the Americans understood that giving them back to Japan would result in 'significant' military costs, but the political pressure of doing so was too great.¹⁹⁰ The NSC assessed that, throughout the 70s, Japan would be able to fully assume its international commitments. The problem was the extent to which Japan would remain aligned with US interests. The NSC advised against a neutral Japan, and it also advised against a full

¹⁸⁶ McNamara to Johnson, 30 August 1967, FRUS/XXIX(2):94

¹⁸⁷ Rusk to Johnson, 4 September 1967, FRUS/XXIX(2):96

¹⁸⁸ NIE, 11 January 1968, FRUS/XXIX(2):111

¹⁸⁹ NIE, 17 February 1969, FRUS/XIX(2):3

¹⁹⁰ Kissinger to Nixon, 12 March 1969, FRUS/XIX(2):4

collective security relationship. The best course of action was to improve the ongoing agreements, with minor to no changes. Even though Japan spent only 1% on its defence, the US assessed that its military, 'the largest non – communist navy and air force in Asia', was adequate for most dangerous scenarios, excluding an all-out Soviet attack. The US would continue to passively support Japan's military modernization, even though inputs from US Treasury favoured a more aggressive investment plan.¹⁹¹ By May 1969, the NSC further cemented these points, with Okinawa to be given back in 1972, should there be an agreement in 1969.¹⁹²

The US forecast for Japan in the 70s was that the country would have a dynamic economy, a motivated population, and a stable government. The question was whether Japan would be able to find a role for itself on the global stage. The US expected that by the 1980s, Japan would match it in terms of economic relations. The Americans believed the Japanese saw themselves as 'bridge-builders' between the communist and non-communist worlds. The US expected Japan to moderately oppose its military footprint in the country, but there would be no calls for dismantling the security alliance.¹⁹³ Nixon's announcement of plans to visit China created shockwaves in Japan, as he did not consult with the Japanese in advance.¹⁹⁴ Aware of the poor optics with their ally, the US eventually became open to consulting with the Japanese on China,¹⁹⁵ expecting the new Tanaka government to prefer continuity in the relationship.¹⁹⁶ Once the US normalised relations with China, Japan followed suit. An intelligence note from October 1972 assessed that the US-Japan security treaty was not viewed by China as an obstacle for China-Japan relations.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹¹ Paper Prepared by the NSC Staff, 29 April 1969, FRUS/XIX(2):8

¹⁹² National Security Decision Memorandum 13, 28 May 1969, FRUS/XIX(2):13

¹⁹³ NIE, 25 June 1970, FRUS/XIX(2):46

¹⁹⁴ Summary Paper Prepared by the Interdepartmental Group for East Asia, 2 August 1971, FRUS/XIX(2):84

¹⁹⁵ Paper Prepared by the Interdepartmental Group for East Asia, undated, FRUS/XIX(2):99

¹⁹⁶ Kissinger to Nixon, 15 July 1972, FRUS/XIX(2):123

¹⁹⁷ Intelligence Note, 2 October 1972, FRUS/XIX(2):136

Under Reagan, the US and Japan entered a more tense phase. Japan had become an economic power, and throughout the 1980s, within the US, a climate of doubt concerning Japan emerged, largely focused on the fear that Japan would overtake the US in terms of being the world superpower. The Reagan administration, strongly fixated on trade and commerce, did not see the economic framework that was designed to help Japan grow as something positive for the US. Instead, they saw preferential trade with Japan as a liability for US business. Despite these tensions, the military ties between the two remained strong. Reagan's cabinet was divided on trade with Japan from the very beginning. There were tensions between the free market purists and the pragmatists over offering relief to the US automobile industry by asking Japan to restrain its car exports to the US.¹⁹⁸ The trade woes never really had an effect on the US-Japan military alliance. In 1983, Reagan and Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro claimed that the defensive rearmament of Japan would continue. The broader goal of this move was to ensure that Japan was properly armed in order to fend off a potential attack from the USSR.¹⁹⁹

Reagan visited Japan later that year, in November. Even though he declared that ties between the US and Japan remained strong, there was a tense atmosphere, largely due to the changes in the status of the two countries. The US was still reeling after a period of economic troubles, and Japan was no longer a country transitioning to an economic powerhouse, it had become one. A Japanese lawmaker told a member of the US delegation that 'your country is still above the standard, of course, but you're not as far above the standard as you used to be'. The Japanese were angry that the US was blaming its economic problems on Japan, and there were doubts over the reliability of the US as an ally.²⁰⁰ The meeting itself was more cordial

¹⁹⁸ Hedrick Smith, 'Reagan's Cabinet Split on Imports of Japanese Cars', *New York Times*, 13 March 1981

¹⁹⁹ Francis Clines, 'Reagan Cautions Japan over Trade', *New York Times*, 20 January 1983

²⁰⁰ Clyde Haberman, 'Reagan's Trip to Japan: Ties Remain Strong', *New York Times*, 7 November 1983

than previous ones, with Reagan emphasizing a need for the US to have greater access to the Japanese market.²⁰¹

The trade tensions did not go away. By late 1984, the US had a record trade deficit with Japan, between \$35 billion and \$50 billion, and Reagan's cabinet wanted to address it. Limits on US imports of Japanese goods, such as steel, were set, and Reagan began pressuring Nakasone to pursue a trade policy that would enable Japan to buy more goods from the US.²⁰² Reagan told Nakasone that unless he opens Japanese markets for US trade, he would not be able to stop Congress from its goal of enacting protectionist measures of its own. Reagan officials claimed that Congress was 'exasperated' with the lack of movement on Japan, and that Reagan had no choice but to increase pressure.²⁰³ One year later, in November 1985, Reagan's 'strike force' on trade recommended that he should consider making unfair trade complaints concerning both Japan and Taiwan, due to selling semiconductors below market price. Reagan's administration was targeting Japanese private companies. Nevertheless, the move also put the Japanese government in a difficult position because it would have been expected to settle these disputes. Competition with Japan badly hurt the US semiconductor industry, as well as computer sales overall.²⁰⁴ These events were taking place in the broader context of the signing of the Plaza Accord, where the US, France, West Germany, the UK, and Japan signed an agreement to depreciate the US dollar in relation to the currencies of the other signatories.²⁰⁵

By 1987, the Plaza Accord was having an effect, and the trade tensions eased to a certain degree. In April 1987, Reagan lifted some tariffs on electronic goods. This was described by the White House as an 'incentive' for Japan, as it had stopped its policy of

²⁰¹ Francis Clines, 'Reagan, in Japan, Pledges Closer Ties', *New York Times*, 10 November 1983

²⁰² Clyde Farnsworth, 'Reagan, Cabinet, set Japan Trade Parley', *New York Times*, 7 December 1984

²⁰³ Gerald Boyd, 'Reagan Expected to Warn Japanese on Bars to Trade', *New York Times*, 30 March 1985

²⁰⁴ Clyde Farnsworth, 'Reagan Trade Panel Accuses Japan and Taiwan', *New York Times*, 14 November 1985

²⁰⁵ Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 'Announcement of [G5] Finance Ministers & Central Bank Governors (the Plaza Agreement)', Archive G7, 22 September 1985

dumping semiconductors on the global market below cost.²⁰⁶ In November 1987, the US further lifted restrictions. Once again concerning imports of electronics, the US renounced a policy of 100% punitive tariffs. Again, the goal was to persuade Japan to stop its dumping policies. Reagan claimed he was enforcing the principles of 'free and fair trade'. Sanctions on computers remained active.²⁰⁷ By October 1989, Japan's transformation in the eyes of the US had been completed. Reagan claimed Japan had 'responsibility for more than its own success', and asked it to contribute more financial aid to poor countries. He asked Japan to continue 'being a major aid donor, championing free trade and supporting mutual security relationships'.²⁰⁸ This made it clear that the US expected Japan to finally integrate within the US alliance system and play an active role.

The trade tensions between the US and Japan continued under Bush. Pressured by Congress, Bush moved quickly and tried to see if he could reach common ground with Japanese leaders on improving economic ties.²⁰⁹ Bush was reluctant to economically penalise Japan.²¹⁰ America underwent a short recession during the Bush years, and Bush refused to blame Japan for America's economic woes.²¹¹ The year 1991 was also the moment Japan's economic development begins to stall, and the country entered its 'lost decade' period, which would go on to cover the rest of the 90s, the 2000s, and even the 2010s. By that point, Japan began pursuing a strategy of trying to stimulate its economy,²¹² and it cooperated with the US to do so in a manner that would be beneficial to both.²¹³ In early 1992, Bush reached an agreement with Japan on the auto industry, despite criticisms from carmakers of the deal as

²⁰⁶ Gerald Boyd, 'Reagan, in Venice, Lifts Part of Tariff on Japan', *New York Times*, 9 June 1987

²⁰⁷ Clyde Farnsworth, 'Reagan Lifts Some of Japan Sanctions', *New York Times*, 5 November 1987

²⁰⁸ Steven Weisman, 'Reagan Urges Japan to Look Past Its Success', *New York Times*, 21 October 1989

²⁰⁹ Clyde Farnsworth, 'Bush Seeks Japan Shift On Imports', *New York Times*, 2 March 1990

²¹⁰ Reuters, 'Bush Cites Japan Talks', *New York Times*, 1 May 1990

²¹¹ Michael Wines, 'Bush Avoids Criticism of Japanese', *New York Times*, 31 December 1991

²¹² David Sanger, 'For Japanese, "Shared Values" in U.S.', *New York Times*, 1 July 1992

²¹³ Thomas Friedman, 'JAPANESE PLEDGES PUSH FOR GROWTH', *New York Times*, 2 July 1992

inadequate.²¹⁴ Japan's underwhelming support of the US war in the Persian Gulf prompted criticism from the American side. In April 1991, Bush had also tried to mend ties with the Japanese, and stop the 'bashing'.²¹⁵

Japan's changing economic fortunes provided Bill Clinton with a chance to change the nature of the US-Japan relationship. Unfortunately, Clinton did not capitalise on the opportunity that was presented. In July 1993, before a trip to Japan, Clinton presented optimism, but the results of negotiations over the trade deficit and greater US access to Japanese markets were underwhelming.²¹⁶ This was happening right after the Plaza Accord was reversed with the Louvre Accord, which stabilised the dollar, but left Japan's economy dealing with more problems than before.²¹⁷ An overly strong yen was proving hurtful for the Japanese manufacturing industry, as Japan was dealing with an asset price bubble following the Plaza Accord. The slow pace would persist into 1994, and in September of that year, the Clinton administration threatened Japan with trade sanctions.²¹⁸ By 1996, with the tense atmosphere persisting, the Clinton administration began signalling a shift in its approach, moving away from a strong focus on trade, to one focused on defence.²¹⁹ In 1998, the US and Japan reached an economic agreement on the deregulation of several sectors of the Japanese economy, and greater access to foreign companies. The weakening of the yen and the growing trade deficit with Japan were the key facilitators to the deal.²²⁰

The US and Australia

²¹⁴ Michael Wines, 'BUSH IN JAPAN; BUSH REACHES PACT WITH JAPAN, BUT AUTO MAKERS DENOUNCE IT', *New York Times*, 10 January 1992

²¹⁵ Maureen Dowd, 'Bush and Japanese Call End to "Bashing"', *New York Times*, 5 April 1991

²¹⁶ Gwen Ifill, 'CLINTON PUSHING FOR JAPAN PACT', *New York Times*, 6 July 1993

²¹⁷ James Chen, 'Plaza Accord: Definition, History, Purpose, and Its Replacement', *Investopedia*, 25 July 2021

²¹⁸ Thomas Friedman, 'Clinton Warns Japan of Trade Sanctions', *New York Times*, 23 September 1994

²¹⁹ Reginald Dale, 'Clinton Off Course on Japan Trade', *International Herald Tribune in New York Times*, 16 April 1996

²²⁰ Alan Friedman, Tom Buerkle, 'Clinton Gets Economic Agreement With Japan', *International Herald Tribune in New York Times*, 16 May 1998

After the US established the ANZUS alliance, relations between the two did not encounter major problems. There was a gradual replacement of British influence with an American one throughout the years. Opposition began to show with the US war in Vietnam. Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam of the Labor Party was critical of the US intervention in Vietnam, and opposed Australian involvement in the war. Whitlam, the longest-serving Labor Prime Minister, campaigned against the war and won, thus having a notable democratic mandate to oppose the US. The impression in Washington was that ending the war would allow for better relations with Australia, and the ANZUS treaty was not under threat because of US military adventurism in Vietnam. Whitlam supported a constructive approach to North Vietnam, wanted the ROC expelled from the Asia-Pacific Network on Science and Technology (ASPAC), and ASEAN expanded. His views were called ‘doctrinaire’ by members of the NSC. Whitlam did change his view on SEATO, no longer opposing it, but he wanted its scale to be drawn down.²²¹

Whitlam’s vision of security for Southeast Asia clashed quite strongly with US ambitions. The Australian Prime Minister asked the Indonesian President Suharto to pressure Thailand to remove its US bases. He planned to use Australia’s SEATO membership to raise the issue with Thailand personally. He believed the US military presence in Thailand would provoke North Vietnam, and destabilize Indochina. Whitlam did not believe in the ability of great powers to stabilize Southeast Asia, and believed it was Australia’s duty to play a different role. Suharto did not promise Whitlam anything concrete, alluding that it was up to Thailand to decide what to do with US bases. Indonesia did see North Vietnam and the PRC as threats, and was hoping for the US, Australia, Japan, and New Zealand to help

²²¹ Holdridge to Kissinger, 1 February 1973, FRUS/E-12:26

economically and militarily. The opposition of Indonesia to Australia's plans was a blow for Whitlam.²²²

As of March 1973, rifts began to appear between Whitlam and the Labor Party. The pro-US Australian ambassador to Washington informed the Americans that a major battle within Labor was coming, with the party's left wing trying to renounce all of Australia's defence alliances and compromise classified US space installations in Australia.²²³ The relationship between the Americans and Whitlam was glacial. An NSC memorandum to Kissinger concerning a potential meeting between Kissinger and Whitlam said the meeting would have been a 'waste of your time and an indication of excessive interest' in Whitlam. His upcoming meeting with Nixon was described as 'all the attention Whitlam deserves or requires'.²²⁴ A letter from Acting Secretary Kenneth Rush to Defense Secretary James Schlesinger emphasized US worries over its alliance with Australia. Some of Whitlam's foreign policy decisions were called 'rather erratic and even irresponsible', with the warning that 'if present trends are not halted, there is little question that grave damage will be done to Australian/American relationships and, in the process, to our vital interests in Australia'. The US hoped to influence Whitlam by appealing to his Defense Minister, Lance Barnard, who was viewed as competent and more aligned with US interests.²²⁵

Under Carter, in the late 70s, there were problems concerning the ANZUS alliance and nuclear proliferation. An exchange of letters between Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and Jimmy Carter emphasized general agreement over the terms of non-proliferation.²²⁶ Carter was open to integrating US allies in the US review process.²²⁷ Fraser thanked Carter for his support and stated that the US President had 'put democracies on the

²²² Holdridge to Kissinger, 1 March 1973, FRUS/E-12:27

²²³ Rogers to Nixon, 16 March 1973, FRUS/E-12:29

²²⁴ Froebe to Kissinger, 11 July 1973, FRUS/E-12:34

²²⁵ Rush to Schlesinger, 21 December 1973, FRUS/E-12:43

²²⁶ Fraser to Carter, 4 February 1977, FRUS/XXII:228

²²⁷ Carter to Fraser, 11 March 1977, FRUS/XXII:229

offensive where too often they have been defensive and reactive to events'.²²⁸ Fraser was also a supporter of ASEAN, and he welcomed meetings between ASEAN and Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. He believed that anti-communism was the main driver of ASEAN. Concerning US policies in Southeast Asia, Fraser told Carter that ASEAN believed there was a 'continuing note of puzzlement and lack of understanding of American policies'. Carter's plans concerning reducing the number of troops in South Korea added to that impression.²²⁹ Carter acknowledged the input as helpful, but he did not go beyond telling Fraser that the US 'is fully committed to retaining its presence and influence in Asia and the Pacific'. He also informed Fraser that the US was reassuring Japan and the ROK about troop withdrawals, going as far as mentioning a potential build-up of forces in South Korea.²³⁰ Fraser largely aligned Australia with the circumspect US stance on the Vietnam-Cambodia conflict of the late 70s.²³¹

Problems occurred concerning New Zealand and its Labor government, which supported the creation of a nuclear-free zone in the South Pacific. The US believed that the imposition of a nuclear-free zone would both lead to 'restrictions on internationally recognised rights of free passage of ships and aircraft', and also make it harder for the US to enforce the ANZUS treaty. The conservative National Party that replaced Labor in New Zealand opposed the concept, but, the US believed that once Labor came back, the issue would return.²³²

Under Reagan, as was the case with Japan, the US felt that its economic treatment of Australia was disadvantageous, and there were calls for the US to impose import quotas on

²²⁸ Fraser to Carter, 23 June 1977, FRUS/XXII:239

²²⁹ Renouf to Carter, 12 August 1977, FRUS/XXII:240

²³⁰ Carter to Fraser, 23 August 1977, FRUS/XXII:241

²³¹ Birch to Carter, 10 February 1979, FRUS/XXII:261

²³² Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, 14 September 1979, FRUS/XXII:266

Australian beef,²³³ as well as other agricultural products.²³⁴ Bush's visit to Australia as President in 1992 did little to change the tense trade dynamic.²³⁵ Australia was running a trade surplus with Japan, but a trade deficit with the US. At the same time, the US felt its recession was also being affected by Japanese trade policies. In this three-way conflict, Bush offered Australia declarative support, but the results were lacking.²³⁶ Australia itself was undergoing a recession in the early 1990s, and the US behaviour of the time did little to improve relations.²³⁷

Clinton visited Australia in 1996, in a trip that was perceived by both the US and Australian press as being too formal, given the ongoing trade disputes between the two countries. Clinton was only the third sitting US President to visit Australia, and the visit was viewed as a chance for a new beginning.²³⁸ While the meeting was generally positive, and the US economy did improve in the late 90s, Clinton still did not hold back from imposing tariffs on Australian goods in an attempt to fight dumping practices.²³⁹

The US and South Korea

The war in Korea, 1950-1953, had a strong effect on the US security posture in Asia. The war resulted in an armistice between the US/UN forces and China, and led to the separation of the Korean peninsula in two: North and South Korea. Both war-torn countries were strongly dependent on their security guarantors. The US struggled considerably with its early relationship with South Korea, shifting from the need of maintaining its client state to

²³³ Reuters, 'No Australian Meat Curbs', *New York Times*, 28 July 1983

²³⁴ NYT, 'Against Australia's Grain', *New York Times*, 31 July 1986

²³⁵ Michael Wines, 'Bush, in Australia, Under Fire on Trade', *New York Times*, 1 January 1992

²³⁶ Michael Wines, 'Bush Assures Australians of His Support', *New York Times*, 2 January 1992

²³⁷ Leonard Silk, 'Economic Scene; Australia's Angst On U.S. Behavior', *New York Times*, 21 February 1992

²³⁸ Todd Purdum, 'Clinton, Golf in Mind, Visits An Understanding Australia', *New York Times*, 20 November 1996

²³⁹ David Sanger, 'INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS; Clinton Restricts Imports of Brazilian Steel and Australian Lamb', *New York Times*, 8 July 1999

avoiding too many security commitments. South Korea was led by Syngman Rhee, a US-backed dictator, and, at the time of the Korean War, the US and South Korea did not have a mutual defence treaty. It was only close to the war's end, in 1953, and at Rhee's insistence, that the US considered a mutual defence treaty. It was particularly irritating to South Korea that the US established mutual security treaties with Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, given that Korea was the main battleground at the time.²⁴⁰ Once the US and South Korea agreed on a mutual defence treaty in 1955, the South Korean government tried to amend it. South Korea wanted the US to pay more in compensation to Koreans using US facilities, and at least partial jurisdiction over US troops in Korea. The fact that the US had status of forces agreements with other countries, and, specifically, a criminal jurisdiction section in their status of forces agreement with Japan, was a particularly sensitive issue to South Korea.²⁴¹ This was all done under the backdrop of a potential North Korean attack happening at any point. The Americans, according to a National Intelligence Estimate dated 7 September 1961, assessed that North Korean subversive tactics were prominent, yet they were also confident that the communist forces would not push for an armed conflict, remaining of the opinion that the greatest risk to South Korea was domestic, as the country was lacking 'a sense of national purpose and faces both tremendous economic problems and a brittle political situation'.²⁴²

During the April Revolution of 1960, Syngman Rhee was ousted from power. The US was aware in early 1961 that South Korea was still politically unstable, and it believed the combination of corruption, poor leadership from the United States Operations Mission (USOM), and a lack of change in posture from the US could lead to another revolution, with a potentially anti-American inclination.²⁴³ These worries were correct, and, in early 1961, South Korea saw the end of its Second Republic and the rise of another dictator, Park Chung-

²⁴⁰ Clark to Joint Chiefs of Staff, 13 May 1953, FRUS/XV(1):514

²⁴¹ Rusk to McNamara, 2 March 1961, FRUS/XXII:201

²⁴² NIE, 7 September 1961, FRUS/XXII:243

²⁴³ Farley to Rostow, 6 March 1961, FRUS/XXII:202

hee. The US expected the new leadership to be less experienced, more authoritarian and nationalistic, overall, harder to work with.²⁴⁴ In spite of difficulties – and ongoing US assessments to see if Park was a communist – the new government understood its dependence on the US, and the conclusion was that the security relationship would not be imperilled.²⁴⁵ The US still believed that as long as it was committed to defend the ROK, the risks of a communist attack were low.²⁴⁶ South Korea was still considered ‘an essential element of our forward defense’.²⁴⁷

During the Kennedy-Johnson years, the issue of US withdrawal from South Korea was still prevalent. Communications between Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara showed that both considered the possibility of reducing US troops and the size of the South Korean army itself, but eventually gave up on those plans in early 1964 because the political costs were too big. The Americans still wanted some cuts in forces by 1965 at latest.²⁴⁸ The Defense Department was eager to redeploy some troops in order to give the US more flexibility, especially combined with America’s plans to use nuclear weapons as a deterrent. The State Department was opposed, thinking that withdrawing forces at a time when the Vietnam War was generating considerable costs would send not only the wrong message to South Korea, but also the region.²⁴⁹

The US supported Japan-South Korea normalization because it saw it as one of the few issues that could stabilize the struggling South Korean economy to a certain extent, in spite of the political costs that would come with it.²⁵⁰ As of early 1964, President Johnson was being advised to push Dean Rusk quite strongly in order to ensure the US lobbied Japan

²⁴⁴ Special NIE, 31 May 1961, FRUS/XXII:224

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Special NIE, 4 April 1962, FRUS/XXII:253

²⁴⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff to McNamara, 10 April 1962, FRUS/XXII:254

²⁴⁸ Komer to Johnson, 22 January 1964, FRUS/XXIX(1):2

²⁴⁹ Rusk to Johnson, 8 June 1964, FRUS/XXIX(1):17

²⁵⁰ NIE, 22 January 1965, FRUS/XXIX(1):31

and the ROK for some kind of settlement. A settlement would have provided an influx of over half a billion dollars in the South Korean economy, and this was a great selling point in the US view.²⁵¹ A memorandum from Robert Komer of the NSC to Johnson pointed out that in spite of US investments, South Korea was still an ‘unstable US stepchild’, and this was due to both poor South Korean leadership, and US neglect. The conclusion was to push for a Japan-South Korea settlement so that Japan can ‘start sharing the burden’.²⁵²

One big issue at the time was South Korean support for the US war in Vietnam. South Korea was one of the few countries that supported the US in the war. The US wanted to send a South Korean combat division to South Vietnam, and it assessed that neither North Vietnam, China, or North Korea would react too strongly to that development. The US viewed this development as ‘one more complication to an already difficult situation for Moscow’.²⁵³ During a conversation between President Lyndon Johnson and President Park Chung-hee in Manila in October 1966, Johnson spoke positively of the ROK support, and contended that there needed to be more balance between the European and Asian theatres in US strategy.²⁵⁴ The two continued conversing throughout the next months, and another talk in December 1967 added insight into how Park wanted South Korea to support the US because of fears of US withdrawal from Asia. South Korean support for the Vietnam War raised questions about a possible attack from North Korea, therefore it was up to the US to increase its military support for South Korean defence at the same time as the commitment to Vietnam.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ Komer to Johnson, 23 January 1964, FRUS/XXIX(1):334

²⁵² Komer to Johnson, 31 July 1964, FRUS/XXIX(1):345

²⁵³ Special NIE, 19 March 1965, FRUS/XXIX(1):35

²⁵⁴ Memorandum of Conversation Between President Johnson and President Pak, 23 October 1966, FRUS/XXIX(1):94

²⁵⁵ Notes on Conversation Between President Johnson and President Pak, 21 December 1967, FRUS/XXIX(1):140

In January 1968, the USS Pueblo, a US navy intelligence ship was captured in North Korean waters. That same month, North Korea sent commandos to perform a raid on the Blue House in Seoul – the President’s residence – with the goal of assassinating Park. The raid failed, but the ensuing tensions on the peninsula further strained the US-South Korea relationship. Park pressed for more US military support, actively considered a variety of retaliatory actions, and pushed for an amendment to the Defense Treaty that would make US defence of South Korea automatic in case of attack. South Korea cited similar US language for the Philippines as a reason for its demands. As was the case in the past, the US was reluctant to amend the treaty, however, it offered unofficial assurances that an attack would lead to US support for South Korea.²⁵⁶ A US assessment of the risk of hostilities in mid-1968 showed that the chance of a conflict was small: the greatest risk was that of miscommunication, and the situation would remain tense, but relatively stable.²⁵⁷

A memorandum from Under Secretary of State Katzenbach to President Johnson in December 1968 highlighted how the US felt bound to Korea not only by treaty commitments, but also by history. The Americans assessed that the South Korean economy was growing at a rapid pace, and the South Korean military was also now viewed as ‘among the best in the world’. US objectives focused on preventing North-South hostilities, improving South Korean development of the economy, political stability, and its defensive capacities, maintaining the *status quo* on the peninsula, and encouraging Japan to play a more active role in South Korean prosperity and security.²⁵⁸ During the Nixon administration, the US had continued with its strategy of supporting the modernization of the South Korean army, while at the same time, reducing its own military footprint.²⁵⁹ The Americans were wary of undertaking the balancing act too hastily, as it would unsettle not only South Korea, but also

²⁵⁶ Rostow to Johnson, 13 April 1968 FRUS/XXIX(1):190

²⁵⁷ Special NIE, 16 May 1968 FRUS/XXIX(1):200

²⁵⁸ Katzenbach to Johnson, 23 December 1968 FRUS/XXIX(1):211

²⁵⁹ Kissinger to Nixon, 22 August 1970 FRUS/XIX(1):70

Japan.²⁶⁰ Park's fears of appearing unable to have something to show from his negotiations with the US in light of the upcoming presidential election of 1971 meant he gave up on his demands that the Americans consult with him in advance of any troop reductions.²⁶¹

By the end of 1970, the US assessed South Korea to be in an improved position, both politically and economically. The US also believed the South Korean military was a good enough deterrent to the North Korean threat. The South Korean diplomatic position had also improved considerably. The Americans believed that the withdrawal of one US Army division would not alter the balance of power. North Korea started resorting to paramilitary and terrorist attacks instead of a more conventional military approach.²⁶² A memorandum from Henry Kissinger to President Richard Nixon about a conversation between US General Wheeler and President Park emphasized this new situation. The US still believed that a full withdrawal would guarantee a North Korean attack.²⁶³ Nixon presented his Doctrine – also referred to as the Guam Doctrine – to Park in two letters, one sent in May 1970, and the other in July 1970. The May letter pointed out how Nixon viewed US policy for Asia. Defense treaties would be upheld, but as US allies become stronger, he believed South Korea needed to share more of the burden.²⁶⁴ Nixon's second letter restated the points of the first, with more guarantees of keeping some US troops, providing more money, and beginning a new military modernization process. The US withdrew 20,000 troops from South Korea.²⁶⁵

With Ronald Reagan, the US-South Korea relationship did not manage to evolve past the tense mood of the previous decades. This was due to a number of reasons, one of them being Reagan's support for South Korean President Chun Doo-hwan. Chun was a dictator, very much disliked in Korea, and the US gave the impression that once again, in the name of

²⁶⁰ Rogers to Nixon, 22 September 1970 FRUS/XIX(1):72

²⁶¹ Rogers to Nixon, 10 November 1970 FRUS/XIX(1):78

²⁶² NIE, 2 December 1970 FRUS/XIX(1):80

²⁶³ Kissinger to Nixon, 25 November 1969 FRUS/XIX(1):46

²⁶⁴ Nixon to Park, 26 May 1970, FRUS/XIX(1):58

²⁶⁵ Nixon to Park, 7 July 1970, FRUS/XIX(1):64

stability, it supported dictators at the expense of South Korea's clear lack of democratization. The US supported Chun due to the belief that he was the best option to ease tensions with North Korea. What the US was looking for was a scenario where it would feel less bound by the obligation to support South Korea militarily in case of war. Chun's rival, pro-democracy candidate Kim Dae-jung had been sentenced to death by execution, and Chun gave in to US pressures to change the sentence to life imprisonment. At that time, South Korea was considering nuclearizing its energy production, and Chun gave signals that he was willing to award construction contracts for nuclear power plants to the US. South Korea was planning to build 46 nuclear plants by 2000.²⁶⁶

In November 1983, Reagan visited the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between the two Koreas. The visit did not result in any new agreements,²⁶⁷ nevertheless, it was criticised by both the USSR²⁶⁸ and China.²⁶⁹ Reagan's visit to South Korea was protested by students, due to Reagan's association with Chun.²⁷⁰ During his visit, Reagan promised that the US would meet its 'responsibilities as a Pacific power' by selling more weapons to South Korea.²⁷¹ The US fears of instability in South Korea came true in the late 1980s, as Chun's dictatorship began to crumble. As protests against Chun mounted, Reagan urged him not to react violently, and to ensure a transition to democracy. The Reagan administration went as far as supporting a Congressional resolution criticising Chun and urging constitutional reform, free press, and freedom of assembly in South Korea.²⁷² Chun eventually gave in, and the 1987 elections were the first free elections in South Korea since the early 70s. Reagan talked with

²⁶⁶ Choi Sung-Il, 'Reagan and Chun', *New York Times*, 1 February 1981

²⁶⁷ Francis Clines, 'Reagan Returns from Asia Trip, Looking to a More "Secure Peace"', *New York Times*, 15 November 1983

²⁶⁸ Associated Press, 'Soviet Calls DMZ Visit By Reagan Provocative', *New York Times*, 14 November 1983

²⁶⁹ Reuters, 'China Asserts Reagan Made Korean Antagonisms Worse', *New York Times*, 17 November 1983

²⁷⁰ Reuters, 'Around the World, Students in South Korea Protest Reagan's Visit', *New York Times*, 3 November 1983

²⁷¹ Clyde Haberman, 'Reagan Gives Vow of Solid Support to South Koreans', *New York Times*, 14 November 1983

²⁷² David Shipler, 'Reagan Cautions Korean President on Unrest', *New York Times*, 19 June 1987

Roh Tae-woo, Chun's designated successor, a move which was viewed as tacit support for Roh despite the Reagan administration claiming the opposite.²⁷³ Roh would go on and win the election, and during a 1989 meeting with him, Reagan claimed that the US would consider withdrawing troops from South Korea should the tensions on the peninsula dissipate.²⁷⁴

Buoyed by improving ties with China, in February 1989, George H. W. Bush also praised South Korea for trying to improve ties with North Korea. He believed the moves would increase the stability of the region.²⁷⁵ Bush said that after a trip to Asia, where he claimed 'that America is and will remain a Pacific power'.²⁷⁶ The Senate, on the other hand, was not happy with the US military footprint in South Korea, estimated at around 43,000 troops in 1989, and pushed Bush to try to reduce it.²⁷⁷ Roh visited Bush in July 1991, at a time when South Korea was establishing diplomatic ties with the USSR and China, and the issue of US troops in Korea was difficult, and anti-American protests were common. Despite that, Roh emphasized that he would like the US presence to continue in a largely similar form.²⁷⁸ By the end of 1991, the US would withdraw its nuclear bombers from South Korea, as part of broader series of cuts in nuclear missiles and artillery shells.²⁷⁹ Another issue of contention was Korea's trade surplus with the US. The Bush administration warned South Korea of sanctions should the trade deficit not be addressed.²⁸⁰

²⁷³ Neil Lewis, 'Reagan Holds Talk With Key Politician From South Korea', *New York Times*, 15 September 1987

²⁷⁴ Robert Pear, 'Reagan Envisions Korea Troop Cut', *New York Times*, 21 October 1988

²⁷⁵ R. W. Apple Jr., 'BUSH HAILS SEOUL FOR BUILDING TIES WITH NORTH KOREA', *New York Times*, 27 February 1989

²⁷⁶ Gerald Boyd, 'Bush Says "Common Ground Was Found" in Asia Trip', *New York Times*, 28 February 1989

²⁷⁷ Andrew Rosenthal, 'Senate Prods Bush and Allies on Sharing Burden', *New York Times*, 30 July 1989

²⁷⁸ David Sanger, 'Shaping a Role in South Korea', *New York Times*, 2 July 1991

²⁷⁹ David Rosenbaum, 'U.S. to Pull A-Bombs From South Korea', *New York Times*, 20 October 1991

²⁸⁰ Reuters, 'Korea's Trade Surplus Is Criticized', *New York Times*, 17 November 1989

Building on diplomatic visits from Jimmy Carter, the Clinton administration offered North Korea an ease of sanctions in exchange for high-level talks over denuclearisation.²⁸¹ Clinton was very optimistic about the possibility of dialogue.²⁸² An agreement was reached in late 1994 through which North Korea would freeze its nuclear program in exchange for the US and other countries financing the construction of two light water nuclear reactors.²⁸³ The talks never really kicked off, and North Korea instead moved to a strategy of forcing conflicts in order to bring the US to the negotiating table, so that a peace agreement would be reached over the status of the Korean peninsula.²⁸⁴ Through 1998 and 1999, the Clinton administration tried to strike a conciliatory tone,²⁸⁵ sometimes expressing worry over the evolution of the North Korean nuclear programme, other times hinting that it might ease sanctions as long as that programme is slowed down, suspended, or abandoned.²⁸⁶

The US and the Philippines

In April 1949, the US and the Philippines concluded a military base agreement. The US was worried about the 'lawlessness' of the Philippines, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the risks posed were not high enough to endanger the military relationship.²⁸⁷ During a meeting between President Truman, President Quirino, Secretary Acheson, and others, Quirino demanded more military assistance, as well as war reparations. Truman was sceptical of funding the Philippines due to its financial instability.²⁸⁸ As of 1951, in accordance with NSC-84, the US, 'regardless of the cost and despite any eventualities, as part of its Pacific

²⁸¹ Michael Gordon, 'Clinton Offers North Korea A Chance to Resume Talks', *New York Times*, 22 June 1994

²⁸² Douglas Jehl, 'Clinton Says the North Koreans Really May Be Ready for Talks', *New York Times*, 23 June 1994

²⁸³ Steven Greenhouse, 'Clinton, in Letter, Assures North Koreans on Nuclear Reactors', *New York Times*, 27 October 1994

²⁸⁴ Alison Mitchell, 'Clinton Visits Korea and New Peace Talks Are Proposed', *New York Times*, 16 April 1996

²⁸⁵ James Bennet, 'Clinton Appeals To North Korea For Closer Ties', *New York Times*, 22 November 1998

²⁸⁶ David Sanger, 'Clinton Is Ready to Scrap Some North Korea Sanctions', *New York Times*, 14 September 1999

²⁸⁷ Johnson to Secretary of State, 19 April, 1949, FRUS/VII(2):416

²⁸⁸ Ely Memorandum of Conversation, 9 August 1949, FRUS/VII(1):421

policy’, would ‘retain the Philippines within the orbit of the democratic powers and to deny it to the Soviet orbit’. The US expected, given the surge of communism, to have a 50-50 chance of maintaining control of the Philippine archipelago. Losing the Philippines would make the first island chain crumble. The US believed that ‘the luxury of retaining the Philippines within the American orbit for the most part by relatively long-term economic methods can no longer be afforded’.²⁸⁹ The US ensured the Philippines did the relevant economic reforms that allowed for the transfer of more military funds. The US concluded that the ‘determination of the Philippines to play a role in the struggle of the free world against communism has been demonstrated’.²⁹⁰

A letter from President Eisenhower to President Quirino also pointed out urgency on the US side for allowing the expansion and development of US bases.²⁹¹ As of 1954, the US wanted to see in the Philippines a government that would be aligned with American interests, a capable Philippine military that would restore internal security, and a stable economy. For these, the US provided military guidance and economic support.²⁹² An NSC report that same year described the Philippines as a key part of the ‘Far East defense perimeter’, and its democratic and economic progress was a good example of US commitment to supporting the country’s transition from colonialism to self-determination.²⁹³

A planned visit by Nixon to the Philippines led to a memorandum from Kissinger to the President, expressing concern over the high levels of corruption in the Philippines, which were affecting the country’s economic stability. There was also a sense that there was domestic opposition to the Philippines’ support for the Vietnam War due to a perceived need for the government to focus on domestic problems. The US-Philippines relationship was

²⁸⁹ Melby Draft Paper, 15 January 1951, FRUS/VI(2):6

²⁹⁰ Matthews to Lay, 6 August 1951, FRUS/VI(2):42

²⁹¹ Eisenhower to Quirino, 4 November 1953, FRUS/XII(2):339

²⁹² State to NSC Planning Board, 14 January 1954, FRUS/XII(2):351

²⁹³ Lay to NSC, 5 April 1954, FRUS/XII(2):359

described as ‘ambivalent’, with the countryside being pro-American and Manila turning against the US. The presence of US bases also incited anti-American sentiment, but Kissinger’s assessment was that the Philippines were not willing to actually compromise the relationship. To add to this, with elections in the Philippines approaching, both Ferdinand Marcos and his rival, Sergio Osmena, presented themselves as independent politicians and people who can work and obtain support from the US.²⁹⁴

By the early 70s, US-Philippines relations were marked by a Muslim insurgency in the Philippines, new negotiations over US bases in the country, and discussions over US and Philippines positions on the Spratly Islands as well as the Paracel Islands. The US was worried about Philippine nationalism, and the problems it would pose for US basing access as well as the US ability to protect its business interests in the Philippines. President Marcos appealed to the public’s nationalist sentiments by asking for a review of all Philippine treaties with the US. Marcos consolidated his dictatorship by imposing martial law in September 1972, which, ironically, made him more dependent on the US.²⁹⁵ Marcos sought US support, telling American Ambassador Byroade that he required ‘active help’ and wanted to know if the US supported him, while complaining about a hostile press. He also asked for more loans, something which the US refused in order to avoid further entanglement. Marcos was afraid of a revolution and saw the ambivalent US position as a form of punishment.²⁹⁶ Byroade’s own view of Marcos is enlightening. Calling Marcos ‘a product of the political system’, Byroade implied that the Philippines President, like all major politicians in the Philippines, was the benefactor of a system that demanded politicians to invest millions of dollars with the expectation that they would recover their investment once they come into office. Byroade said Marcos had ‘always been corrupt by American standards, but by Filipino standards he is

²⁹⁴ Kissinger to Nixon, 17 July 1969, FRUS/XX:191

²⁹⁵ Kissinger to Nixon, 16 March 1973, FRUS/E-12:317

²⁹⁶ Kissinger to Nixon, 7 February 1970, FRUS/XX:207

no better or no worse than other Filipino politicians'. He acknowledged, nevertheless, that Marcos was very efficient, and did more for the Philippines than many other politicians.²⁹⁷

As early as 1971, the US assessed the Philippines situation to not be as bleak as previously thought. While the Philippines were corrupt, the Americans were optimistic about the endurance of the democratic system: the Constitution had prevailed, the transfer of power was peaceful. Changes to the Constitution would come through a Constitutional Convention, not revolution. In his report, Kissinger said that the 'Filipino is addicted to elections and if much energy is absorbed in the political game it fulfils the special purpose in the Philippines of serving to deal with the oriental problem of face. The Filipinos are unusual in Asia for knowing how to find a respected place for defeated ex-Presidents'. The press was presented as useful in weakening revolutionary impulses, Kissinger claimed that the Philippines are a 'compulsively open society, where the life span of a secret is measured in hours'. He also said that the 'democratic values which the U.S. planted in the Philippines have now assumed their own indigenous forms. The roots are deep and if we have faith in the capacity of our own society to change and survive, we cannot give up hope for the Philippines'.²⁹⁸

Concerning the Spratley Islands, the US embassy in the Philippines asked what the US can legally do if Philippine forces are attacked in the Spratleys.²⁹⁹ The Philippines told the US that the PRC views both the Spratleys and the Paracels as its territory, and took measures to deploy troops around them, which surprised US intelligence. The embassy had requested the State Department for 'authoritative interpretation of US obligation to "act" if Phil forces are attacked in Spratleys'. It also restated its demands for US surveillance and informing China that military action in the Spratleys would trigger the US mutual defence

²⁹⁷ Byroade to Nixon, 13 May 1970, FRUS/XX:219

²⁹⁸ Kissinger to Nixon, 31 March 1971, FRUS/XX:235

²⁹⁹ State to Embassy in the Philippines, 31 January 1974, FRUS/E-12:326

treaty.³⁰⁰ The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) assessed that even though the PRC had no plans to attack the Spratleys, the Philippines, Japan, and South Vietnam were worried about the possibility. Some islands were occupied by the ROC, while the PRC occupied others. Kissinger made the remark that the US should 'steer' the PRC to the Senkakus Islands, which were disputed by Tokyo and the Beijing. This surprised Kissinger's aides at a meeting. Asked if he really wanted to do so, Kissinger claimed that the move 'would teach religion to the Japanese'. Eventually, they concluded that it would not be worth the price. The Americans were also struggling with the legal justifications of invoking the mutual defence treaty with the Philippines if an attack on the Spratleys would occur. Neither the Philippines nor Kissinger thought that it was worth invoking the security treaty in case of an attack. The Americans were worried that they were losing their ambiguity on the issue.³⁰¹ Similar discussions took place over the Paracel Islands. The Americans viewed the 'logical' conclusion to the dispute to be the International Court. Kissinger had a poor grasp of the issue and was wary of the US patronising the Philippines with legal arguments.³⁰²

The National Security Council undertook a review of the status of US bases in the Philippines in the 1970s, and concluded that US bases had not led to a position where the US 'controls a disproportionate share of land in the Philippines'. Forces would be reduced to a certain extent after the Vietnam War.³⁰³ Some bases, such as Subic Bay, would be downsized, the bases agreement would run until 1991, and the bases would be 'filipinized', allowing the Philippines a role over immigration, health, customs, and even a symbolic joint command on

³⁰⁰ Embassy in the Philippines to State, 26 January 1974, FRUS/E-12:325

³⁰¹ Minutes of the Secretary of State's Staff Meeting, 31 January 1974, FRUS/E-12:327

³⁰² Minutes of the Secretary of State's Staff Meeting, 9 May 1974, FRUS/E-12:330

³⁰³ Report by the NSC Under Secretaries Committee Review of U.S. Bases and Facilities in the Philippines, 6 April 1970, FRUS/XX:215

the bases. The Philippines kept insisting that the 1952 Security Treaty allowed the US more leverage than other similar treaties, and the US was reluctant to renegotiate.³⁰⁴

In the mid-70s, Marcos planned to announce a new relationship with the US, which would include a new Military Base Agreement.³⁰⁵ By April 1975, the US assessed the circulation in the Philippines media of stories that claimed the Philippines were ‘reassessing’ their security relations with the US. American withdrawal from Vietnam was one reason, however, a visit by Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu to Asia, along with a speech by US President Gerald Ford, which omitted the Philippines when it mentioned US security commitments (Ford did mention Japan, the ROK, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, and Singapore) also fuelled doubts. The US embassy in Manila did not have clear knowledge of whether Ford’s omission was deliberate or not.³⁰⁶ A speech by Schlesinger in New York, which mentioned Japan and the ROK but also omitted the Philippines, added to the tension. A telegram from the embassy to the NSC talked about the need of a visit by Ford to amend the sensation of abandonment.³⁰⁷ The instability of the Marcos regime also led to problems for the Americans. They knew that Imelda Marcos was trying to position herself as Ferdinand Marcos’ successor, and that he did not approve of this. Kissinger enquired if there is a limit to Marcos’ term, and Ambassador Sullivan replied ‘no, but someone might shoot him’. The Philippines wanted to negotiate a new framework whereby the US paid for its bases. Nonetheless, the Americans believed there would be no real desire from the Philippines to administer US bases.³⁰⁸

The issue of bases persisted into the Carter administration. In the late 70s, the US renegotiated its basing agreement with the Philippines. The US did not need a new

³⁰⁴ Kissinger to Nixon, 23 May 1970, FRUS/XX:221

³⁰⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, 24 April 1974, FRUS/E-12:329

³⁰⁶ Embassy in the Philippines to State, 14 April 1975, FRUS/E-12:334

³⁰⁷ Sullivan to Scowcroft, 16 April 1975, FRUS/E-12:335

³⁰⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, 10 April 1976, FRUS/E-12:344

agreement, since the terms of the previous one were satisfactory, but it did recognize that ‘the post-World War II environment which gave rise to the defense relationship has changed, and that events in Vietnam and in the Philippines add urgency to the quest for a more equal and modern relationship’. The Philippines requested the renegotiation and the US agreed. The Philippines also protested that the nature of the Security Treaty would prompt a delayed US response in case of attack on the Philippines. The Philippines often tried to make the treaty provisions ‘automatic’, not conditioned by a series of debatable factors. The treaty also had no applicability over insurgencies, or disputed territorial claims. The US believed that Marcos did not actually want pragmatic agreements, knowing that the US would ultimately act as a security guarantor for the Philippines. He instead wanted the negotiations to go on indefinitely, because they improved Marcos’ position domestically and in the third world.³⁰⁹ The Philippines assessed that the US was not helping with the Muslim insurgency in the south and with the ongoing disputes concerning the Spratly Islands. Marcos capitalised on that and took a more invested role in the renegotiations.³¹⁰ The two sides eventually agreed on a revision to the bases agreement, with the US increasing military funding for the Philippines by around \$500 million in the 1980-1985 period.³¹¹

On 21 August, 1983, Marcos had his long-time rival, Benigno Aquino Jr., assassinated. This made 45 US House of Representatives members urge Reagan not to visit the Philippines, and also urge the US to reconsider its policy of support for Marcos.³¹² The visit was postponed, citing the lack of security in the Philippines.³¹³ One month later, in November 1983, 15,000 Filipinos marched in support of the US near Clark Air Base, led by Benigno Aquino Jr.’s mother, a sign that the Aquino political family was trying to gain

³⁰⁹ Study Prepared by the Interagency Group on Philippine Base Negotiations, 7 March 1977, FRUS/XXII:293

³¹⁰ Paper Prepared by the Interagency Group on Philippine Base Negotiations, 22 October 1977, FRUS/XXII:307

³¹¹ Carter to Marcos, 4 January 1979, FRUS/XXII:326

³¹² AP, ‘45 in the House Urge Reagan To Cancel Visit to Philippines’, *New York Times*, 3 September 1983

³¹³ Steven Weisman, ‘Reagan Postpones Philippines Visit and 2 Other Stops’, *New York Times*, 4 October 1983

support from the US.³¹⁴ The Marcos dictatorship would end in 1986. Following US pressure, a snap election was called for early 1986, in which Marcos ran against Corazon Aquino, Benigno Aquino Jr.'s wife. Reagan expressed his hopes that the election would be free.³¹⁵ Marcos won the election on extremely dubious terms, sparking tensions between Reagan senior advisors, who urged the two sides to work together, and the State Department, who wanted to criticise the Philippines for the fraudulent election.³¹⁶ As it became increasingly difficult for Marcos to hold on to power, the US considered the possibility of offering him asylum, in exchange for him giving up power, a move that raised ethical issues, since Marcos stood accused of various human rights abuses.³¹⁷

What proved decisive was the campaign to gently oust Marcos in a way that would ensure the Philippines did not enter the communist sphere of influence. Slowly but steadily, key parts of the army were turned against Marcos.³¹⁸ Corazon Aquino took power and was quickly invited to the White House, in a move that signalled US support for the new regime.³¹⁹ During Marcos' last years, a communist insurgency developed in the Philippines, and Reagan urged the Philippines military to continue fighting the communists and also accept the rule of Aquino.³²⁰ Thus, the Marcos dictatorship came to an end, and the US alliance system in Asia increased its number of democracies.

