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## DEFENSE SECURITY BRIEF

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Cover Photo: The Taiwan Air Force's Indigenous Defense Fighter (IDF) in the 35<sup>th</sup> Han Kuang Exercises. (Source: Hsiao-Huang Shu/INDSR)



# Amphibious Forces: Still Relevant but They Need “Selling” (and Don’t Be Afraid of Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief)

By Grant Newsham

Few people would argue an Army, Navy, or Air Force is unnecessary. Nor that their main *raison d’être* is to fight. Amphibious forces combine each of these capabilities – ground, sea, and air – but are often viewed, even within militaries, as being of limited usefulness or at least deserving a low priority.

Yet, the Indo-Pacific with its islands, coastlines, and vast ocean expanses is perfectly suited – and indeed demands – amphibious capabilities.

With an amphibious force, a military can conduct operations seamlessly between the sea and land – rather than being confined to one or the other. Indeed, being “amphibious” allows a military to view the ocean as “maneuver space” (sort of like an empty highway) through which forces can move freely and without permission – and are able to get ashore by sea or by air almost anywhere.

Otherwise, huge stretches of the map – the littoral areas – even within one’s own country are mostly off-limits as forces cannot move personnel and equipment from ship to shore and vice versa – unless there is a port

or airfield available. Thus, a military comes to resemble a “ferry service” or an “airline” that happens to have weapons.



The U.S. Marines of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. (Source: The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command)

The importance of amphibious forces is self-evident – at least to Marines (a notably self-confident bunch) and “amphibious sailors.”

However, with perhaps one exception there is not a Marine Corps or an amphibious force anywhere in the Indo-Pacific or beyond that has enough ships, funding, or even recognition and understanding of how an amphibious capability is indispensable to a nation’s defense – or for a government’s ability to care for citizens in distress.

What explains this shortchanging of amphibious forces?

“Iwo Jima” is part of