The Bush years were the moment when the US military footing in its Indo-Pacific alliance system appeared vulnerable. They were marked by a stark reduction in the US military footprint in the Philippines, one of the most striking changes in the US position of its forces in Asia since the withdrawal of troops from Taiwan. In January 1990, the Philippines

³¹⁴ UPI, 'Around the World, 15,000 Filipinos March In Support of Reagan', *New York Times*, 21 November 1983

³¹⁵ UPI, 'Text of Reagan's Statement on Election in Philippines', *New York Times*, 31 January 1986

³¹⁶ Bernard Weinraub, 'Reagan Praises 2-Party-System of Philippines', *New York Times*, 11 February 1986

³¹⁷ Bernard Gwertzman, 'Challenge to Marcos Asylum (Yes and No); Reagan Offers Marcos Possible Exile If He Leaves the Philippines Promptly', *New York Times*, 25 February 1986

³¹⁸ Stanley Karnow, 'Reagan and the Philippines, Setting Marcos Adrift', *New York Times*, 19 March 1989

³¹⁹ James Clarity, Milt Freudenheim, 'The World, Reagan Invites Aquino to Visit', *New York Times*, 27 April 1986

³²⁰ Reuters, 'Reagan Asks Filipino Military To Back Aquino Government', *New York Times*, 8 November 1987

accused the US of violating provisions in its agreement concerning two military bases in the Philippines. The problem was a law that required US bases to buy only US products, which irritated the Philippines, who were trying to increase foreign exchange earnings at the time.³²¹ As talks moved on, US sources conceded that the days of a large American military presence in the Philippines ‘are coming to an end’.³²² The two sides did reach an agreement for the bases at Subic Bay and Clark Air Base,³²³ but, the odds of the Philippines Senate ratifying it were low. The reason was that the bases impinged on the Philippines’ sovereignty.³²⁴ Once the bases issue was resolved, and the US presence in the Philippines decreased, the two countries maintained good relations, and the Clinton administration focused on improving economic ties. Clinton visited the Philippines in late 1994, with trade on his mind, but there was also room for amendments to the military relationship. Clinton negotiated an agreement ‘giving formal approval for American warships to refuel and pick up food supplies in the Philippines’, in a move that irritated some in the Philippines’ Senate.³²⁵

The US and Thailand

As of the early 1950s, with the Korean War ongoing, the US could count on Thai military support. The Thai government supported the US anti-communist position and was worried of the possibility of communist military intervention in Indochina. Thailand was open to receiving US support, however, the certainty of said support was under discussion in Washington.³²⁶ The US was convinced that there were communist elements in Thailand that were ready to strike when given the signal. The Americans counted on the Thai monarchy,

³²¹ Reuters, ‘Philippines Says U.S. Is Violating Bases Pact’, *New York Times*, 12 January 1990

³²² AP, ‘U.S. Talks of Reducing Troops in Philippines’, *New York Times*, 18 September 1990

³²³ NYT, ‘U.S. and Philippines Sign Treaty on Bases’, *New York Times*, 28 August 1991

³²⁴ Phillip Shenon, ‘PHILIPPINES MOVING TO BAR U.S. BASES’, *New York Times*, 12 September 1991

³²⁵ Douglas Jehl, ‘Clinton Begins Pacific Visit in Manila’, *New York Times*, 13 November 1994

³²⁶ Landon Memorandum of Conversation, 25 January 1951, FRUS/VI(2):68

Thailand's historical resistance to foreign domination, its strong economy, its dislike of China, which it viewed as a harbinger of communism, and the anti-communist position of the Thai government, as well as its 'active overt and covert psychological war program' as factors that would oppose any potential pro-communist movements. The US was not expecting China to invade, but it nevertheless pursued a policy of arming the Thai military.³²⁷

The war in Vietnam had considerable ramifications for US Thailand policy. Thailand was worried about the potential expansion of the Vietnam War. On one hand, the Thai leadership wanted a more pronounced US presence, on the other, it feared that more US troops would further determine North Vietnam and the PRC to attack it.³²⁸ The US increased its military presence in Thailand, but it could not increase its military assistance programs, which strained the relationship. The Americans also believed the Thai leadership did not fully appreciate the efforts undertaken by the US to keep Thailand free and stable. Thai support for a heavier US presence was due to a coincidence of Thai and US interests.³²⁹ The US covertly supported a Thai government party, a process which began in 1965 with the February 1969 elections in mind. The goal was to ensure a pro-US government in Thailand that would guarantee the continuity of the existing leadership.³³⁰

CIA assessments of Southeast Asia pointed out that Thailand was deeply worried about the security struggles in Indochina, with Laos being a particular point of interest. Some territories of Laos (Sayaboury, Champassak and Sithadone) were viewed by Thailand as being Thai, the argument being that France took them away from Thailand during the colonial period. North Vietnamese control over parts of Laos was interpreted by Thailand as an invasion of Thailand. Also, the CIA believed that Thailand took the Nixon Doctrine

³²⁷ Lacy to Rusk, 13 February 1951, FRUS/VI(2):69

³²⁸ Scowcroft to Nixon, 11 February 1973, FRUS/E-12:363

³²⁹ Richardson to Rogers, 3 April 1973, FRUS/E-12:366

³³⁰ Memorandum Prepared for the 303 Committee, 7 February 1969, FRUS/XX:3

literally, believing that it had helped the US enough by allowing base support, helping with the war against Vietnam, and intervening in Laos.³³¹ The situation in Laos was similar to that of Cambodia. The US embarked on a policy of supporting Thailand, but it would do so in a manner that would prevent Thailand from invoking SEATO.³³² Thailand was wary of the possibility of US troop withdrawal after the 1969 Paris Peace talks, and wanted a slow and gradual retreat of US forces.³³³

Poor management of the country led to a coup in Thailand in 1971. The coup was not tied to any foreign policy issues.³³⁴ This was a common trend, as a 1969 assessment of Thailand's domestic politics would reinforce that point. The US acknowledged that Thailand suffered from coups, but, most of these were 'palace coups' and the rationales for them were domestic. Thailand was viewed as economically strong and actually quite stable.³³⁵ The Nixon Doctrine made a poor first impression on Thailand, who viewed the US as abandoning the region, and Thai leaders even considered reorienting towards the USSR as a solution. Kissinger told Nixon that he would try to correct the misrepresentation of the Nixon Doctrine.³³⁶ Following the US decision to stop bombing Cambodia during the Vietnam War, Thailand requested the US to reduce its military footprint in the country. With the Vietnam War settled, Thailand was facing domestic criticism concerning the continued US military presence, especially at a time when there were calls for normalization of relations with North Vietnam and China. The US was indeed considering some reductions in the military footprint.³³⁷ The Thanom government fell during student protests in October 1973, but, the

³³¹ Helms to Nixon, 23 October 1970, FRUS/XX:94

³³² Irwin to Nixon, 9 June 1971, FRUS/XX:124

³³³ Department of State Briefing Paper, 10 July 1969, FRUS/XX:16

³³⁴ Kissinger to Nixon, 17 November 1971, FRUS/XX:143

³³⁵ SD Briefing Paper, 11 July 1969, FRUS/XX:17

³³⁶ Kissinger to Nixon, 6 February 1970, FRUS/XX:47

³³⁷ Froebe and Stearman to Kissinger, 20 July 1973, FRUS/E-12:373

US assessed that the new Thai government, under Sanya Thammasak would not pose a threat to the relationship.³³⁸

By the end of 1973, the US concluded that the security situation in Indochina did not warrant a heavy US presence, and it was optimistic that it could withdraw troops by its own schedule. Decisions³³⁹ concerning long-term deployments were deferred until the military situation stabilized.³⁴⁰ It was considerably difficult for the Thai government to tolerate US presence in light of the wider perception of the US presence there as undermining Thailand's sovereignty. Out of the \$135 billion in military and economic aid offered to Indochina since 1951, Thailand received only \$2 billion, despite being the main US military hub, with opportunities for US military operations in Laos and Cambodia. The US ignored this financial detail, but Thailand was very aware of it. The embassy also argued that Thailand was treated 'as a normal developing country in most aid planning, and a minor ally in most MAP (military assistance programs) programming'. The question was 'how much does the USG want in Thailand and at what price'.³⁴¹

A May 1975 conversation between Kissinger and his staff illustrated tensions among them. Some staff members believed the US military presence was heavy and the US attitude towards Thailand had been reckless. Kissinger was dismissive, implying that Thailand, through allowing US bases, shared complicity with US actions.³⁴² By March 1976, frictions emerged between the US plans for a residual military presence, and the extent to which the Thai hierarchy was willing to accept it. The US believed Thailand had lost faith in the value of American presence as a counterweight to Vietnam.³⁴³ The US eventually agreed to draw

³³⁸ Kissinger to Nixon, 15 October 1973, FRUS/E-12:375

³³⁹ Pickering to Scowcroft, 29 November 1973, FRUS/E-12:378

³⁴⁰ National Security Decision Memorandum 249, 23 March 1974, FRUS/E-12:382

³⁴¹ Embassy in Thailand to State, 7 June 1974, FRUS/E-12:386

³⁴² Minutes of the Secretary of State's Staff Meeting, 16 May 1975, FRUS/E-12:400

³⁴³ Barnes to Scowcroft, 4 March 1976, FRUS/E-12:415

back most of its residual military presence.³⁴⁴ Given the unstable situation in Cambodia, Thailand played an active military role there. The extent of US support for these overtures was deemed underwhelming by Thailand.³⁴⁵ As of the late 70s, the US-Thailand relationship was marred by drug trade issues, particularly regarding heroin and opium. The US and Thailand saw eye to eye on narcotics.³⁴⁶ As of 1979, Thailand was worried that Vietnam would invade,³⁴⁷ and requested the US send more military support.³⁴⁸ The US offered relief aid, and Thailand welcomed it.³⁴⁹ By the mid-1980s, the US offered military support, in an accelerated fashion.³⁵⁰

Under Reagan, Thailand's wariness concerning US support for stability in the Vietnam-Cambodia conflict continued.³⁵¹ The raising threat posed by Vietnamese troops in Cambodia determined the US to sell 40 M-48 tanks to Thailand.³⁵² By the end of the Reagan administration, the US revoked special trading privileges worth \$165 million for Thailand due to the refusal to grant copyright protection for US pharmaceuticals and software.³⁵³ During the Bush administration, the US and Thailand went through their own period of tensions over trade. The Bush administration threatened Thailand with retaliatory tariffs in order to improve US copyrights of computer software, music, movies, and books.³⁵⁴ Tempers flared in March 1992 as well, when the Thailand military junta appointed a prime minister, Narong Wongwan, who the US considered had ties to drug trafficking.³⁵⁵

³⁴⁴ Barnes to Scowcroft, 20 March 1976, FRUS/E-12:417

³⁴⁵ Kissinger to Nixon, undated, FRUS/XX:86

³⁴⁶ Bourne to Carter, 6 June 1977, FRUS/XXII:155

³⁴⁷ Kriangsak to Carter, 11 June 1979, FRUS/XXII:173

³⁴⁸ Kriangsak to Carter, 30 July 1979, FRUS/XXII:174

³⁴⁹ Kriangsak to Carter, 31 October 1979, FRUS/XXII:178

³⁵⁰ Prem to Carter, 8 July 1980, FRUS/XXII:190

³⁵¹ Henry Kamm, 'Reagan Facing Limited Decisions on Southeast Asia', *New York Times*, 26 February 1981

³⁵² Reuters, 'Around the World, Reagan Announces Sale Of 40 Tanks to Thailand', *New York Times*, 14 April 1984

³⁵³ Clyde Farnsworth, 'U.S. Revokes Privileges on Thai Goods', *New York Times*, 20 January 1989

³⁵⁴ AP, 'U.S. Warns Thais of Action', *New York Times*, 25 December 1990

³⁵⁵ Philip Shenon, 'U.S. Links New Thai Leader to Drugs', *New York Times*, 26 March 1992

With Bill Clinton elected President in 1992, trade would become the focus of the relationship throughout the 90s. During a tour of the Asia-Pacific in 1996, Clinton claimed the US and Thailand share ‘the dream of an Asia-Pacific region where economic growth and democratic ideals are advancing steadily and reinforcing one another’.³⁵⁶ The late 90s were difficult for most countries in Asia, culminating with the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997. Thailand was no exception, needing a bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The \$16 billion rescue package had the support of the Clinton administration,³⁵⁷ which also urged investors to spend money in Thailand in order to avoid a deeper recession.³⁵⁸

Conclusion

How did the US alliance network evolve in Asia in the half century from 1951 to 2001? The first conclusion is that the San Francisco System was a far less integrated alliance network than one would normally see in a grouping like NATO, for example. The US had remained consistent in maintaining a bilateral approach to alliance affairs, with little opportunity for its members to work together as each alliance was based on a separate security arrangement. The unwillingness of the US to encourage member states of the San Francisco System to form a collective was so pronounced that it did not have an overarching term for them, preferring instead either to refer to its ‘bilateral alliances in Asia’ or simply to enumerate the five treaty signatories – Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand and Australia - when addressing security issues in the Pacific.

Another conclusion concerns the differing US attitude towards those allies that were democratic and those that were non-democratic. It is possible to infer an American approach

³⁵⁶ Todd Purdum, ‘Clinton Hails Thais in Visit At Conclusion Of Asia Trip’, *New York Times*, 27 November 1996

³⁵⁷ David Sanger, ‘First Part of Thai Bailout Is Authorized by the I.M.F.’, *New York Times*, 21 August 1997

³⁵⁸ James Bennet, ‘Clinton Urges Asia Investors To Aid Lands Like Thailand’, *New York Times*, 14 March 1998

to alliance policy in Asia depending on the democratic status of the ally concerned. US policymakers appeared to respect a country that was a democracy far more than one which was a dictatorship. In the case of an ally that was a dictatorship, the US would pursue a strategy of ensuring it was well-defended, and it would then encourage it towards market liberalization and free trade, in the belief that this process would lead to the eventual democratisation of the ally. This scenario was visible across the San Francisco System. In the case of Japan, a democracy, the US expected it to join the international community and it gave back territories like the Ryukyus, Bonin Islands, and Okinawa, in order to resolve political tensions. Similarly, in the case of Australia, when the US was challenged by an Australian Prime Minister who did not believe in the American approach to security and diplomacy for Asia, frustrations arose in Washington. Still, the manner of the approach was restrained, and the episode maintained a certain degree of diplomatic finesse.

In the cases of South Korea and the Philippines, the US was far more cynical. It supported dictators as long as they kept the two countries aligned with the US. It was preoccupied with the economic development of those countries regardless of any issues that might prove to be problematic down the road, as was the case with normalization between Japan and South Korea. Once the Philippines people removed their dictator and started pushing for the US to remove its bases in the 1990s, there was no major pushback from Washington. As regards Thailand, the US government viewed it as a democracy, albeit a flawed one, and it became desensitised to Thailand's inclination towards coups. American policymakers simply concluded that the coups were palace coups with little effect on the alliance with the US, and thus they decided to largely gloss over them. While this instinct was understandable, it is striking that the US would not push for the correction of an otherwise worrying development, all because it maintained a passive belief that ultimately, Thailand was a flawed democracy.

As regards China, a significant conclusion to be drawn from this chapter is that the Sino-American relationship went from a position where American policymakers did not even consider the Beijing regime as being the ‘true China’ to one where Washington willingly cooperated with China to undermine the USSR. The US was so committed to this strategy that it completely disregarded the shockwaves that working with China would send through Tokyo. The US and China entered something of a golden age in their relations from the 1970s until the 1990s. In the late 1990s the first complaints began to surface regarding China’s lack of common ground with US values in terms of human rights, but the Clinton administration chose to ignore them. China’s entrance to the WTO in 2001 would mark a peak moment when Washington believed that, with the USSR out of the picture, China would eventually follow in the footsteps of the US towards capitalism and democracy.

Another key development that took place during the 50 years from 1951 to 2001 is that American allies, from Japan to Thailand, had cultivated a security relationship with the United States which ensured that their own militaries had become increasingly effective. In addition, in spite of occasional economic downturns, another clear development by 2001 was that all of the US allies in the Asia-Pacific had made progress in terms of improving their financial health so that by the turn of the 21st century, the San Francisco System had emerged as a more stable, competent, and better suited collection of allies for working with its central ‘hub’, the United States, than had previously been the case.

Chapter 3. George W. Bush and Quad 1.0

'The Cold War is over. Exactly against whom are we non-aligned?'

K. Natwar Singh, Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs³⁵⁹

The United States lacked a clear threat at the end of the 1990s. With the USSR gone, and many Asian economies still reeling after the 1997 IMF crisis, the question was what the future would look like for the US network of alliances in Asia. During the George W. Bush administration, the tragedy of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks would determine a strong shift in what America considered a threat and in its strategic culture. The new main threat for the Bush administration was terrorism. Interestingly, all US allies in the San Francisco System adapted to terrorism as the new existential threat for America, and implicitly, the American worldview. This chapter is structured as follows: firstly, it will assess US-China relations, insisting on the point that as of 2008, the two countries did not behave like rivals. It will then move on to an analysis of the San Francisco System, expanding on how all five US allies went along with the Bush administration's counterterrorism agenda in order to ensure their bilateral alliances with the US would remain stable. Thirdly, it will look at attempts to pursue greater political and economic integration in Asia, with a particular focus on the Quad, concluding that neither the US nor its allies were sufficiently committed to a comprehensive multilateral political format that would advance their interests.

³⁵⁹ Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honour*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2011, 437-438

The US and China

As was the case in previous administrations, the US was willing to establish increasingly closer ties with China. The Bush administration was a clear example of a presidency which willingly disregarded persistent flaws in Sino-American relations in order to pursue the greater goal of facilitating China's transformation into a democracy by increasing its access to free trade. The Bush administration was aware of China's poor human rights record, and it was aware of its tense relationship with Taiwan and Hong Kong, but key members from the President to his Secretaries of State and cabinet members chose to treat those problems as secondary. The result was a thaw in Sino-American relations that allowed China to not only better position itself as a counterweight to America, but also allowed it to pressure and obtain the dissolution of key bodies that could have posed problems to it, such as the Quad.

Since Nixon's visit to China, the US had hoped that with time the PRC would slowly adapt to the US-led worldview and become a compliant state. The Bush years were a good example of that. The Bush family had strong ties with China, and Sino-American politics went smoothly. This impression was best expressed in comments made by US Secretary of State Colin Powell in 2001, when he both welcomed China's bid to enter the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and also labelled China a 'strategic competitor'.³⁶⁰ Powell eventually conceded that the foundation of the US-China relationship would consist of economic reforms and integration.³⁶¹ This rationale made sense knowing that the WTO is a US-led body, a part of the established US-led economic infrastructure, and it makes it clear that, at the time, the US believed China would be integrated into its economic system. Powell and

³⁶⁰ Colin Powell, 'Remarks on Trip to Asia', 23 July 2001

³⁶¹ Powell, 'Briefing on Upcoming Travel to Japan, Vietnam, The Republic of Korea, The People's Republic of China, and Australia', 20 July 2001

US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice specifically refuted the notion that China was a threat in speeches given in 2002 and 2003.³⁶²

In a similar vein, James Kelly, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, emphasized that not only the US, but also its allies, were optimistic about China's contributions to the global economy. At the same time, he confirmed lingering doubts from the Clinton years about Chinese authoritarianism, nationalism, and he claimed he worried the Chinese political establishment had a poor understanding of the US political process³⁶³ and intentions.³⁶⁴ Both Randall Schriver,³⁶⁵ Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and James Kelly expressed the belief that market liberalisation would alter the nature of Chinese politics, forcing the country to democratise.³⁶⁶ The WTO was seen as a mechanism that would amplify those developments.³⁶⁷

The Bush administration was very committed to free trade as a mechanism of change, continuing Reagan era principles. Assistant Secretary of State Anthony Wayne's remarks to the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong emphasised four pillars of US economic policy, three of which were tied to free trade (resilient markets, trade flexibility, free trade as a principle). Only the fourth pillar, strengthening of international institutions, did not directly touch on free trade. Still, it could be considered something that also enables free trade, as the Bush administration has always supported economic groups such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), or the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).³⁶⁸

George W. Bush also displayed a more positive position towards China. Bush was consistent in this throughout his administration. During a 2001 talk with Chinese Vice

³⁶² Rice, 'Dr. Rice Previews President's Trip to Asia and Australia', 14 October 2003

³⁶³ James Kelly, 'The Future of U.S.-China Relations', 1 May 2001

³⁶⁴ Kelly, 'President Bush's Trip to Asia: Outlook and Policy Prospects', 18 March 2002

³⁶⁵ Randall Schriver, 'The Effects and Consequences of an Emerging China', 19 March 2003

³⁶⁶ Schriver, 'China and the WTO: Compliance and Monitoring', 5 February 2004

³⁶⁷ Kelly, 'U.S.-China Relations', 11 September 2003

³⁶⁸ Anthony Wayne, 'U.S. Economic Engagement in Asia', 4 November 2004

Premier Qian Qichen, Bush said that ‘friendly relations and cooperation between China and the United States is in the interest of Asia’. During a press conference with President Jiang Zemin, Bush denied the US and China were in a ‘clash of civilisations’, and added that ‘different civilizations and social systems ought to have long-term coexistence and achieve common development in the spirit of seeking common ground while shelving differences’.³⁶⁹ During a 2002 meeting, both of them saw the economy, trade, science, and technology as areas where the US and China could cooperate, and both agreed that they need to make a common front against terrorism. Jiang told Bush that China did not see the US as a threat, even though he reminded him to ‘not do unto others what you would not like others to do unto you’.³⁷⁰ During another meeting in Crawford, Texas, in 2002, Jiang insisted that China was not an expansionist power, and even when it would become more developed, it would not aim to threaten other countries.³⁷¹ When Hu Jintao replaced Jiang as President of China, not much changed. Despite tensions over Taiwan, by 2003 Bush maintained the principle that more economic freedom would lead to political liberalisation.³⁷²

There was a short window in 2005 when the US expressed doubts concerning China’s intentions. During an April 2005 hearing in front of the House International Relations Committee, Schriver commented on China’s passage of anti-secession legislation, a move targeted at Taiwan. The law essentially forbade the Republic of China (ROC) to secede from the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and hinted at military action should Taiwan consider the option. Schriver proclaimed US opposition to the legislation, implied it was counterintuitive to traditional Chinese policy on cross-strait relations, and that any move that made the likelihood of military action more likely was unwelcome. Schriver accused China

³⁶⁹ George W. Bush, ‘The President’s News Conference With President Jiang Zemin of China in Shanghai, China’, 19 October 2001

³⁷⁰ Bush, ‘The President’s News Conference With President Jiang Zemin of China in Beijing’, 21 February 2002

³⁷¹ Bush, ‘The President’s News Conference With President Jiang Zemin of China in Crawford, Texas’, 25 October 2002

³⁷² Bush, ‘Remarks at a Welcoming Ceremony for Premier Wen Jiabao of China’, 9 December 2003

of undermining cross-strait relations.³⁷³ The tone from other US officials that same year was relatively different. In May 2005, Evans Revere, Acting Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, pointed out in a conference at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) that China would be welcomed as a global power if it could raise to meet the expectations that are usually held of such powers.³⁷⁴

Similar ideas came from Christopher Hill, Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, in testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in June 2005. Hill warned that US-China competition should not be viewed as a zero-sum game and claimed that China's desire to have its political influence match its economic weight would allow it to shape the regional system to its advantage. Hill also expanded on how China tended to use its trade influence to alter the behavior of other countries, notably Taiwan and North Korea, and claimed the unresolved historical tensions with Japan could add to the tense political environment. Despite this critical framing, Hill was ultimately conciliatory regarding US strategy for China: he said China's 'global emergence is a natural consequence of economic growth and development', and that the US 'must work with China, and with our partners around the world, to ensure that its emergence takes place within strong regional and global security, economic and political arrangements'. He also told the Committee that America must ensure it would not have its influence in Asia diminished.³⁷⁵ To add to this, Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, claimed 'we don't seek to contain China, we seek to engage China' during a talk in New York City in October 2005 at the Asia Society.³⁷⁶

Bush and Hu met in New York City at the Waldorf-Astoria in September 2005. Most key remarks came from Hu. He stated that China did not pursue a trade surplus with the US as a

³⁷³ Schriver, 'Hearing on Peoples's Republic of China (P.R.C.) Anti-Secession Legislation', 6 April 2005

³⁷⁴ Evans Revere, 'The Bush Administration's Second-Term Foreign Policy Toward East Asia', 17 May 2005

³⁷⁵ Christopher Hill, 'Emergence of China in the Asia-Pacific: Economic and Security Consequences for the U.S.', 7 June 2005

³⁷⁶ Nicholas Burns, 'Question and Answer Session Following Speech at the Asia Society', 18 October 2005

strategy, he promised concessions on intellectual property reforms, an area where the US often complained, and applauded US opposition to Taiwan independence. Hu pointed out that the US and China ‘need to see the fact that mutually beneficially and win-win cooperation is the mainstream of our relationship’.³⁷⁷ At the same summit, Mike Green, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, and Senior Director for Asian Affairs told the press that Hu expanded on his peaceful development theory, informing Bush that should China have access to a peaceful environment to develop normally, tensions would recede. Green also described the meeting as ‘cordial’ and ‘friendly’.³⁷⁸ During a March 2006 speech in Sydney, Rice also spoke on the issue of China, claiming that ‘we want conditions in which China's rise is a positive force for the region.’ She restated the US belief that membership in the WTO would determine China to open up its autocratic regime.³⁷⁹

An April 2006 meeting between Bush and Hu gave more indications about the tone of the relationship. Bush claimed that the US and China ‘don't agree on everything, but we're able to discuss our disagreements in a spirit of friendship and cooperation’. Hu added that the two countries ‘share extensive, common strategic interests, and there is a broad prospect for the mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries’. Hu offered little surprise by claiming that Taiwan is ‘an inalienable part of Chinese territory’, and he also offered evasive answers to questions regarding China’s democratization. Asked when China would become a democracy, Hu diminished hopes of democratization, as it was understood by the West:

I don't know—what do you mean by a democracy? What I can tell you is that we've always believed in China that if there is no democracy, there will be no modernization, which means that ever since China's reform and opening up in the late 1970s, China, on

³⁷⁷ Bush, ‘Remarks Prior to Discussions With President Hu Jintao of China in New York City’, 13 September 2005

³⁷⁸ Bush, ‘Press Briefing on the President's Meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao by Mike Green, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and Senior Director for Asian Affairs’, 13 September 2005b

³⁷⁹ Howard, ‘Joint Press Conference with the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice Sydney’, 17 March 2006

the one hand, has vigorously promoted economic reforms, and on the other, China has also been actively, properly, and appropriately moved forward the political restructuring process. And we have always been expanding the democracy and freedoms for the Chinese citizens. In the future, we will, in the light of China's own national conditions and the will of the Chinese people, continue to move ahead the political restructuring and to develop a socialist democracy. And we will further expand the orderly participation of the Chinese citizens in political affairs so that the Chinese citizens will be in a better position to exercise their democratic rights in terms of democratic supervision, democratic management, and democratic decisionmaking'.³⁸⁰

In spite of Hu's remarks, which should have given a very clear signal that China was not willing to join other countries in Asia down the path of democratization, the US NSS was cautiously optimistic about Chinese-American relations. It claimed that as long as China would keep its commitment to peaceful development, it would realize that it shared the same exposure as the US to the challenges of globalization and transnational threats. Mutual interests were expected to bring the US and China together on issues such as counterterrorism, nuclear proliferation, or energy security. Combating disease pandemics, fighting climate change and environmental degradation were also areas of interest.³⁸¹

It is clear that for the Americans, the rise of China was viewed as something enabled by the international economic system that they backed, and in that case, it was logical to welcome China as part of the group of developed countries. These sentiments were amplified by President Bush during an August 2008 radio address, when he told Americans that China's changes were something to be welcomed, because they provided investment

³⁸⁰ Bush, 'Remarks Following a Meeting With President Hu Jintao of China and an Exchange With Reporters', 20 April 2006

³⁸¹ White House, 2006 National Security Strategy, p.42

opportunities for the US.³⁸² The consistency of the American thoughts on China was also presented by Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Thomas Christensen, in a March 2008 statement before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission. Christensen pointed out that the US was ‘not attempting to contain or counter China’s growing influence’, and that in ‘sharp contrast with the Cold War containment policy we applied to the Soviet Union, we are actively encouraging China to play a greater role in international diplomacy and in the international economic architecture’. He explained that a strong US presence in Asia would incentivize China to make choices that would also align with US interests, and that the integration of China into multilateral groups such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) would be a net positive.³⁸³

In hindsight, the handling of China during the Bush administration was poor. There was too much optimism concerning the free market’s power as a tool of democratization, and the US willingly disregarded problems concerning human rights and authoritarianism that it had known about for decades. America had one brand new structural problem however, and that was its increasing financial dependence on China. After WWII, the US economy grew rapidly, and defence spending was not too much of a problem. However, after 9/11, America found it more challenging to sustain the international system that suited its ambitions. America’s current account deficit is on an unsustainable path, and without deficit reduction, the country will encounter inevitable economic pitfalls. As of 2004, Asian countries, especially China and Japan, accounted for 80 percent of central bank purchases of dollars in the US. The biggest issue was that China surpassed Japan in terms of being the US’ biggest creditor. The extent to which China needs US Treasuries decreases, but the US needs China or other countries to buy them, and thus, a dilemma is created. On the other hand, a collapse of the US economy would end up hurting the Chinese and other Asian economies too. The

³⁸² Bush, ‘The President’s Radio Address’, 9 August 2008

³⁸³ Thomas Christensen, ‘Shaping China’s Global Choices Through Diplomacy’, 18 March 2008

more positive scenario requires a form of sustainable economic burden-sharing. For the US, the fact that the country with the heaviest say on ownership of its debt had shifted from Japan to China, was something with considerable geopolitical implications, and made its overall economic outlook less predictable.³⁸⁴

The San Francisco System

The Bush administration was, in many ways, one of the last orthodox administrations when it came to the San Francisco System. Bush was a believer in the conventional way of doing diplomacy, which was essentially bilateral. The signs were visible in many areas: focusing on Japan as the centrepiece of the hub-and-spokes system, choosing not to go further with the Quad, aiming to cooperate with China, having a common ground with countries in the same region, such as counterterrorist cooperation with both the Philippines and Thailand, and still being reluctant to explore more integrated options, not engaging too much with either the East Asia Community or the East Asia Summit, and the list could go on. The Bush years represented one of America's last flirtations with the diplomatic behaviour of the Cold War and the 90s.

America's bilateral alliances served their purpose during the Cold War. With the USSR having collapsed, the San Francisco System did not go away. What happened during the Bush years was actually the opposite: the San Francisco System found a new purpose, all under the guise of fighting terrorism. The 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) described the 'single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise', spoke of a strong military defence against terrorism, and promised to promote democracy as the only system that guaranteed freedom. The third chapter of the NSS expanded on how

³⁸⁴ Iwan Morgan, 'The Indebted Empire: America's Current-Account Deficit Problem', *International Politics*, Vol.45, 2008, 92-112

alliances could be used to counter terrorism. It spoke of how the US could collaborate with allies to fight a 'war of ideas' against terrorism. Chapter Eight of the NSS mentioned that the 9/11 terrorist attacks had 'energized' the bilateral alliances in Asia and gave clear hints on how the US would plan to work with allies. There was a clear expectation from the US for Japan to play a leading regional and global role. The shared values and norms facilitated that. For South Korea, the goal was to improve cooperation with North Korea on denuclearization. For Australia, there was no specific mention other than a need for the alliance to keep on developing on positive terms. The US also remained committed to keeping forces in Asia in order to reflect its commitment. Finally, it emphasized the positive effect of economic alliances such as ASEAN and APEC, and committed to support them.³⁸⁵

In a speech in New York City in 2002, Powell described the US as the 'balance wheel of security in Asia'. Kelly also used the phrase 'five traditional allies' when giving testimony to the House International Relations Committee³⁸⁶. When giving a speech in Washington DC, Director of Policy Planning Mitchell Reiss claimed that the US must continue the 'commitment to our five bilateral alliances and key security partnerships'.³⁸⁷ This is an example of how, at the time, the US was still reluctant to put a label on the San Francisco System, instead going by generic formulations. When the Bush administration became increasingly intertwined with the fight against terrorism, Rice hinted that counterterrorism might be a chance for Asia's bilateral security framework to change into something more comprehensive, but did not give more details.³⁸⁸ The fact that the US was willing to entertain multilateralism under the guise of counterterrorism shows just how important the issue was for the Bush administration, in spite of it never managing to gain strong traction after the Bush years.

³⁸⁵ WH, 'The National Security Strategy of the United States of America', 17 September 2002, p.26

³⁸⁶ Kelly, 'An Overview of U.S.-East Asia Policy', 2 June 2004

³⁸⁷ Reiss, Mitchell, 'Challenges and Opportunities in a Changing Asia', 14 May 2004

³⁸⁸ Rice, 'Dr. Rice Previews President's Trip', 14 October 2003

The US and Japan

The paradox of Japanese security is that while Japan is more dependent on the US for its defence than most countries, it had, for most of its post-Cold War history, refused to reshape its security policy into a more autonomous one, despite repeated attempts from the US to encourage exactly that. The Bush years saw Japan pursue a change of approach, as Tokyo began to consider a foreign policy that was more involved, especially on security matters. Japan slowly became more receptive to playing an active role, and it did so through alignment with the US on the issue of wars in the Middle East. However, it would be wrong to say that Japan's change in strategy was visible only through closer cooperation with the US over Afghanistan and Iraq. For example, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's overtures to both India and NATO can serve as examples of a strategy that was trying to become more global.

Under Koizumi Junichiro,³⁸⁹ Japan embarked on a series of painful economic reforms that had the full support of the US.³⁹⁰ Even before the 9/11 attacks, Japan was considering improving military cooperation with the US, specifically on ballistic missile defence.³⁹¹ What considerably improved the relationship was Japan's support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the 1990s, Japan's support for the US war in Kuwait had been deemed insufficient, and that prompted a change in approach from Tokyo.

Koizumi told the Diet the 9/11 attacks determined Japan to play a more active role in international affairs, and the Self-Defense Force (SDF), along with the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) needed reforms in order to be better equipped to deal with threats. Koizumi's government passed an Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Bill that reflected the need for those

³⁸⁹ Powell, 'Remarks on Trip to Asia', 23 July 2001

³⁹⁰ Kelly, 'Overview of Top Goals and Objectives for East Asia-Pacific Region', 26 March 2003

³⁹¹ Powell, 'Briefing', 20 July 2001

changes.³⁹² His plans were outlined in the same month the attacks took place, when he promised Japan would play an 'active' role, dispatch SDF troops, and urged for more cooperation on diplomatic, economic, humanitarian aspects, in order to complement the rapidly evolving military developments.³⁹³

Bush visited Asia in 2002, and during his speech to the Japanese Diet, he was interrupted for applause 25 times.³⁹⁴ Japan became an active member of the counter-terrorist coalition, deploying the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) to provide logistical aid to the operation in Afghanistan. Japan also expressed openness to helping with the rebuilding of Afghanistan after the war.³⁹⁵ Bush added North Korea to his 'axis of evil' nations, along with Iraq and Iran, and that led to an overlap between the counter-terrorist narrative and the presentation of states as active threats. This was a worthwhile approach, since it enabled Koizumi to emphasize Japan's willingness to work with the US in countering North Korea. Koizumi³⁹⁶ did not refrain from supporting Bush's 'axis of evil' comments.³⁹⁷ Bush added during a meeting with Koizumi that the US and Japan see the Pacific as a 'fellowship' of nations, united by institutions and trade.³⁹⁸

In a speech at the UN in 2002, Koizumi declared that 'now in the international community, Japan is--well, I felt that various countries around the world are looking to Japan to play its appropriate part in the international community on the Afghanistan question'. When talks of a war in Iraq emerged, Koizumi hoped that the international community would reach some kind of consensus concerning sanctions that would prevent the possibility of

³⁹² Koizumi Junichiro, 'Statement by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on the Passing of the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Bill', 29 October 2001

³⁹³ Koizumi, 'Japan's measures in response to the simultaneous terrorist attacks in the United States', 19 September 2001

³⁹⁴ Kelly, 'President Bush's Trip to Asia', 18 March 2002

³⁹⁵ Kelly, 'U.S.-East Asia-Pacific Relations', 14 February 2002

³⁹⁶ Bush, 'The President's News Conference', 19 October 2001

³⁹⁷ Bush, 'Joint Statement by President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi: Partnership for Security and Prosperity', 30 June 2001

³⁹⁸ Bush, 'Remarks to the Diet in Tokyo', 19 February 2002

war.³⁹⁹ When Koizumi addressed the General Assembly, he declared there would be an active response to those who used weapons of mass destruction and claimed that Japan would actively help the US coalition with nation-building.⁴⁰⁰ When the US began its military operation against Iraq, Koizumi maintained a supporting role, troops were dispatched to aid the war effort, and, at the end of 2004, Koizumi maintained that Japan would continue the humanitarian assistance and rebuilding efforts underway. He also expressed an openness to play an active role in information gathering.⁴⁰¹

During a speech at the Baltimore Council of Foreign Affairs, Revere noted that the alliance with Japan needed to become ‘a more mature partnership’, as the US was pushing for its ties with Japan to transform.⁴⁰² Revere followed up those statements a few weeks later when he called Japan a ‘key partner in the global war on terror’ and applauded recent decisions by Tokyo to pursue a more proactive foreign policy.⁴⁰³ Hill gave remarks to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on US relations with Japan and added that ‘our alliance represents more than a defensive balance of power’. He hinted that Article 9 of Japan’s Constitution was part of the ‘constraints’ the country faced in its attempts to play a more invested global role, but he also said that it was up to the Japanese Diet to decide on the next steps. Japanese contributions to the rebuilding of Iraq and Afghanistan were applauded. Hill said he was aware that China and South Korea were sceptical of Japan due to its history. Nevertheless, he noted that both China and South Korea were also prone to nationalist resentment.⁴⁰⁴

³⁹⁹ Koizumi, ‘Opening Statement by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi at the Press Conference in New York’, 13 September 2002a

⁴⁰⁰ Koizumi, ‘Statement by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi at the 57th Session of General Assembly of the United Nations’, 13 September 2002b

⁴⁰¹ Koizumi, ‘Statement by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (Decision on the extension of the Basic Plan regarding humanitarian and reconstruction assistance of the Self Defense Forces in Iraq)’, 9 December 2004

⁴⁰² Revere, ‘U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities and the East Asia-Pacific Region’, 3 May 2005

⁴⁰³ Revere, ‘Bush Second-Term Policy Toward East Asia’, 17 May 2005

⁴⁰⁴ Hill, ‘U.S. Relations With Japan’, 29 September 2005

During remarks in Kyoto on November 2005, Bush praised Japan's transformation, saying that 'Japan is a good example of how a free society can reflect a country's unique culture and history while guaranteeing the universal freedoms that are the foundation of all genuine democracies'.⁴⁰⁵ Japanese Foreign Minister Machimura Nobutaka addressed an audience in New York in 2005 to mark the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II and claimed the 'importance of Japan-US relations will clearly not diminish over time. [...] We share the core values of freedom, democracy, and belief in the market economy, and we are solid and reliable allies in the areas of security and defense. Japan considers the further development of its good relationship with the United States a top priority'.⁴⁰⁶

The 2006 US NSS also pointed out Japan as the most important US ally in the Indo-Pacific, claiming that America and Japan's economic ties, as well as the strength of their democracies were the key factors holding the two together.⁴⁰⁷ This was another sign of the orthodox approach of the Bush administration, relying on the historical impulse of the United States to perceive Japan as its most important ally in Asia. A joint statement by Bush and Koizumi in June 2006 re-stated the US-Japan alliance's core objectives. Among the common values were 'freedom, human dignity and human rights, democracy, market economy, and rule of law'. Among common interests were 'winning the war on terrorism; maintaining regional stability and prosperity; promoting free market ideals and institutions; upholding human rights; securing freedom of navigation and commerce, including sea lanes; and enhancing global energy security'. Discussions about ballistic missile development offered new opportunities for the relationship to develop, and the two sides agreed to make a common front on supporting a seat for Japan at the UN.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ Bush, 'Remarks in Kyoto', 16 November 2005

⁴⁰⁶ Machimura, Nobutaka, 'Japan's Global Strategy and the Japan-US Global Partnership', 29 April 2005

⁴⁰⁷ WH, NSS, p.40

⁴⁰⁸ Bush, 'Joint Statement by President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan: The Japan-U.S. Alliance of the New Century', 29 June 2006

A better understanding of the often downplayed security transformations that took place in Japan can be made by analysing a speech given by Abe at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) headquarters in January 2007. Abe was the first Japanese Prime Minister to address NATO officially, and the meeting signalled Japan's desire for closer association to the US-backed military alliance. Abe pointed out similarities between Japan and NATO, claiming they 'have in common such fundamental values as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It is only natural that we cooperate in protecting and promoting those values. My government is committed to reinforcing the stability and prosperity of the world based on the fundamental values I have just mentioned. For its part, NATO is widening the circle of freedom through an expansion of membership and partnerships'. He hinted at a willingness for Japan to collaborate with NATO and build trust, pointing out that he elevated the Japan Defense Agency to a Ministry. He also said that Japan 'will no longer shy away from carrying out overseas activities involving the SDF, if it is for the sake of international peace and stability'. He added that Japan and NATO would collaborate more on peace building, reconstruction and disaster relief.⁴⁰⁹

The US and Australia

Like Japan, Australia is a country that depends considerably on the US for its defence. Australia did not renounce the concept of offensive war like Japan did; nonetheless, both were aware that they needed a stronger power to provide for their defence. Ever since its independence from Britain, Australia had tried to keep either the UK or the US close to it for security purposes.

⁴⁰⁹ Abe, Shinzo, 'Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the North Atlantic Council', 12 January 2007

Prime Minister John Howard was visiting the US exactly around the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and thus he could observe and communicate from a privileged position, at a time of considerable domestic panic in the US. During his visit, Howard spoke with Bush of better defence cooperation, improving trade ties, supporting China for the WTO, and many other issues. Howard's⁴¹⁰ visits in late 2001 had largely⁴¹¹ corrected⁴¹² the US-Australia⁴¹³ relationship.⁴¹⁴ What was symbolically important was Howard's decision to invoke Article IV of the ANZUS Treaty. The 9/11 attacks determined the US to invoke Article V of NATO, but Howard considered it would be useful to complement the decision with a similar one for ANZUS. ANZUS at the time was a moribund alliance, with New Zealand largely participating in name only. Still, Howard's decision re-enforced the alliance's potential, and underlined the US' status as a Pacific nation. Less than a week after the attacks, Howard was devising plans for an Australian force deployment, which would consist of maritime aircraft, special forces, tanker aircraft, frigates, amphibious command ships, and various other aircraft.⁴¹⁵

Howard never moved away from his alignment with Bush. Like Koizumi, he embraced Bush's 'axis of evil' speech.⁴¹⁶ He also expressed support for regime change in Iraq, a contentious issue on which many other world leaders disagreed.⁴¹⁷ One reason why Howard might have made that comment could be interpreted from a speech he made a few days later, where he claimed that he hoped Australia would be consulted by the US should

⁴¹⁰ John Howard, 'Address at Navy Yard Ceremony Washington D.C, USA', 10 September 2001a

⁴¹¹ Howard, 'Remarks in the Rose Garden White House with President George W Bush, Washington', 10 September 2001b

⁴¹² Howard, 'Interview with Jim Lehrer, News Hour, PBS Washington D.C, USA', 10 September 2001c

⁴¹³ Howard, 'Doorstop Interview - White House, Washington DC', 10 September 2001d

⁴¹⁴ Howard, 'Joint Statement Between the United States of America and Australia', 10 September 2001e

⁴¹⁵ Howard, 'Force Deployment', 17 October 2001

⁴¹⁶ Howard, 'Transcript of the Prime Minister The Hon John Howard MP Press Conference Pierre Hotel, New York', 31 January 2002

⁴¹⁷ Howard, 'Transcript of the Prime Minister The Hon John Howard MP Press Conference Willard Hotel, Washington DC', 9 June 2002a

any military decision on Iraq be made.⁴¹⁸ He met with Bush again in 2002 and the two defined the norms and values that bind their countries: ‘individual liberty, the centrality of the family in national life, a belief in robust but ethical capitalism, and also a belief that we have a responsibility to expand the horizons of democracy and expand the horizons of the common political values that our parties share’.⁴¹⁹

As the war in Iraq was coming closer, the positions taken by Howard became more evasive. In a 2003 interview in Washington DC, Howard expressed hope that the military option should not be necessary, provided that a UN resolution could be successful, a sentiment shared by Koizumi.⁴²⁰ Despite that statement, Bush told the press in a meeting with Howard that Australia was part of the US coalition, and that concerning Iraq, the risks of doing nothing outweigh those of doing something.⁴²¹ The same sentiment was obvious during talks with US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, as Australia was already engaging in pre-deploying forces.⁴²² In a national address, Howard explained the eventual decision to send troops to Iraq, saying that ‘it is right, it is lawful and it's in Australia's national interest’. He also mentioned the close alliance with the US as another reason for the decision. During the speech, he stressed the fact that the US must remain engaged with Asia, and Iraq would be only one of the topics of interest, with the behavior of North Korea also something that warranted continued US engagement with Asia. Howard claimed ‘Australia is a western

⁴¹⁸ Howard, ‘Transcript of the Prime Minister The Hon John Howard MP Press Conference Willard Hotel, Washington DC’, 11 June 2002b

⁴¹⁹ Howard, ‘Transcript of the Prime Minister The Hon John Howard MP Toast To The President Of The United States, George Bush White House, Washington DC’, 10 June 2002

⁴²⁰ Howard, ‘Doorstop Interview - Blair House, Washington’, 8 February 2003

⁴²¹ Howard, ‘Oval Office remarks with President George W. Bush, White House, Washington’, 10 February 2003a

⁴²² Howard, ‘Joint Press Conference with The Hon Donald Rumsfeld - US Secretary of Defense Pentagon, Washington’, 10 February 2003b

country with western values. Nothing will or should change that' and called US critics 'opportunistic and inconsistent'.⁴²³

If anything, a key problem for US-Australia relations was that the two countries were seen as being too close. One contentious issue concerning Bush's relationship with Australia had to do with some in the media having divergent interpretations of a remark by Bush, where he described Australia as a US 'deputy sheriff'. For many in the media, the comparison created the impression that Australia is an American 'lapdog', an issue that has been present for quite some time in Australian discourse and is often brought up by those who believe that the two countries are sometimes too close. When speaking to reporters in Canberra, Bush tried to clarify the remark, declaring that while he indeed referred to Australia as a 'sheriff', this was not meant to imply an expected submissiveness, instead, it was a typically Texan way of speaking about a friend. Bush underlined the fact that in spite of the usage of the word, the US and Australia should be viewed as equals.⁴²⁴ The NSS did not refrain from describing the relationship as a far-reaching one, claiming the 'alliance is global in scope. From Iraq and Afghanistan to our historic FTA, we are working jointly to ensure security, prosperity, and expanded liberty'.⁴²⁵ During a press conference with John Howard, US Vice President Dick Cheney said he was grateful for Australia's support in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴²⁶ Howard continued his support for the US alliance, telling a crowd in New York City in September 2005 'that strong global leadership by the United States is crucial to Asia's future stability and prosperity. The United States is not only a great global power, indeed the world's only superpower'. He also supported the US presence in Asia and its alliances, claiming a strong US presence was vital, and Australia would anchor

⁴²³ Howard, 'Joint Press Conference with the President of the United States, George W Bush Rose Gardens, White House, Washington DC', 3 June 2004

⁴²⁴ Bush, 'Exchange With Reporters Following Discussions With Prime Minister John Howard of Australia in Canberra, Australia', 23 October 2003

⁴²⁵ WH, NSS, p.40

⁴²⁶ Howard, 'Joint Press Conference with Cheney', 24 February 2007

it. He further hinted at greater cooperation by saying close ties with the US were a positive thing, not a negative.⁴²⁷

The US and Australia would go on and sign a Defense Trade Cooperation Treaty which would improve military ties between the two. Bush would praise the agreement in September 2007, recalling once again the important role Australian support in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had played.⁴²⁸ Bush reiterated US support for Australia that same month, in remarks to the APEC Business Summit in Sydney. There, he claimed America's 'commitment to the Asia-Pacific region was forged in war and sealed in peace', pointing out that 'alliances with Australia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines and our defense relationships with Singapore, Taiwan, Indonesia, and others in the region form the bedrock of America's engagement in the Asia-Pacific'.⁴²⁹

Australia's next Labor Prime Minister, and former Ambassador to the US, Kevin Rudd, a China specialist in his younger years, claimed during a press conference at the UN in March 2008 that there are 'three pillars' to Australian foreign policy: the 'alliance with the United States, our membership of the United Nations, and our policy of comprehensive engagement in Asia'.⁴³⁰ Rudd would largely repeat the same points in a talk at the Brookings Institution in Washington DC that same month, claiming that the post-WWII 'institutions are under strain and are in need of reform - reform that once again must be driven by US global leadership'.⁴³¹

What Rudd said in March 2008 was a continuation of his claims during the first national security statement he had given to the Australian Parliament, in February 2008. There, he expanded on the nature of the relationship. Rudd said that the 'United States alliance remains

⁴²⁷ Howard, 'Address to the Asia Society', 12 September 2005

⁴²⁸ Bush, 'Fact Sheet: U.S.-Australia Alliance: Steadfast and Growing', 4 September 2007

⁴²⁹ Bush, 'Remarks at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Business Summit in Sydney', 7 September 2007

⁴³⁰ Kevin Rudd, 'Press Conference, United Nations', 30 March 2008

⁴³¹ Rudd, 'The Australia-US alliance and emerging challenges in the Asia-Pacific Region, The Brookings Institution, Washington', 31 March 2008

fundamental to Australia's national security interests - both globally and in the Asia-Pacific region'. He added that the 'Government believes that the future strategic stability of the Asia-Pacific region will in large part rely on the continuing strong presence of Australia's closest ally, the United States'. He urged greater cooperation between the US, China, and Japan, claiming that tensions between all three had the potential to hurt Australia. On his 'pillars' statement, he gave more detail, asserting the 'alliance with the United States will remain our key strategic partnership and the central pillar of Australian national security policy'. Interestingly, Australia hinted at integration of its own, which partly overlapped with the San Francisco network, by pointing out that the government decided to 'strengthen security policy cooperation with a number of regional partners including Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore'.⁴³²

The US and South Korea

The US alliance with South Korea was always slightly different to that with Japan or Australia. There were two developments in the South Korea alliance during the Bush years. Firstly, North Korea would still serve as the main rationale for the bilateral alliance between the US and the ROK, even though it would acquire a more ominous framing, given Bush's categorization of the DPRK as being part of the 'Axis of Evil'. Secondly, like all San Francisco System members, South Korea would ensure it was aligned with the US on the matter of wars in the Middle East. One of the side effects of this was that it eased pressure and reduced tension within the alliance during more strenuous moments. In spite of these developments, the US call for the alliance to move beyond its security rationale – a call that was answered diplomatically by South Korea – did not succeed in a palpable sense.

⁴³² Rudd, 'The First National Security Statement to the Parliament Address by the Prime Minister of Australia The Hon. Kevin Rudd MP', 4 December 2008

In the early days of the Bush administration, the issue at hand was working with Kim Dae-jung and his *Sunshine Policy*, focused on bettering diplomatic ties between the North and the South. Bush was reluctant to pursue this due to the hawkish instincts typical of a conservative administration, however, he eventually yielded,⁴³³ meeting Kim in 2001 and endorsing his Sunshine Policy.⁴³⁴ Powell, along with Rice, also made efforts to support the policy.⁴³⁵ During a 2002 visit to Asia, Bush expressed support for Korean unification, as long as it took place under South Korean terms. Kim also praised the alliance, calling it ‘indispensable’, and gave signs of a strategic shift consisting of embracing the emerging US narrative on counterterrorism. What Kim did not do, which separated him from Koizumi and Howard, was agreeing with Bush’s ‘axis of evil’ formulation. Nevertheless, Kim downplayed his unwillingness to embrace the term,⁴³⁶ claiming that the US and South Korean worldviews were ‘fundamentally similar’.⁴³⁷

Two factors made it easier for the US and South Korea to convey a positive relationship: a short period of cooperation in the multilateral talks with North Korea and South Korea’s decision to support the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Kelly stated as much in remarks to the House International Relations Committee, pointing out that South Korea’s support for Operation Enduring Freedom was well received (the support ranged from military to economic to diplomatic).⁴³⁸ Bush and Kim met again in 2003 and those were the issues both presented as being key in ensuring a good relationship, along with the usual reminder that the US and South Korea shared similar norms.⁴³⁹ The fact that the US requested South Korea to

⁴³³ Bush, ‘Joint Statement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Korea’, 7 March 2001a

⁴³⁴ Bush, ‘Remarks Prior to Discussions With President Kim Dae-jung of South Korea and an Exchange With Reporters’, 7 March 2001b

⁴³⁵ Powell ‘Remarks at Asia Society Annual Dinner’, 10 June 2002

⁴³⁶ Bush, ‘Remarks at the Dorasan Train Station in Dorasan, South Korea’, 20 February 2002a

⁴³⁷ Bush, ‘The President’s News Conference With President Kim Dae-jung of South Korea in Seoul, South Korea’, 20 February 2002b

⁴³⁸ Kelly, ‘U.S.-East Asia-Pacific Relations’, 14 February 2002

⁴³⁹ Bush, ‘Joint Statement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Korea: Common Values, Principles, and Strategy’, 14 May 2003

dispatch more troops to Iraq and the South Korean government agreed also ensured the relationship remained free of stress.⁴⁴⁰

During November 2005 remarks to troops at Osan, South Korea, Bush claimed the ROK ‘has grown more free and prosperous, it’s built an increasingly capable military that is now ready to assume a larger role in defending its people. By assuming some responsibilities that have traditionally been shouldered by American forces, South Korea will strengthen the deterrent on the Korean Peninsula and free up some of our combat forces to help us win the war on terror’.⁴⁴¹ The idea of reducing the US military presence in South Korea had been mentioned before by Revere in May 2005, when he spoke of combining troop reduction with improving deterrence capabilities.⁴⁴²

Testimony to the House Committee on International Relations by Hill pointed out that the US desired the alliance with South Korea to move ‘beyond its original security rationale as the nation begins to play a global political role commensurate with its economic stature’.⁴⁴³ As with Japan, the US wanted its alliance with South Korea to evolve into a broader one, moving beyond the military aspect. Revere also added the need for South Korea to be more ‘confident and assertive’, as the US pursued plans to give back military control to the South Korean army, especially by giving back control of the Yongsan military garrison, redeploying troops, and enhancing technological capabilities, in attempts to create more ‘strategic flexibility’.⁴⁴⁴ The US was optimistic about its alliances at the beginning of the second Bush term, as a speech by Ambassador Marie Huhtala, Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs to the Asia Society and Texas Ambassadors Forum pointed out. Huhtala was particularly positive about South Korea, claiming that as a ‘new generation of leaders

⁴⁴⁰ Bush, ‘Joint Statement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Korea’, 20 October 2003

⁴⁴¹ Bush, ‘Remarks to United States Troops at Osan, South Korea’, 19 November 2005

⁴⁴² Revere, ‘U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities’, 3 May 2005

⁴⁴³ Hill, ‘North East Asia: A Region of Vital Concern to the United States’, 26 May 2005

⁴⁴⁴ Revere, ‘The Bush Administration’s Second-Term Foreign Policy’, 17 May 2005

emerges which has no direct experience of the Korean War and which is often suspicious of U.S. motives, we are reaching out to younger Koreans, establishing new friendships and invigorating our public diplomacy'.⁴⁴⁵ The NSS of 2006 noted that the US and South Korea were tied by the strength of their democracies, as well as their economic interconnectedness, a point that had been made in relation to Japan as well.⁴⁴⁶

President Bush had two interactions with South Korean President Lee Myung-bak in 2008, one at Camp David during April, and one in Seoul during August. The April meeting focused on keeping the current troop levels, touched on the military upgrade plans that were presented to Congress, and hinted that the relationship needed to adapt to new challenges.⁴⁴⁷ The August meeting went further concerning plans to expand the alliance beyond the military, with Lee urging for more cooperation on the 'maintenance of peace, eradicating terrorism, climate change, and nonproliferation', and Bush adding that 'transformation involves realigning our forces here in Korea, improving the interoperability of our forces, as well as preparing for Korea to take on greater operational responsibilities in times of conflict'.⁴⁴⁸

A March 2007 speech by South Korean Foreign Minister Song Min-soon maintained the idea that the US is an indispensable security partner, as he reinforced the US status as a key ally for South Korea.⁴⁴⁹ He gave more insight into how the alliance evolved, praising the initiation of the Strategic Consultation for Allied Partnership, annual dialogues between

⁴⁴⁵ Marie Huhtala, 'U.S.-Asia Relations: The Next Four Years', 11 February 2005

⁴⁴⁶ WH, NSS, 40

⁴⁴⁷ Bush, 'News Conference Lee Myung-bak', 19 April 2008

⁴⁴⁸ Bush, 'The President's News Conference With President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea in Seoul', 6 August 2008

⁴⁴⁹ Song Min-soon, 'A Vision for the Future', 2 March 2007

Foreign Ministers, and the annual Security Consultative Meetings. He added that he hoped South Korea would be more independent in the alliance in the future.⁴⁵⁰

A June 2007 speech by Song in Seoul expanded on the role of the US-South Korea relationship. He said the ‘Korea-U.S. alliance has been seen as one of the most successful post-World War II alliances. Such assessment is shared by the peoples of both Korea and the United States, and there is a consensus on that view in the international community as a whole’. He added that the alliance had provided economic and military stability to the Korean peninsula and East Asia. On the issue of growing scepticism in South Korea concerning the alliance, he claimed that had been a ‘blessing in disguise’, allowing the two to improve the relationship. He argued that the alliance was not rigid – quite the contrary, the occasional disagreement between the two sides allowed for the alliance to develop and become better.⁴⁵¹

More notably, the US and South Korea agreed to transition wartime operational control from Washington to Seoul by 17 April 2012.⁴⁵² It should be noted that the US and South Korea have a combined military command, and that if war breaks out on the peninsula, Koreans claim they do not have full sovereignty over their own military forces. The end of the Bush years were marked by the occasional hint at the US ceding operational control. This would not happen throughout the Bush, Obama, or Trump administrations, despite occasional attempts and new deadlines. The issue remains contentious and poses a series of logistical challenges.⁴⁵³ Reviewing the US-South Korea alliance relations in a June 2008 speech, Foreign Minister Yu Myung-hwan, claimed that the ‘strategic importance of the ROK-U.S. alliance should not be overlooked under any circumstances’. He added that ‘The ROK-U.S. alliance is the “safety valve” maintaining peace in Northeast Asia at a time when the North

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Song, ‘Speech by H.E. Song Min-soon at a Breakfast Lecture Meeting hosted by the Korean-American Association Korea and the United States: An Enduring and Evolving Alliance’, 21 June 2007

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Yoon Sukjoon, ‘6 Myths About OPCON Transfer and the US-South Korea Alliance’, *The Diplomat*, 25 September 2019

Korean nuclear threat still remains and regional cooperation and conflicts coexist in the region'.⁴⁵⁴

The US and the Philippines

When the US had to downgrade its military presence in the Philippines in the early 1990s, it seemed like the bilateral alliance would drift away with time, becoming something symbolic, like the US-New Zealand security ties. This was not the case. The new focus on terrorism provided the US and the Philippines with a chance to work together on an area where they cooperated before: counterterrorism operations. The Bush years would actually yield an improvement in the alliance – the Philippines would be granted Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) status by the US. On the negative side, US strategy for Asia placed the Philippines strongly in the regional category of Southeast Asian affairs, a logical move, but it was also one that removed the Philippines from the strategic conception of the San Francisco System as a common front of allied nations. It conveyed the idea that the US had an even more regional conception of the Philippines' role in its alliance infrastructure than it had for South Korea.

As Acting Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Public Affairs Thomas Hubbard noted, the US praised the Philippines for its free press, pointed out the strong trade relationship between the two countries, with the US being the largest trade partner and the largest foreign investor in the Philippines, and declared that the Visiting Forces Agreement

⁴⁵⁴ Yu Myung-hwan, 'Remarks by H.E. Yu Myung-hwan Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Republic of Korea At a Breakfast Lecture Meeting Hosted by the Korean-American Association', 19 June 2008

(VFA) would 'rebound' from its 1992 stalling. He expanded on how there was an interest from the US in modernizing the Philippines army.⁴⁵⁵

In the years that followed, Southeast Asia would become a region of key strategic interest for the US mainly due to counterterrorist operations. In 2003 testimony to the House International Relations Committee, Matthew Daley, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs offered praise to the Philippines, while also calling for more spending on security.⁴⁵⁶ Ambassador Cofer Black, Coordinator for Counterterrorism, also declared in testimony to the same committee that the Philippines, along with Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand were countries with which the US was working on training counterterrorist troops.⁴⁵⁷ The Bush administration continued this note of praise for the Philippines throughout its entire tenure.

Bush met with Macapagal-Arroyo in late 2001, and the two spoke of the history and values that bind their countries together. They described their defence treaty as 'vital in advancing peace and stability in the Asia Pacific for the past half a century'. They stated that the military alliance had been strengthened by the fight against terrorism.⁴⁵⁸ They met again in 2003, and the talking points were similar. One notable detail was that Bush referred to the Philippines as the first democracy in Asia, an important point to note, given that the US put a high premium on democratization.⁴⁵⁹

Aside from the formal aspects of the relationship, one key development in the alliance was the promotion of the Philippines to MNNA status. In a joint statement, the US

⁴⁵⁵ Thomas Hubbard, 'US-Philippine Relations: Opportunities to Enhance Our Enduring Partnership', 6 March 2001

⁴⁵⁶ Matthew Daley, 'U.S. Counterterrorism Policy for East Asia and the Pacific', 29 October 2003

⁴⁵⁷ Cofer Black, 'U.S. Counterterrorism Policy in Asia and the Pacific', 29 October 2003

⁴⁵⁸ Bush, 'Joint Statement Between President George W. Bush and President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippines on the 50th Anniversary of the U.S.-Philippine Alliance', 20 November 2001

⁴⁵⁹ Bush, 'Remarks at a Welcoming Ceremony for President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippines', 19 May 2003a

announced its intention to classify the Philippines as MNNA and expanded on its plans to help the country with developing its military.⁴⁶⁰ During a press conference with Macapagal-Arroyo, Bush declared he appreciated the support of the Philippines in the Iraq war, and that the US was considering deploying troops in the southern part of the Philippines to help with counterterrorist operations, reminding the press that it wouldn't be the first time the US has undertaken such actions, and there was a good record of positive results. Bush claimed the Philippines was dealing with terrorism before the war on terror and tried to contextualize US help as being part of a broader issue.⁴⁶¹ This was true, as the Philippines had its own problems with Islamic terrorist groups in Mindanao, commonly known as the Southern Philippines. The conflict raged for decades, starting in 1968, so US help on the issue was nothing new.⁴⁶²

As stated before, the US NSS decided to sidestep the traditional format of the San Francisco alliance network and group the countries of Southeast Asia separately from Japan, Australia, or South Korea.⁴⁶³ The problem for the US-Philippines alliance consisted of the decision in Manila to withdraw from Iraq. The country sent a 'humanitarian contingent' of 51 to Iraq, and the kidnapping of one Filipino truck driver prompted a decision by Macapagal-Arroyo to give in to demands for the Philippines to withdraw.⁴⁶⁴ Most likely due to the small presence in the region to begin with, the US did not react too negatively to the development. Revere told a crowd in Baltimore that in spite of the withdrawal, the alliance was strong.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁰ Bush, 'Joint Statement Between the United States of America and the Republic of the Philippines', 19 May 2003b

⁴⁶¹ Bush, 'The President's News Conference With President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippines', 19 May 2003c

⁴⁶² Don Kirk, 'Estrada Vows to Crush Remnants of Muslim Force on Mindanao', *New York Times*, 19 July 2000

⁴⁶³ WH, NSS, 40

⁴⁶⁴ Rory McCarthy, 'Philippines begins Iraq withdrawal', *The Guardian*, 14 July 2004

⁴⁶⁵ Revere, 'U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities', 3 May 2005

The US and Thailand

As was the case with the Philippines, the US and Thailand saw counterterrorism as the best area of cooperation. As was again the case with the Philippines, this cooperation on an area where the two allies worked together before would bring something new to the alliance in the form of elevating Thailand to MNNA status. With Thailand, it is possible to see the Cold War orthodoxy yet again: the country was still being plagued by coups but the US remained true to its Cold War conclusion that Thailand's coups would be palace coups, temporary in nature, and with little risk to the alliance. In that sense, the US would often reduce the amount of financial support it offered Thailand, or end some military cooperation programs, only to attempt to restart them years later, once the country's political situation stabilised.

During a speech given in Washington DC, Kelly expanded on how US-Thailand relations would look after the 9/11 attacks. Operation Enduring Freedom was a very positive development in the alliance, with Kelly noting that Thailand opened its airspace and ports for US troops to move into the Middle East. He also pointed out that counterterrorism was just one side of the relationship, and that the US and Thailand also found a lot of common ground on counternarcotics. As was typically the case with the Bush administration and US allies, Kelly spoke of the shared norms and values between the US and Thailand, pointing out the country's open society, its prosperity, and strength.⁴⁶⁶

In a joint statement published by the US and Thailand, shared values, the fight against terrorism, and closer economic ties were the main objectives stressed. Another notable point was the US goal of turning Thailand into a regional economic hub.⁴⁶⁷ A 2003 joint statement pointed out the fact that the US was considering adding Thailand to the MNNA list and welcomed Thailand's contributions to the Iraq war. Aside from praising against the fight on

⁴⁶⁶ Kelly, 'U.S.-Thai Relations After September 11, 2001', 13 March 2002

⁴⁶⁷ Bush, 'Joint Statement Between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Thailand', 14 December 2001

terrorism in general, the statement hinted that there could be cooperation between the two on Korean denuclearization.⁴⁶⁸ In an interview with Thepchai Yong of Thailand's Nation TV, Bush expanded on ideas about the alliance. He confirmed that Thailand's counterterrorism strategy was what convinced him to offer the country MNNA status. As was the case with many other countries, Thailand also displayed internal opposition to Bush's policies. When asked about his opinion on that, Bush offered a similar rationale to that used when responding to opposition encountered in Australia, claiming that protest is a healthy manifestation of democracy: 'first of all, a society which allows for people to express themselves is the kind of society I admire. I don't expect everybody to agree with my policies, and I appreciate the fact that they are able to express themselves. I'm not so sure I agree with their desire to have me arrested'. Bush tried to allude to certain failed attempts at the UN to coerce Iraq into backing down from its presumed nuclear program, as a reason why he had no other option but to pursue the military strategy.⁴⁶⁹

The alliance hit a roadblock following a coup d'état in Thailand in 2006, but, it largely returned to normal by the end of the Bush administration. The improving trend in the alliance with Thailand was noted by Revere, as well as President Bush, who met with Thailand Prime Minister Thaksin Chinnawat in September 2005.⁴⁷⁰ The two agreed to work together to halt the increase in weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and also looked forward to signing a free trade agreement.⁴⁷¹ Bush claimed the 'Prime Minister is a person who believes in markets and free enterprise and freedom', and that the free trade agreement was the main priority.⁴⁷² The US NSS claimed that it celebrated both economic dynamism and political

⁴⁶⁸ Bush, 'Joint Statement Between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Thailand', 11 June 2003

⁴⁶⁹ Bush, 'Interview With Thepchai Yong of Thailand's Nation TV', 14 October 2003

⁴⁷⁰ Revere, 'U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities', 3 May 2005

⁴⁷¹ Bush, 'Joint Statement by President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Thaksin Chinnawat of Thailand', 19 September 2005

⁴⁷² Bush, 'Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Thaksin Chinnawat of Thailand', 19 September 2005b

freedom when working with ‘our allies and key friends, including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand’.⁴⁷³

Unfortunately for the US and Thailand’s plans, on 19 September, 2006, while the Prime Minister was at the UN, the military staged a coup d’état, and later claimed that the ‘government is no longer administering the country’, and that the Prime Minister ‘will not return to Thailand for the time being’. Thailand has a long history of military coups, experiencing 17 of them since 1932, with the most recent one taking place in 1991.⁴⁷⁴ An October 2006 statement by the White House concerning the coup developments displayed US concerns about ‘restrictions on civil liberties, provisions in the draft constitution that appear to give the military an ongoing and influential role in decision-making, and the lengthy timetable for democratic elections’. The US also imposed sanctions in accordance with Section 508 of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, and called for ‘clear and unambiguous protection for civil liberties by the interim authorities and the military, and a quick return to democratic elections’.⁴⁷⁵

Following the coup, Prime Minister Thaksin Chinnawat’s party, the Thai Rak Thai, was banned. Eventually, the military allowed for the organisation of new elections in 2007, in a move that can be seen as an apparent return by Thailand to its democratic status. A review of the impact of the sanctions imposed by the US on Thailand showed that the economic downturn experienced was statistically insignificant, with approximately \$35 million being withheld, and the US deciding to continue to offer Thailand \$34 million in assistance programs.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷³ WH, NSS, 41

⁴⁷⁴ Peter Walker, ‘Thai military claims control after coup’, *The Guardian*, 19 September 2006

⁴⁷⁵ Bush, “Statement by the Press Secretary on Thai Coup Developments”, 3 October 2006

⁴⁷⁶ Eric John, ‘The Impact of Section 508 Sanctions on Thailand and Fiji: Helpful or Harmful to U.S. Relations?’, 1 August 2007

By 2008, US-Thailand relations seemed to have returned to normal. During a briefing by Dennis Wilder on one of Bush's trips to Asia in July, he offered praise for Thailand's return to democracy.⁴⁷⁷ Bush also visited Bangkok in August 2008, and met with newly-elected Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej, urged the need for a strengthening of the military ties between the two countries, expanding the relationship beyond the military side, and offered praise for the help with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, noting that counterterrorism has brought them together.⁴⁷⁸ When offering remarks after his meeting, Bush pointed out that Thailand was the oldest US ally in Asia, and that the values of 'freedom and openness' bring the two countries together. Democracy, along with economic freedom, were also positive aspects that helped improve interactions.⁴⁷⁹

The US and India

During the Cold War, India was a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, claiming not to be a supporter of either of the Cold War powers. Realistically, India had cultivated strong defence ties with the USSR, which always were a red flag for the Americans. By the time of the Bush years, questions were being raised concerning India's nuclearization plans, and the implications that would have for the US' traditional ally in the region, Pakistan. What was perhaps most surprising was just how swift most of the worries went away, as the US and India would begin to cooperate more, starting a process that would have considerable implications for Asia's security in the future.

Beginning in 2005, the Bush administration tried to improve its relationship with India. In testimony to the House International Relations Committee, Assistant Secretary for South

⁴⁷⁷ Bush, 'Press Briefing', 30 July 2008

⁴⁷⁸ Bush, 'Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej of Thailand in Bangkok, Thailand', 6 August 2008b

⁴⁷⁹ Bush, 'Remarks in Bangkok', 7 August 2008

Asian Affairs Christina Rocca claimed in June that the year 'is a watershed year in U.S.-India relations', and that it would be marked by mutual visits and more cooperation on defence and technology. She added that the US saw India as a world power in the 21st century, and urged the country to lower its high tariffs so that trade between the two could improve.⁴⁸⁰ In July 2005, Bush had a meeting with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, a meeting described as 'one of the most important visits of the year', considering that India is 'one of our most important partners worldwide', according to Undersecretary of State for Asian Affairs at the NSC, Nick Burns, who went on to add that the two countries are brought together by their democratic regimes.⁴⁸¹

Later that year, in October 2005, while addressing the Asia Society in New York City, Burns spoke about India joining the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The first objective was to ensure compliance before there could be talk of full adherence. Burns also added that the US approach to India was not meant as a counterweight to China, instead it was a result of the shared values between the two, and had economic interests.⁴⁸² Burns expanded on his points, saying that support for the US was not a partisan issue in India. He called India a 'natural partner' for the US on counterterrorism, and welcomed the greater role India was playing in global affairs, especially by helping with the reconstruction of Afghanistan, among others.⁴⁸³

In 2006, the cooperation became stronger. During a February 2006 interview with Doordarshan, India's public service broadcaster, Bush pointed out that 'both of us have to convince our respective people it's in the interest to have a civilian nuclear program supported by the United States and India, as well as a civilian nuclear program that's separate

⁴⁸⁰ Christina Rocca, 'U.S. Policy Toward South Asia', 14 June 2005

⁴⁸¹ Bush, 'Press Briefing on the President's Meeting with Prime Minister Singh of India by Nick Burns, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs and Mike Green, Senior Director for Asian Affairs at the NSC', 18 July 2005

⁴⁸² Nicholas Burns, 'Question and Answer Session Following Speech at Asia Society', 18 October 2005

⁴⁸³ Burns, 'The U.S. and India: The New Strategic Partnership', 18 October 2005a

from a military program in India', speaking about a need for both him and the Indian Prime Minister to support the NPT.⁴⁸⁴ A March 2006 joint statement between the US and India called for more trade, especially on agriculture, energy, and innovation, as well as better cooperation on democratic initiatives.⁴⁸⁵ A March 2006 fact sheet on the US and India strategic partnership also added details on security cooperation, particularly maritime development, counterterrorism, logistics support, defence trade, and non-proliferation.⁴⁸⁶ Bush gave remarks in New Delhi on March 2006, pointing out the connection between the 'world's oldest democracy to the world's largest democracy', and *de facto* putting an end to any rivalry that might have existed between the two.⁴⁸⁷

By 2008, the nuclear tensions that had existed had been largely alleviated. Remarks by Evan Feigenbaum, Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs in April 2008 in Washington DC, made the claim that the US no longer regarded India as simply a South Asian country, instead, more like a regional power, one that should have a voice within the G8.⁴⁸⁸ An earlier interview by Feigenbaum with Times Now Television of India provided a chance for him to expand on his optimism concerning a nuclear deal.⁴⁸⁹ Similarly, during remarks to the press on the nuclear issue by Assistant Secretary for Central Asia Affairs, Richard Boucher, he added that 'the authoritative voice on this is Senator Biden. He's chairman of the committee in the Congress that handles foreign affairs and he probably knows better than any what we have to do'.⁴⁹⁰ The fundamental change in US strategy, to embrace India under Bush, would become a permanent one, as Barack Obama

⁴⁸⁴ Bush, 'Interview With Doordarshan of India', 24 February 2006

⁴⁸⁵ Bush, 'Joint Statement Between the United States of America and India', 2 March 2006

⁴⁸⁶ Bush, 'Fact Sheet: United States and India: Strategic Partnership', 2 March 2006b

⁴⁸⁷ Bush, 'Remarks in New Delhi', 3 March 2006

⁴⁸⁸ Feigenbaum, Evan, 'Strategic Context of U.S.-India Relations', 7 April 2008

⁴⁸⁹ Feigenbaum, 'U.S.-India Relations', 25 March 2008

⁴⁹⁰ Richard Boucher, 'Indian and U.S. Relations', 5 March 2005

and the Presidents that followed would uphold that level of engagement, and even develop it further.

The Quad 1.0

The San Francisco System weathered the Bush years quite well to find a new purpose. The Quad, however, did not. The Quad had its origins in naval cooperation. The Tsunami Core Group of 2004-2005, a platform for coordination following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, served as the one of the very first iterations of what would be Quad 1.0. Years later, Japanese officials, with Abe in the driver's seat, made a push for better cooperation between democracies in the Indo-Pacific. Indian Prime Minister Singh followed suit. It was only a matter of time until Cheney and Bush started exploring turning the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue between the US, Japan and Australia of 2002 into a platform that would work with India. May 2007 marked the only exploratory meeting of the Quad, and with it, rumours of an 'Asian NATO' began, strong Chinese opposition emerged, and eventually, a few months later, the Quad 1.0 came to an end. Abe lost power, Singh became sceptical of aligning too much with the US due to domestic reasons, Rudd was not completely sold on it, and the US decided to stick with the earlier trilateral.⁴⁹¹

The reason was a tacit agreement among all of its members that there was nothing there for the Quad to compete with. China, at the time, was still viewed as a friendly, cooperative country, just a few years away from joining the western powers as a reformed democracy. It is perhaps unsurprising that while the San Francisco System did so well, the Quad did poorly. The San Francisco System, for better or for worse, found something to compete against:

⁴⁹¹ Tanvi Madan, 'The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the "Quad"', *War on the Rocks*, 16 November 2017

terrorism. With the Quad, the conclusion was that it ran the risk of doing more harm than good.

Rudd and Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo held a joint meeting in June 2008 and agreed to continue ministerial consultations, deepening not just military ties, but also economic ties, through the Economic Partnership Agreement / Free Trade Agreement they had just signed. An interesting element was the manner in which security ties were framed, insisting on how 'Japan and Australia both maintained alliance relationships with the United States, the two Prime Ministers emphasised the strategic value of promoting bilateral security and defence cooperation between Japan and Australia'. Both of them emphasized the importance of making sure that the US would remain present in the region's security architecture, to enhance trilateral cooperation.⁴⁹²

The emergence of this new strategic dialogue was welcomed by the US.⁴⁹³ When addressing the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies in April 2006, Bush was asked how he planned to address eventual concerns by China concerning Secretary of State Rice's meeting with her Japanese and Australian counterparts. Bush responded evasively.⁴⁹⁴ A month earlier, Rice tried to ease concerns from China regarding the trilateral, claiming that Japan and China need to work together more, and that the trilateral does not only focus on Asia, but on the Middle East as well.⁴⁹⁵

During a September 2007 meeting with Hu Jintao in Sydney, Prime Minister Howard also tried to downplay the dangers the trilateral posed to China, claiming that the security

⁴⁹² Rudd, 'Joint Statement with Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda of Japan and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, on Comprehensive Strategic, Security and Economic Partnership', 12 June 2008b

⁴⁹³ Hill, "North East Asia", 26 May 2005

⁴⁹⁴ Bush, 'Remarks at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies and a Question-and-Answer Session', 10 April 2006

⁴⁹⁵ Howard, 'Joint Press Conference with Rice', 17 March 2006

agreement was not meant to counter anyone in particular.⁴⁹⁶ The trilateral structure was supported by Prime Minister Rudd in a June 2008 speech in Tokyo, where he called for more military and logistical exercises between the three.⁴⁹⁷ Rudd, on the other hand, opposed the addition of India to the trilateral. In an interview with ABC Radio Canberra's *Newshour*, he claimed that the quadrilateral agreement was not being formally advanced by anyone, implying that there was no reason to cancel the talks between the US, Japan, Australia, and India, because there was nothing to cancel in the first place. He called the agreement unproductive given the current circumstances.⁴⁹⁸ Rudd was right. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue would become relevant roughly a decade later.

In spite of the Quad's faltering, the road was being paved for its re-emergence through increases in what can be called 'inter-spokes cooperation' – cooperation between members of the San Francisco System. The year 2001 marked the beginning of a new level of cooperation between Japan and Australia. During a speech in Sydney at the Australia-Japan conference, Howard spoke of how the relationship was good, but it needed to be closer. He acknowledged a difference in culture, but he said that common goals could overcome it. He pointed out that economic ties would be the main driver behind closer cooperation and declared that 'I continue to believe that the Australia-Japan partnership is one of the most important foundations of the region's stability and economic prosperity'. He went on to say that Asia needed a 'strong and confident Japan' in order to be stable.⁴⁹⁹ Later that year, Howard visited Japan and declared during a speech in Tokyo that the help from Japan with the crisis in East

⁴⁹⁶ Howard, 'Joint Press Conference with the President of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency Hu Jintao, Phillip Street, Sydney', 6 September 2007

⁴⁹⁷ Rudd, "Press Conference, Tokyo", 12 June 2008

⁴⁹⁸ Rudd, 'Interview with Jim Middleton, Newshour, ABC Radio Canberra Australian Foreign Policy', 20 February 2008

⁴⁹⁹ Howard, 'Address at the Australia-Japan Conference The Quay Restaurant, Sydney', 29 April 2001

Timor was important for Australia. He took advantage of the meeting to discuss trade on oil and gas.⁵⁰⁰

Koizumi and Howard met in Canberra in 2002 and put forward a joint statement expanding on how ‘Japan and Australia share common values, especially democracy, freedom, and as such we fight together against terrorism’. Being closer to Australia was part of Koizumi’s East Asia Community plan, an attempt to build bridges among most countries in the Asia-Pacific.⁵⁰¹ In a joint press conference, the two declared that the fight against terrorism brought their countries together, and that Australia supported Japan’s attempts to obtain a place at the UN Security Council. Both spoke of improving their trade relationships, and they stressed their ‘core alliances’ with the US and hope the US would stay engaged in Asia.⁵⁰² The two would meet again in 2003 and welcome their ‘epoch-making’ trade agreements, as well as shared values and cooperation on fighting terrorism.⁵⁰³ At this meeting, Howard claimed that the relationship needs to move forward from an economic one to a security one, declaring that North Korea’s denuclearization was a topic that brought the two countries together.⁵⁰⁴ It is clear that some building blocks in the Japan-Australia relationship were established during the first Bush term, and they took place on terms that the Bush administration supported, such as security cooperation and free trade.

The US was aware that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan made cooperation between Japan and Australia easier.⁵⁰⁵ Howard spoke of Japan-Australia ties during a visit to Japan and reminded people of the three-way security agreement with the US that had been agreed

⁵⁰⁰ Howard, ‘Press Conference - Hotel Okura, Tokyo’, 3 August 2001

⁵⁰¹ Koizumi, ‘Opening Statement by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Prime Minister John Howard of Australia at the joint Press Conference’, May 1 2002a

⁵⁰² Koizumi, ‘Joint Press Statement by Prime Minister John Howard and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’, May 1 2002b

⁵⁰³ Koizumi, ‘Japan-Australia Joint Press Conference’, 16 July 2003

⁵⁰⁴ Howard, ‘Joint Press Conference with Prime Minister Koizumi, Prime Minister’s Official Residence, Japan’, 16 July 2003

⁵⁰⁵ Revere, ‘U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities’, 3 May 2005

upon a few years before and that all sides were pleased with it.⁵⁰⁶ In 2007, Japan and Australia signed a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, which ‘identifies a range of cooperative activities to deepen the strategic partnership between Australia and Japan’. It would also ‘enhance policy coordination on security issues in the Asia-Pacific and beyond and expand practical cooperation in areas including defence, law enforcement, counter-terrorism, counter proliferation, peace operations and the exchange of strategic assessments and related information’.⁵⁰⁷

Rudd also presented the Japan-Australia relationship in positive terms during a visit to Japan. He said in June 2008 during a press conference in Tokyo that both countries have a number of economic, political, and strategic similarities.⁵⁰⁸ When he announced the Asia-Pacific Community, Rudd spoke of Japan as a ‘core priority’ for Australia, claiming that ‘from our trade treaty in 1957, through to working together to establish APEC in the 1980s under Bob Hawke's leadership, and to our security cooperation, developments in our relationship with Japan have been at the forefront of our regional engagement’.⁵⁰⁹

In 2001, Japan and India also began improving their relationship. Starting in late 2001, Japan and India put forward a joint declaration, requiring the relationship to reach a new ‘qualitative’ level. Japan and India expanded on ‘the ideas of democracy and market economy, the spirit of tolerance, receptivity to diversity and the wisdom to benefit from the distinctive characteristics of their civilizations and cultures’ they have in common. They agreed to hold yearly foreign ministry meetings, more comprehensive security dialogues, and establish friendship groups in their parliaments. The two were not just united in their opposition to terrorism, but also in their opposition to weapons of mass destruction, support

⁵⁰⁶ Howard, ‘Press Conference Imperial Hotel, Tokyo’, 20 April 2005

⁵⁰⁷ Howard, ‘Security Cooperation with Japan’, 9 September 2007

⁵⁰⁸ Rudd, ‘Press Conference, Tokyo’, 12 June 2008

⁵⁰⁹ Rudd, ‘Address to the Asia Society’, 4 June 2008

for the UN, and the principles of free trade.⁵¹⁰ These developments are key to understanding how the Quad came to be, because they paved the way for better cooperation between its members.

It can also be argued that the road was being paved for Quad Plus, and for this, a note needs to be made of cooperation among other San Francisco System member countries, such as Australia and the Philippines. The two countries share religious ties, an opposition to communism, they both consider themselves maritime countries, tend to favour multilateralism, they are US allies, and both have had problems with domestic political tensions.⁵¹¹ The relationship had not always been positive, since the Australian push for ANZUS contrasted strongly with the Philippines wanting a Pacific Pact. The US bilateral alliances with the Philippines can be considered a concession given the fact that the country wasn't allowed to join ANZUS. For what it's worth, Australia had no major opposition to the Philippines joining ANZUS, but the US opposed the decision, being of the opinion that a multilateral framework would benefit more.⁵¹² The 9/11 attacks made the two countries work together on defence issues, and the Philippines began to actively court Australia and Japan for more cooperation. Treaties of substance would only occur a decade later.⁵¹³ In May 2007, Howard was visited by Macapagal-Arroyo in the Parliament in Canberra. The two expanded on their countries' shared history, from the Second World War to the current problems with terrorism. Both made a push for more multilateralism.⁵¹⁴ Howard also visited India in March

⁵¹⁰ Koizumi, 'Japan- India Joint Declaration', 10 December 2001

⁵¹¹ Dan Halvorson, Lucy West, "A retrospective on the Australia-Philippines political and security relationship: on Canberra's terms?", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 2020, Vol.74.5, 559

⁵¹² Ibid. 562-563

⁵¹³ Ibid. 569

⁵¹⁴ Howard, 'Joint Press Conference with Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo President of the Republic of the Philippines Parliament House, Canberra', 31 May 2007

2006, and held a press conference with Prime Minister Singh, stressing the need for closer security cooperation between Australia and India.⁵¹⁵

Australia and South Korea hinted at having closer relations during an August 2008 visit by Rudd to Seoul. He said the relationship was very developed economically, and that it should grow politically as well.⁵¹⁶ Rudd also pointed out that the two countries are middle powers who rely on trade and are both democracies, and therefore should look for opportunities to expand their security and political engagements.⁵¹⁷

Abe visited the Philippines on December 2006, and claimed that the two not only shared the same values and norms, but that they should trust each other more and form a common front within the international community. He also hinted that the two shared the same challenges, from North Korea to terrorism.⁵¹⁸ Foreign Minister Aso Taro previously said in July 2006 that Japan wanted to play a more active role in the Philippines' peace process in Mindanao, by sending an International Monitoring Team (IMT) and helping with economic and social development.⁵¹⁹

In August 2007, Abe Shinzo made a very important visit to New Delhi, India, and made his 'Confluence of the Two Seas' speech, which was regarded as one of the biggest attempts between Japan and India to form closer ties. Shared norms and a common view on Asia's trade policies and security architecture were presented as grounds for bringing the two countries closer.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁵ Howard, 'Joint Press Conference with Dr Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India Hyderabad House, New Delhi', 6 March 2006

⁵¹⁶ Rudd, 'Press Conference', 11 August 2008b

⁵¹⁷ Rudd, 'Speech to a Dinner Hosted by Business Groups Seoul, Republic of Korea', 11 August 2008c

⁵¹⁸ Abe 'Press Conference', 9 December 2006

⁵¹⁹ Aso, Taro, 'Remarks by H.E. Foreign Minister Taro Aso on the Occasion of Friendship Day Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Normalization of Diplomatic Relations Between Japan and the Philippines', 23 July 2006

⁵²⁰ Abe, 'Confluence of the Two Seas', 22 August 2007

The Pacific Dream and strategic culture

Bush's vision of the Pacific Dream most closely resembles the principles espoused by Ford, especially if one looks at how the US managed its relationship with China. It is clear the US understood that Asia was a place it did not have to disengage from. It is also obvious that terrorism and the Middle East had almost completely taken over the Bush administration's foreign policy rationale. This was not sustainable, and its only benefit was providing the US and its allies with time to make the argument that there still was value in maintaining their alliances.

If the emergence of the Quad was an interesting development for the region, there were other signals of integration that the US and its allies have missed out on. The failures of these bodies had implications for the future geopolitics of the region. Calls for closer integration came from all three major allies, as Japan, Australia, and South Korea called for the establishment of Asian communities. During a meeting in Beijing to discuss trade talks between Australia and China, John Howard talked about Australia's desire to join the East Asia Summit (EAS). The EAS is a regional forum that serves as a China-backed attempt to pursue regional integration from a position of leadership, an alternative to the East Asian Community (EAC), a proposed trade bloc that would enhance ASEAN, and be led by Japan. Howard claimed that Australia was willing to join the EAS and hoped China would support its bid to enter the group.⁵²¹ Australia would be accepted in 2005. During a September speech in New York City, Howard emphasized that what matters is 'substance of relations between countries, more so than the formal architecture of any diplomatic exchange'.⁵²²

During a June 2008 meeting in Sydney, Rudd reiterated Australian plans for an Asian community that would also encompass the US. He claimed Australia needed to 'have a vision

⁵²¹ Howard, 'Doorstop Interview Great Hall of the People, Beijing, China', 19 April 2005

⁵²² Howard, 'Address to the Asia Society', 12 September 2005

for an Asia Pacific Community’, which would consist of a ‘regional institution which spans the entire Asia-Pacific region - including the United States, Japan, China India, Indonesia and the other states of the region’, and that was capable of ‘dialogue, cooperation and action on economic and political matters and future challenges related to security’.⁵²³ Rudd later met with Japanese Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo, and the two spoke positively about the Australian plans for integration, and Rudd thanked ‘Japan for their positive response to the proposal and the discussions associated with the proposal that I put forward for an Asia Pacific community’.⁵²⁴

In August 2008, during a visit to Seoul, the press challenged Rudd on whether his plans were too ambitious. He downplayed his initial remarks, claiming that his push was for an invitation to dialogue.⁵²⁵ He continued backtracking on his ambitions for the Asia Pacific Community, claiming that the ‘concept here as outlined in the original speech is not for a political union, it's not for a monetary union, its not for a customs union and its not for an economic union. It is however a long term goal for 2020 to have a body across the Asia Pacific region which enables all of the countries of the region to cooperate not just on economic matters but on political and security matters as well’.⁵²⁶

Japan was pushing for closer integration at around the same time. Koizumi Junichiro gave remarks on how Asian integration would look in May 2005, and claimed that ‘the creation of an East Asian community in the future is becoming an important common agenda for the region’. The first East Asia Summit was scheduled to take place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in December 2005. On that topic, Koizumi claimed ‘I would like to confirm in Kuala Lumpur

⁵²³ Rudd, ‘Address to the Asia Society AustralAsia Centre, Sydney: It's time to build an Asia Pacific Community’, 4 June 2008

⁵²⁴ Rudd, ‘Remarks Following Meeting with Prime Minister Fukuda, Tokyo’, 12 June 2008

⁵²⁵ Rudd, ‘Press Conference, Seoul, Republic of Korea’, 11 August 2008b

⁵²⁶ Rudd, ‘Press Conference, Asan Medical Centre - Cochlear Clinic Seoul, Republic of Korea’, 11 August 2008d

with all the country leaders a basic concept of regional cooperation – one that envisages the creation of an East Asian community in the future’.⁵²⁷

Aso Taro advertised the idea during a December 2005 speech. Japan had joined the EAS – along with another 16 countries – and tried to shape it according to its values. The EAS consists of all members of ASEAN – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, along with China, Japan, Australia, India, New Zealand, South Korea, the United States, and Russia.⁵²⁸ Aso pointed out that while the prospect of European-style integration was unlikely, there were many other avenues for cooperation.⁵²⁹

During visits to the US and Singapore, Japanese Foreign Minister Fukuda Yasuo tried to advertise Asian integration in a way that would be appealing to the US. He claimed that a ‘peaceful and prosperous Asia, an open Asia, will be in the interest not just of Japan but of Asian countries as a whole, and of the entire international community including the United States of America’. He added that ‘the Japan-US alliance will be conducive in expanding the scope of activity for Japan in Asia, and also good Japan-Asia relations will be beneficial for the Japan-US alliance as well’.⁵³⁰

By May 2006, Aso Taro reiterated his view of the need of an Asian community in a speech at CSIS in Washington DC. He claimed Japan’s ‘goal in the region is clear: we seek to create “stable and prosperous East Asia”. This can only be achieved by cooperation among all of our partners who have stakes in the region's future, and the Japan-U.S. Alliance will

⁵²⁷ Koizumi ‘Remarks by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi at ‘The Future of Asia’ Conference Dinner (May 25) Hosted by the Nihon Keizai Shimbun’, 25 May 2005

⁵²⁸ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, “EAS Factsheet”

⁵²⁹ Aso, ‘Asian Strategy As I See It’, 7 December 2005

⁵³⁰ Fukuda Yasuo, ‘Press Conference by Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda Following His Visits to the United States and Singapore’, 21 November 2007

continue to play an irreplaceable role therein'.⁵³¹ He added, whatever form the multilateral regional framework would take, it would need to be inclusive of China, and not a mechanism for power politics. Aso also outlined five policy objectives that would strengthen cooperation, and they consisted of strengthening the US alliance, deeper cooperation with China, more regional cooperation, better strategic relations between Japan and India, and resolving the problems with North Korea.⁵³²

A December 2006 speech by Prime Minister Abe following a visit to the Philippines gave an impression of how Japan sees regional integration. Abe claimed that concerning 'frameworks for regional economic partnership in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific, we have for example ASEAN+3, that encompasses Japan, China and Korea plus the ASEAN countries. We also have the East Asia Summit (EAS) framework, which on top of the first framework also involves Australia, New Zealand and India. Then we have the idea of the Asia-Pacific as a whole, which was discussed at the APEC economic leaders meeting held recently'.⁵³³ Abe would return to his points in his 2007 landmark speech in New Delhi, India. There, he claimed that 'Japan and India coming together in this way, this "broader Asia" will evolve into an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the United States of America and Australia. Open and transparent, this network will allow people, goods, capital, and knowledge to flow freely'.⁵³⁴

During a speech at the Lowy Institute in Sydney, Australia, in August 2006, South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon made a few points on how multilateralism can lead to better integration. He said that as 'demonstrated by close cooperation with the JUSCANZ (acronym of Japan-US-Canada-Australia-New Zealand) on key issues at the UN, as well as at

⁵³¹ Aso, "Working Together for a Stable and Prosperous East Asia" - Lessons of the Past, a Vision for the Freedom to Dream - Address by Foreign Minister Taro Aso Center for Strategic and International Studies', 3 May 2006

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Abe, 'Press Conference Following Visit to the Philippines', 9 December 2006

⁵³⁴ Abe, 'Confluence of the Two Seas', 22 August 2007

the APEC and the ARF, we share common positions on important political, social, economic and humanitarian issues'.⁵³⁵ The point Ban was making served as an attempt to support the UN, however, the inclinations toward cooperation were evident.

Beliefs, attitudes, actions

Despite what seemed like a notable change in the way the US perceives threats, the Bush years did not alter US strategic culture. At best, they provided a temporary change of focus. In terms of beliefs, the review is mixed. The US never moved away from viewing itself as a Pacific nation, still, the focus on the Middle East, and then Europe, relegated Asia to third place in US priorities. In terms of writing the rulebook for the Pacific, the US did not move away from its belief that it has a duty to shape the norms of the region. Moves like supporting China in joining the WTO reinforced said belief in its ability to act as the country that brings everyone together in the Pacific, according to its norms. Finally, US scepticism concerning China's authoritarian tendencies, as well as its constant reminding of its shared norms and values with its allies reinforced the notion that the US believed its norms and values were the best for the region.

In terms of attitudes, there are also some mixed results. As far as working with its allies, this held true when it came to forming a common ground against terrorism. Often, these positions were largely symbolic or declaratory, and they varied from case to case. The extent to which the US worked with its allies in Asia to combat terrorism also varied from case to case and was mostly limited to security issues. Concerning multilateral formats, the US was reluctant to join multilateral formats that it had not initiated. The eventual joining of the EAS and the subsequent disinterest of China showed the early stages of tension between

⁵³⁵ Ban Ki-Moon, 'New Direction of Korea-Australia Relations', 14 August 2006

the two concerning control. The third issue concerns whether the US ‘plays by its own rules’, if it displays hypocritical behavior. There were no major moments of the US actively disregarding its own diplomatic commitments.

In terms of practices, the Quad can be considered an example of the US trying to establish its own multilateral institutions, regardless of its failure. In terms of participation in the groups of others, it can be considered that the Quad was not a US creation, and its participation in it is an example of this. Finally, there is the matter of adherence to its own rhetoric. The US stayed true to its commitments not to provoke China, and it has rewarded allies that cooperated with it in terms of combating terrorism. It is difficult to say how, and the extent to which, the US rewarded allies that supported it in its pro-democracy agenda. Overall, the US focus on terrorism slightly altered its beliefs about Asia being the centre of its interests, even though this alteration was temporary. US attitudes in terms of working with its allies were in the early cooperative stages, with a minimal security focus. US practices were consistent with rhetoric for the most part.

Conclusion

To conclude, under Bush, the US was unwilling to contain China. The San Francisco System was a more appropriate mechanism for US ambitions than the Quad, with the latter not lasting more than a few years. Both Japan and Australia found a new sense of security purpose during this time. This is not surprising, given that both countries have atypical security situations which make them better suited to uphold the US security rationale. The US found a way for trade and security cooperation with South Korea. The Philippines and Thailand were promoted to MNNA status, which marked the peak of the San Francisco

System. Bush also normalized relations with India, which would pave the way for improved security cooperation in the future.

Bush espoused a vision for the Pacific Dream mainly influenced by Ford's Pacific Doctrine. Unfortunately, under Bush, the US did not focus on Asia primarily. Instead, it focused on the Middle East. This was the price for establishing terrorism as the *de facto* existential threat to US interests. Aside from this, the US was reluctant to participate in most forms of multinational security and economic cooperation that were not initiated by it.

Chapter 4. Obama's Asia strategy. A 'pivot' to multilateralism

'Why don't you "pivot" out of here?'

Dai Bingguo, China State Councillor for Foreign Affairs⁵³⁶

The Obama years were marked by two problems in terms of American foreign policy in Asia. Firstly, the US needed to convey the message that it was planning to make Asia a higher priority. Bush's Middle East focus created the impression that the US was not that interested in Asia. The Obama administration had to convey very clearly that the United States was willing to rebrand itself as the key power in Asia. The second problem concerned the manner in which the US would re-engage with Asia. For the first years of the Obama administration, the US did try to present its return to Asia as a development that did not threaten China. The prospect of confrontation and competition would nonetheless prove inescapable. The US and China had almost no option but to engage in a more confrontational stance, not only because of US desires to do so, but also because of American allies' insistence that the US return with a heavier military say. The reason for that was China itself, through its push for more influence in the South China Sea in particular. America wanted to return to Asia in a complete sense, but its 'return' was mostly military. One reason for that was the eventual failure of Obama's Trans-Pacific Partnership, an event that took place in part thanks to the administration that followed Obama.

The US and China

⁵³⁶ Hillary Clinton, *Hard Choices*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014, 79

Obama's early approach to China was strikingly similar to that of Bush. For the first years, the message was one of cohabitation, even in spite of China's eventual change in leadership, with Hu Jintao being replaced by Xi Jinping. What led to a change in stance was mainly the increasingly tense atmosphere over the South China Sea. The US NSS maintained a conciliatory stance toward China. It claimed the US 'will continue to pursue a positive, constructive, and comprehensive relationship with China'. The expectation that China would adhere to the 'responsible stakeholder' theory persisted, and the NSS hinted that the US would monitor the military modernization of China in order to ensure that its allies were not threatened. Even though the strategy outlined that the US 'will not agree on every issue, and we will be candid on our human rights concerns and areas where we differ', it also followed up with the idea that 'disagreements should not prevent cooperation on issues of mutual interest, because a pragmatic and effective relationship between the United States and China is essential to address the major challenges of the 21st century'.⁵³⁷ In other words, differences between the US and China were not expected to fundamentally derail the relationship.

In a July 2009 speech in Washington DC on the US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, Obama set the tone for what many in his administration hoped would be a cordial relationship. He claimed that the US and China 'have a comprehensive relationship that reflects the deepening ties among our people. [...] I believe that we are poised to make steady progress on some of the most important issues of our times'. He also refuted concerns that the US was trying to contain China:

Let us be honest: We know that some are wary of the future. Some in China think that America will try to contain China's ambitions; some in America think that there is something to fear in a rising China. I take a different view, and I believe President Hu takes a different view as well. I believe in a future

⁵³⁷ The White House, "National Security Strategy", May 2010, 43

where China is a strong, prosperous, and successful member of the community of nations, a future when our nations are partners out of necessity, but also out of opportunity. This future is not fixed, but it is a destination that can be reached if we pursue a sustained dialogue like the one that you will commence today and act on what we hear and what we learn.⁵³⁸

Obama met with Chinese President Hu Jintao once again in November 2009, during his visit to China. The US pointed out that ‘each country and its people have the right to choose their own path, and all countries should respect each other's choice of a development model’, a statement that validated China’s long-standing strategy of prioritizing sovereignty over transnational issues. When the issue of human rights came up, both sides expressed a need to work together, acknowledging their differences and their mutual respect.⁵³⁹ At another meeting, Obama added on the need to facilitate China’s emergence as a world power, claiming that the US ‘welcomes China's efforts in playing a greater role on the world stage, a role in which a growing economy is joined by growing responsibilities’.⁵⁴⁰

During his meeting with Hu in January 2011, Obama claimed that it would be best for the US and China to ensure that when one is successful, so is the other, further saying that China’s economic rise had benefits for the US as well, along with the Asia-Pacific. Hu once again reiterated that ‘China and the United States should respect each other's choice of development path and each other's core interests’.⁵⁴¹

Xi Jinping would become the most consequential PRC leader since Mao. When Obama and Xi had a call in March 2013, the tone was positive. Both promised to cooperate more on economic matters, and the US sent its Secretary of State and Secretary of Treasury

⁵³⁸ Barack Obama, “Remarks at the United States-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue”, 27 July 2009

⁵³⁹ Obama, ‘Joint Statement by the United States of America and the Republic of China’, 17 November 2009a

⁵⁴⁰ Obama, ‘Remarks Following a Meeting With President Hu Jintao of China in Beijing’, 17 November 2009b

⁵⁴¹ Obama, ‘Remarks at a Welcoming Ceremony for President Hu Jintao of China’, 19 January 2011a

to visit Beijing and work on improving the relationship.⁵⁴² The two met in June 2013, with senior Obama administration officials saying in a conference call that both sides wanted to avoid the risk of conflict between a great power and a rising power, and would establish a relationship that reflected that reality.⁵⁴³ During their meeting, Obama and Xi promised to continue their cordial relationship, and the Chinese President noted that the ‘China-U.S. relationship has reached a new historical starting point’.⁵⁴⁴ Xi also took the opportunity to advance his own vision, emphasizing that ‘China will work hard to realize the Chinese dream of the great national renewal and will work hard to push forward the noble cause of peace and development for all mankind’.⁵⁴⁵ This marked the clash of two ‘dreams’: one advocated by Kerry, which reinforced the US liberal order, and the one put forward by Xi, which emphasized a renewed China. The meeting was deemed of notable importance by National Security Advisor Tom Donilon, who called it ‘central to our Asia Pacific rebalancing strategy’. He claimed that the US strategy was to continue to engage with China, and that Xi expressed some interest in joining the TPP.⁵⁴⁶

Obama and Xi would meet again in Saint-Petersburg in September 2013, when Xi claimed he hoped the two countries would establish a new kind of relationship. This marked the beginning of the change in stance China would develop, seeking parity with the US. In November 2014, Obama visited Xi in Beijing. During their press conference, Xi claimed China wanted to play a bigger security role in Asia, saying that ‘the Pacific Ocean is broad enough to accommodate the development of both China and the United States, and our two countries should work together to contribute to security in Asia’. Obama claimed that he

⁵⁴² Obama, ‘Press Release - Readout of the President's Phone Call with Chinese President Xi Jinping’, 14 March 2013

⁵⁴³ Obama, ‘Background Conference Call by Senior Administration Officials on the President's Meetings with President Xi Jinping of China’, 4 June 2013

⁵⁴⁴ Obama, ‘Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Xi Jinping of China in Rancho Mirage, California’, 7 June 2013a

⁵⁴⁵ Obama, ‘Remarks Following a Meeting With President Xi Jinping of China and an Exchange With Reporters in Rancho Mirage, California’, 7 June 2013b

⁵⁴⁶ Obama, ‘Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Tom Donilon’, 8 June 2013

‘welcomes the continuing rise of a China that is peaceful, prosperous, and stable and that plays a responsible role in the world. And we don't just welcome it, we support it’. Obama added ‘a strong, cooperative relationship with China is at the heart of our pivot to Asia’.⁵⁴⁷

The increased assertiveness of China in the South China Sea, through its controversial ‘9 dash line’ claims, had led to territorial disputes with Brunei, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. It could be argued that the deteriorating situation here is what tilted the balance decisively in favour of confrontation, as this approach not only provoked US ire, it also prompted a response from multiple US treaty allies, such as Japan, Australia, and the Philippines. Tensions also increased in the East China Sea, where, in 2013, China designated a new Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) which led to strong condemnation from the US, Japan, and South Korea. The ADIZ made it possible for China to make a legal claim to intercepting planes flying into its newly claimed airspace, despite it not being recognized by any of its neighbours. The Obama administration was aware of the issue in December 2013, when Joe Biden’s visit to Asia covered a number of topics, the East China Sea among them.⁵⁴⁸ The US stated that it does not recognize the ADIZ.⁵⁴⁹ As a response to the Chinese manoeuvres, South Korea expanded its own ADIZ, a move that the US did not endorse.⁵⁵⁰ In an April 2014 joint statement, Obama and Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo⁵⁵¹ declared they ‘share strong concern over recent actions that have raised tensions in the East China Sea and South China Sea, such as the uncoordinated declaration of an Air

⁵⁴⁷ Obama, ‘The President's News Conference With President Xi Jinping of China in Beijing, China’, 12 November 2014

⁵⁴⁸ Obama, ‘Background Briefing’, 3 December 2013a

⁵⁴⁹ Obama, ‘Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on the Vice President's Asia Trip’, 4 December 2013

⁵⁵⁰ Obama, ‘Background Briefing By Senior Administration Officials on the Vice President's Trip to Asia’, 7 December 2013

⁵⁵¹ As of 1 January, 2020, Japan has reverted to its traditional naming convention, which uses the family name first, and the given name second. This thesis adheres to the new convention.

Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea. Our two countries oppose any attempt to assert territorial or maritime claims through the use of intimidation, coercion or force'.⁵⁵²

According to the US National Security Strategy, China was not perceived as a threat, instead, the US emphasized that it:

welcomes the rise of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous China. We seek cooperation on shared regional and global challenges such as climate change, public health, economic growth, and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. While there will be competition, we reject the inevitability of confrontation.⁵⁵³

The NSS description of China is striking when compared to INDOPACOM speeches on the threats the US faced in Asia. Admiral Samuel Locklear III, head of INDOPACOM, expressed greater scepticism concerning China's actions than the Obama administration would present. During testimony given to the House Armed Services Committee, Locklear stated that China is attempting to 'advance a vision for an alternative security architecture in Asia that affords Beijing increased influence in the region and diminishes the role of the United States'. China's strategy of creating artificial islands in order to expand its claims in nearby seas was also criticized.⁵⁵⁴ Locklear was replaced in 2015 with Admiral Harry Harris, and his testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee in February 2016 maintained a strong line on China. Harris used the term *revanchist* for Russia, leaving China to be described as *destabilizing*.⁵⁵⁵ That same month, Harris gave a speech at the Pentagon, where he listed China, along with North Korea, as two of the five strategic problems the US

⁵⁵² Obama, 'Joint Statement by President Obama and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan: The United States and Japan: Shaping the Future of the Asia-Pacific and Beyond', 25 April 2014a

⁵⁵³ WH, "National Security Strategy", February 2015, 24

⁵⁵⁴ Samuel Locklear, 'PACOM House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, Prepared Statement', 15 April 2015

⁵⁵⁵ Harry Harris, 'ADM Harry B. Harris, Jr., Commander, U.S. Pacific Command Before the Senate Armed Services Committee', 23 February 2016

encountered. Two more, Russia, and terrorism, also have significant ramifications in Asia, so Harris took advantage of that to support the pivot. Harris urged closer ties with India, he praised Australia's defence white paper, praised allies in general, and stated that China had been described as threat by the US since 2013, and that his criticisms were consistent with US policy. He also added that a harshening of US rhetoric was a result of Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea, not US decision-making.⁵⁵⁶ It is thus quite clear the Indo-Pacific region was being transformed by China's rise. Since Xi Jinping came to power, China had abandoned the prudence that was characteristic of the Deng Xiaoping era.⁵⁵⁷

The US and China also had to navigate the contentious issue of Taiwan. With China becoming increasingly assertive, unofficial US support for Taiwan ran the risk of escalating into a bigger problem. The US never abandoned the idea of militarily supporting Taiwan, as Vice President Biden confirmed during an August 2011 meeting with PRC officials. The Chinese officials raised the issue of Taiwan, once again restating the sensitivity of the topic, but the US language hinted that there would be no change in policy and that the US would continue to provide Taiwan with weapons because it saw that military link as a factor that added to the security of the region.⁵⁵⁸ A November 2015 US factsheet on its rebalance to Asia made room for Taiwan, advancing the idea that America had 'strengthened our unofficial relationship with the people of Taiwan'. That was the only mention of Taiwan, and it reinforced the country's paradoxical situation: because most countries do not recognise it, it could not be presented as a key priority outside of a crisis – the document did not mention Taiwan in the 'alliances' or 'emerging partners' section. For Taiwan's role to change, it needed to be presented as a higher priority, ideally outside the context of cross-strait

⁵⁵⁶ Harris, 'Presenter: Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr., Commander, U.S. Pacific Command', 25 February 2016

⁵⁵⁷ Ash Rossiter, Brendan Cannon, "Conflict and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific", *Conflict and Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, New York: Routledge, 2020, 1-2

⁵⁵⁸ Obama, 'Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Vice President Biden's Meetings with Chinese Leaders', 18 August 2011

relations.⁵⁵⁹ Obama's China policy can be best described as a strategy of caution that eventually came to terms with the crude reality that great power competition was inevitable.

The San Francisco System

Obama's re-engagement strategy for Asia was named the 'pivot'. Resulting largely from Kurt Campbell, Obama's Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, the goal behind the pivot was to move America's central focus away from the Middle East to Asia, in the broadest sense possible, military, political, economic, and diplomatic. In order to do this, the Obama administration made a strong deviation from the politics of the Bush years. Mainly, it pursued a multilateral approach, aiming to work together with multiple allies over a number of key issues. Until 2015, America's pivot to Asia was designed as a cautious overture, aiming to restate America's essential role in Asia as a Pacific power. Given the continent's deteriorating security situation, the pivot's main success was military: it underlined the core area where both the Americans and their allies could agree, namely America's status as a military guarantor for the San Francisco System and beyond.

The National Security Strategy made it clear the US considered more engagement with its allies. It also stated a willingness to deepen cooperation with China, India, and Russia, marking the fact that the Obama administration was considering a number of 'resets' in US relationships at the beginning of the term. Neither China or Russia were described as 'adversarial', implying that the Obama administration continued to consider terrorist groups as the main threat to US stability and interests. The NSS claimed the alliances with 'Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand are the bedrock of security in Asia and a foundation of prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region'. This was an implied acknowledgement

⁵⁵⁹ Obama, 'Fact Sheet: Advancing the Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific', 16 November 2015

of the San Francisco System, and it also hinted that prosperity comes through democratization. Asia was highlighted as a key economic area, and the US had taken ‘substantial steps to deepen our engagement in the region, through regional organizations, new dialogues, and high-level diplomacy’.⁵⁶⁰

The Obama administration did not hold back on symbolism. Obama called himself the first Pacific President, and his administration did give considerable attention to East Asia in particular. His first meeting was with Japanese Prime Minister Aso Taro, the first foreign leader received by Obama was South Korean President Lee Myung-bak, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s first formal state visit was to Asia.⁵⁶¹

During a November 2009 press briefing, Obama’s national security team gave details about the pivot. The goal was to ‘renew America’s alliances in the region, to continue to forge new partnerships’. The ‘overarching theme is that America is a Pacific nation, it understands the importance of Asia in the 21st century, and it’s going to be very engaged in a very comprehensive way to make progress on a whole series of issues that are critical for our prosperity and our security’. Another issue according to Jeff Bader, National Security Council Senior Director for East Asian Affairs, was on the ‘common perception in the region that U.S. influence has been on the decline in the last decade, while Chinese influence has been increasing’.⁵⁶²

Hillary Clinton made supportive statements regarding the San Francisco System in a speech in January 2010, when she said the ‘alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand, and the Philippines are among the most successful bilateral partnerships in modern

⁵⁶⁰ NSS, 3-49

⁵⁶¹ Gries, “Humanitarian hawk meets rising dragon: Obama’s legacy in US China policy”, in Oliver Turner, Inderjeet Parmar, *The United States in the Indo-Pacific*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020, 33

⁵⁶² Obama, ‘Press Briefing by Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes; National Security Council Senior Director for East Asian Affairs, Jeffrey Bader; and Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economic Affairs Michael Froman on the President’s Trip to Asia’, 9 November 2009

history. The security and stability provided through these relationships have been critical to the region's success and development. Our shared values and strategic interests enabled generations to grow up and prosper in a region largely at peace, and they remain key to maintaining stability and security. Our commitment to our bilateral relationships is entirely consistent with – and will enhance – Asia's multilateral groupings'.⁵⁶³

Clinton made similar points in October 2011, when she added that 'we're celebrating this at a moment when America is in the midst of a strategic pivot. The wars of the last decade are winding down and transitioning; the world's economic and strategic center of gravity is shifting east; and the United States is committed to an even deeper network of relationships across the Asia-Pacific region.'⁵⁶⁴ Obama added similar points in November 2011, when he said that there is 'no region in the world that we consider more vital than the Asia-Pacific region, and we want, on a whole range of issues, to be working with our partner countries around the Pacific rim in order to enhance job growth, economic growth, prosperity, and security for all of us'.⁵⁶⁵

During a January 2013 speech, Japan's Prime Minister Abe Shinzo presented the five principles of Japanese diplomacy. He stated that the interest of Japan 'lies eternally in keeping Asia's seas unequivocally open, free, and peaceful - in maintaining them as the commons for all the people of the world, where the rule of law is fully realized'. He added that the alliance with the US would be key to that, while also stating that Japan needed to work with other Asian countries on naval cooperation.⁵⁶⁶

During a speech the same month, Abe Shinzo told the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington that Japan must be a regional leader, especially

⁵⁶³ Clinton, 'Remarks on Regional Architecture in Asia: Principles and Priorities', 12 January 2010

⁵⁶⁴ Clinton, 'Remarks at the U.S.-Japan Council Annual Conference', 7 October 2011

⁵⁶⁵ Obama, 'Remarks at an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation CEO Summit Question-and-Answer Session in Honolulu', 12 November 2011

⁵⁶⁶ Abe, Shinzo, 'The Bounty of the Open Seas: Five New Principles for Japanese Diplomacy', 18 January 2013

when promoting the rules-based international order. He mentioned freedom of navigation, a contentious issue with China, and urged for more cooperation among Japan, the US, South Korea, and Australia. He also promised he would spend more on defence so that the US-Japan alliance remained strong.⁵⁶⁷ The five principles themselves consisted of: universal values, freedom of the seas, economic cooperation, closer intercultural ties, and bringing in more young people to visit Japan. The principles can be considered part of the Abe doctrine.⁵⁶⁸

Abe mentioned in a September 2013 speech that the ‘security environment [...] is growing increasingly severe’, and that Japan needed to cooperate with its allies because ‘no country can maintain its peace and safety by itself’.⁵⁶⁹ The deteriorating security situation was also noted by South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se, who spoke of the ‘Asian paradox’, expanding on the growing wealth of Asia, and its increasingly uncertain security situation. He made a plea in favour of Korean unification as a means to ease tensions.⁵⁷⁰ The US NSS of 2015 claimed America ‘has been and will remain a Pacific power’. It added that the US was looking to modernize its alliances.⁵⁷¹

During a March 2013 meeting with Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr, Secretary of State John Kerry made it clear that he was planning to continue the pivot strategy that was advocated by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton before him, when he said he is ‘equally as married to, if not more married, than my predecessor’ to the pivot. He also

⁵⁶⁷ Abe, “Japan is Back”, Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 22 February 2013

⁵⁶⁸ Abe, ‘Dinner Speech by H.E. Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan on the Occasion of the Nineteenth International Conference on “The Future of Asia” Hosted by the Nihon Keizai Shimbun’, 23 May 2013

⁵⁶⁹ Abe, ‘Opening Remarks by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the first meeting of the Advisory Panel on National Security and Defense Capabilities’, 12 September 2013

⁵⁷⁰ Yun Byung-se, ‘Keynote Speech by H.E. Yun Byung-se Minister of Foreign Affairs 2014 Asian Leadership Conference’, 3 March 2014

⁵⁷¹ WH, ‘National Security Strategy’, February 2015, 24

mentioned that Australia played a key role in the US pivot strategy.⁵⁷² A month later, while giving a speech in Tokyo, Kerry expanded on the idea of a Pacific partnership. Invoking shared values with Japan, Kerry emphasized the importance of a ‘Pacific Dream’, which would ‘translate our strongest values into an unprecedented security, economic, and social cooperation’. He reiterated that the ‘presence of the United States in the Asia Pacific and our network of alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand, these have already formed a fundamental platform’.⁵⁷³ Two things are noticeable here: the emergence of a new thread on the ‘Pacific Dream’ and the loose mentioning of the San Francisco System, with all US treaty allies being presented as bedrocks of US presence and strategy. It is thus no surprise that during his visit, Kerry reiterated that the US rebalance to Asia would continue.⁵⁷⁴

During a January 2014 speech following a meeting with South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se, Kerry mentioned that trade with South Korea was part of the pivot strategy.⁵⁷⁵ The idea of a US rebalancing to Asia was welcomed by South Korean President Park Geun-hye, who stated she will ‘strongly support the U.S. policy to rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region as it contributes positively to the regional peace and cooperation’.⁵⁷⁶ A fact sheet put forward by the Obama administration on the rebalance to Asia emphasized a strengthening of the ‘treaty alliances with Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), and the Philippines, while maintaining our long-standing alliance with Thailand’ as one of the achievements of the rebalance.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷² John Kerry, ‘Remarks With Australian Foreign Minister Bob Carr After Their Meeting’, 18 March 2013

⁵⁷³ Kerry, ‘Remarks on a 21st Century Pacific Partnership’, 15 April 2013

⁵⁷⁴ Kerry, ‘Joint Press Availability With Japanese Foreign Minister Kishida After Their Meeting’, 14 April 2013

⁵⁷⁵ Kerry, ‘Remarks With Republic of Korea Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se After Their Meeting’, 7 January 2014

⁵⁷⁶ Obama, ‘The President’s News Conference with President Park Geun-hye of South Korea in Seoul, South Korea’, 25 April 2014b

⁵⁷⁷ Obama, ‘Advancing the Rebalance to Asia’, 16 November 2015

A January 2016 meeting between Obama and Australian Prime Minister Turnbull had Obama claiming the ‘rebalance has been effective in part because we have such strong treaty alliances, and Australia is one of those critical alliances’.⁵⁷⁸ At an October 2016 meeting between the US Secretaries of State and Defense and their South Korean counterparts, Carter said the US ‘rebalance is entering its next phase and we’re seeing allies and partners come together in a principled and inclusive security network to contribute to regional security and uphold shared principles’.⁵⁷⁹

One of the key Obama administration officials behind the pivot strategy, Kurt Campbell, expanded on the rationale for the pivot in his book, *The Pivot – The Future of American Statecraft in Asia*. While taking some of the blame for the ambiguous rollout of the pivot strategy, Campbell stated that the Obama administration was willing to strengthen bilateral alliances because it did not feel having no formal alliance structure was an ‘advantage’.⁵⁸⁰ The economic and military moves that were made were meant to increase coherence within the San Francisco alliance network. He added that the US planned to pivot to Asia from the early days of the George W. Bush administration, but those plans were changed when the 9/11 terrorist attacks happened. US policy in the Middle East did not have a negative impact on US policy in Asia, and he mentioned that the military operations in the Middle East facilitated an improvement in cooperation with San Francisco alliance network allies, such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Thailand.⁵⁸¹

The US and Japan

⁵⁷⁸ Malcolm Turnbull, ‘Joint remarks with Barack Obama, President of the United States before their Bilateral Meeting’, 19 January 2016

⁵⁷⁹ Kerry, ‘Remarks at the U.S.-Republic of Korea 2+2 Ministerial Meeting’, 19 October 2016

⁵⁸⁰ Campbell, *The Pivot*, 12-14

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 18-22

It was established in the previous chapter that Abe was one of the main architects behind Japan's change in foreign policy to a more assertive stance. Unfortunately for Abe, his governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lost power in 2009 to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). Three years of stagnation followed, with three different Japanese Prime Ministers all with the objective of making Japan less dependent on the US. All three failed to change the relationship in any meaningful way, and by 2012 Abe was back in power, and he continued his strategy of anchoring Japan in the US-led security infrastructure.

The Japan Ministry of Defence's 2009 White Paper had special mentions for the US and Australia, among others. Japan listed the UN and the alliance with the US as the main pillars for ensuring its stability. The government of Japan outlined two key areas where it was working to improve its protection capabilities: more investment in defence, and upholding the existing security arrangements with the US.⁵⁸² The government had also tried to expand the definition of the 'right to self-defense', claiming that it 'is not necessarily confined to the geographic boundaries of Japanese territory, territorial waters and airspace'. Nevertheless, there was still reluctance to send military formations abroad.⁵⁸³ The document further stated that the 9/11 terrorist attacks served as the basis for US-Japan consultations on improving security, reinforcing the notion that terrorism was the main threat that fuelled Japanese strategic thinking. The document made it clear that the alliance served as a basis not just for security concerning Japan, but also for security on the Korean peninsula, the rise of China, easing tensions concerning the Taiwan Strait, and others. Shared values, such as democracy and counterterrorism also featured.⁵⁸⁴

Within the 2010 White Paper, Japan stated that the alliance with the US was a springboard for not just regional, but also global objectives, attempting to tie in humanitarian

⁵⁸² Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan*, 2009, 118

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 119

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 229-233

and disaster relief with its conventional security situation. The US forces in Japan were described as a 'public good', adding to a sense of security not only in Japan, but in neighbouring countries as well.⁵⁸⁵

Meeting with Prime Minister Aso Taro, Obama declared his willingness to improve the alliance beyond the military aspects, touching on climate change, among other subjects. He raised the issue of Afghanistan as well.⁵⁸⁶ While meeting with his successor, Yukio Hatoyama, Obama agreed to the need for 'extended deterrence'.⁵⁸⁷ Hatoyama did look for a more equal footing, and a stronger position from Japan concerning Afghanistan was one of the options. There was no opposition toward a stronger US presence in Asia.⁵⁸⁸ Obama refused to let the San Francisco System be presented as an outdated historical structure, mentioned that the US 'looks to strengthen old alliances and build new partnerships with the nations of this region. To do this, we look to America's treaty alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand, and the Philippines, alliances that are not historical documents from a bygone era, but abiding commitments to each other that are fundamental to our shared security'.⁵⁸⁹

Obama and Hatoyama met again in January 2010, to celebrate 50 years since the signing of the US-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. Hatoyama claimed the alliance was 'indispensable not only for the defense of Japan alone, but also for the peace and prosperity of the entire Asia-Pacific region'. He added that as long as there would be regional

⁵⁸⁵ Japan MOD, *Defense of Japan*, 2010, 260-261

⁵⁸⁶ Obama, 'Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Prime Minister Taro Aso of Japan and an Exchange With Reporters', 24 February 2009

⁵⁸⁷ Hatoyama, Yukio, 'Joint Press Conference by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama of Japan and President Barack Obama of the United States of America', 13 November 2009

⁵⁸⁸ Obama, 'The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama of Japan in Tokyo, Japan', 13 November 2009

⁵⁸⁹ Obama, 'Remarks in Tokyo', 14 November 2009

instability, the alliance would continue.⁵⁹⁰ Hatoyama was replaced by Kan Naoto, who also made a visit to the US in September 2010. Kan hinted that there would be no major changes to the alliance.⁵⁹¹

One notable security concession was made nevertheless, concerning the status of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, a disputed territory between Japan and China. During an October 2010 meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Maehara Seiji, the issue was addressed by Clinton. She claimed that the US-Japan security treaty covered the Senkakus, a considerable statement given the active dispute with China, at a time when the Obama administration was aiming to improve relations with most countries in Asia.⁵⁹² Obama himself would reiterate the statements in April 2014, well into his second term.⁵⁹³ His statement on the Senkakus, declared that the US ‘don’t take a position on final sovereignty determinations with respect to Senkakus, but historically, they have been administered by Japan, and we do not believe that they should be subject to change unilaterally. And what is a consistent part of the alliance is that the treaty covers all territories administered by Japan. So this is not a new position, this is a consistent one’.⁵⁹⁴ A joint statement by the Security Consultative Committee on new guidelines for US-Japan cooperation also restated support for the Senkakus.⁵⁹⁵ Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio also raised the issue of Chinese intrusions in Japanese territory in a speech to the Diet in January 2016, when addressing security policy.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁰ Hatoyama, ‘Statement by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security of Japan and the United States of America’, 19 January 2010

⁵⁹¹ Kan, Naoto, ‘Press Conference by Prime Minister Naoto Kan Following His Visit to the United States’, 24 September 2010

⁵⁹² Clinton, ‘Joint Press Availability with Japanese Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara’, 27 October 2010

⁵⁹³ Ankit Panda, ‘Obama: Senkakus Covered Under US-Japan Security Treaty’, *The Diplomat*, 24 April 2014

⁵⁹⁴ Obama, ‘The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan’, 24 April 2014a

⁵⁹⁵ SD, ‘Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee: A Stronger Alliance for a Dynamic Security Environment The New Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation’, 27 April 2015

⁵⁹⁶ Kishida, Fumio, ‘Foreign Policy Speech by Foreign Minister Kishida to the 190th Session of the Diet’, 22 January 2016

On 11 March 2011, the Great East Japan earthquake took place, the most powerful earthquake ever recorded in Japan, and the fourth most powerful in the world. It created a tsunami that led to a nuclear reactor meltdown at the Fukushima power plant. The earthquake and the nuclear meltdown changed two aspects of the Japan-US alliance. Firstly, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) took an active role in offering support and performing rescue missions. This led to a change in Japanese public opinion concerning the SDF. Historically, the public had been sceptical of the SDF, especially due to its status as a military force that is operationally unlike any army. The opinion changed after the earthquake, and the SDF began to be viewed more positively by the population, as it was polling at around 95 per cent positive views.⁵⁹⁷ The image improvement of the SDF aided the cause of those who supported reform of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which could turn the SDF into a more typical army.

The US support during the earthquake, through Operation Tomodachi, served as a reminder that logistically, the US is a major asset to Japan. The success of Operation Tomodachi could be viewed both through an idealistic lens, as a means of emphasizing the friendship between the US and Japan, and through a more pragmatic lens, as an opportunity for the US to remind Japan of how essential the alliance is at a time when Japan was exploring a potential realignment of its own.⁵⁹⁸ During a May 2011 meeting with Obama, Prime Minister Kan mentioned ‘the depth of the kizuna, or the bonds of friendship, between Japan and the United States. And Japanese people are deeply grateful for what the United States has done’, concerning logistical earthquake help.⁵⁹⁹ Japan chose its third Prime

⁵⁹⁷ Pew Research Center, ‘Japanese Resilient, but See Economic Challenges Ahead’, 1 June 2011

⁵⁹⁸ Asaho Mizushima, ‘The Japan-US “military” response to the earthquake, and the strengthening of the military alliance as a result’, *Fukushimaontheglobe*, 10 December 2012

⁵⁹⁹ Obama, ‘Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Naoto Kan of Japan in Deauville, France’, 26 May 2011

Minister in just a few years in the person of Noda Yoshihiko. He would meet with Obama in April 2012, and largely reaffirm the existing alliance as a stable one.⁶⁰⁰

By the end of 2012, the Democratic Party of Japan would be defeated by the Liberal Democratic Party, and Abe would be re-elected as Prime Minister following his previous time in office in the late 2000s. Abe did not refrain from criticizing the previous DPJ leaders in a meeting with Obama in February 2013. He said the US and Japan had ‘restored the bonds of friendship and the trust [...] that had been markedly damaged over the past three years’. He promised more defence spending, reforms to the self-defence principle, new military guidelines, and full support from Japan for the liberal international order.⁶⁰¹ The two leaders agreed to pursue multilateralism in diplomacy, while setting a tough stance on North Korea, in accordance with the Obama administration approach of strategic patience.⁶⁰² By ‘strategic patience’, the US chose not to engage diplomatically with North Korea, considering that by reacting too strongly to its nuclear tests and missile launches, it would be playing into Pyongyang’s hands, giving the DPRK the international attention it was craving.

The US also took measures to reform its military strategy in order to better accommodate Japanese issues. A longstanding problem was that of basing, where complaints from Japanese nationals concerning a heavy US military presence in Okinawa were addressed. Kerry announced relocations of US troops, from Okinawa to Guam, Hawaii, and Australia. In exchange for this shift in posture, Japan would better address burden-sharing issues.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰⁰ Obama, ‘Joint Statement by President Obama and Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda of Japan--A Shared Vision for the Future’, 30 April 2012

⁶⁰¹ Abe, ‘Press Conference by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during His Visit to the United States of America’, 22 February 2013b

⁶⁰² Obama, ‘Remarks Following a Meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan and an Exchange With Reporters’, 22 February 2013

⁶⁰³ Kerry, ‘United States and Japan Sign Protocol to Amend the Guam International Agreement’, 3 October 2013

Japan adhered to the increasing US concerns in the South China Sea, with a December 2013 fact sheet stating that multilateral cooperation on maritime safety in the South China Sea was needed.⁶⁰⁴ By the end of 2013, senior Obama administration officials declared the alliance with Japan was at a ‘high-water mark across the board’.⁶⁰⁵ Abe also claimed in an April 2014 meeting with Obama that the ‘Japan-U.S. alliance has been revived very strongly’. Abe also adhered to a conciliatory tone concerning China, emphasizing better relations.⁶⁰⁶

By the end of 2014, Japan passed new security legislation that facilitated better cooperation with the US. The State Department responded positively.⁶⁰⁷ The legislation allowed Japan to create its own National Security Council, modelled after that of the US, and it allowed better protection of state secrets, improved cybersecurity, established a space strategy, and ensured better defence communication.⁶⁰⁸ The military guidance reforms of 2015, the first in 17 years, were applauded by Kerry as ensuring ‘important new frontiers for our alliance’.⁶⁰⁹ The US and Japan put forward a joint statement in April 2015, and they committed to respect the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, support democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, improve economic ties, enforce norms of international law concerning the freedom of navigation and overflight, among others.⁶¹⁰ When asked if the improvements in ties between the two could be seen as a provocation to China, Obama demurred.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁴ Obama, ‘Fact Sheet on United States-Japan Global Cooperation: Meeting Modern Challenges’, 3 December 2013b

⁶⁰⁵ Obama, ‘Background Briefing’, 3 December 2013a

⁶⁰⁶ Obama, ‘News Conference With Abe’, 24 April 2014a

⁶⁰⁷ SD, ‘U.S.-Japan Joint Press Statement’, 18 December 2014

⁶⁰⁸ SD, ‘Joint Statement of Security Consultative Committee’, 27 April 2015a

⁶⁰⁹ Kerry, ‘Remarks at a Luncheon in Honor of Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe’, 28 April 2015b

⁶¹⁰ Obama, ‘Joint Statement—U.S.-Japan Joint Vision Statement’, 28 April 2015a

⁶¹¹ Obama, ‘The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan’, 28 April 2015b

The US and Australia

The best course of action for Australia would be to continue building on the success of the past years. This is largely what happened, nonetheless, a new dimension emerged in the US-Australia alliance: an increasing amount of room being made for Japan to play a part. This would come to have implications for the Quad in the future, but also for America and Australia's strategic culture, marking an embrace of multilateralism. Australia needed the US pivot, especially in the security sense.

In May 2009, Australia published its Defence White Paper, which outlined its key strategic issues. The previous White Paper was issued in 2000, and a new one was due. Australia aspired to meet its security obligations to Southeast Asia and the US.⁶¹² Public meetings and consultations showed that there was no clear threat perceived by Australia, and that the 'present strategic environment is relatively benign in terms of a major military threat'. Support for the alliance with the US continued.⁶¹³ Even though there was no clear threat perception, the document outlined that of 'particular concern would be any diminution in the willingness or capacity of the United States to act as a stabilising force'.⁶¹⁴ The Australian Defence Department clearly stated that Australian strategic planning was shaped by US primacy, that US power acted as a stabilising force historically, and this had not hindered attempts by Australia to secure its own strategic goals. The document outlined an expected rise in multipolarity.⁶¹⁵ The document stated that a 'potential contraction of US strategic presence in the Asia-Pacific, with a requirement for allies and friends to do more in their own regions would adversely affect Australian interests, regional stability and global security'. The expectation was that the US would remain the most powerful actor in Asia

⁶¹² Australian Department of Defense, 'Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030', May 2009, 13

⁶¹³ Ibid., 18

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 28

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 30

until 2030 at least, in political, economic, and military terms. There were worries that in the future, the US would have to deal with too many security obligations, in what Paul Kennedy called ‘imperial overstretch’, and the US was expected to rely more on its allies to make up for the increased burden.⁶¹⁶ In terms of regional stability, Australia wanted to work with the US, Japan, China, India, and Indonesia, to ensure balance, but it dedicated attention to stating that ‘strategic stability in the region is best underpinned by the continued presence of the United States through its network of alliances and security partnerships, including with Japan, the Republic of Korea, India and Australia, and by significant levels of US military capability’.⁶¹⁷ It is notable that all the members of the Quad, along with South Korea, are mentioned here. The alliance with the US remained the most important defence agreement.⁶¹⁸

Rudd had never avoided pointing out that he believed the US played an essential role in the Asia-Pacific, claiming that ‘through its network of alliances in our region, the US presence in the Western Pacific has been a force for stability for more than half a century’. He expanded on his desire for Asia to emulate European integration, in an attempt to ‘build an Asia Pacific century that does not repeat the errors of the European century of the one past - one characterised by national conflict and international conflict; but instead a century that by dint of our efforts together is truly peaceful, truly pacific, prosperous and sustainable for all the peoples of our region’.⁶¹⁹ He added that ‘the future strategic stability of the Asia-Pacific region will in large part rely on the continuing strong presence of Australia's closest ally, the United States’.⁶²⁰

Prime Minister Julia Gillard, who replaced Rudd in June 2010, visited Washington DC in 2011 and gave remarks to Congress. Her speech insisted that the US and Australia were

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 32-33

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 43

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., 93

⁶¹⁹ Rudd, ‘Towards an Asia-Pacific Century Speech to the Kokoda Foundation Australia-US Trilogy’, 20 November 2008

⁶²⁰ Rudd, ‘The First National Security Statement’, 4 December 2008

historical allies, and the wars in the Middle East served as an occasion for the alliance to be renewed. She pointed out how the 9/11 attacks brought the two countries together, united in a common front against terrorism. She claimed the era of the Cold War, dominated by two powers, came to an end, and the new century, marked by multiple powers having a greater say was a welcome evolution. She also claimed that if China was prosperous, then everybody would benefit.⁶²¹

Obama went on to address the Parliament in Canberra, where he made the argument that the US and Australia were not that different. He mentioned immigration as a unifying factor, talking about the 'brilliant tapestry of our nations'. He reiterated the point that historically, the US had been a Pacific nation, and that it was possible to see an 'enhanced presence in the alliance that we've strengthened: in Japan, where our alliance remains a cornerstone of regional security; in Thailand, where we're partnering for disaster relief; in the Philippines, where we're increasing ship visits and training; and in South Korea, where our commitment to the security of the Republic of Korea will never waver'. Afterwards, Obama made a defence of the liberal order.⁶²²

When Gillard gave remarks on the publication of Australia's 2013 Defence White Paper, she made it clear that the alliance with the US was of notable importance, claiming it 'reaffirms the central and enduring importance of our alliance relationship with the United States and the contribution this makes to regional stability and to Australia's security'. She then stated that Australia was looking for 'deeper defence partnerships in our region including with China, our longstanding partner New Zealand, and with countries such as Indonesia, India, Singapore, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Malaysia'.⁶²³

⁶²¹ Julia Gillard, 'Address to the Congress of the United States, Washington', 9 March 2011

⁶²² Obama, 'Remarks to the Parliament in Canberra', 17 November 2011

⁶²³ Gillard, 'Transcript Of Remarks At Launch Of 2013 Defence White Paper', 3 May 2013

Gillard gave a speech in January 2013 on Australia's security post-9/11. She noted that the focus on counterterrorism was coming to an end, and more focus on Asia was needed. She said the 'relationship between China and the United States [...] will determine the temperature of regional affairs in coming decades', adding that she was 'optimistic about the ability of China and the United States to manage change in the region. She claimed that Australia would 'support our ally the United States in continuing to play its role as a stabilising force in the region', and it would be focused on 'building deeper relationships with China, Indonesia, India, Japan and Korea, amongst others'.⁶²⁴ In May 2013, the US and Australia signed a Defense Trade Cooperation Treaty, which facilitated the faster acquiring of technology for the defence sectors of both countries, and enabled better collaboration on defence technologies.⁶²⁵ An October 2013 Statement of Principles between the governments of the US and Australia stated that the 'enduring defence and security cooperation partnership between the United States and Australia is of significant benefit to both nations and the region', and 'initiatives may include security cooperation exercises; joint and combined training activities; humanitarian and disaster relief activities; and such other activities'.⁶²⁶

Following the US-Australia ministerial consultations, known as AUSMIN, a few aspects relevant to the alliance were made clear. The force posture review improved in terms of military strategy, and was going to 'examine opportunities to expand their cooperation on ballistic missile defense'. In the Indo-Pacific region, it was aiming to 'strongly support the promotion of regional peace, stability, and security, and agreed to continue their contributions to development, the promotion and protection of human rights, and the advancement of

⁶²⁴ Gillard, 'Australia's National Security Beyond the 9/11 Decade', 23 January 2013

⁶²⁵ Kerry, 'U.S. Defense Trade Cooperation Treaty With Australia', 16 May 2013

⁶²⁶ SD, 'Statement of Principles between the Government of the United States of America and the Government Of Australia', 21 November 2013

democracy and economic integration’, and it would uphold UNCLOS. It thus aligned with US support for UNCLOS and other similar agreements.⁶²⁷

The June 2014 Force Posture agreement allowed the US to move troops more easily through Australia.⁶²⁸ This was in accordance with Prime Minister Abbott’s statement to Obama that he would ‘want to assure the President that Australia will be an utterly dependable ally’.⁶²⁹ Kerry also emphasized the alignment, adding that ‘whether it is support for democracy, rule of law, standing up for human rights, speaking out across the planet, Australia is at our side’.⁶³⁰ During a January 2016 speech at CSIS, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull associated prosperity in Asia with the US presence there, emphasizing that the region’s economic development could not have happened without US security and economic support. He took a cautious tone on China, mentioning that it was up to China to avoid making strategic mistakes that would put it at odds with western powers. He also pressured the US to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), adding that it was ‘a product of American leadership and crucial for resolving potential flashpoints in many parts of the globe. Non-ratification diminishes American leadership where it is most needed’.⁶³¹

Another AUSMIN meeting in October 2015 expanded on the alliance’s evolution. Both sides ‘expressed strong concerns over recent Chinese land reclamation and construction activity in the South China Sea’, and they added that they ‘shared economic and strategic interests between Australia, the United States and Thailand, both countries reiterated their support for Thailand’s return to democracy, and stressed the importance of protecting human

⁶²⁷ SD, ‘Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN)’, 20 November 2013

⁶²⁸ Obama, ‘Fact Sheet: The United States and Australia: An Alliance for the Future’, 12 June 2014b

⁶²⁹ Obama, ‘Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Anthony J. Abbott of Australia and an Exchange With Reporters’, 12 June 2014a

⁶³⁰ Kerry, ‘Remarks With Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott Before Their Meeting’, 12 June 2014

⁶³¹ Turnbull, ‘Australia and the United States: New Responsibilities for an Enduring Partnership’, 18 January 2016

rights and fundamental freedoms’. The issue of the South China Sea was raised during a November 2015 meeting between Obama and Prime Minister Turnbull, where Obama said he had an ‘excellent discussion around the importance of maintaining freedom of navigation and maritime rules. Since neither of us are claimants in some of the controversies that are taking place in the South China Sea, it’s, I think, very important for us simply to uphold the basic principle that these issues should be resolved by international norms and rule of law, and peacefully settled’.⁶³² These trends would continue until the final meeting between Obama and Prime Minister Turnbull, where both would point out how counterterrorism made the alliance stronger.⁶³³

The US and South Korea

In an attempt to answer the increasingly difficult North Korean question, the Obama administration set out to pursue ‘strategic patience’ with the DPRK. Strategic patience failed to disincentivise Pyongyang from acquiring and testing nuclear weapons, and thus, the question was how else could the relationship with South Korea be developed. One option was the US-Japan-South Korea trilateral, but the problem there can be traced back to the Cold War, specifically to a controversial mid-1960s agreement that was too generous to Japan and aged poorly in South Korea. The US lacked a clear answer on how to make sure Seoul and Tokyo worked together. Aside from that, Japan and South Korea have a history of distrust, going back to Japan’s rule over Korea since the late 19th century. Another option was to double down on the security side, the best example being the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile shield. The shield’s deployment led to anger

⁶³² Turnbull, ‘Remarks by President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull after Bilateral Meeting’, 18 November 2015

⁶³³ Turnbull, ‘Remarks at the Bilateral meeting with the Honourable Barack Obama, President of the United States of America’, 21 November 2016

from China, which placed economic sanctions on South Korea, and a lukewarm US reaction which had Seoul asking itself even more questions about the future of the alliance. The Obama years highlighted just how hard it was for the US and South Korea to define their alliance as anything more than a preventive, reactive one aimed to deter North Korea. For it go anywhere, the US needed to abandon its post-WWII 'first island chain' mentality and accept South Korea as an ally on an equal footing with countries like Japan and Australia.

Obama had to work with Lee Myung-bak, South Korea's first conservative president in 10 years. The ideological difference did not present a major hurdle. Obama called Lee in May 2009, in order to discuss a nuclear test by North Korea. He had called Japanese Prime Minister Aso as well, but he did not speak to both at the same time.⁶³⁴ The two met in June 2009 to reiterate that the defence treaty remained 'the cornerstone of the U.S.-ROK security relationship, which has guaranteed peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia for over fifty years'. The US also signalled that it would maintain 'a robust defense posture, backed by allied capabilities which support both nations' security interests'.⁶³⁵ Obama travelled to South Korea in November 2009, when he met with Lee once again. He spoke on the need to renegotiate and implement the US-South Korea Free Trade Agreement.⁶³⁶ Obama would meet again with Lee in Seoul in November 2010, where both finalized the renegotiation of the free trade agreement.⁶³⁷

In December 2010, the US, Japan, and South Korea published a trilateral statement emphasizing their shared values and common responsibilities. There was also agreement on the need to cooperate with China where possible, since a cordial relationship would be

⁶³⁴ Obama, 'Press Release - Readout of President Obama's Calls with Republic of Korea President Lee Myung-bak and Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso', 25 May 2009

⁶³⁵ Obama, 'Joint Statement by the United States of America and the Republic of Korea on the Alliance Between the United States of America and the Republic of Korea', 16 June 2009

⁶³⁶ Obama, 'The President's News Conference With President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea in South Korea', 19 November 2009

⁶³⁷ Obama, 'The President's News Conference With President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea in Seoul', 11 November 2010

beneficial.⁶³⁸ It is notable that the statement presented the US relationships with Japan and South Korea as 'alliances', yet the relationships between Japan and South Korea was described as a 'partnership'. The reluctance of the two to call each other allies is another inter-spokes issue for the alliance network.

During an October 2011 speech, South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan expanded on a few issues concerning the alliance. His belief was that the US and China would continue to cooperate for the foreseeable future, since it was in their best interests. He added that South Korea wanted to expand its relationships with both the US and China, and that he expected improvement with the US on issues like wartime operational control, and the free trade agreement. As for China, improvements were expected on working to coordinate policy on North Korea, and improving the military relationship in general.⁶³⁹

Obama and Lee met in March 2012 once again. Obama emphasized a greater role for the US, pointing out that the US was willing to uphold its status as a leader in Asia, adding that the 'United States as a Pacific nation will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future'. Obama also emphasized that despite discussions in Washington concerning his goals to reduce US defence spending, the cuts would not alter strategic ambitions for Asia.⁶⁴⁰

The policy of increased security cooperation suffered an unanticipated setback with the THAAD system. The ballistic missile system, whose deployment was regarded as a success for US-South Korea military ties, and whose operational purpose was that of improving US abilities to scan North Korea, also had the side effect of improving US capabilities of scanning China. The response to the deployment of THAAD by China had been very critical,

⁶³⁸ SD, 'Trilateral Statement Japan, Republic of Korea, and the United States', 6 December 2010

⁶³⁹ Kim Sung-hwan, 'East Asia's New Security Order and the Direction for Korea's Diplomacy', 21 October 2011

⁶⁴⁰ Obama, 'The President's News Conference With President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea in Seoul', 25 March 2012

and it reached the point where China imposed sanctions on South Korea.⁶⁴¹ A few years later, China and South Korea agreed to mend ties, but the economic price for South Korea was notable, and the lack of strong US support for its ally in a moment of economic difficulty led to Seoul doubting the strength of the alliance.⁶⁴² Some declarative support came from INDOPACOM Admiral Harry Harris, who called Chinese criticisms of THAAD ‘preposterous’ during a February 2016 speech.⁶⁴³

A May 2013 meeting between Obama and Park Geun-hye allowed both to restate a tough stance on North Korea. Here, Obama used the term ‘denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula’.⁶⁴⁴ The joint statement that followed the news conference featured the term ‘denuclearization of North Korea’, which was an example of a confused approach from the US.⁶⁴⁵ The two administrations found common ground in taking a hawkish stance. In January 2014, Kerry stated during a meeting with Yun that the US and South Korea were ‘very firmly united, without an inch of daylight between us, not a sliver of daylight, on the subject of opposition to North Korea’s destabilizing nuclear and ballistic missile programs and proliferation activities’.⁶⁴⁶ During an April 2014 meeting with Obama, Park was questioned about her three-step unification plan put forward in March 2014 in Dresden, which was rejected by North Korea.⁶⁴⁷ In a May 2015 meeting with Yun, Kerry once again stated there is ‘not an inch, not a centimeter, not a microscope – of difference between the United States

⁶⁴¹ Victoria Kim, ‘When China and U.S. spar, it’s South Korea that gets punched’, *Los Angeles Times*, 19 November 2020

⁶⁴² Christine Kim, Ben Blanchard, ‘China, South Korea agree to mend ties after THAAD standoff’, *Reuters*, 31 October 2017

⁶⁴³ Harris, ‘Presenter: Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr.’, 25 February 2016

⁶⁴⁴ Obama, ‘The President’s News Conference’, 7 May 2013a

⁶⁴⁵ Obama, ‘Joint Statement by President Barack Obama of the United States and President Park Geun-hye of South Korea’, 7 May 2013b

⁶⁴⁶ Kerry, ‘Remarks’, 7 January 2014

⁶⁴⁷ Obama, ‘The President’s News Conference’, 25 April 2014b

and the Republic of Korea in our approach to the question of North Korea's provocations and its nuclear program'.⁶⁴⁸

The US and the Philippines

With the Philippines, the US remained constant in pursuing its goal of gradually regaining the access and influence it had lost in the 1990s. Obama built on the Bush administration's cooperation with the Philippines and was lucky to preside over a time when Manila had Presidents that were open to deeper cooperation with Washington. China's incursions in the South China Sea served as a platform for the US, the Philippines, Japan, Australia, and Taiwan to air their grievances over what they saw as Chinese attempts to expand in an area that was open to everyone, not only Beijing. Litigation over the issue of territorial waters would eventually give Manila a winning hand.

During Obama's first two years in office, Philippines President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo finished her term, and 2010 saw the election of Benigno Aquino III as President. Throughout Aquino's term, the Philippines and the US enjoyed a cordial relationship. Hillary Clinton, along with Philippines Secretary of Foreign Affairs Albert del Rosario, took part in the signing of the Manila Declaration on board the USS Fitzgerald in Manila Bay, Philippines. Both sides agreed to 'reaffirm the treaty as the foundation of our relationship for the next 60 years and beyond', with the US wanting to 'maintain a robust, balanced, and responsive security partnership including cooperating to enhance the defense, interdiction, and apprehension capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Philippines'. There was also agreement on working together on transnational agreements such as ASEAN or APEC.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁸ Kerry, 'Joint Press Availability With Republic of Korea Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se', 18 May 2015

⁶⁴⁹ SD, 'Signing of the Manila Declaration On Board the USS Fitzgerald in Manila Bay, Manila, Philippines', 16 November 2011

In January 2012, the US and the Philippines agreed on improvements concerning bilateral cooperation, which facilitated better coordination at coast guard level, fewer hurdles with organizing joint exercises, more transnational cooperation, along with improvements on working together on counterterrorism operations.⁶⁵⁰ Another meeting in April 2012 reinforced the need to develop both the economic ties, via trade, and the military ones, by allowing the US to strengthen its presence in the Philippines.⁶⁵¹ Obama met with Aquino in June 2012, and he hinted that close cooperation with the Philippines was an important part of the broader pivot strategy.⁶⁵²

Obama restated the US support for the Philippines during an address to troops at Fort Bonifacio in Taguig, Philippines. He claimed the US and the Philippines ‘have been bound by a mutual defense treaty [...] our commitment to defend the Philippines is ironclad, and the United States will keep that commitment, because allies never stand alone’.⁶⁵³ The signing of the new defence agreement, which built upon the mutual defence treaty, was aimed at improving ‘rotational presence of U.S. forces; facilitate humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the Philippines and the region; improve opportunities for bilateral training; and support the long-term modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) as it works to establish a minimum credible defense’.⁶⁵⁴

These statements had been confirmed in a January 2016 Joint Statement following a US-Philippines ministerial dialogue, which emphasized the need to expand security cooperation, US support for Philippines maritime security through the transfer of logistics and information, and more military cooperation so that the Philippines defence posture would

⁶⁵⁰ SD, ‘Toward a Deeper Alliance: United States-Philippines Bilateral Cooperation’, 27 January 2012

⁶⁵¹ SD, ‘Joint Statement of the United States-Philippines Ministerial Dialogue’, 30 April 2012

⁶⁵² Obama, ‘Remarks Following a Meeting With President Benigno Aquino III of the Philippines and an Exchange With Reporters’, 8 June 2012

⁶⁵³ Obama, ‘Remarks to United States and Filipino Troops at Fort Bonifacio in Taguig, Philippines’, 29 April 2014

⁶⁵⁴ Obama, ‘Fact Sheet: United States-Philippines Bilateral Relations’, 28 April 2014b

improve.⁶⁵⁵ Kerry also met in June 2016 with Philippines Foreign Minister Perfecto Yasay, and Yasay claimed the Philippines will adhere to the newly-signed defence agreement, and that the US was ‘our only treaty ally, and we will continue our consultations and engagements with them on a way forward with our national interests paramount’.⁶⁵⁶ This was at a time when a territorial dispute between the Philippines and China was taking place over borders in the South China Sea.

For the Philippines, the US pivot to Asia, combined with increased Chinese assertiveness, was enough to determine President Aquino to improve the alliance with the US.⁶⁵⁷ The territorial dispute with China over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea was another issue that determined Aquino to seek better cooperation with the US, since the Philippines believed that their ability to exploit oil resources nearby was being challenged. The signing of the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) was an example of that.⁶⁵⁸ Despite these improvements, China correctly predicted that the US would be reluctant to play too aggressive a role in the South China Sea, and pursued a policy of improving ties with countries that were part of the US strategy for Asia.⁶⁵⁹ The election of Rodrigo Duterte, a pro-China politician, as President in 2016 made an almost instant impact. The Philippines, who emerged victorious at the Permanent Court of Arbitration in its territorial dispute with China, now downplayed the decision in order to avoid a political dispute. Duterte also subsequently ordered US troops to withdraw from the Philippines under the justification that they anger China. Though the withdrawal was not a complete one, and the treaties in place were not cancelled, the move weakened the alliance.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁵ SD, ‘2016 Joint Statement of the United States-Philippines Ministerial Dialogue’, 12 January 2016

⁶⁵⁶ Kerry, ‘Remarks With Philippines Foreign Secretary Perfecto Yasay’, 27 July 2016

⁶⁵⁷ Renato Cruz De Castro, ‘Indo-Pacific geopolitics and foreign policy, the case of the Philippines 2010-2018’, *Conflict and Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*, pp.156-158

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., 160-162

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., 163-164

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., 165-167

The US and Thailand

If Bush had managed to sidestep the issue of coups in Thailand, the Obama administration would also have to successfully sidestep the same issue. Both Presidents managed to ensure the alliance was not compromised, still, questions can be asked on how feasible the strategy of largely ignoring the palace coups was in the increasingly complicated political context of the 21st century. It was becoming clear that the occasional coups were leading to Thailand lagging behind other US treaty allies within the San Francisco System, and that only added to the splintering of the alliance network.

During the Obama years, the US and Thailand attempted to normalize the relationship. Free elections were held in 2011 following governmental crackdowns on democracy activists. The elections were won by Yingluck Shinawatra, the first female Prime Minister of Thailand, and relations with the US largely returned to normal. It is of little surprise that until the 2011 elections clarified the country's situation, the Obama administration refrained from engaging with key political figures. Prime Minister Shinawatra met with Hillary Clinton in November 2011, in a meeting where the US praised Thailand for its return to democracy. Clinton expanded on how the US would offer logistical support to ensure economic development took place, in order to make sure the new government would have popular support.⁶⁶¹

In June 2012, the US and Thailand updated the status of the strategic dialogue. They looked to 'enhance their strategic partnership to further promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. The United States recognized Thailand's efforts in dealing with cross-border challenges, including trafficking in persons and illicit narcotics and other transnational organized crimes, and emphasized the importance of a joint partnership with

⁶⁶¹ Clinton, 'Joint Press Availability With Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra', 16 November 2011

Thailand in addressing these challenges'.⁶⁶²Obama met with Shinawatra in November 2012, and restated the praise concerning the return to democracy.⁶⁶³ He added that strategic talks would continue, and also mentioned that the relationship needed to move beyond the military side. He reiterated the fact that Thailand was part of the US strategy for ASEAN, serving as a hub.⁶⁶⁴

Despite recovering from a coup in 2006, Thailand went through another coup in 2014. This affected the alliance with the US, albeit not in a major way, but it generated a similar type of stagnation in interactions, political and economic, as was the case following the previous coup. Before the coup, Kerry had met with Thai Foreign Minister Surapong Tovichakchaikul in May 2013, and the two talked about the importance of Thailand on security issues and noted the need for better counterintelligence efforts.⁶⁶⁵ This was a continuation of previous US policy concerning Thailand, a restatement of focus on security issues.

The string of victories for the populist movement led by Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra determined the army to orchestrate a coup and impeach the Prime Minister.⁶⁶⁶ In December 2013, State Department Spokesperson Jen Psaki stated the US 'strongly supports democratic institutions and the democratic process', and further expressed support for holding elections.⁶⁶⁷ By January 2014, the US stated opposition to the attempt to 'block polls', and supported freedom of expression.⁶⁶⁸ Violence erupted in Thailand a month later,

⁶⁶² SD, 'Joint Statement of the Fourth United States-Thailand Strategic Dialogue', 14 June 2012c

⁶⁶³ Obama, 'Remarks at a State Dinner Hosted by Prime Minister Yinglax Chinnawat of Thailand in Bangkok', 18 November 2012a

⁶⁶⁴ Obama, 'Joint Statement by President Obama and Prime Minister Yinglax Chinnawat of Thailand', 18 November 2012b

⁶⁶⁵ Kerry, 'Remarks With Thai Foreign Minister Dr. Surapong Tovichakchaikul Before Their Meeting', 6 May 2013

⁶⁶⁶ Thomas Fuller, 'Thailand's Military Stages Coup, Thwarting Populist Movement', *New York Times*, 22 May 2014

⁶⁶⁷ Jen Psaki, 'Political Tensions in Thailand', 9 December 2013

⁶⁶⁸ Psaki, 'Election-related Unrest in Thailand', 26 January 2014

with the US condemning it and restating its support for democracy.⁶⁶⁹ As was the case in 2006, in light of the deteriorating situation, the US considered suspending its funding for Thailand. In May 2014, the State Department announced it was reviewing US government funding for Thailand following the coup, with most training and education programs being suspended.⁶⁷⁰ The US also cancelled military exercises, and the funding for similar defence programs was also suspended.⁶⁷¹ Kerry also expressed disappointment in the coup, and urged a return to democracy.⁶⁷² Thailand's Constitution was abolished, and a new one would be enacted in 2017.

The US and India

The US and India were pursuing deeper security relations before either Washington or New Delhi started actively describing China as a threat. The two were pursuing a strategic partnership 'underpinned by our shared interests, our shared values as the world's two largest democracies, and close connections among our people'. The growth of India was deemed 'responsible', and counterterrorism as well as nonproliferation were the main areas of interest.⁶⁷³ In mid-2009, India elected a new Prime Minister, as Sonia Gandhi of the Indian National Congress (INC) was replaced by Manmohan Singh, of the same party. Obama and Singh met in November 2009, and Obama continued to describe India as a great power, using the term 'a rising and responsible global power'. He claimed the 'relationship between the United States and India will be one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century'.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁶⁹ Kerry, 'Violence in Thailand', 28 February 2014

⁶⁷⁰ SD, 'Response to the Coup in Thailand', 28 May 2014

⁶⁷¹ Marie Harf, 'Cancellation of U.S.-Thailand Engagements', 24 May 2014

⁶⁷² Kerry, 'Coup in Thailand', 22 May 2014

⁶⁷³ NSS, 43

⁶⁷⁴ Obama, 'The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India', 24 November 2009

In November 2010, Obama addressed the Parliament of India, and claimed that ‘instead of being lured by the false notion that progress must come at the expense of freedom, you built the institutions upon which true democracy depends: free and fair elections, [...] an independent judiciary and the rule of law, [...] and a thriving free press and vibrant civil society’.⁶⁷⁵ During the visit, he gave a joint statement with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, both of them supporting better defence cooperation.⁶⁷⁶

In July 2011, Hillary Clinton gave details on the strategic dialogue between the US and India, and outlined maritime security as an area for cooperation.⁶⁷⁷ During her visit to India, Clinton said the US is ‘betting on India’s future’, pointing out that ‘democracy, pluralism, opportunity, and innovation’ served as a bridge between the two countries. She laid down the possibility for linking the Indian Ocean with the Pacific Ocean as one strategic area, by adding that ‘the stretch of sea from the Indian Ocean through to the Pacific contain the world’s most vibrant trade and energy routes linking economies and driving growth’. She emphasized the fact that India and the US were both geographically advantaged countries, and they needed to capitalize on that. India’s Look East strategy, consisting of trying to engage more with East Asia, was also welcomed.⁶⁷⁸

Clinton met her counterpart, Foreign Minister Krishna, in Washington DC and claimed the two countries had ‘expanded coordination and information sharing in the fight against violent extremism. Our militaries are participating in joint exercises and are increasingly cooperating to combat piracy, patrol vital sea lanes, and protect freedom of navigation. Bilateral defense trade has surpassed \$8 billion over the last five years.’⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁵ Obama, ‘Remarks to the Indian Parliament in New Delhi’, 8 November 2010a

⁶⁷⁶ Obama, ‘Joint Statement by President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India’, 8 November 2010b

⁶⁷⁷ Clinton, ‘Remarks at the Opening Session of the U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue’, 19 July 2011

⁶⁷⁸ Clinton, ‘Remarks on India and the United States: A Vision for the 21st Century’, 20 July 2011

⁶⁷⁹ Clinton, ‘Remarks at the U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue’, 13 June 2012

A Joint Statement published in June 2013 emphasized US support for the Malabar military exercises.⁶⁸⁰ During a meeting in September 2013 between Obama and Prime Minister Singh, the two stated that the defence relations were improving and on a good path, they would work towards signing a Joint Declaration on Defense Cooperation, while Obama welcomed the decision by India to join the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) military exercises in 2014 and they promised they would work on counterterrorist operations.⁶⁸¹

A new Prime Minister followed Manmohan Singh: Narendra Modi. India changed governing parties, with Modi coming to power along with the Bharatiya Janata Party, also known as the BJP, a conservative party. It was the first time in 15 years that the INC had lost power. Obama and Prime Minister Modi met in September 2014, and they issued a joint statement where they urged a renewal of the Framework for US-India cooperation for another 10 years, as well as more cooperation on maritime security, in order to ensure that sea lanes are protected.⁶⁸² This interest in maritime security was restated in a January 2015 Joint Statement, that would ‘affirm the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight throughout the region, especially in the South China Sea’.⁶⁸³ Around the same time Obama and Prime Minister Modi met, and when questioned on the issue of the US-India military alignment, Modi said he welcomed the ‘progress in giving shape to our joint strategic vision on our Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean region and also our joint engagement with regional partners like Japan. This will also strengthen our maritime security cooperation’.⁶⁸⁴ During a press briefing by the head of INDOPACOM, Admiral

⁶⁸⁰ SD, ‘Joint Statement: Fourth U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue’, 24 June 2013

⁶⁸¹ Obama, ‘Joint Statement by President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India’, 27 September 2013

⁶⁸² Obama, ‘Joint Statement by President Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India’, 30 September 2014a

⁶⁸³ Obama, ‘Joint Statement by President Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India—U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region’, 25 January 2015

⁶⁸⁴ Obama, ‘Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India in New York City’, 28 September 2015

Locklear, it was emphasised that the military developments with India were positive, and that the US military deployment strategy encountered little change.⁶⁸⁵

In a July 2014 meeting with External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, Kerry drew a number of similarities between Modi's domestic agenda and that of Obama.⁶⁸⁶ Modi's election was viewed by the US as a chance to improve relations.⁶⁸⁷ During a September 2014 meeting with Modi, senior administration officials of the Obama administration declared that they expected the security relationship to improve 'significantly'.⁶⁸⁸

The improvement in messaging continued when Kerry gave remarks alongside US Vice President Joe Biden and Modi in September 2014 and stated that there was a possibility that 'for the first time the United States and India don't just share the same founding ideals, but we share the same economic and political imperatives'.⁶⁸⁹ During a meeting in March 2016 with Ajit Doval, the National Security Advisor of India, Kerry said Obama called US-India ties a 'defining relationship of this century'.⁶⁹⁰

The Quad's absence

Even though the Quad had been abandoned during the late Bush years, multilateral cooperation between US allies did not cease in the Obama years. Similarly, multilateral groups including the US and other like-minded countries also appeared. The broader point here is that even without a rationale for the Quad, America and its allies did not stop building

⁶⁸⁵ Samuel Locklear, 'Department of Defense Press Briefing on U.S. Pacific Command's Area of Responsibility by Admiral Locklear in the Pentagon Briefing Room', 25 September 2014

⁶⁸⁶ Kerry, 'Remarks With Indian Minister for External Affairs Sushma Swaraj After Their Meeting', 31 July 2014

⁶⁸⁷ SD, 'Joint Statement on the Fifth India-U.S. Strategic Dialogue', 31 July 2014

⁶⁸⁸ Obama, 'Press Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on the Upcoming Visit of Prime Minister Modi of India', 26 September 2014

⁶⁸⁹ Kerry, 'Remarks With Vice President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi', 30 September 2014

⁶⁹⁰ Kerry, 'Remarks With Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval', 30 March 2016

common ground on security, economics, and many logistical issues. Japan and Australia, Japan and India, India and Australia, had all developed closer bilateral ties. On trilaterals, the US-Japan-India trilateral started holding meetings, as well as the US-Japan-Australia trilateral. The notable detail here is that all members that took part in these groupings were the initial Quad members. It can be argued that the Quad never really disappeared.

The earthquake of 2011 determined an improvement in relations between Japan and Australia too. Australia offered Japan financial assistance, and agreed to improve their cooperation on nuclear safety. Prime Minister Kan and Prime Minister Gillard also agreed ‘it was timely to further develop bilateral cooperation and to strengthen coordination in the civil and military areas on disaster preparedness and response. They also confirmed that Japan and Australia would continue to cooperate on disaster relief in international fora such as the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD), Security and Defence Cooperation Forum (SDCF), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS), based on any bilateral framework on disaster relief and humanitarian assistance’.⁶⁹¹

The Defense White Paper published by Australia expanded on the relationship with Japan. Australia called Japan a ‘critical strategic partner’, and praised the 2008 Memorandum on Defence Cooperation, which allowed for better military relations.⁶⁹² Japan’s 2012 Defense White Paper stated that the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation signed between Japan and Australia announced in 2007 was making steady progress. The document was only the second such type of agreement Japan has signed, the other one being the US Mutual Defense Treaty.⁶⁹³

In December 2009, Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama met with Indian Prime Minister Singh, and the two discussed better cooperation concerning the East Asia Summit (EAS) and

⁶⁹¹ Gillard, ‘Japan-Australia Joint Communique’, 21 April 2011

⁶⁹² Ibid., 33

⁶⁹³ Japan DOD, 2012, 280-282

improvements on defence collaboration.⁶⁹⁴ During a 2010 speech in Canberra, Prime Minister Rudd outlined that ‘India and Australia have now designated the relationship as a strategic partnership’.⁶⁹⁵ Gillard visited India in late 2012 and focused on improving economic and cultural ties. Australia was considering selling India uranium, and Gillard emphasized that any controversies concerning the country’s adherence to international protocols or trustworthiness should not overcome the importance of India being a liberal democracy.⁶⁹⁶ Gillard emphasized that naval military exercises would continue, and that annual meetings between the Prime Minister of each country and high-ranking cabinet officials would be held. Gillard told the press the ‘defence relationship is under-developed’. She acknowledged that Australia at the time had stronger ties with China than with India, and that naval exercises would be a good step towards correcting imbalances. Counterterrorism also featured as an area of cooperation.⁶⁹⁷

Some trilaterals included the US. One example is the US-Japan-India trilateral, which held a meeting in May 2013, focusing on ‘greater Indo-Pacific commercial connectivity and regional and maritime security, and cooperation’.⁶⁹⁸ During the Fifth US-India Strategic Dialogue, the statement hinted at more cooperation between the two and Japan in South East Asia.⁶⁹⁹ In September 2015, at the inaugural US-Japan-India trilateral ministerial, the main focus was the ‘growing convergence of their respective countries’ interests in the Indo-Pacific region’, as well as the ‘importance of international law and peaceful settlement of disputes; freedom of navigation and overflight; and unimpeded lawful commerce, including

⁶⁹⁴ Hatoyama, ‘Minutes of Joint Press Conference by Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama of Japan and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India following the Japan-India Summit Meeting’, 29 December 2009

⁶⁹⁵ Rudd, ‘Prime Minister Speech at the opening of the National Security College Australian National University’, 24 April 2010

⁶⁹⁶ Gillard, ‘Transcript of Press Conference - New Delhi, India’, 15 October 2012

⁶⁹⁷ Gillard, ‘Transcript of Press Conference - New Delhi, India’, 17 October 2012

⁶⁹⁸ SD, ‘U.S.-Japan-India Trilateral Meeting’, 1 May 2013

⁶⁹⁹ SD, ‘Joint Statement’, 31 July 2014

in the South China Sea'.⁷⁰⁰ The remarks given following the meeting allowed External Affairs Minister Swaraj to support the 'increasing convergence of our strategic, political, economic, and security interests', and he also added that the 'sea lanes of communication in the region are the lifetime – the lifeline of India's trade and commercial externalities'.⁷⁰¹

Another successful trilateral with the US at its core was the US-Japan-Australia trilateral. During a November 2014 meeting between Obama, Abbott, and Abe, their joint press release emphasized 'their commitment to deepening the trilateral partnership among Australia, Japan and the United States to ensure a peaceful, stable, and prosperous future for the Asia-Pacific region. They noted that this partnership rests on the unshakable foundation of shared interests and values, including a commitment to democracy and open economies, the rule of law, and the peaceful resolution of disputes'. It also stated collective defence cooperation through military exercises would continue, leaving room for peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and cyber capacity building.⁷⁰² The American side emphasized the 'reaffirmed the global reach of their cooperation and the value of comprehensive US engagement in the Asia-Pacific region'.⁷⁰³

The Pacific Dream and strategic culture

The Pacific Dream got another, upgraded variant during the Obama years, from John Kerry. Kerry remained loyal to the same principles that Acheson and Ford espoused, the belief that the US military presence in Asia was a stabilising force, and the belief that free trade and open markets can lead to prosperity. What Kerry brought that was new was a broader

⁷⁰⁰ SD, 'Inaugural U.S.-India-Japan Trilateral Ministerial', 29 September 2015

⁷⁰¹ Kerry, 'Remarks With Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida', 29 September 2015b

⁷⁰² Tony Abbott, 'Prime Minister's Joint Press Release with the President of the United States of America and the Prime Minister of Japan', 16 November 2014

⁷⁰³ Obama, 'Press Release - Australia-Japan-United States Trilateral Leaders Meeting Joint Media Release', 16 November 2014

understanding of economic interconnectedness. Simply put, Kerry's vision of *growth* also made room for human rights, as well as climate. This was an attempt to make the concept of economic development more responsible, and was made possible by the increasing number of shared values and principles between the US and its allies. This phenomenon truly started at the end of the Cold War, and the US adapted to it two decades later.

The security side of Asian cooperation was not a major problem for the US but there were considerable challenges in forging a coherent economic vision for integration. The US was wary of fully adhering to China-supported and Japan-supported formats, and the Obama administration made it a priority to get the TPP accepted by its partners in Asia. The US invested a lot of effort to make sure its treaty allies supported the TPP. During an April 2013 meeting with Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert Del Rosario, Kerry made sure the TPP was on the agenda.⁷⁰⁴ That same month, Kerry met with Japanese Foreign Minister Kishida Fumio, and Kishida emphasized that the TPP would become an important strategic tool if the US and Japan were to implement it.⁷⁰⁵ When Biden visited Asia in December 2013, a background briefing by administration officials noted that he was planning to raise the issue of the TPP with US allies.⁷⁰⁶ A meeting in February 2014 between Kerry and Kishida once again addressed the topic of the TPP, with Kerry claiming that 'finalizing the TPP is one of the most important things that we can do for our countries' economic futures'.⁷⁰⁷

A meeting in April 2014 between Obama and Benigno Aquino III was marked by Aquino's intent to have the Philippines join the TPP.⁷⁰⁸ The same strong interest in joining

⁷⁰⁴ Kerry, 'Remarks With Philippine Foreign Secretary Albert Del Rosario Before Their Meeting', 2 April 2013

⁷⁰⁵ Kerry, 'Joint Press Availability With Japanese Foreign Minister Kishida After Their Meeting', 14 April 2013

⁷⁰⁶ Obama, 'Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on Vice President Joe Biden's Trip to Asia', 3 December 2013

⁷⁰⁷ Kerry, 'Remarks With Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida After Their Meeting', 7 February 2014

⁷⁰⁸ Obama, 'The President's News Conference With President Benigno S. Aquino III of the Philippines in Manila, Philippines', 28 April 2014a

the TPP came from Abbott during a June 2014 meeting with Obama.⁷⁰⁹ The two would meet again in November 2014 in Beijing, and Obama praised Abbott for being an ‘outstanding partner’ concerning the TPP strategy.⁷¹⁰

Turnbull reiterated support for the TPP during a meeting with Obama in Manila.⁷¹¹ The importance of the TPP in a strategic sense was underlined by it being mentioned during an October 2015 meeting between Kerry, his Australian counterpart, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, US Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, and his Australian counterpart, Defense Minister Marise Payne.⁷¹² All of them emphasized the importance of the TPP, making it clear that the agreement does not just serve an economic purpose, but also a strategic one. During a June 2016 speech, Obama said that the TPP is ‘both part of the driving force that created this rules-based system that is now being prepared to ratify among the various nations.’⁷¹³

Economic integration did not take shape just through the US pursuit of the TPP. US allies have also tried to ensure better economic ties among themselves, and one of the most dedicated countries on that front was Australia. One of the key achievements for Australian foreign policy in 2013 consisted of a free trade agreement with South Korea, which determined Abbott to claim the FTA ‘secures Australia’s position in a major market where competitors like the United States, European Union and ASEAN countries are already benefitting from preferential access’.⁷¹⁴ In a March 2014 speech to the Asia Society in Canberra, Abbott spoke of his plans to pursue further trade missions to Japan, South Korea,

⁷⁰⁹ Obama, ‘Remarks’, 12 June 2014a

⁷¹⁰ Obama, ‘Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Anthony J. Abbott of Australia and an Exchange With Reporters in Beijing, China’, 10 November 2014

⁷¹¹ Obama, ‘Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Malcolm B. Turnbull of Australia in Manila, Philippines’, 17 November 2015

⁷¹² Kerry, ‘Remarks With Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, and Australian Defense Minister Marise Payne’, 13 October 2015

⁷¹³ Turnbull, ‘Joint remarks with Obama’, 19 January 2016

⁷¹⁴ Abbott, ‘Australia concludes FTA negotiations with the Republic of Korea’, 5 December 2013

and China.⁷¹⁵ Australia would also secure an economic partnership with Japan, which was praised by Abe in a May 2014 speech.⁷¹⁶ Economic interconnectedness was also among Japan's five foreign policy pillars, and Foreign Minister Kishida would often brief the Japanese Diet on progress on those fronts.⁷¹⁷

Beliefs, attitudes, actions

Where there any notable changes between the Bush and Obama administrations in terms of US strategic culture? In terms of beliefs, the US had more aggressively asserted that it is a Pacific nation, openly using that formulation. It also began to more aggressively present the notion that it wants to be the country that wrote the rulebook for the Indo-Pacific. The US did not compromise on its belief that its norms and values are the best for the region, on the contrary, it began asserting them in a stronger manner.

In terms of attitudes, the US had become more committed to working with its allies in achieving its goals and keeping a leadership profile, but also actively implementing security and economic goals. It had also pursued a number of multilateral formats, both on the security and economic side, while upholding most existing ones. It had been reluctant to pursue multilateral formats where China would be one of the biggest deciders. The US had struggled at times to play by its own rules, with particular attention to the UNCLOS situation. The US upheld UNCLOS as the default maritime law for Southeast Asia, however, the US itself did not ratify UNCLOS, giving it a convenient way out. This type of inconsistency can be costly in the future for US narratives and objectives.

⁷¹⁵ Abbott, 'Address to the Asia Society, Canberra', 25 March 2014

⁷¹⁶ Abe, "'Rising Asia: Messages for the Next 20 Years" Speech by Prime Minister Abe at the 20th International Conference on The Future of Asia', 22 May 2014

⁷¹⁷ Kishida, 'Speech by H.E. Mr. Fumio Kishida, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, at the 19th International Conference on "The Future of Asia"', 23 May 2013

On practices, the US had established multilateral formats, but they did not go beyond standard ministerial talks, which means there was no pressure to institutionalise them. The eventual failure of the TPP can be considered another low in terms of practically establishing new formats. The US had been open to participate in groups that were initiated by its allies, nonetheless it had been reluctant to participate in groups initiated by countries that the US did not see as like-minded. The US generally adhered to its own rhetoric.

Conclusion

To conclude, under Obama the US perception of China became negative. By Obama's second term, the US became aware that its attempts to integrate China in the US-led economic worldview were futile. The San Francisco System, which peaked during the Bush years, gradually became inadequate for what the US needed in Asia. The US consolidated its security ties with Japan and Australia, marking a validation of the fact that those two countries were best positioned to be America's pillars in Asia. The US tried to work with South Korea more, on both economic and security issues, a process which ended with a mixed record. The relationship with the Philippines took a downturn with the election of Duterte. Thailand's repeated coups marked another dent in that relationship. By now, it had become apparent that the San Francisco System was splintering in some ways, with Japan and Australia being in the best position, South Korea in the middle, and the Philippines and Thailand becoming more passive partners than core members. A series of multilaterals between the US and its allies, and between US allies themselves, paved the way for the new security infrastructure of Asia. In spite of these developments, the Obama administration did not bring back the Quad.

Obama's vision for the Pacific Dream is a notable one since, through Kerry, the US added a more modern layer over the established views of Acheson and Ford. Kerry did not renounce the fundamental principles of security engagement and free trade, instead he upgraded the commercial dynamic to something more fitting for the 21st century. The US refocused to Asia through the pivot, in an effort to recalibrate its engagement with the Middle East. There was openness for both multinational economic and security cooperation.

Chapter 5. The San Francisco alliance network during the Donald Trump administration

‘The truth is that our policies – and those of other free nations – resurrected China’s failing economy, only to see Beijing bite the international hands that were feeding it’

Mike Pompeo, July 23, 2020⁷¹⁸

Donald Trump’s victory in the 2016 election came as a surprise to many in US politics. Trump ran on a populist agenda, and now that he was President there were questions concerning his foreign policy, which had its own controversial positions. Ultimately, Trump moved into a hard-line, security-centric approach to foreign policy. This represented a change in some ways, but it wasn’t as radical as some feared. This chapter is structured as follows: the first section will look at the emergence of a bellicose stance from the US vis-a-vis China. Trump’s approach tried to mimic the late Cold War rhetoric at some points. The second section looks at the San Francisco System, particularly, a shift back to bilateral, defence-heavy approaches from the US. The only realistic exception here was the Quad, and that happened because the Quad was viewed as a necessary tool to counter China. Finally, the chapter will inspect Trump’s understanding of a Pacific Dream, or rather his lack thereof.

The US and China

What Trump made clear on the 2016 campaign trail was that he had a transactional approach to almost all aspects of politics, foreign policy included. It didn’t matter if a country was a

⁷¹⁸ Mike Pompeo, ‘Communist China and the Free World’s Future’, 23 July 2020

US ally, partner, or enemy – what Trump wanted from them was some form of *quid pro quo*. With China, Trump attempted that *quid pro quo*, did not get it, and ended doing something that the Obama administration had also considered, something that was perhaps overdue in US foreign policy: a shift in its approach towards China to a more combative stance.

Trump's first Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, met in February 2017 with State Councillor Yang Jiechi, and the two 'discussed the importance of improving and maintaining a mutually beneficial economic relationship between the two largest economies in the world'.⁷¹⁹ During the early stages of the relationship, there was a shared belief in the US and China that the two countries could further develop their economic relationship. Tillerson also met with Xi during the same month and expressed a desire to continue constructive dialogue between the two countries.⁷²⁰ The optimistic tone continued into April 2017, when Tillerson gave remarks at a China summit, claiming that the US was 'looking to make progress with China on areas of foreign policy, those that serve our interest as well as the region's'.⁷²¹

Tillerson held a press conference in June 2017 with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. The two addressed the issue of China, and presented a very conciliatory and optimistic tone. Tillerson said the 'U.S. and China have undergone – relations have undergone a profound transformation over the past 40 years. [...] In furthering this relationship, we need to work to expand areas of cooperation, as we did today, on issues where we have shared security interest. But we also need to address, directly and very frankly, areas where we face threats or areas where we have differences so that we can narrow these differences and solve the problems'. Concerning doubts the US had about China's ambitions in the South China Sea, Tillerson added that 'China has committed to resolve their disputes peacefully and in

⁷¹⁹ Mark Toner, 'Secretary Tillerson's Meeting With State Councilor of the People's Republic of China (PRC) Yang Jiechi', 28 February 2017

⁷²⁰ Tillerson, 'Remarks With President Xi Jinping Before Their Meeting', 19 March 2017

⁷²¹ Tillerson, 'Remarks on China Summit', 6 April 2017

accordance with recognized principles of international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea'. Mattis also said that there is a need to 'prioritize mechanisms that contribute to greater risk reduction between our armed forces, that open and maintain effective channels of communication between us, and that expand areas of cooperation where we can. At the same time, we do manage our differences where we have them, and while competition between our nations is bound to occur, conflict is not inevitable'. He added that the 'United States and China agreed to explore new areas of mil-to-mil cooperation, including exchange of officers to improve transparency and mutual understanding, and to discuss strategic issues'.⁷²² In this sense, there were considerable similarities with the way the Obama administration used to perceive China and its ambitions.

Trump spoke to Chinese President Xi Jinping about North Korea in September 2017. Both of them agreed to build common ground through the United Nations (UN).⁷²³ Trump and Xi also met in November 2017 in Beijing, when Xi tried to emphasize that both countries could act as global leaders together, adding that 'the Pacific Ocean is big enough to accommodate both China and the United States'.⁷²⁴ Tillerson gave a press briefing on the same day, and it could be inferred from his speech that the US was becoming uneasy with the way in which trade negotiations were going. Tillerson 'called for China to give fair and reciprocal treatment to U.S. companies and exports to reduce the U.S. trade deficit and rebalance the economic relationship', all while he said there was not enough progress on trade imbalances. He acknowledged that the US-China trade imbalance kept increasing, giving no clear answer to how the problem should be resolved.⁷²⁵

⁷²² Tillerson, 'Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis at a Joint Press Availability', 21 June 2017

⁷²³ Donald Trump, 'Press Release - Readout of President Donald J. Trump's Call with President Xi Jinping of China', 18 September 2017

⁷²⁴ Trump, 'Remarks to Members of the Press With President Xi Jinping of China in Beijing, China', 9 November 2017

⁷²⁵ Trump, 'Press Briefing by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson', 9 November 2017b

Trump was known for his indifference to nuance. During a February 2018 meeting with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, the issue of Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) was raised. The press wanted to know whether Trump would want Australia to join FONOPS in the South China Sea. Trump's answer to the question was:

'we'd love to have Australia involved, and I think Australia wants us to stay involved. I have to say, we've developed a great relationship with China, other than the fact that they've been killing us on trade for the last long period of time—killing us, absolutely killing the United States on trade. But we have developed a great relationship with China—probably closer than we've ever had. And my personal relationship, as Malcolm can tell you, with President Xi is, I think, quite extraordinary. He's somebody that I like, and I think he likes me. With that being said, he likes China and I like the United States'.⁷²⁶

These types of statements made it clear to US allies, and US rivals, that the US President was highly superficial in his approach. This made it easier to understand why China had not been deterred from its calculated challenge to US primacy, and why US allies had doubled down on reinforcing their military capabilities.

Tillerson lasted as Secretary of State from February 2017 to March 2018. His departure from the State Department was controversial, the consensus being that he and Trump could not work together. Tillerson was replaced by Trump's former head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Mike Pompeo. Pompeo met with Wang in May 2018, and both emphasized the need to work together on North Korea, adding that a good relationship between Presidents Trump and Xi would be beneficial for both sides.⁷²⁷ They met again in June 2018, and Wang

⁷²⁶ Trump, 'The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Malcolm B. Turnbull of Australia', 23 February 2018a

⁷²⁷ Pompeo, 'Remarks With Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councilor Wang Yi at a Press Availability', 23 May 2018

claimed ‘we talk and work together far more than we compete’. Pompeo added that the US ‘wants a very constructive relationship with China’. One notable difference was that Pompeo criticized China’s strategy of building military outposts on the South China Sea, a common grievance shared by China’s neighbours.⁷²⁸

In November 2018, Pompeo and Mattis met with Yang and Defense Minister General Wei Fenghe to discuss US-China diplomatic and security topics. They had positive words for the military-to-military relationship, and expressed a shared desire to make a common front on denuclearizing the Korean peninsula. The position on the South China Sea further demonstrated that divisions persisted, as they ‘committed to support peace and stability in the South China Sea, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea in accordance with international law. [...] The United States called on China to withdraw its missile systems from disputed features in the Spratly Islands, and reaffirmed that all countries should avoid addressing disputes through coercion or intimidation. The United States remains committed to fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows’. Moreover, the US ‘raised concerns about China’s lack of adherence to its international obligations and commitments on human rights and religious freedom. China’s campaign of repression in Xinjiang undermines human rights and regional security’.⁷²⁹ This meeting marked a shift in messaging concerning grievances on military and human rights issues.

At the press conference that followed the summit, both sides acknowledged tensions but tried to downplay them. Pompeo thanked China for its support at the UN on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, while also stating that US policy on Taiwan would not change. Yang claimed that China was pursuing ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics.

⁷²⁸ Pompeo, ‘Press Availability With Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi’, 14 June 2018

⁷²⁹ SD, ‘U.S.-China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue’, 9 November 2018

Everything that we do is to deliver a better life for the Chinese people, to realize rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. It is not intended to challenge or displease anyone'. He added that 'China would remain a contributor to world peace and global development, as well as a defender of the international order'. He also added that China was 'committed to peace and development in the Asia Pacific. We respect the United States interest in the Asia Pacific. At the same time, we expect the United States to respect China's security interests in the Asia Pacific, China's sovereignty and development interests. China has undertaken some constructions on its islands and reefs. Most of them are civilian facilities. The purpose is to serve the interest of the Chinese people and also to provide public goods to others'.⁷³⁰

By December 2018, Trump was frustrated with the way trade negotiations with China were going. He still expressed hope for an alternative where tariff increases could be avoided, by saying 'what I'd be doing is holding back on tariffs. China will be opening up. China will be getting rid of tariffs. You know, China right now has major trade barriers—they're major tariffs—and also major nontariff barriers, which are brutal. China will be getting rid of many of them. And China will be buying massive amounts of product from us, including agricultural from our farmers—tremendous amount of agricultural and other products'.⁷³¹

The hope that the US and China would agree a trade deal that would put the economic balance on a more equal footing had diminished. By late 2019, the relationship had changed considerably. In March 2019, the Hong Kong protests had started. The souring of the economic relationship, combined with the violence in Hong Kong, determined the US to take a strong shift in tone. In October 2019, Mike Pompeo gave a speech at the Hudson Institute in New York City on the China challenge. He claimed 'the communist government in China

⁷³⁰ Pompeo, 'Press Availability With Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Chinese Politburo Member Yang Jiechi, and Chinese State Councilor and Defense Minister General Wei Fenghe', 9 November 2018

⁷³¹ Trump, 'Remarks on China-United States Trade Relations and an Exchange With Reporters Aboard Air Force One While En Route to Joint Base Andrews, Maryland', 1 December 2018

today is not the same as the people of China. They're reaching for and using methods that have created challenges for the United States and for the world', adding that 'it is no longer realistic to ignore the fundamental differences between our two systems and the impact, the impact that those two systems have, the differences in those systems have on American national security'. He emphasized the point that 'we've been slow to see the risk of China – the risk that it poses to American national security, because we wanted friendship with the People's Republic from the very start', and that the US 'all too often shied away from talking directly about the human rights issues there and American values when they came into conflict, and we downplayed ideological differences, even after the Tiananmen Square massacre and other significant human rights abuses'.⁷³² This was a marked change from the previous Republican administration. Pompeo's speech marked a framing of the US-China relationship as one between rivals. The nature of the conflict was systemic, presented as a battle between democracy and autocracy, and Pompeo's speech was riddled with reminders that China is a communist country, in what was an attempt to rally old anti-communist sentiments among US conservatives.

In January 2020, the US and China signed the Phase One Trade Agreement, which covered some elements of the trade relationship, however, it was supposed to be a document that would begin a larger redefining of the trade relationship. Despite the agreement being far from what was expected, Trump hailed it as a victory, stating in a meeting with Chinese Premier Liu He that 'our negotiations were tough, honest, open, and respectful—leading us to this really incredible breakthrough. [...] It should have happened 25 years ago, by the way'. He criticised previous administrations for the absence of a trade deal with China, claiming that the US:

⁷³² Pompeo, 'The China Challenge', 30 October 2019

‘never even had a deal with China. In all fairness, I don't blame China. I blame the people that stood here before me. I don't blame China. I told that to President Xi. I was in Beijing, making a speech, saying how they're ripping us off. And guess what? He wasn't too happy. I looked at him. I said, “He's not happy” And I said, “I'd better change the speech quickly” So I said: “I don't blame him. I blame our Presidents” And I'm right. We should have done the same thing to them, but we didn't. We didn't. We never had a deal with them. They'd do whatever they wanted it’.⁷³³

In May 2020, David Stillwell, Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, held a briefing on China's National Security Legislation, a mechanism through which Hong Kong had been brought under mainland rules. Stillwell claimed ‘the world is finally recognizing that China's pushing – Beijing is pushing a form of government that many only now are beginning to recognize as problematic’. He also did not refrain from attacking China for its handling of COVID-19, claiming China had mishandled the global pandemic and took advantage of the crisis to strengthen its influence in Hong Kong.⁷³⁴

Pompeo followed up with a June 2020 statement from the State Department concerning the ‘obscene’ propaganda of the CCP. The statement was full of metaphors and symbolism, conveying the notion that the CCP is no different from an organized crime group.⁷³⁵ The problem for Pompeo was that the CCP was exploiting US racial tensions following the death of George Floyd, an African American killed by the police, as an example of the US as a divided country, unfit for its hegemonic position. What was striking in Pompeo's statement was the level of hyperbole.

⁷³³ Trump, ‘Remarks With Vice Premier Liu He of China on Signing the United States-China Phase One Trade Agreement’, 15 January 2020

⁷³⁴ David Stillwell, ‘Briefing on P.R.C. National People's Congress Proposal on Hong Kong National Security Legislation’, 27 May 2020

⁷³⁵ Pompeo, ‘On the Chinese Communist Party's Obscene Propaganda’, 6 June 2020

That same month, Pompeo gave a speech at the virtual Copenhagen Democracy Summit, where he tried to frame the CCP as a rogue actor, following the violence in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. Pompeo also invoked the China-India border conflict that started again in May 2020 as an example that China could not be trusted. He mentioned the occasional skirmishes in the South China Sea as another example of increasing violence at China's borders.⁷³⁶ The hardening of the US stance continued. In July 2020, the US took a far stronger position on the South China Sea. A press statement from Pompeo clarified that the 'PRC has no legal grounds to unilaterally impose its will on the region. Beijing has offered no coherent legal basis for its "Nine-Dashed Line" claim in the South China Sea since formally announcing it in 2009'. Pompeo invoked the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal decision based on UNCLOS favouring the Philippines. He added that 'Beijing's harassment of Philippine fisheries and offshore energy development within those areas is unlawful, as are any unilateral PRC actions to exploit those resources'.⁷³⁷ This marked a notable change in the manner in which the US approached the South China Sea disputes.

In August 2020, the State Department designated Chinese Confucius Institutes as Foreign Missions, implying that they were proxies for the CCP to advance a political agenda. The State Department claimed they were 'organizations primarily located on U.S. college and university campuses that push out skewed Chinese language and cultural training for U.S. students as part of Beijing's multifaceted propaganda efforts. The PRC government partially funds these programs, under guidance from the CCP's United Front Work Department'.⁷³⁸ The culmination of the deterioration of US-China ties during the Trump administration was

⁷³⁶ Pompeo, 'Europe and the China Challenge', 19 June 2020

⁷³⁷ Pompeo, 'U.S. Position on Maritime Claims in the South China Sea', 13 July 2020

⁷³⁸ SD, "'Confucius Institute U.S. Center' Designation as a Foreign Mission', 13 August 2020

reached in January 2021, when the State Department designated the atrocities committed in Xinjiang as genocide and crimes against humanity.⁷³⁹

The pattern was clear when it came to the China relationship for the Trump administration. Failure to secure a more equal economic relationship had prompted the Trump administration to pursue Cold War-like competition. It was unclear if this was meant to be an intimidation tactic designed to force China to the negotiating table, but it was clear that China had given no signs of changing its behaviour or making concessions to the US. A power struggle between the US and China had emerged in Asia. Jennifer Lind claimed that the US, through its embrace of the 'liberal order' was acting like a revisionist power, because it was abandoning its more pragmatic and cynical foreign policy of past decades.⁷⁴⁰

Considering the deterioration of relations with China, and Trump's inclination for chaos, it is no surprise that there was a slight change in terms of the US-Taiwan relationship. Trump signed into law H.R. 535, the 'Taiwan Travel Act', which permitted travel between US and Taiwanese officials at all levels. This move meant even lower-ranking politicians could go on trips to Taiwan in order to better showcase their political stance. The obvious negative here was that it would intensify complaints from China, which is what the Trump administration most likely wanted to see anyway.⁷⁴¹ When NSC Advisor Robert O'Brien gave a talk in Phoenix, Arizona in June 2020, he criticised the PRC's various attempts to 'erase' Taiwan, such as forcing US airlines to remove the country's name from their flights destination. He also criticised the emerging practice in US movies to remove Taiwanese flags in order not to

⁷³⁹ Pompeo, 'Determination of the Secretary of State on Atrocities in Xinjiang', 19 January 2021

⁷⁴⁰ Jennifer Lind, 'Asia's Other Revisionist Power', *Foreign Affairs*, March / April 2017

⁷⁴¹ Trump, 'President Donald J. Trump Signs H.R. 294, H.R. 452, H.R. 535, H.R. 3656, and S. 831 into Law', 16 March 2018

offend mainland Chinese audiences. O'Brien's attacks made it clear that Taiwan had become a part of the broader US scuffle with the PRC.⁷⁴²

The San Francisco System

The San Francisco System seemed to become unfit for purpose in the Obama years, acting as a passive structure of US bilateral alliances, instead of a more dynamic trilateral or multilateral format that would explore new ways for countries to cooperate. Under Trump, like under Bush, the San Francisco System found a new sense of purpose, energised by Trump's shunning of multilateralism.

The US and Japan

On the campaign trail, Donald Trump had attacked Japan for being a 'free-rider'.⁷⁴³ This move surprised many in Tokyo, who did not expect economic nationalism to be such a strong feature of Trump's campaign. This decision led to the re-emergence of the debate concerning Japan's contributions to the alliance, and whether they were sufficient. While some had supported Trump's claims,⁷⁴⁴ arguing that the uncertainty Trump provoked would lead to more defence spending by US allies, others had criticized them, arguing that Japan and other countries labelled as 'free-riders' had considerably improved their strategic position over the past decades.⁷⁴⁵ What was clear is that regardless of Trump's initial assessment of Japan, his relationship with Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo led to a considerable change in perspective. Abe was one of the foreign leaders who invested the most in efforts to court

⁷⁴² Trump, 'Press Release - The Chinese Communist Party's Ideology and Global Ambitions', 26 June 2020

⁷⁴³ Linda Sieg, 'Trump candidacy stirs alliance angst in Japan', *Reuters*, 20 March 2016

⁷⁴⁴ Michael Moran, 'What Trump Gets Right About Alliances', *Foreign Policy*, 5 December 2019

⁷⁴⁵ Sato Yoichiro, 'Trump wrong to accuse Japan of free riding on security', *Nikkei*, 17 July 2019

Trump, and the personal relationship between the two meant the US-Japan alliance weathered the Trump years without strain.

Abe visited the White House in February 2017. The goal of the early visit was to emphasize the importance of the Asia-Pacific to the Trump administration. During the meeting, there was strong insistence on the importance of alliances, and Mattis also made an appearance, telling US allies that America was ‘with them, shoulder to shoulder, 100 percent, and that we’re seeking to strengthen what are already longstanding and major and important alliances’. Japan had also been reassured that the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands remained protected by Article V of the US-Japan Security Treaty, a continuation of what had been established under the Obama administration. While Abe succeeded in gaining US support for Japan’s military and strategic interests, there was no desire from Trump to reconsider his stance on the TPP, as he once again insisted on prioritizing bilateral trade agreements.⁷⁴⁶

The joint statement that was published following the meeting strongly emphasized the security aspect of the alliance. The US promised to defend Japan, with particular attention given to the Senkakus. The statement added that considering ‘an increasingly difficult security environment in the Asia-Pacific region, the United States will strengthen its presence in the region, and Japan will assume larger roles and responsibilities in the alliance’.⁷⁴⁷ The appetite of the Trump administration for military strategy policy would become more evident across the years. At the press conference that followed, Trump further demonstrated that whatever animosity he had concerning Japan on the campaign trail had dissipated, arguing that he wanted ties with Japan to improve, and added that the US and Japan ‘face numerous challenges, and bilateral cooperation is essential’.⁷⁴⁸ Once again, there is a dedication to the

⁷⁴⁶ Trump, ‘Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials on Prime Minister Abe’s Visit to the White House’, 9 February 2017

⁷⁴⁷ Trump, ‘Joint Statement by President Trump and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan’, 10 February 2017

⁷⁴⁸ Trump, ‘The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan’, 10 February 2017b

bilateral approach, in spite of the joint statement mentioning the importance of US-Japan-South Korea cooperation on denuclearization strategy.

In March 2017, Tillerson met with Japanese Foreign Secretary Kishida Fumio. Kishida said the US and Japan discussed how to strengthen their alliance, and decided to hold a 2+2 meeting, or Security Consultative Committee meeting. Both said they look forward to ‘expanding trilateral cooperation with South Korea’, in order to address the North Korean threat.⁷⁴⁹ Vice President Mike Pence met with Abe in April 2017, and the two emphasized both bilateral and trilateral cooperation with South Korea concerning North Korea and the threats that it produces.⁷⁵⁰

In August 2017, Tillerson, along with Mattis, Japanese Foreign Minister Kono Taro, and Japanese Defence Minister Onodera Itsunori, gave remarks to the press. The focus was North Korea but Tillerson did make another series of reassurances to US allies by saying that the US ‘will honor our treaty agreements with Japan without reservation, whether in times of peace or in the face of conflict. We will also cooperate to advance trilateral and multilateral security and defense cooperation with other partners in the region, notably the Republic of Korea, Australia, India, and other southeast Asian countries’.

Trump visited Tokyo in November 2017, and the meeting focused on North Korea, as well as the ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ concept. The briefing held by a senior administration official restated the desire of the US to contribute to the defence of Japan and reiterated the fact that the ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ was not a containment strategy for China. There was emphasis added on changing the term to ‘Indo-Pacific’, to better capture the rise of India. When asked about the potential increase in activity concerning the Quad, the senior administration official responded positively, noting that India would be the western edge and

⁷⁴⁹ Tillerson, ‘Press Availability With Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida’, 16 March 2017

⁷⁵⁰ Pence, ‘Press Release - Readout of the Vice President's Meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’, 18 April 2017

the US would be the eastern edge.⁷⁵¹ The press release following the meeting between Trump and Abe hinted at a hardened stance concerning North Korea, as the document not only pointed out that North Korea was necessitating closer ballistic missile cooperation between the US and Japan, it also added that the US and Japan contemplated more military cooperation with South Korea as well.⁷⁵² Another press release came out the same day, emphasizing economic cooperation. The US expressed a willingness to contribute to the ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ by spending more on infrastructure, a strategy that Japan had been pursuing for some time.⁷⁵³

In April 2018, Abe visited the US once again. A briefing by National Economic Council (NEC) Director and Assistant to the President for Economic Policy Larry Kudlow and National Security Council Senior Director for Asian Affairs Matthew Pottinger gave more insights into the evolution of the relationship. They left an opening to the idea that the US was considering changes to the TPP, but nothing concrete came of it. Kudlow tried to differentiate between Trump’s ‘America First’ policy and the US alliance system, noting that ‘America First’ did not mean the US wanted to go it alone when it came to international issues. Kudlow further added that the TPP offered little help to what the administration planned to do concerning China and the trade war with it.⁷⁵⁴ A White House statement following the meeting emphasized the close friendship between Trump and Abe.⁷⁵⁵ The news conference with the two leaders highlighted their common ground on North Korea, and Trump claimed the US was ‘exploring ways to expedite the sale of American military

⁷⁵¹ Trump, ‘Background Briefing by a Senior Administration Official on President Trump’s Visit to Tokyo, Japan’, 5 November 2017

⁷⁵² Trump, ‘Press Release - President Donald J. Trump’s Summit Meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan’, 6 November 2017a

⁷⁵³ Trump, ‘Press Release - President Donald J. Trump’s Visit to Japan Strengthens the United States-Japan Alliance and Economic Partnership’, 6 November 2017b

⁷⁵⁴ Trump, ‘Press Briefing by NEC Director and Assistant to the President for Economic Policy Larry Kudlow and NSC Senior Director for Asian Affairs Matthew Pottinger on the Official Working Visit of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan’, 17 April 2018a

⁷⁵⁵ Trump, ‘President Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe are Working Together to Strengthen the U.S.-Japan Alliance’, 17 April 2018b

equipment to Japan through the Foreign Military Sales program'.⁷⁵⁶ Once again it was noticeable how military spending became a trademark of Trump's alliance politics. Countries could improve their standing with the US if they emphasized a desire to cooperate in military affairs.

When Trump and Abe met again in June 2018, they discussed economic issues but they also talked about Trump's summit in Singapore with North Korean President Kim Jong-un, and Abe expressed support for it.⁷⁵⁷ The summit itself was expected to present a notable improvement in US-DPRK relations, particularly in the area of denuclearization. In concrete terms, the summit diplomacy between Washington and Pyongyang changed very little in terms of Indo-Pacific geopolitics. The notable outcomes of the summit diplomacy mostly consisted of made-for-TV superficial moments, ranging from Trump claiming he and Kim exchanged 'love letters', to the US President referring to North Korea's leader as 'Rocket Man'. The DPRK took full part in the diplomatic argument, releasing a statement describing Trump as a 'dotard'.⁷⁵⁸ The Singapore summit marked an end of the insult diplomacy, nevertheless, questions could be raised about Trump and Kim's style of politics, which prefers the superficial over the practical.

A joint statement concerning the US-Japan Pacific Dialogue emphasized the need for the two countries to work together and to integrate Pacific island countries better.⁷⁵⁹ This marked an increase in attention that the US and Japan gave to the Pacific Islands, and an attempt to safeguard a group of countries that might have felt diplomatically neglected over the past few years.

⁷⁵⁶ Trump, 'The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan in Palm Beach, Florida', 18 April 2018

⁷⁵⁷ Trump, 'The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan', 7 June 2018

⁷⁵⁸ Tessa Wong, "'Dotard' Trump? The story of "rocket man" Kim's insult', *BBC*, 22 September 2017

⁷⁵⁹ SD, 'Joint Statement on the Second U.S.-Japan Pacific Dialogue', 28 June 2018

Abe and Trump would meet again in May 2019, in Tokyo. The meeting expanded on the positives of the relationship, such as their common stance on North Korea, the improving defence ties, and an improvement in economic ties.⁷⁶⁰ The State Department document on the meeting hinted at an openness concerning some degree of multilateral framework. The document claimed the two leaders ‘highlighted the need for an increasingly networked structure of alliances and partnerships, anchored by the U.S.-Japan Alliance, to counter challenges to the United States’ and Japan’s shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region’.⁷⁶¹ The source made no explicit mention of the Quad.

In October 2020, a State Department document outlining the shared values of both countries was published. The document mentioned ‘stability in the Indo-Pacific region’, the ‘preservation and promotion of political and economic freedoms’, ‘respect for human rights and support for democratic institutions’, and ‘the expansion of prosperity for the peoples of both countries and the international community as a whole’ as key objectives shared by the two countries.⁷⁶² The attempts by Abe to pursue a more militaristic path for Japan would only slow down the rise of China, not reverse it, according to Eric Heginbotham and Richard Samuels. Japan needed to change its strategy from one where it focused on defeating aggression at the margins of its territory to one where it would demonstrate to China that a potential attack on Japan would be unsustainable, as the costs would be too great.⁷⁶³

Overall, military ties and a shared tough stance on North Korea allowed the US-Japan alliance to persist throughout the Trump years, in spite of Trump’s transactional approach to diplomacy and his disregard for alliances. The endurance of the alliance also owed to Abe’s personal politics, as he cultivated a friendship with Trump that few other leaders managed.

⁷⁶⁰ Trump, ‘The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan in Tokyo, Japan’, 27 May 2019

⁷⁶¹ SD, ‘President Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Advance the United States’ and Japan’s Global Partnership’, 27 May 2019

⁷⁶² SD, ‘The United States and Japan Reaffirm Strong Ties and Shared Democratic Values’, 5 October 2020

⁷⁶³ Eric Heginbotham, Richard Samuels, ‘A New Military Strategy for Japan’, *Foreign Affairs*, 16 July 2018

One of the biggest minuses of the relationship remained the inability to salvage the TPP, as the US would still not re-join the trade agreement even after Trump left office. The continued absence of the US from the emerging trade blocs in Asia had a profoundly negative effect on US influence.

The US and Australia

Australia, similar to Japan, serves as an example of how easy it is for some US allies to weather whatever political storms they come across. Australia's winning card was the Quad. Trump brought back the Quad due to his desire to punish and counter China for not partaking in his deals, and the re-emergence of the Quad gave Australia a chance to continue upholding a functioning relationship with the US.

Trump and Turnbull had a call in January 2017, emphasizing the strength of the alliance.⁷⁶⁴ Pence also met with Australian officials in April 2017. He reassured Australia that the US would not retreat from Asia, and praised Australia for its contributions to the Afghanistan war, along with the help in counterterrorist operations.⁷⁶⁵ Trump met Turnbull in May 2017, and they discussed conventional topics, such as the strength of the alliance and regional security.⁷⁶⁶ The Australia-United States Ministerial Consultation (AUSMIN) of June 2017 reinforced US support for its Marine Rotational Force in Darwin, Australia, adding that the size of the deployed force would be the largest to date.⁷⁶⁷ Tillerson met Mattis, Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, and Australian Defense Minister Marise Payne in June 2017. Bishop claimed they discussed maritime cooperation and adherence to the international rules-

⁷⁶⁴ Trump, 'Press Release - Readout of the President's Call with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull', 28 January 2017

⁷⁶⁵ Pence, 'Press Release - Readout of the Vice President's Meetings with Australian Officials', 22 April 2017

⁷⁶⁶ Trump, 'Press Release - Readout of the Meeting between President Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull of Australia', 5 May 2017

⁷⁶⁷ SD, 'AUSMIN 2017 Fact Sheet on the U.S. – Australia Relationship', 4 June 2017

based order. Tillerson provided a reminder of the shared values of freedom, and democracy that the two countries had, while telling China to stop its militarization of islands in the South China Sea. Payne expressed support for the increased US military presence in northern Australia. Tillerson was questioned if there was a contradiction between the apparent isolationist rhetoric of the Trump administration and its pursuit of alliances, and answered evasively that the US was upholding dialogue with its partners, and that should be the main focus of attention, not disagreements of philosophy within the administration.⁷⁶⁸

Trump and Turnbull met again in February 2018, and spoke about improving trade ties, their shared support for a free and open Indo-Pacific strategy, and better security cooperation. The conversation often focused on Afghanistan, as well as cybersecurity cooperation.⁷⁶⁹ Turnbull pointed out that the ‘security alliance is as close as it possibly could be, yet keeps getting closer. The cooperation is more intense than it has ever been’. Trump reiterated his support for bilateralism over multilateralism, saying ‘I like bilateral deals much more than multilateral. I like to be able to negotiate with one country. And if it doesn't work out, you terminate. And during the termination notice, right after you consent, they call you and they say, “Please, let's make a deal,” and you fix the deal. When you get into multi, you can't do that’.⁷⁷⁰

Pompeo visited Australia in August 2019, and gave a speech where he said that ‘the days of Australia as a middle power are coming to an end’. Aside from hinting that the status of Australia on the world stage should be elevated, Pompeo further added that the US supported Australia ‘because you stand for the same things that we do: transparency and the rule of law, basic human dignity and freedom, responsible trade investment, partnership, not

⁷⁶⁸ Tillerson, ‘Press Availability With Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, And Australian Defense Minister Marise Payne’, 5 June 2017

⁷⁶⁹ Trump, ‘Press Release - President Donald J. Trump's Meeting with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull Strengthens the United States-Australia Alliance and Close Economic Partnership’, 23 February 2018b

⁷⁷⁰ Trump, ‘News Conference’, 23 February 2018a

domination’.⁷⁷¹ It is easy to observe that the way these shared values were defined allowed for a strong contrast with China.

Pompeo and Defense Secretary Mark Esper met with Payne and Defense Minister Linda Reynolds in August 2019. Payne emphasized that ‘without strong U.S. engagement, the region that we all want, the region that we indeed need, can’t be achieved’. This marked an adherence of Australia to the US Indo-Pacific strategy. Pompeo tried to downplay the notion that the US was forcing countries to choose between it and China. Reynolds also defended the US-Australia partnership, saying the ‘alliance is and continues to be our most important defense relationship, and it’s – also remains the cornerstone of our defense and our security policies’. Esper confirmed that the Indo-Pacific was the key priority for US strategy, and that the US had no plans to retreat.⁷⁷²

The joint statement that followed the AUSMIN went into more detail. The ‘Ministers and Secretaries emphasised the need for an increasingly networked structure of alliances and partnerships to maintain an Indo-Pacific that is secure, open, inclusive and rules-based; and where nations conduct themselves in ways that enhance regional stability, reinforce international law, and respect the sovereignty of all countries’. This was a discreet call for a better integration of the existing bilateral networks. The statement continued by saying that they ‘shared a commitment to deepen cooperation with a range of partners, including with Japan and India, and welcomed the recent Trilateral Strategic Dialogue and Trilateral Defence Ministerial meetings as ways to advance trilateral policy coordination. The Ministers and Secretaries also welcomed the increased engagement in the Indo-Pacific by the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the EU, and expressed their readiness to further boost

⁷⁷¹ Pompeo, ‘The U.S. and Australia: The Unbreakable Alliance’, 4 August 2019a

⁷⁷² Pompeo, ‘Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs Marise Payne, and Australian Minister of Defense Linda Reynolds at a Press Availability’, 4 August 2019b

cooperation on development, infrastructure investment and defence cooperation'. This was another embrace of multilateralism, and it went even further, hinting that cooperation with European actors would be welcome.⁷⁷³

Trump met with Turnbull's successor, Prime Minister Scott Morrison, in September 2019. The meeting did not bring a radical shift in the alliance, but nevertheless Morrison was asked if rising tensions between the US and China would lead to Australia being caught in the middle. He refuted the claims, saying 'obviously, we're keen to see the United States and China be able to come to an agreement. But what is always necessary is that deals have got to be fair. Deals have got to be good deals. Deals have got to be sustainable deals'. Trump took advantage of the occasion to praise Australia for the increases in its defence spending, marking once again a tendency to applaud an ally for investment in military capabilities.⁷⁷⁴

The July 2020 meeting between Pompeo, Esper, Payne, and Reynolds further established the tendency for multilateral cooperation. By this point, the US had hardened its position concerning China, and Pompeo had become one of the staunchest critics of the CCP in the administration. Pompeo made it clear the meeting 'started this morning by talking at length about the Chinese Communist Party's malign activity in the Indo-Pacific region, and indeed all around the world. [...] The United States commends the Morrison government for standing up for democratic values and the rule of law, despite intense, continued, coercive pressure from the Chinese Communist Party to bow to Beijing's wishes. It is unacceptable for Beijing to use exports or student fees as a cudgel against Australia. We stand with our Australian friends'.

⁷⁷³ Pompeo, Mark Esper, 'Joint Statement on Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) 2019', 5 August 2019a

⁷⁷⁴ Trump, 'The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia', 20 September 2019

Payne emphasized shared values, and mentioned democracy, along with the freedom to dissent, among them. She talked about the ‘alliance as the basis to deepen our friendship with others. We already do. We’ll work more closely with existing partnerships such as the Five Eyes, the ASEAN, the Quad, the Trilateral Infrastructure Partnership, the East Asia Summit’. Esper thanked Australia for its support at a time when the South China Sea was becoming increasingly unstable. Reynolds added that ‘we are both experiencing a profound change in the geopolitical framework that underpins our security but also our prosperity’.⁷⁷⁵ The joint statement following the AUSMIN took a harsh tone on China, with the leaders of the US and Australia criticizing China’s actions concerning Hong Kong, Taiwan, its repression of Uighurs, and refuting China’s ‘nine-dash line’, which sparked numerous litigations in the South China Sea with a number of countries opposing the delineation.⁷⁷⁶

The US and South Korea

The US-South Korea alliance endured despite many instances when Washington and Seoul did not see eye to eye. The Trump years provided the alliance with yet another opportunity to relive that experience. Trump was a staunch opponent of almost anything Obama did before him, and in that sense, Obama’s strategic patience with North Korea, a failed policy in itself, was to be scrapped. Trump tried to break new ground by engaging with North Korea’s dictator, Kim Jong-un, yet he did that leaving little room for South Korea’s input and most of his achievements were symbolic.

In December 2016, Park Geun-hye was impeached by the National Assembly of South Korea, and the South Korean government entered a transition period. In February 2017, a

⁷⁷⁵ Pompeo, ‘Secretary Michael R. Pompeo at a Press Availability With Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne, and Australian Defence Minister Linda Reynolds’, 28 July 2020

⁷⁷⁶ SD, ‘Joint Statement on Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) 2020’, 28 July 2020

US-South Korea Foreign Ministerial Joint Statement on North Korea's ongoing situation was released. Tillerson, Kishida, and South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se condemned North Korea's ballistic missile test.⁷⁷⁷ Tillerson met with Yun in March 2017, and restated their common front on North Korea. Yun welcomed the Trump Administration's announcement of 'its robust [...] defense of the ROK'. They both also defended the THAAD deployment. They were aware of China's displeasure with THAAD, but they did not consider Beijing's economic retaliation against South Korea to be the best response.⁷⁷⁸ Acting President Hwang Kyo-ahn met with Tillerson in March 2017 to restate the stability of the alliance.⁷⁷⁹

Vice President Mike Pence met with National Assembly Speaker Chung Sye-kyun in April 2017, both of them reaffirming the US-South Korea alliance, as well as the THAAD system.⁷⁸⁰ Once Moon came to power, he met with Trump in June 2017, and the fundamental principles of the alliance were reaffirmed. As was the case with Japan, Trump backtracked on his tough rhetoric on South Korea as a free-rider and reiterated the 'commitment to provide extended deterrence to the ROK, drawing on the full range of United States military capabilities, both conventional and nuclear'. He also 'pledged to continue to coordinate closely to achieve our shared goal of complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner'.⁷⁸¹ The adherence to denuclearizing the Korean *peninsula* as opposed to denuclearizing *North Korea* is notable here, as this is one of the main goals of almost all US allies and even its rival, China.

⁷⁷⁷ SD, 'U.S.-ROK-Japan Foreign Ministerial Joint Statement on the Situation in North Korea', 16 February 2017

⁷⁷⁸ Tillerson, 'Remarks With Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se Before Their Meeting', 17 March 2017a

⁷⁷⁹ Tillerson, 'Remarks With Acting President Hwang Kyo-ahn Before Their Meeting', 17 March 2017b

⁷⁸⁰ Mike Pence, 'Press Release - Readout of the Vice President's Meeting with Speaker of the National Assembly Chung Sye-Kyun', 17 April 2017

⁷⁸¹ Trump, 'Joint Statement by President Trump and President Moon Jae-in of South Korea', 30 June 2017

Trump and Moon met again in November 2017.⁷⁸² They found common ground on their shared economic ties, and Moon had to navigate the difficult path between approaching a conciliatory tone with regards to North Korea, and also emphasizing US strength in order to gain support from Trump, by stating that ‘war must not break out again on the Korean Peninsula. And in this respect, the United States has provided enormous support. The close coordination between Korea and the United States and the overwhelming superiority of power that stems from the R.O.K.-U.S. alliance will eventually make North Korea cease its reckless provocations and make North Korea come out to dialogue for denuclearization’.⁷⁸³

Pompeo met with Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha in May 2018, as the negotiations between the US and North Korea were improving. They hinted the US would make few concessions during the negotiations.⁷⁸⁴ Another meeting between Trump and Moon in November 2018 showed an increase in the effect that Trump’s hard-line approach to North Korea generated. While the readout mentioned that they reaffirmed the US-South Korea alliance, it also noted that they had ‘discussed the ongoing efforts to accomplish our two countries’ mutual goals of achieving the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea’.⁷⁸⁵ The denuclearization of North Korea was an objective that had gained traction only among US leaders. It was not shared by countries with a stake in achieving peace on the peninsula because it did not seem realistic.

A meeting in June 2019 between Trump and Moon in Seoul saw Moon emphasize the constant need for dialogue between the US and North Korea. However, a more practical achievement of the meeting was the agreement to converge the US Indo-Pacific strategy with

⁷⁸² Trump, ‘Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Moon Jae-in of South Korea in Seoul, South Korea’, 7 November 2017a

⁷⁸³ Trump, ‘Remarks at a State Dinner Hosted by President Moon Jae-in of South Korea in Seoul, South Korea’, 7 November 2017b

⁷⁸⁴ Pompeo, ‘Remarks With Republic of Korea Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha at a Press Availability’, 11 May 2018

⁷⁸⁵ Trump, ‘Readout of the Vice President's Meeting with President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea’, 15 November 2018

South Korea's own 'New Southern Policy'. In the meeting, Moon said 'President Trump is the maker of peace on the Korean Peninsula. You really are the peacemaker of the Korean Peninsula. I hope that this meeting with Chairman Kim Jong Un at the Panmunjom will bring hope to the people of South and North Korea and that it will be a milestone in the history of humankind towards peace'.⁷⁸⁶ A State Department document published in July 2019 reiterated the key points, while it also 'highlighted their robust military sales partnership, including the recent acquisition of 40 F-35A Joint Strike Fighters to bolster U.S.-R.O.K. combined defense'.⁷⁸⁷ This once again confirmed the openness of the Trump administration to improve alliances through military agreements.

A State Department fact sheet released in November 2019 gave more details about the coordination between the US Indo-Pacific strategy and South Korea's New Southern Policy. The shared focus would be on the Pacific Islands, with both countries pledging to spend more on infrastructure. While the outreach of the program was small, it should be noted that both the US and Japan had expressed a desire for deeper engagement with the Pacific Islands, and infrastructure spending was one way to improve relations.⁷⁸⁸ The State Department released a document in January 2020 that emphasized how South Korea was a worthwhile ally of the US, and not a dependent country. The document expanded on South Korea's military contributions to the alliance, such as its high government spending on defence, including an 8.2% rise in 2019, and a planned 7.1% annual rise until 2024. South Korean military deployments in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Persian Gulf were also praised. The document also had a critical section concerning the spending South Korea committed to hosting US troops on its territory, noting that South Korea 'bears no more than one-third of the costs most

⁷⁸⁶ Trump, 'The President's News Conference With President Moon Jae-in of South Korea in Seoul, South Korea', 30 June 2019

⁷⁸⁷ SD, 'President Donald J. Trump and President Moon Jae-in Reaffirm the United States' and Republic of Korea's Ironclad Alliance', 2 July 2019

⁷⁸⁸ SD, 'Joint Fact Sheet by the United States and the Republic of Korea on Cooperation between the New Southern Policy and the Indo-Pacific Strategy', 2 November 2019

directly associated with the stationing of U.S. forces on the Korean Peninsula. As these costs rise, South Korea's share is shrinking. Moreover, these narrowly defined costs are only one part of the picture. America's contributions to South Korea's defense in this highly technological age—including some advanced capabilities Seoul still needs to acquire—far exceed the cost of U.S. “boots on the ground” and constitute a far larger burden for the American taxpayer than meets the eye’.⁷⁸⁹ The document emphasized the high priority the Trump administration placed on military cooperation.

In November 2020, the State Department expanded on the cooperation between the US Indo-Pacific strategy and South Korea's New Southern Policy. It noted that the ‘ROK and the United States are working to increase transparency and strengthen maritime law enforcement capacity with partner maritime law enforcement agencies to more efficiently provide material support for facility construction and enhance equipment interoperability based on complementary efforts, architecture, and equipment’.⁷⁹⁰ The idea of strengthening maritime law enforcement could provide openings for common positions on future maritime law violations by China, even though the wording was deliberately ambiguous.

After Donald Trump lost the 2020 election, Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun made remarks in Seoul in December 2020 about the future of the Korean peninsula. He praised the Singapore statement, expressed hope about future diplomatic exchanges, praised the US-South Korea alliance, and implied that in terms of norms and values, the US and South Korea share plenty in common. He hinted that the US and South Korea could advance a ‘Pax Indo-Pacific’, and afterwards claimed that the ‘war is over; the time for conflict has ended, and the time for peace has arrived’.⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁹ Pompeo, Esper, ‘South Korea Is an Ally, Not a Dependent’, 16 January 2020

⁷⁹⁰ SD, ‘The United States of America and The Republic of Korea on Working Together to Promote Cooperation between the Indo-Pacific Strategy and the New Southern Policy’, 13 November 2020

⁷⁹¹ Stephen Biegun, ‘The Future of the United States and the Korean Peninsula’, 10 December 2020

The US and the Philippines

The last months of the Obama years saw the emergence of Rodrigo Duterte as President of the Philippines. Duterte would present the most radical shift in Philippines politics since perhaps the Ferdinand Marcos years in terms of the country's geopolitical allegiances. Duterte did not hide the fact that he wanted better relations with China, largely for economic reasons. Security would trump economics and by the end of the 2010s, Duterte would tone down his belligerent rhetoric towards the US.

Trump met with President Duterte in April 2017. Trump's personal style of politics was already creating controversy, and this meeting was no different. Despite Duterte being criticized for his disregard for human rights and his own war on drugs which led to a number of extrajudicial killings, Trump had no problem in expressing his sympathy for him.⁷⁹² The meeting was described as 'a very friendly conversation, in which the two leaders discussed the concerns of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regarding regional security, including the threat posed by North Korea'.⁷⁹³ Tillerson also visited the Philippines in August 2017. The trip was part of a broader sustained effort (which Trump would join) to convince the Philippines to take a harder stance on North Korea, preferably via the UN. He also emphasized the enduring role of counterterrorism as a topic that brings the US and the Philippines together regardless of other conflicts.⁷⁹⁴

Trump and Duterte met again in November 2017, and by this time Duterte's push for the US to disengage with the Philippines was very muted. The meeting reiterated discussion

⁷⁹² Michelle Xu, John Gershman, 'Human Rights and Duterte's War on Drugs', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 16 December 2016

⁷⁹³ Trump, 'Press Release - Readout of President Donald J. Trump's Call with President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines', 29 April 2017

⁷⁹⁴ Tillerson, 'Press Availability in Manila, Philippines', 7 August 2017

points as if the two countries had not had any disagreements in recent years. The Joint Statement claimed that the two ‘reaffirmed their commitment to the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951, as reinforced by the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. [...] They also reaffirmed their commitment to continue defense cooperation, including by reinforcing respective national defense capabilities and interoperability and enhancing joint activities, disaster response, and cybersecurity’.⁷⁹⁵ Trump made his visit to the Philippines to build pressure on North Korea, promote the US Indo-Pacific strategy, continue US counterterrorism investments in the Philippines, which were around \$150 million, and improve trade relations.⁷⁹⁶

The December Joint Statement on the Bilateral Strategic Dialogue between the US and the Philippines hinted that there would be alignment to a small extent on key strategic issues for the US. The two sides found common ground on improving trade ties. They also reached common ground on working together to oppose North Korea through the UN. On another point, they ‘reiterated their commitment to uphold freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea in the South China Sea, and stressed the importance of peacefully resolving disputes in accordance with international law, as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention’. Also, the two sides, as was the case with Japan, South Korea, and Australia, had left an opening for some form of multilateral cooperation, when they ‘expressed their desire to strengthen regional cooperation under the ASEAN-U.S. Strategic Partnership and in APEC’.⁷⁹⁷ The document cemented a series of foreign policy wins for the US. The Philippines did not rule out the possibility of taking a stance on North Korea, and there was also a stronger stance on the South China Sea. The support for ‘ASEAN centrality’ was

⁷⁹⁵ Trump, ‘Joint Statement by President Trump and President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines’, 13 November 2017

⁷⁹⁶ Trump, ‘Press Release - President Donald J. Trump's Trip to the Philippines’, 14 November 2017

⁷⁹⁷ SD, ‘Joint Press Statement: U.S.-Philippines Bilateral Strategic Dialogue 2017’, 1 December 2017

another welcome development, even surprising to an extent, given Trump's repeated criticisms of multilateral frameworks.⁷⁹⁸

Pompeo met with Philippines Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. in March 2019. Locsin made a point that there was room for the alliance to 'ensure the unfailing mutual defense of our two countries'. Still, he added that the 'key word is mutual. We have our end to hold up as well, and we need the means to do that from the United States'. Pompeo tried to tie in China's overtures in the South China Sea with the US Mutual Defense Treaty with the Philippines, claiming that as an 'island nation, the Philippines depends on free and unobstructed access to the seas. China's island-building and military activities in the South China Sea threaten your sovereignty, security, and therefore economic livelihood, as well as that of the United States. As the South China Sea is part of the Pacific, any armed attack on Philippine forces, aircraft, or public vessels in the South China Sea will trigger mutual defense obligations under Article 4 of our Mutual Defense Treaty'.⁷⁹⁹ The positive development here was the reinforced alliance, but the threat made by Pompeo, that China's island-building in the South China Sea could trigger an activation of Article 4 of the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty, leading to a war between the US and China, came across as a very provocative comment. The backdrop over this was the Philippines victory in 2016 handed by an arbitration tribunal which ruled that China's 'nine-dash line' is incompatible with UNCLOS. The US argument was in line with the broader point that Chinese overtures in the South China Sea would be met with increasingly strong reactions.

The US and the Philippines held a Bilateral Security Dialogue in July 2019. The Joint Statement restated Pompeo's bellicose stance on his visit to Manila in March 2019, his most striking remark being the 'clarification that the South China Sea (SCS) is in the Pacific, and

⁷⁹⁸ Rifki Dermawan, 'At a Time of Crisis, ASEAN Centrality Really Matters', *The Diplomat*, 17 April 2020

⁷⁹⁹ Pompeo, 'Remarks With Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin, Jr. at a Press Availability', 1 March 2019

that any armed attack on Philippine armed forces, public vessels, or aircraft in the SCS will trigger Article IV of the Mutual Defense Treaty'. The document also expanded on improving military cooperation, a more alert stance in the South China Sea, and even 'emphasized the importance of the rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms'.⁸⁰⁰ The fact that the US and the Philippines expressed a willingness to approach the topic of human rights, in spite of indifference regarding the topic on the part of both Duterte and Trump, was an interesting development. The framing was made in such a manner as to place the US and its allies as alternatives to China.

The US and Thailand

Given Thailand's history of coups, the objective for the relationship was to inject a degree of stability. Trump had a call with Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha in April 2017, where they focused on strengthening the alliance. The two also expanded on improving economic ties.⁸⁰¹ During the Sixth US-Thailand Strategic Dialogue in July 2017, the US managed to expand its agenda with its ally. Discussions covered making a common front against North Korea, counterterrorism, the 'importance of a cooperative approach to ensuring a peaceful and stable South China Sea, freedoms of navigation and overflight, and claimants exercising self-restraint in the conduct of activities that could complicate or escalate disputes', and cybersecurity.⁸⁰²

In August 2019, Pompeo met with Thai Foreign Affairs Minister Don Pramudwinai. The meeting was aimed at reinforcing the importance of the US-Thailand alliance. Pompeo also claimed that 'security cooperation is thriving too. Every year since 1982, American military

⁸⁰⁰ SD, 'Joint Statement From the 8th Philippines-United States Bilateral Strategic Dialogue (BSD)', 17 July 2019

⁸⁰¹ Trump, 'Press Release - Readout of President Donald J. Trump's Call with Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha of Thailand', 30 April 2017

⁸⁰² SD, 'Sixth U.S.-Thailand Strategic Dialogue', 14 July 2017

personnel, our Thai counterparts, and troops from other Asian countries have held exercises called Cobra Gold, the Indo-Pacific's largest annual multinational exercise. The foreign minister and I agreed to keep our security ties strong'. He once again advanced the US agenda for the Indo-Pacific, by saying that the main focus would be on North Korea and the South China Sea. The issue of ASEAN centrality came up again, as Pompeo wanted to 'bolster ties' with other countries through ASEAN.⁸⁰³

The US and Thailand published a Joint Statement in October 2017, which reiterated shared values, the alliance's importance in security stability in the Indo-Pacific, and other similar topics. Notably, they 'welcomed closer military-to-military cooperation and joint exercises, including Cobra Gold—the largest multilateral military exercise in Asia, which help promote interoperability and friendship'. Thailand's transition to democracy was praised, and, as was typical, there was a call for better economic relations.⁸⁰⁴

The US and India

Trump was elected on a populist agenda, a factor that worried some in Washington. The convenient detail here is that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was also elected on a populist platform. Many had doubts about Trump's combative approach to China, yet the Indian government was among those willing to entertain a more combative approach to China due to the two countries' military skirmishes in the Himalayas. The lengths to which Trump and Modi would go to align their political personas was quite surprising.

⁸⁰³ Pompeo, 'Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo And Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai At a Press Availability', 1 August 2019

⁸⁰⁴ Trump, 'Joint Statement by President Trump and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha of Thailand', 2 October 2017

Trump called Modi in January 2017. The two highlighted their countries' friendship, and hinted that there was work to be done on economic and defensive matters.⁸⁰⁵ A fact sheet published in June 2017 emphasized the US commitment to ensure India develops militarily, and particularly highlighted the Malabar exercise as a means of improving ties.⁸⁰⁶ Tillerson met with Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in October 2017. Swaraj said 'we consider the U.S. as an indispensable partner in every sector of India's march forward'. He added that 'defense engagements have intensified. We are consulting closely on security and counterterrorism issues, and commencement of U.S. crude oil purchase by India has added a new dimension to our energy partnership'.⁸⁰⁷

Trump and Modi met in February 2018, and both claimed they would continue working to ensure the safety of the Indo-Pacific region, though the discussions predominantly expanded on the issue of democracy in India.⁸⁰⁸ A preview of the August 2018 2+2 ministerial meetings highlighted that the US 'declared India a major defense partner in 2016, a status unique to India, and operationalizing that status will also be an important part of our discussion at the 2+2. [...] We are also eager to expand defense trade, which is estimated to reach 18 billion by 2019 from essentially zero in 2008. To support this goal, the U.S. Government recently granted India Strategy Trade Authority Tier 1 designation, which enables U.S. companies to export dual-use items to India under a more streamlined, licensed process'.⁸⁰⁹ During the opening remarks for the meeting, Swaraj implied that India's 'great

⁸⁰⁵ Trump, 'Press Release - Readout of the President's Call with Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India', 24 January 2017

⁸⁰⁶ Trump, 'Press Release - Fact Sheet: The United States and India — Prosperity Through Partnership', 26 June 2017

⁸⁰⁷ Tillerson, 'Press Availability With Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj', 25 October 2017

⁸⁰⁸ Trump, 'Press Release - Readout of President Donald J. Trump's Call with Narendra Modi of India', 8 February 2018

⁸⁰⁹ SD, 'Previewing the Upcoming U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue', 30 August 2018

political, economic, and security role can reinforce U.S. efforts to promote stability in the region’.⁸¹⁰

In the joint statement that followed the meeting, they ‘reaffirmed the strategic importance of India’s designation as a Major Defense Partner (MDP) of the United States and committed to expand the scope of India’s MDP status’. They also ‘committed to work together and in concert with other partners toward advancing a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, based on recognition of ASEAN centrality and on respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, rule of law, good governance, free and fair trade, and freedom of navigation and overflight’.⁸¹¹ While it was true that the US had actively pursued a strong relationship with India, it would be wrong to say that there were no signs from India that this relationship could develop in a productive manner. India was willing to participate in the anti-China security front that the US was building.

Pence met with Modi in November 2018, and they ‘reiterated the importance of the U.S.-India strategic partnership and of advancing our shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific’. They claimed they would find common ground on counterterrorism operations.⁸¹² This made India another country that openly claimed it adhered to the US Indo-Pacific strategy. All San Francisco System members and India had agreed to a certain extent to work with the US Indo-Pacific strategy.

Pompeo met with Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar in June 2019. He emphasized shared goals, the agreement over the shared Indo-Pacific vision, the fact that the US had ‘granted India Strategic Trade Authorization tier 1 status last year, allowing India to enjoy the same license-free access to certain defense articles as NATO allies, Japan, South

⁸¹⁰ Pompeo, ‘Opening Remarks at the U.S.-India 2+2 Dialogue’, 6 September 2018

⁸¹¹ SD, ‘Joint Statement on the Inaugural U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue’, 6 September 2018

⁸¹² Pence, ‘Readout of the Vice President’s Meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India’, 14 November 2018

Korea, and Australia. This status also creates greater supply chain efficiency and supports U.S. industry and investment’, and other military improvements.⁸¹³

Jaishankar was thankful to US liberalization in terms of export regulations on defence and high technology that would otherwise make it harder for India to purchase them. He made a more nuanced case for multilateralism when he said the ‘Indo-Pacific is for something, not against somebody. And that something is peace, security, stability, prosperity, and rules’. This did not deter Pompeo from taking a combative stance on China, claiming the countries ‘in this part of the world which have signed on to the Belt and Road projects have found Beijing’s deals come not with strings attached, but with shackles. [...] We, together, should act quickly to fulfill the ambitious vision for prosperity that’s shared by President Trump and Prime Minister Modi – not just for our own people, but for the good of the region and the world’.⁸¹⁴

Pompeo, Esper, Jaishankar, and Indian Minister of Defense Shri Rajnath Singh held a press conference in December 2019. Pompeo spoke about their shared values, stressing the fact that both countries are democracies. He also mentioned the thriving defence relationship. Opposition to China’s 5G networks was also presented. Esper largely reiterated Pompeo’s points, with the focus being on the idea of the US and India as democracies with a strong military connection. Singh also noted that the two countries had ‘complementary interests’. Jaishankar tried to add more diversity to the topics, adding that the US and India also work together on science and technology cooperation.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹³ SD, ‘Secretary Pompeo Travels to India to Deepen Our Strategic Partnership’, 25 June 2019

⁸¹⁴ Pompeo, ‘Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo And Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar At a Press Availability’, 26 June 2019

⁸¹⁵ Pompeo, ‘Secretary Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper, Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, and Indian Minister of Defense Shri Rajnath Singh at a Press Availability’, 18 December 2019

Trump's appreciation for populist events was visible during his 'Namaste Trump' rally in Ahmedabad, India, in February 2020. Trump always tried to use rallies domestically to shore up support in a political climate where he would say everyone was against him. The India rally was quite unique in the sense that the branding of it was so heavily catered to Trump. By doing this, India, like Japan, South Korea, and the other US allies, has shown that the best way to deal with Trump politically was to cater to him. Modi himself was to a certain degree a populist, so the rally was a win-win for both leaders. Trump returned Modi's favour and implied that many of India's achievements were due to Modi's leadership.

Trump used the rally to create a clear separation between China and India, by saying 'there is all the difference in the world between a nation that seeks power through coercion, intimidation, and aggression, and a nation that rises by setting its people free and unleashing them to chase their dreams. And that is India. This is why India's accomplishment over the last 70 years is completely unrivaled no matter where you go'. He added that the US would continue to provide India with 'some of the best and most feared military equipment on the planet', noting that the US 'make the greatest weapons ever made: airplanes, missiles, rockets, ships. We make the best. And we're dealing now with India'. Trump was happy to announce that the US would 'sign deals to sell over \$3 billion in the absolute finest, state-of-the-art military helicopters and other equipment to the Indian Armed Forces. I believe that the United States should be India's premier defense partner, and that's the way it's working out'.⁸¹⁶ Trump's message was clear, India and China were rivals, and India was strongly aligned with the US. Even though this was not the case, Trump tried to maximize the impression.

In August 2020, Deputy Secretary Stephen Biegun gave remarks on the US-India strategic partnership. He marked a nuanced change in the dynamic of the relationship, noting

⁸¹⁶ Trump, 'Remarks at a "Namaste Trump" Rally in Ahmedabad, India', 24 February 2020

how ‘our partnership with India has become all the more vital. To borrow a phrase from my – Prime Minister Vajpayee – we have “overcome the hesitations of history” to achieve a strong and stable partnership underpinned by that shared democratic values and common interests’. He added that ‘our new Indo-Pacific strategy [...] is focused around democracies. It’s focused around free markets. It’s focused upon the values that the Indian government and the Indian people share with the United States government and the United States people. In order to make that successful we have to tap into the full scale of the region’.⁸¹⁷

In October 2020, Pompeo travelled to India to discuss the US-India Global Strategic Partnership. He said that there was a ‘strategic convergence’ on most key issues. He said he ‘welcomes India’s emergence as a leading regional and global power’.⁸¹⁸ That same month, Pompeo, Esper, and their Indian counterparts Jaishankar and Singh held a ministerial dialogue. Pompeo and Esper spoke positively of the military relationship while Jaishankar said that ‘the performance of our relationship in the last few years has been exceptionally positive’.⁸¹⁹ The Joint Statement following the ministerial dialogue reiterated support for the US Indo-Pacific strategy, and praised increased maritime cooperation.⁸²⁰

The Quad

In May 2019, the US, Japan, Australia, and India held consultations concerning the Quad. They expressed support for the ‘rules-based order in the region’, and they ‘highlighted their efforts to maintain universal respect for international law and freedom of navigation and overflight’, an allusion to the South China Sea. There was also an attempt to define the Quad

⁸¹⁷ Biegun, ‘Deputy Secretary Biegun Remarks at the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum’, 31 August 2020

⁸¹⁸ SD, ‘Secretary Pompeo Travels to India to Advance U.S.-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership’, 25 October 2020

⁸¹⁹ Pompeo, ‘Secretary Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, Indian Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, and Indian Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh Joint Press Availability at the U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue’, 27 October 2020

⁸²⁰ SD, ‘Joint Statement on the Third U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue’, 27 October 2020

in a non-military manner, by emphasizing the need to work together on improving private sector opportunities, good governance, institutional transparency, and other issues.⁸²¹ A State Department document released in August 2019 covering the US-Australia alliance had a section where it explicitly mentioned the Quad, highlighting the two countries' willingness to 'further deepen trilateral cooperation with Japan, and enhance engagement with India, including through the Quad'.⁸²² During that same US-Australia meeting, Pompeo spoke about the Quad, saying that the US and Australia had 'worked together in what we call the Quad, and we are revitalizing it', adding that there was 'momentum within the Quad, and there's lots of room for growth'.⁸²³

A meeting between the Quad foreign ministers took place in September 2019. They 'reaffirmed their shared commitment to close cooperation on maritime security, quality infrastructure, and regional connectivity in support of a rules-based order that promotes stability, growth, and economic prosperity', and also discussed cyber security, ASEAN centrality, and hinted that they would meet at the margins of the 2019 East Asia Summit.⁸²⁴

Consultations were held in November 2019, and the Quad members 'reaffirmed their support for a rules-based order in the region that promotes stability, growth, and economic prosperity'. They once again pursued collaboration on a variety of topics, such as 'counter-terrorism, cyber, development finance, maritime security, humanitarian assistance, and disaster response'. They spoke positively of ASEAN and insisted that the organization have a greater role in Indo-Pacific strategy.⁸²⁵

⁸²¹ SD, 'U.S.-Australia-India-Japan Consultations ("The Quad")', 31 May 2019

⁸²² SD, 'Australia and the United States: An Alliance for the Future', 5 August 2019b

⁸²³ Pompeo, 'The U.S. and Australia', 4 August 2019a

⁸²⁴ Morgan Ortagus, 'Secretary Pompeo's Meeting with Quad Foreign Ministers of Australia, India, and Japan', 27 September 2019

⁸²⁵ SD, 'U.S.-Australia-India-Japan Consultations ("The Quad")', 4 November 2019

The COVID-19 pandemic did not deter the Quad, and a September 2020 meeting highlighted how it aimed to facilitate cooperation in an attempt to tackle the pandemic. On this occasion, the Quad members also ‘discussed ways to promote the use of trusted vendors, particularly for 5G networks. They explored ways to enhance coordination on counterterrorism, maritime security, cyber security, and regional connectivity, as well as quality infrastructure based upon international best practices, such as the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment. Participants also highlighted the need to improve supply chains in sectors including critical minerals, medical supplies, and pharmaceuticals’.⁸²⁶ This marked a rejection by the Quad of China’s 5G infrastructure.

The foreign ministers met again for a Quad ministerial in October 2020. In his opening remarks, Pompeo tied the strength of the Quad to the principles of democracy. He said their ‘partnership isn’t multilateralism for the sake of it. All of us seek a free and open Indo-Pacific and our conversations aim to achieve that good outcome’. He also explicitly presented the Quad as a mechanism that opposed the CCP, saying that ‘it is more critical now than ever that we collaborate to protect our people and partners from the CCP’s exploitation, corruption, and coercion. We’ve seen it in the south, in the East China Sea, the Mekong, the Himalayas, the Taiwan Straits. These are just a few examples’. Payne tried to frame the Quad in a less conflictual manner, saying that it had a ‘a positive agenda. It’s a diplomatic network that assists us as democracies to align ourselves in support of shared interests. We believe in a region governed by rules, not power. We believe in the fundamental importance of individual rights and in a region which – in which disputes are resolved according to international law. And we believe in regional security and recovery from COVID-19 that supports sovereign choices for the countries of the Indo-Pacific’. Jaishankar spoke in favour of the rules-based order, also legitimizing the Quad by saying the ‘objective remains advancing the security and

⁸²⁶ SD, ‘U.S.-Australia-India-Japan Consultations (“The Quad”)’, 25 September 2020

the economic interests of all countries having legitimate and vital interests in the region. It is a matter of satisfaction that the Indo-Pacific concept has gained increasingly wider acceptance. The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative that we tabled at the East Asia Summit last year is a development with considerable promise in that context'.⁸²⁷

During a late October 2020 meeting in India, the State Department released a document that once again mentioned the Quad, pointing out that it 'has proven to be an effective multilateral mechanism, helping to create resilient supply chains, promote transparency, counter disinformation, and increase maritime security'.⁸²⁸ The Joint Statement of the US-India ministerial meeting also emphasized the Quad, claiming that the two countries 'appreciated the exchange of views on regional issues of mutual interest, as well as ongoing cooperation related to maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, regional connectivity, health security and counter terrorism'.⁸²⁹

Another Quad meeting took place in December 2020. On this occasion, the Quad positioned itself against Chinese disinformation campaigns. Aside from that, they discussed humanitarian developments and facilitating access to vaccinations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Once again, ASEAN centrality was mentioned.⁸³⁰ There was an ongoing battle between China and US-aligned forces over supply chains, and the integration of the Quad into the supply chains debate further highlighted how it had become a group aimed at countering China.

The US push for the Quad had been strong. Nonetheless, some analysts, like J. Berkshire Miller, have pointed out that it was the improvement in Japan-India ties that had also facilitated deeper Quad cooperation. The good relationship between Abe and Modi had

⁸²⁷ Pompeo, 'Secretary Michael R. Pompeo Opening Remarks at Quad Ministerial', 6 October 2020

⁸²⁸ SD, 'Pompeo Travels to India', 25 October 2020

⁸²⁹ SD, 'Joint Statement', 27 October 2020

⁸³⁰ SD, 'U.S.-Australia-India-Japan Consultations ("The Quad") Senior Officials Meeting', 18 December 2020

played a key role, as well as the rise of China. Miller pointed out that there was considerable overlap between Japan's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' strategy and India's 'Act East Policy'. To add to this, a good military relationship between Japan and India had also been well received by the US, which had been improving its own military relationship with both. Cooperation should not be confused with the establishment of a formal alliance, however, as all the members of the Quad were pursuing their own economic and strategic interests.⁸³¹

The temporary suspension of the Quad, and its re-emergence were contextualised by Tanvi Madan in an article for *War on the Rocks*. The Quad started with a mixed focus, touching both on better coordination on dealing with natural disasters and a geopolitical focus on China. It was the geopolitical focus on China, combined with scepticism that China was a threat, especially in Australia, India and to a lesser extent, Japan, that determined the eventual suspension of the group. The Quad needed a decade of deepening military security cooperation between its members for them to reach a degree of confidence that would allow for its eventual re-emergence.⁸³²

If the Quad was to act as a counterbalance to China, it would need to act as a platform that could accept future members. In that sense, the Quad had encountered some difficulties. An analysis brief by Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan of the Perth USAsia centre highlighted the difficulties the Quad had in trying to maintain working relationships with potential members. One stipulated formula would be the 'Quad Plus', while another one would be the 'Quad plus three'. The main 'candidates' would be South Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam. The problem was that all three countries were reluctant to join the Quad because they thought it would add an unnecessary source of tension with China.⁸³³

⁸³¹ J. Berkshire Miller, 'How Abe and Modi Can Save the Indo-Pacific', *Foreign Affairs*, 15 November 2017

⁸³² Tanvi Madan, 'The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of the "Quad"', *War on the Rocks*, 16 November 2017

⁸³³ Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, 'Towards a Quad-Plus Arrangement?' *Perth USAsia Centre*, 2020, 3-6

The Pacific Dream and strategic culture

It is difficult to place the Trump administration's Pacific Dream in context. Trump was averse to any kind of parallel with the Obama administration, and thus the likelihood of Trump borrowing and upholding fundamental principles from Kerry's view of the Pacific Dream was close to zero. Despite that, some parallels can be drawn with all three versions. Like Bush, Trump operated under the principle that guided Acheson: that there needed to be a threat to the US military-economic structure. Moving away from terrorism, Trump found China as a modern stand-in for the USSR. Trump distanced himself from the Ford principle of upholding economic cooperation as one of the key goals, and went back to the late 80s, and early 90s tendency of strongarming both rivals and friends with threats of trade wars. Ironically, Trump's fixation with China as a rival made his administration express concerns over human rights, and his scepticism of multilateral trade deals brought him closer to the idea of fair growth. The point here was that in Kerry's speech there were some principles that were very well adapted for the modern great power conflict that is taking place between the US and China.

The Trump administration is not famous for what it did concerning a US Pacific Dream, instead it is famous for what it undid. All indications are that on security, the Trump administration tried to move the US back to the Bush years, while its opinion concerning a greater political-economic structure was that there shouldn't be one, since it would minimise US leverage. The way the Trump White House understood US alliances is ironically similar to the way China understood them: hierarchic, top-down, with the biggest country calling all the shots and the smaller countries following it because they have no choice. President Trump in particular had a very simplistic and cynical, in some ways old-fashioned, understanding of America's trade relations. It brought back memories of the Reagan and Bush Sr.

administrations, but also the Bush Jr. years. Trump opposed the TPP, and by doing so he set back US strategy in Asia considerably.

In April 2015, Trump criticised the TPP, claiming it was bad for workers. He opposed Congressional ratification of the TPP. During the 2016 election, opposition to the TPP began growing within the US, a development that Trump exploited and forced Hillary Clinton to claim she also did not support the TPP.⁸³⁴ Trump opposed the TPP during the Republican debates, and, during a campaign rally in Ohio, he called the trade deal ‘a continuing rape of our country’.⁸³⁵ He won the election, and at this point, if there were any beliefs that Trump was playing politics, taking advantage of a toxic sentiment concerning trade within the US electorate, they were quickly dispelled, as Trump left the TPP on 23 January 2017, the third day of his presidency.⁸³⁶

This position taken by Trump had not been analysed properly. The Trump administration was remarkably chaotic, and there were numerous policy moves Trump had considered and eventually didn’t do, oftentimes because he couldn’t but sometimes because he never meant to. The TPP however, was different, by the speed, consistency, and action taken. It is possible Trump was tempted to do it because he saw it as an easy win with his electorate. He may have done it because he saw it as a quick way to dismantle something the Obama administration and Hillary Clinton worked hard on. What is certain is that by doing so, he caused the US to lose the initiative concerning Asia’s economic integration.

It was not just the TPP. Asian economic integration is anathema to Trump’s trade philosophy. On the 2016 campaign trail, Trump attacked America’s trade relationship with Japan in a manner that was reminiscent of the 1980s. Trump named Japan, along with China

⁸³⁴ Adam Taylor, ‘A timeline of Trump’s complicated relationship with the TPP’, *Washington Post*, 13 April 2018

⁸³⁵ Cristiano Lima, ‘Trump calls trade deal “a rape of our country”’, *Politico*, 28 June 2016

⁸³⁶ Taylor, ‘Timeline of Trump’, *Washington Post*, 13 April 2018

and Mexico as the reasons why America is ‘getting absolutely crushed on trade’.⁸³⁷ Trump also called the US trade deal with South Korea a ‘horrible deal’, and threatened to terminate it.⁸³⁸ The US-South Korea trade deal was a project that the Bush administration, and later the Obama administration, had worked on.

These types of statements were part of a Trump strategy to coerce US allies into renegotiating deals. Japan, South Korea, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a major achievement of the Clinton administration, were renegotiated, with NAFTA being rebranded as the United States-Canada-Mexico Agreement (USMCA). Neither of these trade deals changed the trade relationships in a radical way, but they were presented by Trump in a positive light because his administration was in charge of renegotiating them.

Beliefs, attitudes, actions

Donald Trump presented the US with its biggest shift in strategic culture of all the 4 presidents studied in this thesis. In terms of beliefs, the US adhered strongly to the notion that it is a Pacific nation, continuing a move initiated by the Obama administration. On the security side, the US moved strongly on the belief that it should write the rulebook for the Pacific, from freedom of navigation to the territorial integrity of its allies. In terms of norms and values, the US more strongly emphasized an adherence to norms and values that it had previously supported, this time with the goal of creating a contrast with China.

In terms of attitudes, the US worked with its allies, in bilateral and multilateral settings, to achieve security goals. It was far less open to cooperation on economic issues. Economic reviews of existing trade deals took place, but the negotiations were tense and coercive in

⁸³⁷ Jonathan Soble, Keith Bradsher, ‘Donald Trump Laces Into Japan With a Trade Tirade From the ‘80s’, *New York Times*, 7 March 2016

⁸³⁸ Philip Rucker, ‘Trump: “We may terminate” U.S.-South Korea trade agreement’, *Washington Post*, 28 April 2017

nature, with the US specifically aiming to ‘correct’ what it called imperfections in the trade relationships. Nevertheless, the Quad, and its robust bilateral military alliances are examples of the US continuing to support multilateral formats concerning security. The US still did not ratify UNCLOS, and a look at its trade philosophy under Trump enforces the idea that the US was inclined to play by its own rules and accord itself specific exemptions from the normative framework it set out.

In terms of practices, the US did not fully institutionalise the Quad but ministerial meetings did begin taking place. In that sense, there is still a positive example of the US establishing multilateral institutions. On the economic side, the US withdrew from the TPP and renegotiated key trade deals, such as NAFTA and with South Korea. This signals that the US was a lot more circumspect concerning the multilateral institutions it supported. If one considers the Quad a group initiated by ‘others’, then it is an example of the US willing to take part in groups that it did not initiate. Nevertheless, the trade policy of the Trump administration reinforced the notion that the US saw itself as the leader of any group, and thus it would be difficult to say that the US had become more willing to entertain multilateral formats proposed by others. Finally, there were clear examples of the US adhering to its own rhetoric, largely because the rhetoric itself became much sharper.

US strategic culture shifted towards more integration on the security side, and a reviewed, cautious, bilateral approach on the economic side. The US was still deeply sceptical of broad-reaching economic agreements. Nonetheless, it entertained some forms of integration, with particular regards to security, as long as it could remain the leader of said coalitions.

Conclusion

To conclude, under Trump, the US finalised its switch to a position of systemic rivalry with China. The Quad re-emerged, and it began holding a dual position with the San Francisco System in terms of being the go-to framework for US security planning. As expected, the US continued to consolidate security cooperation with Japan and Australia, key pillars of US foreign policy in Asia. Aside from trade renegotiations, the US worked with South Korea too, but the notable distinction here is that South Korea was moving to a place of increased security autonomy, without trying to bind itself too strongly to US security institutions. Once Duterte toned down his anti-US positioning, the relationship with the Philippines improved. The US also attempted to normalise relations with Thailand. This did not change the impression of splintering within the San Francisco System, which increasingly seemed like a group of reluctant and passive US security treaties. Trump greatly improved ties with India, which only aided the re-emergence of the Quad, and the integration of India into the regional security infrastructure.

Chapter 6. The San Francisco alliance network during the presidency of Joe Biden

‘Before I came to office, the story was about how the People’s Republic of China was increasing its power and America was falling in the world.

Not anymore’⁸³⁹

Joe Biden, State of the Union 2023

The election of Joe Biden as US President in 2020 was expected to be a ‘return to normal’ in US politics, a move away from Trump’s controversies and conflictual approach to politics. In some ways Biden did change the approach, switching back to a more accepting view of multilateralism, and a more accommodating stance with US allies. What did not change was the fact that the US and China were competing with each other. This chapter is structured as follows: a first section looks at how the differences between Trump and Biden concerning China are mostly differences of style, not practice. It is followed by a second section that looks at the San Francisco System’s return to passivity as its members are once again emboldened by trilaterals, multilaterals, and Biden’s decision to continue supporting the Quad. The final section will explore Biden’s Pacific Dream and the extent to which this can be achieved, given a series of constraints.

The US and China

⁸³⁹ Joe Biden, ‘Remarks of President Joe Biden – State of the Union Address as Prepared for Delivery’ White House, 7 February 2023

If there was any hope that the US and China would improve their relationship, those hopes were quickly diminished. The COVID pandemic, the Quad, and the US decision to continue seeing itself as being in a battle of values with China not only maintained the glacial relationship, they also led to a further deterioration of it, both in a diplomatic sense, and an economic one.

The Department of Defense published in 2021 its Annual Report to Congress on *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*. The report made it clear that there was no intention from China to move away from great power competition on military affairs. The Defense Department report stated that the PRC was aiming to 'match or surpass U.S. global influence and power, displace U.S. alliances and security partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region, and revise the international order to be more advantageous to Beijing's authoritarian system and national interests' by 2049. China's conception of strategic competition was defined as 'rivalry among powerful nation states, as well as a clash of opposing ideological systems'. The report added that 'Beijing views the United States as increasingly determined to contain the PRC, creating potential obstacles to its strategy. Additionally, the PRC's leaders are increasingly willing to confront the United States and other countries in areas where interest diverge'.⁸⁴⁰

On 23 January 2021, the State Department expressed concern over Chinese military pressure on Taiwan. The US emphasized that it 'will continue to assist Taiwan in maintaining a sufficient self-defense capability'.⁸⁴¹ Secretary of State Anthony Blinken called PRC Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs Yang in February 2021, and expressed US support for human rights and democratic values in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong. He also informed Yang that the US would attempt to make a common front with

⁸⁴⁰ Department of Defense, 'Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China', 2021, III-XI

⁸⁴¹ Price, 'PRC Military Pressure Against Taiwan Threatens Regional Peace and Stability', 23 January 2021

its allies in the Indo-Pacific ‘to hold the PRC accountable for its efforts to threaten stability in the Indo-Pacific, including across the Taiwan Strait, and its undermining of the rules-based international system’.⁸⁴² The US also made it clear that it stood in support of the people of Hong Kong, at least in a moral sense, condemning China’s crackdown on democratic institutions and its decisions to alter Hong Kong’s electoral system in a manner that would allow the CCP to exert greater control. It mentioned the Sino-British Joint Declaration in emphasizing the need for Hong Kong to have autonomy, and urged China to respect Hong Kong’s adherence to personal freedoms and human rights.⁸⁴³

In March 2021, the PRC sanctioned two US officials on the Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), which generated condemnation from the State Department. Beijing was accused of trying to intimidate those speaking out against human rights abuses and those who support individual freedoms.⁸⁴⁴ At the end of that month, the US, along with the United Kingdom and Canada, put forward a joint statement condemning Chinese atrocities in Xinjiang.⁸⁴⁵ These were examples of the Biden administration coordinating with allies to form a common front against China, a sign of a shift to multilateralism.

The main highlight of March 2021 was the meeting between Blinken, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, and their Chinese counterparts, Yang Jiechi of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, and Wang Yi, State Councillor. Before the meeting, Blinken and Sullivan said that they wanted to send the message that the US’ China policy plans consisted of strengthening itself at home, and working with allies and international institutions. They made it clear that the meeting was a one-off, and that there

⁸⁴² Anthony Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with PRC Director Yang’, 5 February 2021

⁸⁴³ Blinken, ‘Assault on Democracy in Hong Kong’, 11 March 2021

⁸⁴⁴ Blinken, ‘PRC Sanctions on U.S. Officials’, 27 March 2021

⁸⁴⁵ SD, ‘Joint Statement on Xinjiang’, 22 March 2021

was no clear objective for it other than both sides communicating where they stand. From what State Department documents show, US officials were of the belief that the Chinese officials were hoping for a change of tone.⁸⁴⁶ They were not aware that it was China who was expecting the US to pursue a change of tone.

During the meeting, Blinken said the US ‘relationship with China will be competitive where it should be, collaborative where it can be, adversarial where it must be’. Sullivan added that the US was ‘particularly proud of the work that we’ve done to revitalize our alliances and partnerships, the foundation of our foreign policy’. These statements were strongly rebutted by Yang, who claimed ‘it is important for the United States to change its own image and to stop advancing its own democracy in the rest of the world’. He countered on human rights criticisms, pointing out that ‘we hope that the United States will do better on human rights’, adding that ‘China has made steady progress in human rights and the fact is that there are many problems within the United States regarding human rights, which is admitted by the U.S. itself as well’. Wang also added that in ‘the past several years, China’s legitimate rights and interests have come under outright suppression, plunging the China-U.S. relationship into a period of unprecedented difficulty’. He also said that ‘China urges the U.S. side to fully abandon the hegemonic practice of wilfully interfering in China’s internal affairs’. Blinken and Sullivan responded, with Blinken saying that he was ‘hearing deep satisfaction that the United States is back, that we’re re-engaged with our allies and partners’, and Sullivan adding that ‘a confident country is able to look hard at its own shortcomings and constantly seek to improve’.⁸⁴⁷

⁸⁴⁶ SD, ‘Senior Administration Officials Preview of National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken’s Trip to Anchorage, Alaska’, 16 March 2021b

⁸⁴⁷ Blinken, ‘Secretary Antony J. Blinken, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Director Yang And State Councilor Wang At the Top of Their Meeting’, 18 March 2021b

This tense diplomatic exchange was one of the most public displays of a fundamental shift between the US and China. It was a clear example of China actively challenging the international *status quo* that had benefitted the US for decades. Historically, China avoided provoking the US in the middle of diplomatic meetings, preferring to address tensions during closed-off bilateral gatherings. However, this meeting demonstrated a radical shift in strategy. China had not only publicly accused the US of having a hegemonic presence in Asia, it also challenged the US on its own domestic shortcomings concerning human rights.

One of the very few areas where the US and China did hint at cooperation was climate change, with both committing to adhere to the Paris Agreement, and working together at COP 26 to reduce emissions.⁸⁴⁸ This positive outcome weighed little in the overall image of US-China relations, given that, in the same month, China sentenced Hong Kong pro-democracy activists for unlawful assembly, determining the US to issue another public condemnation.⁸⁴⁹ The US had become consistent in invoking the Sino-British Joint Declaration whenever it published statements concerning Hong Kong. Moreso, in June 2021, Blinken called Yang to underscore ‘U.S. concern over the deterioration of democratic norms in Hong Kong and the ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity against predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang. He also called on Beijing to cease its pressure campaign against Taiwan and peacefully resolve cross-Strait issues’.⁸⁵⁰

Blinken also attempted to facilitate the liberation of two Canadian citizens being held by China over unsubstantiated claims. Trump had promised Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau that he would fight for the liberation of the two detained Canadians, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. The two were released in September 2021, in exchange for the release of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou, who was arrested in Canada on a US warrant in 2018.

⁸⁴⁸ SD, ‘U.S.-China Joint Statement Addressing the Climate Crisis’, 17 April 2021

⁸⁴⁹ Blinken, ‘Sentencing of Hong Kong Pro-Democracy Activists for Unlawful Assembly’, 16 April 2021

⁸⁵⁰ Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with Politburo Member Yang’, 11 June 2021

It was believed Spavor and Kovrig's detainment had been a form of retaliation for Meng's arrest.⁸⁵¹

By the end of July 2021, the US made it once again clear that competition with China was official policy. State Department Deputy Secretary Wendy Sherman claimed the US 'welcomes the stiff competition between our countries—and that we intend to continue to strengthen our own competitive hand—but that we do not seek conflict with the PRC', and that she had 'raised concerns in private – as we have in public – about a range of PRC actions that run counter to our values and interests and those of our allies and partners', on topics such as 'human rights, including Beijing's anti-democratic crackdown in Hong Kong; the ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang; abuses in Tibet; and the curtailing of media access and freedom of the press. She also spoke about our concerns about Beijing's conduct in cyberspace; across the Taiwan Strait; and in the East and South China Seas'.⁸⁵² One year after China's attempts to change Hong Kong's political system, the US condemnation continued, with the State Department noting that 'People's Republic of China (PRC) and Hong Kong officials have systematically undermined Hong Kong's democratic institutions, delayed elections, disqualified elected lawmakers from office, and forced officials to take loyalty oaths to keep their jobs'. It once again asked China to adhere to the Sino-British Joint Declaration.⁸⁵³

The US also maintained its interest in the issue of arbitration disputes in the South China Sea. The Trump administration had been critical concerning territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and the Biden administration took a similar stance. The pressure was facilitated by the broader international environment, particularly the fact that relations

⁸⁵¹ Robin Brant, 'China frees Canadians Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig after Huawei boss released', *BBC*, 25 September 2021

⁸⁵² Price, 'Deputy Secretary Sherman's Visit to the People's Republic of China', 26 July 2021

⁸⁵³ Blinken, 'Marking One Year of Hong Kong's National Security Law', 16 July 2021

between China and the Philippines had deteriorated. The tense situation allowed for better coordination between the US and the Philippines. In July 2021, the US made a statement on the fifth anniversary of the arbitral tribunal ruling that favoured the Philippines in its dispute with China. The statement asked both China and the Philippines to adhere to the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS), a cynical demand coming from the US, given that Washington did not ratify UNCLOS and adhered to it selectively. The US once again stated that not only did it support the Philippines in the territorial dispute, it also emphasized that an armed attack on the Philippines would invoke Article IV of the US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty, and lead to an armed conflict, building on a line of argument that had been previously put forward by Michael Pompeo.⁸⁵⁴

In August 2021, the US took action to accommodate Hong Kongers who were leaving the city following the change of the political system. Residents of Hong Kong who travelled to the US received safe haven for 18 months.⁸⁵⁵ In October that year, the US criticised increased Chinese military pressure on Taiwan, and restated its military support for Taiwan's self-defence capacities.⁸⁵⁶

The US took a strong stance on China concerning security issues, but its trade policy was more complicated. There had been signs from the US that it was open to a less confrontational approach on trade, still, the tense situation over tariffs and the trade deficit had persisted. In October 2021, US officials hinted that they were willing to cooperate more with China on trade as long as there would be protections for US workers. The Biden

⁸⁵⁴ Blinken, 'Fifth Anniversary of the Arbitral Tribunal Ruling on the South China Sea', 11 July 2021

⁸⁵⁵ Blinken, 'Safe Haven for Hong Kongers', 5 August 2021

⁸⁵⁶ Price, 'Increasing People's Republic of China Military Pressure Against Taiwan Undermines Regional Peace and Stability', 3 October 2021

administration criticised the Phase One trade agreement the Trump administration signed with China, saying that it did little to resolve existing imbalances in the trade relationship.⁸⁵⁷

An October meeting between Blinken and Wang highlighted the paradox of US-China relations: they both affirmed a need to keep communications lines open on issue like ‘the DPRK, Burma, Iran, Afghanistan, and the climate crisis’, but the US raised concerns over PRC actions on issues ranging from undermining the US-based order to human rights violations in ‘Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, the East and South China Seas, and Taiwan’.⁸⁵⁸ Once again Blinken met with Wang, in November 2021, and mentioned US concerns over Chinese military pressures over the Taiwan strait. He asked Beijing to address cross-Strait issues ‘peacefully and in a manner consistent with the wishes and best interests of the people on Taiwan’.⁸⁵⁹ The US and China did try to strike common ground on climate issues. They adhered to key parts of the Glasgow Declaration, aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to ensure a quick transition to clean energy.⁸⁶⁰

It was clear that US-China relations had entered a new phase. The radical departure that started in the 2010s was continuing into the 2020s. For some, China had emerged as a great power, and that status made it incompatible with the US-led world order. Chinese policymakers believed that ‘China has gone through the stages of standing up and getting rich and is now advancing to the stage of becoming strong’. Even though China was aware that its ideology did not have the popularity of western liberalism, it would do anything in its power to maximise its own ideological comfort zone. This meant there was a willingness to accept even multilateral formats, as long as China had a say in them. The risk of exclusion, be it

⁸⁵⁷ Biden, ‘Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials on the Administration’s Trade Approach to China’, 4 October 2021

⁸⁵⁸ Price, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Meeting with PRC State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang’, 31 October 2021

⁸⁵⁹ SD, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with People’s Republic of China (PRC) State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi’, 13 November 2021

⁸⁶⁰ SD, ‘U.S.-China Joint Glasgow Declaration on Enhancing Climate Action in the 2020s’, 10 November 2021

from trade blocs or defence agreements was what drove fears in China.⁸⁶¹ A strong feature of Chinese foreign policy remained its reluctance to establish clear, enduring military alliances. When the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine started to backfire and turn into a quagmire for Moscow, Beijing appeared to make a common front with Russia, although this development came across as partly performative.⁸⁶²

Biden inherited a difficult situation on Taiwan. The country's status had always been complicated, and by the end of the Trump administration tensions were high. The challenge for the Biden administration was to try to move the Taiwan issue beyond the security framing into an economic one, where Taiwan's importance to the US could be better emphasized. There was some effort from Biden to ensure US allies supported the *status quo* in the Taiwan straits, as was seen in a May 2021 press conference with South Korean President Moon.⁸⁶³ Biden also pursued legislation that would enable Taiwan to invest in US manufacturing, a bipartisan effort. The semiconductor industry's development in the US was also something to which Taiwan could contribute.⁸⁶⁴ When Biden organised his summit for democracy, whether Taiwan would be invited was a contentious issue. Taiwan is a democracy, but it has full diplomatic relations with only 13 countries. Biden officials said Taiwan was a 'powerful example' of a democracy. However, they also stated that Taiwan would be engaged in accordance with the US' One China policy.⁸⁶⁵ Biden's Bipartisan Innovation Act, legislation that strengthened and safeguarded US domestic semiconductor production, emphasised how important Taiwan was to US national security interests.⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁶¹ Yan Xuetong, 'Becoming Strong', *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2021

⁸⁶² Graham Allison, 'Xi and Putin Have the Most Consequential Undeclared Alliance in the World', *Foreign Policy*, 23 March 2023

⁸⁶³ Biden, 'The President's News Conference With President Moon Jae-in of South Korea', 21 May 2021b

⁸⁶⁴ Biden, 'Remarks at the Mack Lehigh Valley Operations Manufacturing Facility in Lower Macungie Township, Pennsylvania', 28 July 2021

⁸⁶⁵ Biden, 'Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials on the Summit for Democracy', 7 December 2021

⁸⁶⁶ Biden, 'ICYMI: Biden Administration Urges Congress to Pass the Bipartisan Innovation Act', 19 July 2021

The San Francisco System

The San Francisco System appears to suffer whenever multilateralism becomes a feature of US foreign policy. Under Biden, the alliance network returned to being a passive alliance group, as most of its members continued exploring different forms of integration. The issue of splintering within the San Francisco System would also become more obvious. The publishing of the US Indo-Pacific strategy in early 2022 was another landmark moment for the US and its allies. The strategy clarified that for the US, the Indo-Pacific was the most important region, and that climate, China, and the risks of pandemic outbreaks had become the key concerns. The Quad, defence cooperation with allies such as sharing sensitive nuclear submarine technology, and AUKUS, had all been examples of increased deterrence. The Americans would also ‘recognize the limitations in our ability to change China, and therefore seek to shape the strategic environment around China by building a balance of influences that advances the future we seek, while blunting Beijing's efforts to frustrate U.S. objectives and those of our partners’. They acknowledged the need for more US economic commitment, and mentioned the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) as a solution in that context.⁸⁶⁷

Blinken gave remarks on the US Free and Open Indo-Pacific in Indonesia, and expanded on five pillars that would shape US strategy.⁸⁶⁸ Firstly, there was *freedom* in the sense of upholding democracy, keeping the internet free, and ensuring freedom of the seas. Secondly, there were *alliances*, from the San Francisco System to the Quad, but there would also be room for economic groups, like APEC or the East Asia Summit. Thirdly, there was *trade*, from IPEF, to Biden’s ‘Build Back Better World’, a global version of his domestic ‘Build Back Better’ programme, to infrastructure, and digital economies. Fourthly, there was

⁸⁶⁷ Biden, ‘Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials Previewing the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific Strategy’, 11 February 2022

⁸⁶⁸ Blinken, ‘A Free and Open Indo-Pacific’, 14 December 2021

resilience, in the sense of being better prepared to combat pandemics, and funding green energy. Lastly, there was *security*, in the sense of promoting ‘integrated deterrence’, supporting AUKUS, and ensuring there is competition with China. These five pillars, freedom, alliances, trade, resilience, and security, would define the US conception of the Indo-Pacific.⁸⁶⁹ Blinken’s remarks were part of a greater trend by the Biden administration to try to re-define its strategy for the Indo-Pacific. The Secretary of State did not deviate much from traditional US rhetoric, however, the *resilience* section was made to accommodate the ongoing COVID pandemic, and *integrated deterrence* was the security strategy approach of choice for the Biden administration.

The US and Japan

By September 2020, Prime Minister Abe had resigned from his position due to health reasons. This meant that when Biden took office, he would work with Japan’s new Prime Minister, Suga Yoshihide. There were no major differences between Abe and Suga, or the Prime Minister that would follow him, Kishida Fumio. What Japan had lost was the consistency of Abe’s long tenure. Blinken called Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu during the Biden administration’s first week. The two reaffirmed the status of the US-Japan alliance as the ‘cornerstone of peace, security, and prosperity for a free and open Indo-Pacific region across the globe’. Blinken also mentioned the ‘importance of continued U.S.-Japan-Republic of Korea cooperation and stressed President Biden’s pledge to strengthen U.S. alliances and engage with the world again’, thus signalling renewed US interest in improving the US-Japan-South Korea trilateral.⁸⁷⁰ A press conference by Suga following the summit with Biden outlined the core interests of Japan: cooperation on the

⁸⁶⁹ SD, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Remarks on a Free and Open Indo-Pacific’, 13 December 2021

⁸⁷⁰ Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi’, 26 January 2021a

coronavirus pandemic, applying Article V of the US-Japan security treaty to the Senkaku Islands, closer cooperation with the fellow Quad members, and denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.⁸⁷¹ Blinken and Motegi talked again the following month, expressing concern over Chinese claims regarding the Senkaku Islands. Both sides reaffirmed that the disputed territories fell under Article V of the US-Japan security treaty, which meant the US upheld its stance that it would go to war for Japan over the islands.⁸⁷²

In March 2021, Blinken and Austin met with Motegi and Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo. Motegi said that ‘the strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific has entered into a completely different dimension than where it used to be, and the importance of our alliance has never been elevated to such heights’. They also ‘agreed on the recognition that China’s behavior, where inconsistent with the existing international order, presents various challenges to the alliance and the international community’. Finally, Blinken added that they were all ‘united in the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region, where countries follow the rules, cooperate whenever they can, and resolve their differences peacefully. And in particular, we will push back if necessary when China uses coercion or aggression to get its way’.⁸⁷³

The joint statement published after the meeting further emphasized that there was a clash of systems between the US and China. The statement emphasized ‘China’s unlawful maritime claims and activities in the South China Sea and recalled that the July 2016 award of the Philippines-China arbitral tribunal, constituted under the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention, was final and legally binding on the parties’. Finally, they ‘shared serious concerns regarding the human rights situation in Hong Kong and the Xinjiang Uyghur

⁸⁷¹ Suga Yoshihide, ‘Press Conference by the Prime Minister after the Japan-U.S. Summit Telephone Talk’, 28 January 2021

⁸⁷² Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi’, 10 February 2021

⁸⁷³ Blinken, ‘Secretary Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi, and Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi at a Joint Press Availability’, 16 March 2021c

Autonomous Region’.⁸⁷⁴ This was clear signalling that Japan thought China was removing itself from the US-supported international order, and that it opposed such a development.

A background press call by senior administration officials in April 2021 gave details concerning the recent push by the Biden administration to improve its relationships with allies. The senior administration officials noted that there had been more engagement from US allies across the board recently. They expressed worries concerning the historic Japan-South Korea tensions, noting that it ‘is concerning to us, even to the point of being painful for us, to see relations between Japan and South Korea fall to the current level. The political tensions are such that we believe it actually impedes all of our abilities to be effective in Northeast Asia, and I think the President will want to discuss this in some detail with Prime Minister Suga’. They added that there is a limit concerning the extent to which the US can mediate the conflict, saying they ‘fully understand that this is a bilateral matter between South Korea and Japan. But as a friend of both, we have an interest in seeing relations improved between these two great democracies. We have so much in front of us and we’re hopeful that we’ll be able to find a way to engage on that directly going forward’.⁸⁷⁵

A joint press conference between Suga and Biden was held in mid-April 2021. Aside from agreeing on shared values and objectives, the two pledged closer cooperation with ASEAN, as well as Australia and India. They pledged to hold a ‘frank dialogue’ with China concerning the disagreements over China’s actions in the East China Sea and South China Sea. They attempted to energize the US-Japan-South Korea trilateral, by claiming that it had ‘become more important than ever before’. They also restated their support for enforcing

⁸⁷⁴ SD, ‘U.S.-Japan Joint Press Statement’, 16 March 2021

⁸⁷⁵ Biden, ‘Background Press Call by a Senior Administration Official on the Official Working Visit of Japan’, 15 April 2021

deterrence, with another mention of the US willingness to defend the Senkakus in case of aggression.⁸⁷⁶

Blinken met with Japanese National Security Advisor Akiba Takeo in August 2021, with China as one of the main talking points. They both ‘reiterated their shared opposition to any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea and activities that undermine, destabilize, or threaten the rules-based international order’ and ‘pledged to maintain peace and stability, lawful unimpeded commerce, and respect for international law, including freedom of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea in the South China Sea and beyond’.⁸⁷⁷ Once again, the US and Japan displayed a common front in opposing China on a growing list of divergences between the Washington and Beijing.

Following Abe’s success in establishing a cordial relationship with Donald Trump, the expectation was that the emergence of a left-leaning US President would make US-Japan relations more tense. That was not the case, as it was clear that the Biden administration was more committed to developing its relationship with Japan. It also cannot be said that the relationship had stagnated, as Japan had continued its path of aligning itself with the US on increasingly sensitive matters. Japan had become increasingly unwilling to accommodate China as it had in the past. Igata Akira and Brad Glosserman have expanded on how Japan had made itself ‘indispensable’ once again in an article for *Foreign Affairs*. The combination of renewing the agreement to host US troops with the new bilateral focus on supply chains and sensitive technology made it obvious that Japan was making the most of its position in Asia as a sophisticated economy.⁸⁷⁸

⁸⁷⁶ Suga, ‘Joint Press Conference by Prime Minister Suga and President Biden of the United States’, 16 April 2021

⁸⁷⁷ Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Meeting with Japanese National Security Advisor Akiba’, 9 August 2021

⁸⁷⁸ Akira Igata,, Brad Glosserman, ‘Japan Is Indispensable Again’, *Foreign Affairs*, 15 July 2021

Blinken's meetings with Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa emphasized how the US and Japan were using the G7 as a means for deepening their cooperation. With the Biden administration, the US restarted its practice of trying to make Japan and South Korea cooperate within a trilateral with the US. Blinken's meetings with Hayashi in December 2021,⁸⁷⁹ as well as his meeting a month earlier with both former Japanese Minister Mori and Korean Foreign Affairs Minister Choi, were attempts at doing that.⁸⁸⁰

Biden met with Japan's Prime Minister, Kishida Fumio in January 2022, and they both signalled that Japan's defence capabilities needed to be upgraded, along with the way Japan viewed its security. Biden welcomed Kishida's plans to revise Japan's National Security Strategy, with more spending on defence. They also pushed back against Chinese disruptive activities in the East China Sea and South China Sea, as well as PRC practices in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. They reaffirmed that Article V of their defence treaty applies to the Senkakus as well.⁸⁸¹

The two met again in May 2022, and this time it was Kishida making the case that the US was Japan's 'only ally who shares universal values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and rule of law'. The phrasing was interesting, and probably raised some eyebrows in Australia. Still, Kishida continued and strikingly announced a slightly more hawkish approach from Japan concerning China, saying that he and Biden 'concurred to monitor closely recent activities of Chinese navy and joint military exercise of China and Russia and strongly oppose the attempt to change the status quo by force. In East China Sea and South

⁸⁷⁹ Price, 'Secretary Blinken's Meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi', 11 December 2021

⁸⁸⁰ SD, 'Deputy Secretary Sherman's Trilateral Meeting with Republic of Korea First Vice Foreign Minister Choi and Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Mori', 17 November 2021

⁸⁸¹ Biden, 'Readout of President Biden's Meeting with Prime Minister Kishida of Japan', 21 January 2022

China Sea’. He reiterated his plans to increase Japan’s defence budget, and supported the IPEF.⁸⁸²

The US and Australia

Australia had always been regarded as strong US ally, nonetheless, with the Biden administration a new level of engagement was reached. The emergence of the US-UK-Australia alliance – formally known as AUKUS – marked both a new level of military cooperation between the US and Australia, and created inter-alliance strains, particularly due to the impression that the US realignment to Asia was being generated at the cost of US commitments in Europe, with France reacting particularly negatively to the alliance.

A Joint Statement on the US-Australia Ministerial consultations of September 2021 highlighted the key areas of cooperation. The US and Australia would cooperate on ‘regional security, infrastructure, economic growth technology, democratic resilience, human rights, addressing the climate challenge, and pandemic response’. They emphasized their commitment to ASEAN centrality and once again reiterated the importance of adhering to UNCLOS.⁸⁸³

A press conference held during the AUSMIN also expanded on AUKUS and its implications. Blinken, Austin, and their counterparts, Marise Payne of the Foreign Ministry, and Peter Dutton of the Defense Ministry, gave remarks to the press. They praised AUKUS, saying that it would ‘deepen our cooperation on a range of security and defense priorities, including by strengthening our joint capabilities and interoperability in a number of key areas: cyber, AI, quantum technologies, additional underseas capabilities’. Blinken pointed

⁸⁸² Biden, ‘The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan in Tokyo, Japan’, 23 May 2022

⁸⁸³ SD, ‘Joint Statement on Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) 2021’, 16 September 2021a

out normative similarities, by saying that ‘the partnership between our countries underpins stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region as a whole. We share a commitment to democracy and the rule of law. We stand up for human rights and stand together against threats to democratic governance, including state-sponsored disinformation. We work together to help neighbors in the Indo-Pacific and to take on urgent global challenges’. They also ‘discussed strategic competition. We discussed the competition of China at a number of levels that requires us to respond and to increase resilience. This does not mean that there are not constructive areas for engagement with China’. Austin said that the alliance would ‘significantly improve the Australian navy’s reach and defensive capabilities. It will also help to contribute to what I call integrated deterrence in the region, the ability for the United States military to work more effectively with our allies and partners in defense of our shared security interests’. Dutton said that they ‘discussed plans to accelerate establishment of Australia’s guided weapons and explosive ordinance enterprise, and we agreed to cooperate on its development’.⁸⁸⁴

The AUSMIN talks marked an important step in US-Australia relations. The emergence of AUKUS was meant to complement the Quad. It is also notable that AUKUS was a trilateral, it not only served as a way for the US to improve its relationship with Australia, it is also provided a way for the UK to increase its engagement in the Indo-Pacific following its decision to leave the European Union. AUKUS was a means to ameliorate the potential strategic downfalls that Brexit would bring. The move was not without controversy. The decision to improve cooperation between the three allies came at the cost of cancelling a submarine contract between Australia and France. The abrupt move created considerable diplomatic discontent on the French side. It would take months for the relationship to improve.

⁸⁸⁴ Blinken, ‘Secretary Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne, and Australian Defence Minister Peter Dutton At a Joint Press Availability’, 16 September 2021b

The US and Australia worked on having a common line concerning human rights abuses. In December 2021, the US and Australia passed legislation that aimed to ‘address more comprehensively human rights abuses, corruption, malicious cyber activity, violations of international humanitarian law, and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) proliferation globally — all of which threaten international peace and security’.⁸⁸⁵

The US and South Korea

With South Korea, and the peninsula’s biggest problem, North Korea, the US was in a hard spot. Both Obama and Trump’s approaches had failed, and North Korea had become a nuclear-armed state, a failure of US foreign policy strategy. The Biden administration tried to compensate for this by looking to develop the alliance with South Korea in other areas, from economic ties to the broader possibility of South Korea aligning itself with the Quad.

Blinken called South Korea Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha, not only to restate the solid background of the alliance but also to emphasize a renewed willingness in Washington for US-Japan-South Korea cooperation.⁸⁸⁶ South Korea changed its foreign Minister later on, with Chung Eui-yong taking Kang’s place. Blinken and Chung spoke again, with the agenda being nearly identical.⁸⁸⁷

Blinken and Austin visited South Korea in March 2021. The joint statement following the foreign and defence ministerial meeting reaffirmed the US commitment to defend South Korea. It also affirmed the US military presence in South Korea as a positive development, made a mention of US-Japan-South Korea trilateral cooperation as being mutually beneficial, and made the point that all sides oppose ‘all activities that undermine and destabilize the

⁸⁸⁵ Blinken, ‘On the Australian Sanctions Regime’, 2 December 2021

⁸⁸⁶ Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with ROK Foreign Minister Kang’, 26 January 2021b

⁸⁸⁷ Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with ROK Foreign Minister Chung’, 11 February 2021

rules-based international order’.⁸⁸⁸ The way the statement was framed was another example of both sides trying to communicate in a manner that allowed South Korea to associate itself with US foreign policy goals without committing in the same manner that Japan or Australia would do. The statement did not explicitly mention China, but the agreement of South Korea to tacitly support the US goal of a ‘rules-based international order’ was a form of diplomatic signalling that confirmed South Korea’s adherence to the US worldview to a considerable extent. Another interesting example was the extent to which the trilateral with Japan had re-emerged as a key focus. The issue was less important in previous years.

Blinken and Austin wanted to convey to South Korea President Moon Jae-in that the US had returned to a more multilateral stance. Their new approach was praised by Moon.⁸⁸⁹ The two met with their counterparts, Chung Eui-yong from the Foreign Affairs Department and Suh Wook from the Ministry of Defense. Blinken said the decision by him and Austin to visit East Asia for their first foreign visit was a deliberate attempt to signal the priority of the Indo-Pacific. Aside from re-energizing the alliance, statements from Suh made it clear that the attempts to find common ground between South Korea’s New Southern Policy and the US Indo-Pacific strategy would continue.⁸⁹⁰

A document from the State Department went into further detail concerning the plans for the alliance. It mentioned the 11th US-ROK Special Measures Agreement, and the attempts to facilitate burden sharing. It also pointed out that the New Southern Policy and the

⁸⁸⁸ SD, ‘Joint Statement of the 2021 Republic of Korea – United States Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting (“2+2”)', 18 March 2021

⁸⁸⁹ Blinken, ‘Secretary Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Republic of Korea President Moon Jae-in Before Their Meeting’, 18 March 2021d

⁸⁹⁰ Blinken, ‘Secretary Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Republic of Korea Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong, and Republic of Korea Defense Minister Suh Wook at a Joint Press Availability’, 18 March 2021a

Indo-Pacific strategy would develop their areas of convergence on climate policy, health security, energy security, democracy initiatives, cyber capacity building, and space.⁸⁹¹

In May 2021, during a US-South Korea roundtable, Moon expressed a willingness to work with the US on improving the semiconductor supply chain. He said he was ‘pleased that our two countries agreed to strengthen our semiconductor supply chain cooperation based on our complementary structures’.⁸⁹² This was a notable development, given that the semiconductor supply chain was one of the more contentious issues in the broader US-China rivalry during the Biden years, and South Korea was one of the biggest global producers of semiconductors.

During their joint statement, Biden and Moon emphasized their support for democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. They supported the new Special Measures Agreement, denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, and would look for overlaps between the New Southern Policy and the Indo-Pacific strategy. They also expressed support for ASEAN and for ‘enhanced cooperation with Pacific Island Countries and acknowledge the importance of open, transparent, and inclusive regional multilateralism including the Quad’.⁸⁹³ Given South Korea’s more cautious approach to China, this was an example of rather close alignment between the two allies. The expression of tacit support for the Quad, the combination of regional strategies, as well as similarity on norms and values conveyed the impression that South Korea would remain closer to the US for the foreseeable future.

Throughout June and July 2021, Foreign Minister Chung undertook considerable outreach to his US counterparts. In early June 2021 he met with the US head of INDOPACOM, Admiral John Aquilino, and asked him to ‘continue to contribute to strengthening the ROK-U.S. alliance which serves as a linchpin for the stability and

⁸⁹¹ SD, ‘U.S.-ROK Alliance – Expanding Bilateral Cooperation for the 21st Century’, 17 March 2021

⁸⁹² Moon Jae-in, ‘Remarks by President Moon Jae-in at ROK-U.S. Business Roundtable’, 21 May 2021

⁸⁹³ Biden, ‘Joint Statement by President Biden and President Moon Jae-in of South Korea’, 21 May 2021

prosperity in the region, and to establishing peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula'. Aquilino also stated that 'he will actively support diplomatic efforts by the ROK and the U.S. by maintaining robust ROK-U.S. combined defense posture'.⁸⁹⁴ He also met with a delegation of US Senators, who 'mentioned that the ROK is the first overseas destination of the bipartisan delegation from the U.S. Congress since the outbreak of COVID-19, while emphasizing the importance of the ROK-U.S. alliance'. Chung also 'extended appreciation for the U.S. Congress' strong support for the ROK-U.S. alliance, and requested its continuous attention and support for the issues on the Korean Peninsula as well as backing Korean corporates' activities in the U.S. and legislation allocating a professional visa quota for Koreans'.⁸⁹⁵

A month later, he met with Wendy Sherman, US Deputy Secretary of State, discussing their support for denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.⁸⁹⁶ All these meetings are notable, since they represent an expansion of the US-South Korea relationship. The meeting with Aquilino represented a close association between South Korea and INDOPACOM. The INDOPACOM had been sceptical of China for years, and South Korea's continued engagement with it reinforced the military alliance. The meeting with the Congressional delegation represented an improvement on the political side, touching on North Korea policy and a variety of other topics. These tied in with Moon's own statements on supply chains, and what resulted was a far more expansive US-South Korea relationship.

A meeting between US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and South Korea's National Security Advisor Suh Hoon spoke on the need for diversifying the security relationship, with more cooperation in 'critical areas such as advanced technology, secure and

⁸⁹⁴ Chung Eui-yong, 'Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong Meets with Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command', 7 June 2021a

⁸⁹⁵ Chung 'Foreign Minister Meets with Delegation from U.S. Congress', 7 June 2021b

⁸⁹⁶ Chung, 'Foreign Minister Meets with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State', 22 July 2021

trustworthy 5G, resilient supply chains, and global health’.⁸⁹⁷ The US and South Korea continued trying to develop their alliance in a way that made it better suited for economic cooperation. In December 2021, during the 6th US-ROK Economic Dialogue, the two countries agreed to better cooperate on supply chains, infrastructure, the COVID pandemic, and a better integration of the US FOIP vision and South Korea’s New Southern Policy.⁸⁹⁸

One good way to improve US-South Korea ties during the Biden years was to ensure South Korea invested in US-based businesses. When Biden visited South Korea in May 2022, one of the topics of conversation was Samsung building a facility in Texas that would create 3,000 jobs. This pattern of harnessing technological innovation was in adherence with what Biden presented in the IPEF. Biden administration officials added that the US-ROK relationship was no longer something with security implications for the two allies; it had become something with implications for the whole region.⁸⁹⁹ When Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol met in May 2022, they stated that the challenges their countries faced could be confronted through their shared universal values. Yoon claimed that South Korea and the US were ‘global comprehensive strategic allies, stand ready to meet these challenges collectively and shape a rules-based order in that process’, essentially subscribing to the US worldview. Yoon added that the US and South Korea needed to move in a new direction of cooperation, particularly in the fields of ‘semiconductors, batteries, civil nuclear power, space development, cyberspace, and other emerging industries’. Yoon further added that the two countries would ‘work in concert to build a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. And taking that first step is to participate in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework’.⁹⁰⁰ The

⁸⁹⁷ Biden, ‘Statement by NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne on National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan’s Meeting with ROK National Security Advisory Suh Hoon’, 12 October 2021

⁸⁹⁸ SD, ‘The Sixth U.S.-ROK Senior Economic Dialogue’, 17 December 2021

⁸⁹⁹ Biden, ‘Background Press Call by a Senior Administration Official Previewing President Biden’s Second Day in the Republic of Korea’, 20 May 2022

⁹⁰⁰ Biden, ‘The President’s News Conference With President Yoon Suk Yeol of South Korea in Seoul, South Korea’, 21 May 2022b

joint statement published later that day added that Biden and Yoon ‘recognize the importance of maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific that is prosperous and peaceful’, and also that ‘President Biden shares his support for President Yoon's initiative to formulate ROK's own Indo-Pacific strategy framework’. The statement also stipulated that the US and South Korea shared a similar position on the South China Sea as well as the Taiwan strait.⁹⁰¹

The US and the Philippines

The problem for the US, and for Asia in general, is how to balance the region’s security interests with its economic interests. The Philippines under Rodrigo Duterte constituted a clear example of a country’s political leader having to fight two contrasting forces. During the Biden years, Duterte would largely abandon his tough stance on the US, and no longer hint that he wanted the US to remove itself militarily from the Philippines. This gave the alliance a new purpose but larger issues remained.

Blinken called Philippines Secretary of Foreign Affairs Teodoro Locsin Jr. in late January 2021. Blinken ‘stressed the importance of the Mutual Defense Treaty for the security of both nations, and its clear application to armed attacks against the Philippine armed forces, public vessels, or aircraft in the Pacific, which includes the South China Sea’. He also restated that the US rejects China’s claims in the South China Sea.⁹⁰² The mentioning of these topics in a phone call with the Philippines emphasized US willingness to convey the message that the Philippines was still part of its own defensive bloc.

In February 2021, Duterte addressed the balancing act he was doing concerning the US-China great power rivalry. He said ‘I am walking on a tightrope, actually. I cannot afford

⁹⁰¹ Biden, ‘Joint Statement by President Biden and President Yoon Suk Yeol of South Korea’, 21 May 2022b

⁹⁰² Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Locsin’, 27 January 2021a

to be brave in the mouth against China because, well, we are avoiding any confrontation — a confrontation that would lead to something which we can hardly afford, at least not at this time’. Concerning the US, Duterte said ‘we asked so much of them because they have taken so much from us’, and while he said he did not want to take sides, he made it clear that he agreed with the US presence in his country due to the need to compete with China. He supported the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), provided the US made the expected financial contributions that come with the burden-sharing process, despite claiming in the past that he would let the agreement expire.⁹⁰³

Blinken and Locsin had another call in April 2021, and this time their alignment was even more obvious. Both ‘expressed their shared concerns with the massing of PRC maritime militia vessels in the South China Sea, including at Whitsun Reef, and reiterated their calls on the PRC to abide by the 2016 arbitration ruling issued pursuant to the Law of the Sea Convention. Secretary Blinken also reaffirmed the applicability of the 1951 U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty to the South China Sea’.⁹⁰⁴

One notable development that took place throughout 2021 was the closer relationship between the Philippines and Japan. It had been established that Japan had been pursuing a policy that was closely aligned with the US. It could be argued that the Philippines was aligning itself with the US-led order by pursuing a closer relationship with Japan, and thus avoiding openly supporting the US. Japan and China had strong disagreements, and improved relations between the Philippines and Japan would not be well received in Beijing. However, this was an attempt to consolidate inter-spokes relations, and stronger Japan-Philippines ties made the US-backed security order more coherent. In May 2021, Duterte met with Japan Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide, and they talked about tensions in the South China Sea.

⁹⁰³ Rodrigo Duterte, ‘Philippines to remain neutral amid heightened geo-political tension, says President Duterte’, 12 February 2021

⁹⁰⁴ Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Locsin’, 8 April 2021

Duterte said there needed to be more cooperation on ‘domain awareness, maritime security and safety, freedom of navigation and overflight and maritime connectivity and commerce’. The rationale behind the closer relations was an attempt to reduce the chance of conflict.⁹⁰⁵

In July 2021, Duterte virtually participated in the Communist Party of China and World Political Parties Summit. He offered praise to China for its fight against poverty, and said there ‘won’t be any turning back. China has risen and will play an important role in global affairs for decades to come’. He praised the CCP in particular for its battle against poverty, and expressed hope that as China has become a superpower, it will pursue peace as an objective.⁹⁰⁶ That same month, the Philippines restored the VFA, which facilitated the US military presence in the country. Duterte hinted that he would let the VFA expire, but he changed his plans, and the agreement was restored. Chinese military activity around the Philippines was believed to be the main driver behind the decision.⁹⁰⁷ Blinken and Locsin met in September 2021, and discussed China’s lack of adherence to UNCLOS.⁹⁰⁸ They also discussed the COVID-19 pandemic, economic engagement, and human rights.

In October 2021, Duterte attended ASEAN summits. He presented a foreign policy that catered to both the US and China. He said that ASEAN should adhere to UNCLOS, he supported the implementation of a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, and he also urged better cooperation with China, especially on the pandemic, climate, and geopolitical issues.⁹⁰⁹ On the issue of AUKUS, he said the new partnership must not stand in the way of

⁹⁰⁵ Duterte, ‘President Duterte tackles South China Sea, security issues with Japanese PM Suga’, 20 May 2021

⁹⁰⁶ Duterte, ‘Duterte calls for sustained dialogue, peaceful engagement with China’, 7 July 2021

⁹⁰⁷ Sophie Jeong, Brad Lendon, ‘Philippines renews key military agreement with the United States’, *CNN*, 30 July 2021

⁹⁰⁸ Ned Price, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Meeting with Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Locsin’, 9 September 2021

⁹⁰⁹ Duterte, ‘President Duterte calls for regional unity to attain peace, stability in South China Sea’, 26 October 2021

ASEAN, as the ASEAN platform remains the best way for preventing conflict in the South China Sea.⁹¹⁰

By the end of the year, Duterte had continued to improve relations with Japan. In late October, Duterte praised Japan for ‘supporting rules-based order particularly in the South China Sea issue’. Japan put out a statement in support of the fifth anniversary of the Arbitral Tribunal’s ruling that sided with the Philippines in its territorial dispute with China in the South China Sea. Duterte also said he ‘hopes cooperation with Japan could continue to fortify regional and global supply chains, build quality infrastructure, boost tourism, and strengthen micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)’.⁹¹¹ One month later, in November, the Philippines and Japan agreed to extend their strategic partnership. Duterte said ‘Japan is unrivaled among our bilateral partners’. Prime Minister Kishida claimed Japan-Philippines relations had reached a ‘golden age’ during Duterte’s tenure. The two countries ‘agreed on the necessity to pursue deeper security engagement and coordination by launching a Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting or 2+2 meeting’.⁹¹²

On the 75th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations, the two countries upheld all the positives of the alliance, with attention given to reaffirming the principles of their defence treaty, particularly Article IV’s ‘obligations to respond to an armed attack in the Pacific Area on either the United States or the Philippines’. The two countries once again upheld UNCLOS and the tribunal ruling, and tried to address regional security architecture, still, the only substantive mentions focused on ASEAN centrality.⁹¹³

To add detail to this, on 19 November 2021, the US issued another criticism of China concerning its activities in the South China Sea, when the PRC Coast Guard ‘blocked and

⁹¹⁰ Duterte, ‘AUKUS must complement ASEAN-US partnership — President Duterte’, 27 October 2021

⁹¹¹ Duterte, ‘President Duterte praises Japan for backing rules-based order’, 29 October 2021

⁹¹² Duterte, ‘Philippines, Japan agree to strengthen strategic partnership’, 19 November 2021

⁹¹³ SD, ‘Joint Vision for a 21st Century United States-Philippines Partnership’, 16 November 2021

used water cannons against Philippine resupply ships’ that were heading to Second Thomas Shoal. Both the US and the Philippines had claimed that such an action ‘directly threatens regional peace and stability, escalates regional tensions, infringes upon freedom of navigation in the South China Sea as guaranteed under international law, and undermines the rules-based international order’. While the US did not ratify UNCLOS, it reminded the PRC and the Philippines that their own treaty obligations imply adherence to UNCLOS, which made the tensions in the South China Sea even more unacceptable.⁹¹⁴

The US and Thailand

The US-Thailand relationship had always had fluctuations, largely due to Thailand experiencing coups. The relative stability experienced by Thailand since 2014 allowed the relationship to develop to a certain extent. The US had been trying to ensure it did not lose Thailand’s support for key issues in the way it had occasionally done with the Philippines.

Blinken met with Thailand Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai in January 2021. Aside from reaffirming their alliance, and noting that they would cooperate on COVID, they also ‘discussed the importance of working together to advance our shared prosperity, security, and values across the free and open Indo Pacific region’.⁹¹⁵ In May 2021, on the occasion of the seventh US-Thailand strategic dialogue, both countries reaffirmed their commitment to the alliance and pledged to cooperate on APEC and ASEAN.⁹¹⁶

Blinken and Pramudwinai met again in September 2021. Blinken said the US ‘alliance with Thailand that is grounded, of course, in a shared history but also, critically, a

⁹¹⁴ SD, ‘On the Situation in the South China Sea’, 19 November 2021

⁹¹⁵ Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai’, 27 January 2021b

⁹¹⁶ SD, ‘Seventh U.S.-Thailand Strategic Dialogue’, 21 May 2021

shared future.’ He mentioned ASEAN, COVID, and APEC as areas where the two countries worked together. Pramudwinai also observed that the US and Thailand have had relations for the past 200 years, and the moment was right for further developing them.⁹¹⁷ Following their meeting, they ‘acknowledged the threat of the climate crisis and reaffirmed the global interest in strengthening climate ambition and promoting sustainable economic growth’ and ‘discussed ways to further align goals on trade and investment, connectivity, and sustainable and inclusive growth’.⁹¹⁸ In the early years of the Biden administration, the relationship did not develop in any new notable ways, however, the US did attempt to keep Thailand in its sphere of influence.

The US and India

With the re-emergence of the Quad during the Trump administration, it was expected that US-India relations would continue their positive developments during the Biden administration. This forecast was correct, as US-India ties did continue on the upward path that has been noticeable since the George W. Bush years.

Blinken had a call with India’s Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. The talks mostly focused on the coup d’état in Myanmar, nevertheless, they did state that they looked forward to developing relations, both on regional cooperation and through the Quad.⁹¹⁹ The US and India were consistent in their attempts to consolidate their relationship through multilateral institutions. In May 2021,⁹²⁰ Blinken and Jaishankar once again stated that they hoped that by partnering through institutions like the UN and the Quad they could work more

⁹¹⁷ Blinken, ‘Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai Before Their Meeting’, 27 September 2021a

⁹¹⁸ Price, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Meeting with Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Don’, 27 September 2021b

⁹¹⁹ Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar’, 9 February 2021

⁹²⁰ Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar’, 28 May 2021b

efficiently on dealing with global challenges.⁹²¹ They expressed similar plans for inviting India as a G7 guest country and working from there.⁹²²

In late July 2021, Blinken met with Jaishankar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Before the meeting, Jaishankar said that improving the ‘Quad as a collaborative platform is in our mutual interest, and we must work together even more closely on key contemporary challenges like terrorism, climate change, pandemics, and resilient supply chains’. Blinken added that there ‘is a greater imperative than ever, I think, on cooperation, coordination, collaboration among countries, especially among countries who share basic perspectives, basic values, and basic interests’.⁹²³ During their press conference, Jaishankar mentioned that through the ‘Quad framework, we are engaged on maritime security, HADR, counterterrorism, connectivity on infrastructure, cyber and digital concerns, COVID-19 response, climate action, education, and resilient and reliable supply chains’. Blinken added that the US ‘believe this partnership will be critical for delivering stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond, and for showing the world how democracies can deliver for their people’, and that the two countries ‘discussed strengthening our regional cooperation, both bilaterally and through the Quad with Japan and Australia as well as other multilateral partnerships’.⁹²⁴

Blinken also discussed the deepening the US-India strategic partnership during his meeting with Modi. The two discussed ‘regional security, including through U.S.-Australia-India-Japan Quad consultations’.⁹²⁵ The document that expanded on the deepening of the strategic partnership made it clear that the US ‘supports India’s emergence as a leading global

⁹²¹ Blinken, ‘Secretary Antony J. Blinken with Indian Minister of External Affairs Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar Before Their Meeting’, 28 May 2021

⁹²² Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar’, 3 May 2021

⁹²³ Blinken, ‘Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar Before Their Meeting’, 28 July 2021a

⁹²⁴ Blinken, ‘Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar at a Joint Press Availability’, 28 July 2021b

⁹²⁵ Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Meeting with Indian Prime Minister Modi’, 28 July 2021c

power and vital partner in efforts to ensure that the Indo-Pacific is a region of peace, stability, and growing prosperity and economic inclusion’, and that ‘India is a leading global power and a key U.S. partner in the Indo-Pacific and beyond’.⁹²⁶ Biden and Modi met again in April 2022, and both hailed the progress the US and India had made, a development deemed unthinkable a few decades ago.⁹²⁷

The Quad

The Quad re-emerged during the latter half of the Trump administration. Joe Biden had embraced the Quad as a mechanism to counter China, and he did not see it as only a military tool. Instead, it was viewed as a multi-purpose informal group that aimed to deal with economic and political affairs too. This meant that the Quad had emerged as a popular tool through both a Republican and Democratic administration, further emphasising the point that there was universal consensus in Washington that competition with China was key, and the Quad could be a good tool for it.

During his call with India’s External Affairs Minister, both Blinken and Jaishankar ‘underscored India’s role as a preeminent U.S. partner in the Indo-Pacific and the importance of working together to expand regional cooperation, including through the Quad’.⁹²⁸ Blinken’s call with Australian Foreign Minister Payne had a similar message, as they ‘emphasized the importance of cooperation, including through multilateral organizations and mechanisms like the Quad, to tackle shared challenges such as climate change, COVID-19, and global health security’.⁹²⁹

⁹²⁶ SD, ‘The United States and India: Deepening our Strategic Partnership’, 27 July 2021

⁹²⁷ Biden, ‘Remarks Prior to a Virtual Meeting With Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India’, 11 April 2022

⁹²⁸ Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar’, 29 January 2021

⁹²⁹ Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with Australian Foreign Minister Payne’, 27 January 2021c

The early support for the Quad continued. In February 2021, Blinken had a call with all the Quad foreign affairs ministers. They discussed cooperation on COVID-19, ‘countering disinformation, counterterrorism, maritime security, the urgent need to restore the democratically elected government in Burma, and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience in the broader region’, as well as support for ASEAN centrality. They also ‘reiterated their commitment to the Quad meeting at least annually at the Ministerial level and on a regular basis at senior and working levels to strengthen cooperation on advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific region, including support for freedom of navigation and territorial integrity’.⁹³⁰

In March 2021, the first leaders’ summit of the Quad was held, in an online format. During the virtual summit with Suga, Morrison, and Modi, Biden noted that it was the first multilateral summit of his presidency. Talking about generating economic growth in order to exit the pandemic in good shape, Biden said the Quad ‘is going to be a vital arena for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific’. Modi emphasized their shared democratic values, and the possibility for the Quad to work on climate change and emerging technologies. Morrison also mentioned inclusivity, particularly working with ASEAN. Suga emphasized the necessity for a free and open Indo-Pacific, a concept that Japan advanced and which was adopted by the Quad.⁹³¹

The joint statement following the Quad meeting outlined the key objectives. They claimed they were ‘united in a shared vision for the free and open Indo-Pacific. We strive for a region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion’. They would ‘commit to promoting a free, open rules-based

⁹³⁰ Blinken, ‘Secretary Blinken’s Call with Quad Ministers’, 18 February 2021

⁹³¹ Biden, ‘Remarks With Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia, and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga of Japan in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue Leaders Virtual Summit’, 12 March 2021a

order, rooted in international law to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. We support the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity. [...] We reaffirm our strong support for ASEAN's unity and centrality as well as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. [...] the Quad looks forward to the future; it seeks to uphold peace and prosperity and strengthen democratic resilience, based on universal values'. They also pledged to work together in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹³²

The fact sheet published after the Quad Summit of March 2021 outlined vaccine partnerships, particularly integration with COVAX, a US-led vaccine initiative that was meant to counter China's vaccine diplomacy. The leaders also pledged to work on climate change by creating a Quad working group, and they also singled out emerging technology as an area of interest.⁹³³ Overall, the ambitions of the Quad were considerably diversified under the Biden administration.

A Kantei statement on the US-Japan-India meeting of mid-March 2021 added a Japanese perspective on the Quad. Aside from cooperation on vaccines and ASEAN centrality, the statement mentioned that the meeting 'raised the Quad countries of Japan, the U.S., Australia, and India to a new stage in their relationship. We were all of the same mind that we will hold an in-person summit by the end of 2021. Going forward we will act in firm cooperation so that, with the Quad nations at the center, we succeed in producing truly ambitious and concrete results'.⁹³⁴

It is unsurprising that the Quad featured in the tense meeting in Anchorage between Blinken, Sullivan, Wang, and Yang. In the talk with the press before the meeting, senior

⁹³² Biden, 'Joint Statement by President Biden, Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga of Japan—The Spirit of the Quad', 12 March 2021c

⁹³³ Biden, 'FACT SHEET: Quad Summit', 12 March 2021b

⁹³⁴ Suga, 'Press Conference by the Prime Minister on the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Leaders' Video Conference', 13 March 2021

administration officials emphasized that the Quad would be a mechanism that allowed the US to gain leverage in the region by doing positive things, like vaccine cooperation. One was quoted saying about Biden's meeting with Quad leaders in February that it it 'isn't just about something that is here to counter China; this is about [...] doing something that enhances our leverage, enhances the quality of life in the region in meaningful ways'.⁹³⁵ Sullivan mentioned the Quad leader's meeting organized by Biden early in his presidency as an example of democracies working together in order to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific. This was the first time US officials publicly discussed the Quad during a meeting with Chinese officials.⁹³⁶

The first trip abroad by Blinken and Austin was to Japan and South Korea, further emphasizing the importance of the Indo-Pacific to the Biden administration. During their meeting with Suga they mentioned the Quad, with Suga saying that by holding the first ever Quad leaders video conference, 'we were able to send a strong message to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific'. Blinken added that 'we'll stand together in defense of an open and free Indo-Pacific region, as you did so eloquently in the Quad leaders summit'.⁹³⁷

During their meeting with Chung and Suh, they mentioned that there were no discussions about South Korea joining the Quad. Blinken did say that with 'regard to the Quad, I would just say it's – I think as you know, it's an informal grouping of likeminded countries that have come together to deepen cooperation on a whole host of issues. Many of these issues we're also working very closely with the Republic of Korea. We find that working through some of these sub-regional groupings, including the trilateral, the work we do with Korea and Japan, is very beneficial in addressing some of the challenges we face'.⁹³⁸

⁹³⁵ SD, Senior 'Administration Officials Preview', 16 March 2021b

⁹³⁶ Blinken, 'Secretary Blinken, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan Meeting', 18 March 2021e

⁹³⁷ Blinken, 'Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin with Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga Before Their Meeting', 16 March 2021a

⁹³⁸ Blinken, 'Press Availability', 18 March 2021a

This means the US acknowledged South Korea's desire to work with the Quad despite not being officially part of it. This was a far more accommodating stance than the Trump administration, which would often force US allies to choose between openly associating themselves with the US or disengagement with US policy.

It was also notable that the US considered the trilateral with Japan and South Korea as a structure that could complement the Quad. The trilateral was not a high priority for the Trump administration but the meetings intensified during the Biden administration. What was interesting was the mentioning of the Quad at trilaterals. The issue of South Korea joining the Quad once again came up, and the impression was that there would be more cooperation, without any specific mentioning of integration. The Quad was described as an 'informal grouping' and an 'open architecture', which means that once again the message was that South Korea was not pressured to join but integration to some degree would be welcome.⁹³⁹

The US Defense Department supported the Quad during the US-Australia 2021 Ministerial Consultations. The two countries 'reaffirmed their commitment to working through the Quad to support Indo-Pacific partners to respond to the defining challenges of our time', and aside from cooperation on vaccines for the COVID-19 pandemic, they were dedicated to 'deepening cooperation on other core regional challenges including climate change, critical and emerging technology, maritime security, infrastructure, cyber, and countering disinformation'. They would also try to ensure 'regular Quad engagement at all levels'.⁹⁴⁰

The Quad was discussed during a meeting between Blinken and Payne, in early May 2021. The two mentioned that they 'do quite a bit of multilateral collaboration, for example,

⁹³⁹ Biden, 'Background Press Call on the Upcoming Trilateral Meeting with Japan and the Republic of Korea', 1 April 2021

⁹⁴⁰ Department of Defense, 'Joint Statement on Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) 2021', 16 September 2021

through the Quad. Our countries are working with India and Japan to advance a shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific. We're tackling big, complex challenges, like ensuring international law is respected in the East and South China Seas, and increasing global access to safe, effective vaccines for COVID-19. President Biden was very proud to host the first-ever leaders' summit of the Quad back in March; we look forward to doing a great deal more through the collaboration among our countries in the months and years ahead'.⁹⁴¹

Senior officials from the US, Japan, Australia, and India had a meeting in August 2021. They 'acknowledged that global security and prosperity depends on the region remaining inclusive, resilient, and healthy. They discussed the importance of sustained international cooperation to end the COVID-19 pandemic in the Indo-Pacific and to promote economic recovery'.⁹⁴²

The AUSMIN consultations of September 2021 once again mentioned the 'Quad is already making a difference on COVID-19 vaccine production and delivery through the Quad Vaccine Partnership, and deepening cooperation on other core regional challenges including climate change, critical and emerging technology, maritime security, infrastructure, cyber, and countering disinformation'.⁹⁴³ During the press conference following the meeting, Payne implied that the new AUKUS alliance would be complementary to the Quad.⁹⁴⁴

The Quad leaders' Summit of September 2021 once again provided an opening for the leaders of the Quad countries to work together. During a background press call by senior US officials concerning the Summit and the bilateral meetings with India, the Quad was described as an 'unofficial gathering', with the specification that it is 'not a regional security organization'. US officials added that the Quad 'is part of a larger fabric of engagement that

⁹⁴¹ Blinken, Marise Payne, 'Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Australian Foreign Minister and Minister for Women Marise Payne at a Joint Press Availability', 13 May 2021

⁹⁴² SD, 'U.S.-Australia-India-Japan Consultations (the "Quad") Senior Officials Meeting', 12 August 2021

⁹⁴³ SD, 'Joint Statement', 16 September 2021a

⁹⁴⁴ Blinken, 'Press Availability', 16 September 2021b

you will see -- that you've already seen evidence of with very high-level bilateral engagements with security partners, other steps that we've taken. And we believe that the Quad will be a key and critical format and forum for discussion and joint purpose as we head into a challenging period ahead'. The Quad and AUKUS were described as 'completely separate initiatives', and the Quad was 'a discussion and engagement effort around a number of practical matters, like -we've discussed COVID and issues associated with climate change', with the added points that there 'is not a military dimension to it or security dimension to it. And it is an informal grouping'.⁹⁴⁵

Biden, Morrison, Modi, and Suga made a joint statement following the second summit announcing that they would 'recommit to our partnership, and to a region that is a bedrock of our shared security and prosperity—a free and open Indo-Pacific, which is also inclusive and resilient'. They would also 'recommit to promoting the free, open, rules-based order, rooted in international law and undaunted by coercion, to bolster security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond'. They stated that they 'stand for the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity of states'. They emphasized that 'our shared futures will be written in the Indo-Pacific, and we will redouble our efforts to ensure that the Quad is a force for regional peace, stability, security, and prosperity'.⁹⁴⁶

The fact sheet published following the summit also mentioned the creation of an infrastructure coordination group, more work on green energy strategies, as well as more cooperation on space policy.⁹⁴⁷ The message from the Biden administration concerning the Quad was becoming clearer: it was not an Asian NATO, but it was becoming an increasingly

⁹⁴⁵ Biden, Joe, 'Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials Previewing the Quad Leaders Summit and Bilateral Meeting with India', 23 September 2021

⁹⁴⁶ Biden, Joe, 'Joint Statement by President Biden, Prime Minister Scott Morrison of Australia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga of Japan on the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue', 24 September 2021

⁹⁴⁷ Biden, 'FACT SHEET: Quad Leaders' Summit', 24 September 2021b

coherent multinational grouping. While US officials did not say it specifically, this grouping was acting often in ways that challenged China, both in Asia and around the world.

The Kantei published its own take on the Quad following the summit meeting. It praised the fact that the leaders ‘agreed to hold the summit meetings every year. The initiative that Japan has promoted to bring together Japan, the United States, Australia and India has now completely taken root. [...] the meeting was extremely fruitful toward further progress in cooperation for the realization of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” for the four nations’.⁹⁴⁸

China’s own approach to the Quad had changed over time. In 2018, Wang Yi called the Quad ‘sea foam’, writing it off as nothing serious. From 2018 to 2021, Chinese academics have changed their view and recommendations for it. Initially, China’s strategy consisted of driving wedges between Quad members, however, the approach was not very successful and the strategy changed to one where China was trying to highlight other groups in order to minimize the Quad’s potential. Should the Quad start having results, Joel Wuthnow argued that China would begin to consider it a threat. Chinese officials were aware that the Quad was about China, but they were still undecided whether the Quad could actively counter China. The increased formalization of the Quad was worrying Chinese officials, especially given the prospects of closer cooperation between the Quad and groups like the G7 or the Five Eyes intelligence network. In March 2021, the Defense Minister of China said that the Quad was encouraging ‘bloc confrontation’ and ‘blatantly stirring up trouble among regional countries’. There was also a reluctance from China to move to a more positive foreign policy due to fears that the Quad would only further capitalize on that and increase its own weight in the region.⁹⁴⁹

⁹⁴⁸ Suga, ‘Press Conference by the Prime Minister on the Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Summit Meeting and Other Matters’, 25 September 2021

⁹⁴⁹ Joel Wuthnow, ‘China’s Shifting Attitude on the Indo-Pacific Quad’, *War on the Rocks*, 7 April 2021

The US strategy of multilateral cooperation was proving to be a challenge for China, as the country had almost no formal allies, and its reluctance to enter alliances where there would be a high degree of reciprocity and cooperation was working against it. The belief was that by joining multinational formats that emphasized mutual cooperation, China, which was often the stronger country, would have more to lose and therefore it avoided cooperation beyond economic pragmatism.

The Quad's increasing integration was becoming more obvious. Dhruva Jaishankar and Tanvi Madan noted that the group facilitated bilateral and trilateral cooperation, as 'Australia, Japan, and the United States, for instance, have coordinated their approaches to infrastructure financing. Australia, India, and Japan have focused jointly on supply chain resilience. In October 2020, India and Japan signed on to a statement on digital encryption released by the Five Eyes intelligence alliance—which includes Australia and the United States'. Military cooperation also now exceeded the Malabar exercise, moving to counterterrorism and cybersecurity, and a general improvement in military-to-military relations.⁹⁵⁰ There had also been calls for the Quad to develop its space policy, following its members' willingness to share satellite data among each other. Ankit Panda and Benjamin Silverstein have argued that the Quad is 'well positioned to consult on and design guidelines, principles, and rules that address mutually concerning space issues. Consensus among these countries could generate significant momentum toward broadly observed norms in space and, eventually, binding rules'.⁹⁵¹

A joint statement by the Quad leaders following a meeting in Tokyo in May 2022 stated that all members supported the principles of 'freedom, rule of law, democratic values, sovereignty and territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes without resorting to threat

⁹⁵⁰ Dhruva Jaishankar, Tanvi Madan, 'How the Quad Can Match the Hype', *Foreign Affairs*, 15 April 2021

⁹⁵¹ Ankit Panda, Benjamin Silverstein, 'It's Time for the Quad to Chart a Bold Course on Space Governance', *The Diplomat*, 22 October 2021

or use of force, any unilateral attempt to change the status quo, and freedom of navigation and overflight'. It also added that the leaders would 'uphold the international rules-based order where countries are free from all forms of military, economic and political coercion'. In this sense, the Quad and the US worldview were synchronised. The statement expanded on the role of the Quad, which would cover vaccines, infrastructure, developing financial institutions, ASEAN centrality, support for climate working groups, and other initiatives.⁹⁵²

The fact sheet published following the meeting went into more detail. The Quad would support an Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), a Quad Fellowship for students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as well as establishing a climate Working Group as well as a Quad Cybersecurity Partnership. It also marked the establishment of a new humanitarian assistance and disaster relief program (HADR) to recognise the 2004 founding of the Quad following the Indian Ocean Tsunami.⁹⁵³

The heads of state gave further remarks the next day, with Kishida urging cooperation, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese also subscribing to the free and open Indo-Pacific concept, and Modi adding that the Quad had become more influential, which was a welcome development. Biden added that 'I was once asked by the leader of China why I kept talking about being an Indo-Pacific power. And I said: "Because we are. We share the Pacific—one entire side of our country." And we have been deeply involved with all of you for a long time'.⁹⁵⁴

The Quad had become a platform for a series of US goals, but not all of them were security-related. This is why the emergence of AUKUS was important to the Biden

⁹⁵² Biden, 'Joint Statement by President Biden, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Australia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan on the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue Leader's Summit in Tokyo, Japan', 23 May 2022

⁹⁵³ Biden, 'FACT SHEET: Quad Leaders' Tokyo Summit 2022', 23 May 2022b

⁹⁵⁴ Biden, 'Remarks With Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Australia, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India at the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue Leaders Summit in Tokyo, Japan', 24 May 2022

administration. Biden saw AUKUS as the strictly security-related group, and developments in the middle of his term reflected that. For example, there was an attempt to bring Japan closer to AUKUS. Australia and Japan had been consolidating their security relationship for the past decade, and as such, Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles had declared that he would like to see Japan join AUKUS.⁹⁵⁵ In January 2023, Kishida visited London and signed a defence agreement with UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. The agreement would allow Britain and Japan to deploy forces in each other's countries. Britain thus joined the US and Australia as being the third country to have that ability.⁹⁵⁶ These were all made within the context of Japan increasing its defence budget for 2023 by about \$7.3 billion, an attempt to match the 2% defence spending pledge that would normally be required of NATO members.⁹⁵⁷

The Pacific Dream and strategic culture

The Biden administration National Security Strategy doubled down on the notion that the US is in a battle between democracies and autocracies. It positions itself in competition with China, and considers its 'free and open Indo-Pacific' strategy to be the best way forward. The FOIP vision is a means for cementing ties with allies. It presents China as a competitive state that is actively seeking to dismantle US alliances and aims to reshape the global order in a manner that would not suit US interests.⁹⁵⁸

When Biden attended the East Asia Summit in October 2021, he 'outlined his vision for [...] a region that is open, connected, prosperous, resilient, and secure'. He added that the US would work with its allies to pursue a vision of the Indo-Pacific 'that will define our shared

⁹⁵⁵ Stephen Dziedzic, James Oaten, 'Australia's "indispensable" partnership with Japan could see it join AUKUS pact as strategic links grow', *ABC NEWS (Australian Broadcasting Corporation)*, 9 December 2022

⁹⁵⁶ Rishi Sunak, 'Prime Minister hosts Japanese PM and agrees historic defence agreement', *Prime Minister's Office*, 11 January 2023

⁹⁵⁷ Yamaguchi Takaya, Takemoto Yoshifumi, 'Japan to increase defence budget by \$7.3 bln in fiscal 2023 – sources', *Reuters*, 9 December 2022

⁹⁵⁸ White House, 'National Security Strategy', 2022, 23-24, 37

objectives around trade facilitation, standards for the digital economy and technology, supply chain resiliency, decarbonization and clean energy, infrastructure, worker standards, and other areas of shared interest'. Finally, he 'reiterated the U.S. commitment to the international rules-based order and expressed concern over threats to that order. He made clear that the United States will continue to stand with allies and partners in support of democracy, human rights, rule of law, and freedom of the seas'.⁹⁵⁹

Biden further tried to bring like-minded countries together by organising his Summit for Democracy in December 2021. The plan was to bring together more than 100 countries 'representing diverse democratic experiences'. The US wanted the summit to 'provide leaders a forum to engage, listen, and speak honestly about the challenges and opportunities facing democratic governments and about how democracies can deliver for their citizens'. Biden administration officials added that the US was 'approaching the summit from a place of humility', adding that 'America's greatest strengths lie in our power for learning, self-improvement, and the power of our example. We know we're not perfect -- far from it -- and we always have to strive to live up to our highest ideals and principles'.⁹⁶⁰

When the IPEF was launched, in Tokyo in May 2022, Biden claimed the 'future of the 21st-century economy is going to be largely written in the Indo-Pacific—in our region'. He added that the 'the nations represented here today, and those who will join this framework in the future, are signing up to work toward an economic vision that will deliver for all peoples—all our peoples: the vision for an Indo-Pacific that is free and open, connected and prosperous, and secure as well as resilient, where our economic—where economic growth is sustainable and is inclusive'. The IPEF was about clean energy and decarbonisation, about closing loopholes, funding education and healthcare, better taxation and better trade. It was

⁹⁵⁹ Biden, 'Readout of President Biden's Participation in the East Asia Summit', 27 October 2021

⁹⁶⁰ Biden, 'Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials on the Summit for Democracy', 7 December 2021

ultimately, America's first new economic vision for the Indo-Pacific since the TPP had failed. It had 13 members at its launch.⁹⁶¹

For Biden, there was strong adherence to Kerry's vision of the Pacific Dream, which was unsurprising. However, the Biden administration in some ways adhered strongly to Acheson's version as well. In both security and economics, the Biden administration had been perhaps the most accommodating of the four studied in this thesis when dealing with US allies. Its guiding principles understood the two *revulsions* and the administration, like the Trump one before it, used China as a stand-in for the communist threat of the Cold War. What was noticeable over the decades was the shift in the US perception of China, from insignificant country to economic partner to systemic rival. Otherwise, there had been two universal constants across all three versions of the Pacific Dream: a belief that the US military presence in Asia added stability, and a belief that trade could be conducive of prosperity first, and shared norms and values that enable democratisation second.

If the Trump years were in many ways a departure from the more typical tenets of US foreign policy, the Biden years were an attempt to return to more traditional principles. Biden was still plagued by a problem Trump exploited quite well, considering that, since the 2008 financial crisis, more and more Americans had been growing sceptical of trade deals. As a result, the US had not joined the TPP, even though the Biden administration had cautiously hinted that it was considering it. On the campaign trail, Biden said he would be open to renegotiating the TPP.⁹⁶² During a meeting with Suga, Biden was told by his counterpart that he should consider re-joining the TPP, and that Japan would support it.⁹⁶³

⁹⁶¹ Biden, 'Remarks on the Launch of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity in Tokyo, Japan', 23 May 2022

⁹⁶² Adam Behsudi, Doug Palmer 'Biden says he would renegotiate TPP', *USA Today*, 1 August 2019

⁹⁶³ Sakaguchi Yukihiro, 'Japan cautiously explores possibility of US returning to TPP', *Nikkei Asia*, 15 May 2021

In spite of that, Biden did not move on re-joining the TPP in his first two years in power. Instead, his administration worked on creating a new economic framework that would encompass Asia. On 23 May 2022, the Biden administration published the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), an initiative that attempted to emulate the TPP. The IPEF has 14 member states: Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the US, and Vietnam. When the IPEF was announced, China opposed it, claiming it was another attempt by the US to make countries in Asia choose sides.⁹⁶⁴

The IPEF had four ‘pillars’, they were allocated to trade, supply chains, clean economy, and a fair economy.⁹⁶⁵ This meant that the IPEF was one of the structures that most closely resembled the principles outlined by John Kerry in his Tokyo speech. In this case, the IPEF built on the integration structure that the TPP was meant to work on, and it expanded beyond it, being more attuned to contemporary worries. It was also more broadly defined, making association with the IPEF easier. For example, India had chosen to associate itself only with Pillar I, concerning trade.

Beliefs, attitudes, actions

In terms of beliefs, the US has continued to strongly emphasize that it is a Pacific nation. The institutionalisation of the Quad, along with the emergence of the IPEF were examples of US attempts to try to ‘write the rulebook’ for the Pacific. The US has also consistently upheld its own norms and values, as clashes with China over democracy and human rights continued.

⁹⁶⁴ Teddy Ng, ‘China says Washington’s “divisive” Indo-Pacific strategy doomed to fail’, *South China Morning Post*, May 23 2022

⁹⁶⁵ Office of the United States Trade Representative, ‘The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity: Biden-Harris Administration’s Negotiating Goals for the Connected Economy (Trade) Pillar’, 23 September 2022

In terms of attitudes, the US has gone to greater extents in working with its allies on both the security and economic front, marking a slight departure from the more selective Trump period. The Quad, the Quad Plus, the IPEF, and AUKUS were all examples to expand multilateral formats, all supported by the US, which served as proof of the stronger embrace of multilateralism. The US had largely adhered to the rules it laid out, once again with UNCLOS being the clear outlier.

In terms of practices, the US has institutionalised the Quad and became a part of AUKUS, demonstrating that the US was taking action to properly establish multilateral institutions. The lax formats around the Quad Plus and the IPEF proved that the US still found it easier to coordinate on the security side rather than on the economic. Since the re-emergence of the Quad had been ‘led’ by the US, it could be said that it, Quad Plus, AUKUS, and the IPEF especially, were examples of formats where the US took the initiative. In spite of Japan’s invitation for the US to re-join the TPP, the signs pointed to a reluctance by the US to join the multilateral groups of others. By and large the US had adhered to its own rhetoric, with the main exception being the UNCLOS treaty, which invalidated to a certain extent US rhetoric on the South China Sea.

Conclusion

To conclude, under Biden the US systemic rivalry with China continued. By this point, the Quad, Quad Plus, AUKUS, the IPEF, all had a clearer place in US strategy than the San Francisco System. Security cooperation with Japan and Australia continued at a steady pace. The Biden administration had been more accommodating to the less committed approach by South Korea to security. An improvement in relations with the Philippines and the departure of Duterte did not lead to a radical improvement in the Philippines’ status within US plans. It

was also clear that Thailand did not come across as a major strategic partner, instead, there was a tendency to add Thailand to the ASEAN affairs category, something that had happened in the past too. Biden was less of a populist than Trump or Modi, but the US had been accommodating towards India, even in instances of Indian reluctance to take a strong stance against Russia in the Russia-Ukraine war.

The Quad was institutionalised and consolidated, as was AUKUS. Quad Plus and the IPEF to a lesser extent. Biden's Pacific Dream vision was influenced by Kerry, but had overlaps with Acheson too. There was a departure from Ford's economic integration principles. Like Obama, Biden was open to cooperate in multinational formats both of the economic and security type.

Chapter 7

Conclusions. The Pacific Dream revisited

This thesis aimed to look at the evolution of US alliances in Asia from the George W. Bush administration to the first half of the Joe Biden administration, 2001-2022, through the lens of strategic culture and the concept of an American Pacific Dream. Five main research questions were identified in the Introduction and these will now be revisited in the Conclusion. These research questions were: firstly, what is the nature of the US Pacific Dream and how does it relate to US strategic culture in the Indo-Pacific? Secondly, how has the US alliance network in the Pacific region evolved and to what extent has the San Francisco System been replaced by the Quad Plus? Thirdly, in what ways have US allies influenced the evolution of the US alliance network in the Indo-Pacific and the achievement of the US Pacific Dream? Fourthly, to what extent is the Pacific Dream and US strategic culture in the Indo-Pacific embodied in US National Security Strategies, especially Biden's 2022 NSS? Fifthly, how inherent is the containment of China to the US alliance network in the Indo-Pacific and is this alliance network fit for purpose?

The Pacific Dream and US Strategic Culture

The Pacific Dream is a concept through which the US aims to make its case for the security, political, and economic integration of Asia in a framework that it leads and that benefits American interests. US policy-makers have been working on a coherent strategy for the Pacific since the end of WWII, and even by the early 2020s there are entire areas where there is no consensus regarding the best approach. In this sense, integration in Asia has been considerably slower and more difficult than in Europe. This does not mean the US has not

recorded progress in some of its initiatives. The most successful area has been with the security alliances. In the areas of politics and economics, the US and its allies think alike on many issues, but it is considerably harder to reach common ground. What has been happening in the past decades is a broadening of the scope of the US Pacific Dream. Successive American administrations have been trying to make the Pacific Dream encompass a political and economic dimension, repeatedly calling for the scope of US alliances to go beyond the security side. The Cold War and post-Cold War periods demonstrate that US security alliances have been quite enduring.

In this sense, the thesis has answered the question asked by David Haglund, ‘what can strategic culture contribute to our understanding of security policies in the Asia-Pacific region?’.⁹⁶⁶ Concerning US allies’ strategic culture, key developments that engage the literature have also been made: the idea put forward by Alex Burns and Ben Eltham, that Australia is facing a contradiction between its strategic aspirations and capabilities has also been refuted by this thesis.⁹⁶⁷ If one is to believe Andrew Oros’ argument, that Japan is in its ‘fourth wave’ of strategic culture, one of increasing militarisation, then this thesis has added considerable detail to that.⁹⁶⁸ As for Kim Jiyul’s conception of South Korean strategic culture, with its three pillars, the second pillar, its focus on North Korea, is becoming less central to Seoul’s grand strategy. The first and third pillars, those of prosperity and closer engagement with the US have stayed strong, and this thesis has added detail on how exactly they have developed over time.⁹⁶⁹ There is also value to de Castro’s point that the strategic culture of the Philippines is more consistent than one would think. This thesis has

⁹⁶⁶ David Haglund, ‘What Can Strategic Culture Contribute to Our Understanding of Security Policies in the Asia – Pacific Region?’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.35.2, 2014, 310-328

⁹⁶⁷ Alex Burns, Ben Eltham, ‘Australia’s Strategic Culture: Constraints and Opportunities in Security Policymaking’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.35.2, 2014, 187-210

⁹⁶⁸ Andrew Oros, ‘Japan’s Strategic Culture: Security Identity in a Fourth Modern Incarnation?’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.35.2, 2014, 227-248

⁹⁶⁹ Jiyul Kim, ‘Strategic Culture of the Republic of Korea’, *Contemporary Security Strategy*, Vol.35.2, 2014, 270-289

demonstrated that even during the Duterte administration, the Philippines stayed clear from compromising their relationship with the US. To the contrary, they deepened it on the security side in order to counter Chinese moves in the South China Sea.⁹⁷⁰

The manner in which the US has pursued the Pacific Dream has often been cynical and hierarchical. The US has supported dictatorships that were aligned with it, as long as they prevented the rise of a communist alternative. The US has also placed greater emphasis on some countries than others, specifically Japan, owing both to security reasons and a perceived ease of dealing with them, since their regimes were democratic. Immediately after WWII, there were attempts by US allies, specifically South Korea and the Philippines, to establish a *Pacific Pact*. Initially sceptical, the US reluctantly agreed, focusing on a group consisting of Japan, Australia, the Philippines, and Indonesia. The problem at that time was complete mistrust between US allies: Australia and New Zealand did not want to join a security alliance with Japan, as they were sceptical Japan could align itself with the west in terms of strategic culture. Starting in the 1950s, US politicians, including Secretary of State Dean Acheson, observed two key ambitions for people in Asia: an inclination to escape from poverty, and a rejection of foreign domination. When President Gerald Ford spoke about his Pacific Doctrine, among his premises were maintaining a US presence in Asia, upholding the alliance with Japan, and ensuring economic cooperation through normalization with China. When John Kerry gave his speech in Japan, his main point was that the US needed to further integrate the already successful bilateral alliances. He focused on economic growth, military consolidation, and shared values, such as the rule of law and democracy. The definition of the Pacific Dream became broader.

⁹⁷⁰ Renato Cruz De Castro, 'Philippine Strategic Culture: Continuity in the Face of Changing Regional Dynamics', *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol.35.2, 2014, 249-269

It could be argued that the whole concept of political integration in the Pacific, the US Pacific Dream, is a chimera of sorts, something unachievable. This is true if the US were to abandon the natural course of its foreign policy that had been established through Acheson, Ford, and Kerry. Disruptive presidencies that attempt to return to the stubborn unilateralism of the George W. Bush years run the risk of compromising the alliance network central to the US Pacific Dream. Nevertheless, US foreign policy has proven to be quite consistent, in spite of occasional shocks. The Pacific Dream has evolved and proven to be quite adaptable over the decades. Unless the US fully renounces any ambition for Asian integration into an American-led world order, the possibility of pursuing its Pacific Dream will always be there. Even the disruptive Trump presidency realised tacitly that it could not fully compromise American alliances. If anything, it doubled down on security consolidation, continuing the process of multilateral defensive cooperation. The problems posed by an administration like Trump's is the narrow, security-centric outlook, which is no longer consistent with the Pacific Dream. America needs to do more to integrate Asia, both economically and politically, into its vision for the Pacific region, and 'doing more' also means supporting initiatives of its allies.

As regards American beliefs, there are three defining issues. Firstly, the US has consistently defined itself as a 'Pacific nation'. It has been established throughout the thesis that even though there have been moments when China has tried rhetorically to push back at this narrative, the US and its allies have been consistent in defining it as a Pacific nation. Moreover, the US has increased its focus on this region, making a visible move away from Europe as its traditional priority region, to Asia. Secondly, there is the US belief that it has to 'write the rulebook' of the Pacific, in terms of economic institutions, territorial dispute adjudication, what constitutes a free society, and so on. In that sense, the US has been consistent in trying to maintain its status as the rulebook writer, despite encountering a

number of failures in establishing a working economic framework. Competition from China has been strongest in the area of trade, but the US has not abandoned the belief that it is the main writer of rules for Indo-Pacific integration. Thirdly, there is the belief that US norms and values are the best for the region. In this sense, US strategic culture has evolved, taking a more pronounced stance. In the early 2000s, the US was implying this, expecting countries from Asia, including China, to eventually adhere to these principles. Once US policymakers adapted to the belief that China was a strong regional competitor, the manner in which the US advanced this point became more forceful. Even so, the US has been consistent in upholding this belief, and in refusing to accommodate the point that alternative norms and values can coexist or replace some of its own principles.

On the matter of US attitudes in the Indo-Pacific, another three issues can be addressed. The first point is whether the US has worked with its allies in achieving its goals. Contrary to popular belief that Republican administrations tend to be unilateralist, and Democratic administrations focus more on alliance management, this thesis has observed that regardless of ideology, the US tends to focus on some form of cooperation with its allies. The US has a very good understanding of the fact that its allies can act as force multipliers. The second point concerns the US tendency to pursue multilateral formats in order to achieve its goals. Here, US strategic culture has been consistent, albeit very specific: the US pursued multilateral formats where it takes the initiative. When multilateral formats that include the US but are led by other countries are proposed, the US is very reluctant to become invested. The only notable exception here is ASEAN, however, ASEAN was initially conceived as a body meant to fight communism. The third point concerns the evolution of US rhetoric. Does the US uphold and adhere to its own description of norms and values? Here, there has been a noticeable shift throughout the decades. During the Cold War, the US was very flexible in what it defined as like-minded countries: there was a request for there to be opposition to

communism and an openness to doing business with the US. After the Cold War, a focus on democratization and aspects such as human rights gained prominence. With the emergence of China as a major rival, the US doubled down on the democratic ideals rhetoric, marking a shift from a negative framing (opposition to something, as it was with communism) to a positive framing (democracy, human rights, freedom of navigation as elements that bind the US and its allies together). In this sense, US strategic culture evolved.

Concerning US actions, this thesis analysed three areas: the establishment of multilateral institutions, the participation in the groups of others, and signs that the US was applying its own rhetoric. Concerning multilateral institutions, the US has supported the Quad, AUKUS, and put forward the IPEF. This marks a return to the initial endeavours of the Obama administration. On the matter of participating in the groups of others, it can be said that AUKUS is firstly an Australian idea that the US supports. The embrace of the FOIP strategy meant the US accepted the Indo-Pacific vision of Japan. In general though, the US has preferred to keep the initiative in terms of defining new concepts. In terms of signs that the US has adhered to its own rhetoric, there are mixed movements. On one hand, a consistent theme of US rhetoric since 2001 has been the embrace of democracy and human rights. While the US has taken action to condemn China on those fronts, its actions in other parts of the world, particularly its difficulty in questioning ties with various regimes in the Middle East that are notorious for their autocratic rule and human rights breaches, has been a constant issue. The US, even during the Biden years, has not shown an intention to ratify UNCLOS, which also puts its rhetoric on freedom of the seas in question. As long as the US does not adhere to the very legal framework it upholds in the South China Sea, it will always be possible to point out American hypocrisy on this front.

The San Francisco System, the Quad, and their symbiotic relationship

The San Francisco System goes by that name owing to the San Francisco peace treaty. It is a product of its time, as well as proof of the enduring character of US security alliances since the end of WWII. Nevertheless, the US has always been reluctant to describe the San Francisco System as anything more than a convenient set of bilateral alliances, with different security purposes, united by the fact they happen to be security alliances that have the US at the centre, hence the alternative name, ‘hub-and-spokes’ system. In this sense, the thesis has built on the work put forward by Kimie Hara, especially her edited book on the San Francisco System, from 2015.⁹⁷¹ The thesis argues that the San Francisco System has passed its peak, and it is now ceding the way to new alliances, such as the Quad, Quad Plus, or the numerous multilateral groups that have appeared in the Indo-Pacific over time. Hara’s work argued that one of the flaws of the San Francisco System is the inability of its allies to agree with each other over security issues. This thesis argues differently, it makes the claim that when it comes to allied alignment, better options are present. In doing so, the thesis also engaged with Kim Beazley’s work from 2003, which also looked at the validity of the San Francisco System. Beazley said that the lack of alternatives made the San Francisco System so enduring, and this thesis, starting almost where Beazley’s article ended, makes the point that finally, the alternatives are emerging, and the durability of the system can be called into question.⁹⁷²

The perception of China as a growing rival to the US has paved the way for other alliances with the same goal – protection *from* a threat – to emerge, particularly the Quad in its second iteration during the Trump administration. The question here was whether the Quad would supplant the San Francisco System. The answer is that the Quad and the San

⁹⁷¹ Kimie Hara (editor), *The San Francisco System and its Legacies, Continuation, transformation, and historical reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific*, New York: Routledge, 2015

⁹⁷² Kim Beazley, ‘Whither the San Francisco alliance system?’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.57.2, 2003, 325-338

San Francisco System can coexist. The San Francisco System has continued, as it always did, to provide a simple framework for US bilateral alliances, a security architecture that ensures the US remains a security player in Asia. The Quad has emerged as a means of multi-national security integration and cooperation, one of many such minilateral groups, aimed at providing an alternative to China's strategy for expanding influence in Asia. The purposes of the Quad do not cancel those of the San Francisco System, and the role of the San Francisco System can easily continue regardless of the evolution of the Quad.

The Quad can also be a platform for resolving the types of disputes between US allies that the San Francisco System cannot. For example, Japan and South Korea have not fully overcome historical grievances. This is due to the Korean belief that Japan has not accounted for its colonial war crimes, and the Japanese belief that the issue has been settled. Attempting to reform the San Francisco System in a manner that tries to deal with this issue would be difficult, instead, the nature of the Quad, especially its Quad Plus format, allows for a sidestepping of this. Quad Plus allows South Korea to associate itself selectively with the US-led format, and it also keeps Japan at its core, as a fundamental Big Four member. This format has proven to be rewarding, since both Japan and South Korea have expressed a consistent desire for deeper security cooperation not only with the US, but with groups such as NATO. The US played a part in the initial attempt to resolve the historical disputes in the 1960s, but those diplomatic endeavours did not play out well, and the US has gradually shifted to a position where it supports platforms that try to bring Japan and South Korea together wherever they can cooperate successfully. In this case, the thesis' conclusions concerning the Quad align themselves with the analysis of Tanvi Madan and Dhruva Jaishankar.⁹⁷³ The Quad is transforming into a group that aims to move beyond security

⁹⁷³ Dhruva Jaishankar, Tanvi Madan, 'How the Quad Can Match the Hype', *Foreign Affairs*, 15 April 2021

issues, and that direction is supported by the Biden administration. This thesis has added further context to that development.

The increasing value of US allies in the Indo – Pacific

An important point made by this thesis is that since 2001, the US has shifted to a position where it gives more credence and trust to its allies. Democratisation, an increase in trade with Pacific allies, and consistent dialogue between the US and its allies have all featured more heavily than diplomatic arguments or other similar setbacks. In the end, the US has allowed increased say for its allies in light of its competition of values with China. With all these transformations in mind, the thesis complements Kurt Campbell's work on the Pivot, by adding more detail on how the US worked to improve its ties with allies after the 2008 economic crash.⁹⁷⁴ The thesis also positions itself to counter the points made by David Kang in his book *US grand strategy in the 21st century*, arguing that the US and its allies do not want to cede ground to China's rise, and that they do not perceive Beijing as a peaceful, trade-minded power.⁹⁷⁵

Biden, the NSS and US alliances in the Pacific

The role of US allies in the Pacific, so important to the US Pacific Dream, and to American strategic culture more generally, can be observed in US National Security Strategies, especially since 2001. The Bush administration's NSS, while not denying that America must remain engaged with the Indo-Pacific, was more preoccupied with the Middle East, and saw the US alliance network in the Pacific region at least partly in terms of America's strategy for

⁹⁷⁴ Kurt Campbell, *The Pivot, The Future of American Statecraft in Asia*, New York: Hachette, 2016

⁹⁷⁵ David Kang, *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017

Afghanistan and Iraq. There was a certain openness to working with allies, but both the US and its allies believed at the time that China did not pose a major threat. Obama's NSS was a marked shift away from the low priority that characterised the Pacific region in the Bush NSS. It was Obama who began the attempt to move American strategic culture, as set out in his administration's NSS document, towards the prioritisation of the Asia-Pacific as the main geo-political region for future US interests, through his 'pivot' strategy. However, this aim had only limited success, partly owing to the difficulty for the US to disengage from Europe and end its involvement in various conflicts in the Middle East. The incoming Trump administration's change of policy in the region, especially regarding membership of the TPP, also diminished what Obama had managed to achieve.

The Trump NSS can be seen as both a return to the Bush years in terms of optics concerning US alliances, and as a return to the Cold War in terms of rhetoric. In spite of this, the Trump administration could not afford to move the focus of the US away from Asia, as it endeavoured to frame China as the main threat to US interests. Nevertheless, Trump saw American alliances as mainly military and bilateral, and he was known for pursuing the same strategy of economically strongarming allies as he did with China, a country with which the US entered into a trade war in order to achieve a 'better deal' for US exports. Trump's abandonment of the Trans-Pacific Partnership owing to it not being the type of economic deal he considered proper, also had a detrimental effect on Washington's general aim of establishing deeper economic ties with the Indo-Pacific.

The Biden administration's NSS document, published in 2022, is in many ways similar in its aims to the Obama NSS, with more applied success. The changing political context in the Indo-Pacific has worked in Biden's favour, as US allies are now more receptive to the idea of countering China, and China itself had been pursuing more assertive policies. Biden has returned to the strategy of engaging in multilateral formats, trying to re-start the

US-Japan-South Korea trilateral for example, and putting forward a new economic vision in the form of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, which aims to slowly fill the gap left by the US not joining the TPP. Nonetheless, Biden has also kept some aspects of Trump's more hawkish approach, including cold relations with China, and escalating America's technological war with Beijing. Overall, the positive development is that the US has acquired a very good understanding of the importance of the Pacific region to its political ambitions, and this is visible in both its NSS documents and its strategic culture more generally. The problem concerns the manner in which the US chooses to approach competition with China, with a clear divergence between Republican administrations which have a more security-focused attitude and are cautious of multilateral groupings, and Democratic administrations which want stronger relationships with multiple allies that are not limited entirely to national security issues.

Competition versus containment

With the rise of China as a challenger, it has seemed to many observers that a new Cold War has started, and that the US is trying to contain China in a manner similar to its Cold War attempts at containing the USSR. However, this is not an entirely accurate reading of the situation. Firstly, the Cold War attempts at containing the USSR were meant to prevent the spread of Soviet communism. China is an autocratic state, but while it still uses communist bureaucratic language and formats, it does not shun capitalism and does not describe itself as being in an existential battle with capitalism, as a communist country would. Secondly, China poses a considerable regional military threat, but it does not constitute a military challenge of the magnitude of the USSR, which had an established military footprint in a number of countries. China has proven reluctant to build military alliances, and most of its military endeavours with other countries are transactional. This appears to be true in the case of its

recent 'strategic partnership' with Russia in relation to the Russo-Ukraine war, although it is too soon to know where this will lead. China can still pose a considerable military challenge to the US in East Asia but its main strength lies in its global economic reach which it is very difficult to contain.

However, it can be argued that, in a security sense, China is already being 'contained' and has been for decades, and the expectation of an even greater containment strategy would be excessive. China is bordered by what the US has historically called the 'first island chain', consisting of Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines, none of which are allied with China or willing to abandon their security relationships with the US in order to appease China. This is true even in the case of Taiwan which is, of course, joined to China according to the 'one China' principle. The US has also been successful in maintaining its alliance with South Korea, which means it has a military foothold in continental Asia. To make matters even more complicated, the relationship between China and India is tense, with occasional military skirmishes over disputed territories, which means that China struggles to both its east and south.

What can also be said about the US-China dynamic is that there is indeed a challenge from China to the US-driven 'rules-based international liberal order', but the side-effect of that is not really containment of China; instead it is a dispute between worldviews, particularly the US-defined Pacific Dream, and Xi Jinping's Chinese Dream, which also challenges the American Dream. This has led to a race between the two powers over political formats, economic agreements, and military consolidation. China has moved into a position where it is more confident and less willing to play by western rules. Instead it considers itself self-sufficient enough to establish its own rulebook and have other countries play by that. One example of this is the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), another example is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). They are expansive economic bodies that aim

to further connect countries in Asia and the rest of the world to China's economy while at the same time they enable China to determine key economic decisions. China's desire to exclude the US from some of these organisations, by insisting that some of its economic arrangements are for Asian countries only, is another example of the attempt to consolidate an alternative worldview.

The US was slow to move away from the 'responsible stakeholder' theory. The real shift happened in the final years of the Obama administration, and, in a policy sense, it was continued in the Trump administration. This helps to explain why the Quad never really re-emerged during the Obama years, and that it did so during the Trump years. The Biden administration has not reversed or halted the change in approach to China, which is a further example of the way in which the US sees China has changed for the long-term future. In this sense, the thesis develops arguments put forward by Rush Doshi in his book, *The Long Game*. What Doshi did for contextualising China's grand strategy at the end of the Cold War and the decades after, this thesis aimed to build upon, by further analysing how the US itself adapted to what was a clear ambition by China to challenge Washington.⁹⁷⁶ Tensions between the US and China are indeed rising, but in spite of that, this thesis has put forward a more nuanced take on the dynamics between the US and China, providing an alternative to a certain strain of literature which warns of an imminent clash between Washington and Beijing, such as the works of Graham Allison⁹⁷⁷ or John Mearsheimer.⁹⁷⁸ War is not inevitable, and the solution to the China threat does not consist of the US minimising its presence in Asia, on the contrary, a review of how US alliances in the Indo-Pacific have evolved adds to the point that Washington's presence is something desired by a handful of

⁹⁷⁶ Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*, New York: Oxford University press, 2021

⁹⁷⁷ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides' Trap?*, London: Houghton Mifflin, 2017

⁹⁷⁸ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014

allies, and that any hypothetical clash between the US and China would automatically affect some of Asia's biggest economies and militaries. This is something that the literature on the topic often fails to account, and it is a problem, because it can be one of the biggest reasons for why there hasn't yet been any wide-ranging military conflict in Asia between the great powers.

Final points

Since the end of World War II, the US has risen to a position of primacy in global affairs. However, the immediate post-Cold War era, in the 1990s, appeared to present the US with a strategic quandary - the lack of an obvious existential threat. Since both the US and its allies were unwilling to dismantle the Cold War structure of security alliances and economic connections in the Euro-Atlantic and the Asia-Pacific there was something of a lull in terms of US grand strategy. Even after 9/11, the enhanced US focus on international terrorism during the George W. Bush administration did not prove to be as pervasive as had been expected and eventually, the rise of China to global power status, at least in economic terms, resulted in the US returning to a more traditional, competitive, strategic culture.

This development has cemented the already functioning security alliances in the Pacific, referred to by scholars as the San Francisco System, and paved the way for greater economic cooperation and security integration, at a multinational level, especially in the form of the Quad and Quad Plus. The biggest challenge for the US and the completion of the alliance network inherent to its Pacific Dream, is whether it will be able to establish a political and economic framework that allows for deeper integration within the Indo-Pacific, given the powerful competition from China and the reluctance of states in the region, even allies like New Zealand, to confront China. The issue here is that there already is movement

led by China to limit or reduce US influence, along with the removal of the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership of its own accord during the Trump administration – albeit that the TPP evolved in 2018 into the CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership), of which Japan, Australia and New Zealand are members and which the US might eventually join in some form.

This thesis has explained what the Pacific Dream is, how it has evolved, and what challenges it faces. It has analysed the evolution of established US security networks, and new, emerging ones, and has concluded that these structures can co-exist. It has also analysed the evolution of economic integration in the Indo-Pacific, and assessed the declining US involvement in the process. It has explained how the San Francisco System is no longer fit for purpose and is being slowly replaced, primarily by the Quad and Quad Plus. It has defined the nature of US-China relations as changing, but not simply towards containment and a new Cold War, but instead as a relationship focused on competition. While it is true that China is perceived in Washington as the main long-term threat to the US worldview, this threat is being handled in a less rigid manner than the Soviet threat during the Cold War. The thesis has also shown that US allies in the region are having a considerable effect on US strategic culture, a natural development resulting from their democratisation, and that the US is tacitly coming to terms with the reality that its ability to write the rulebook on the Indo-Pacific and its international relationships is strongly tied to the establishment of a climate of cooperation and trust with its allies.

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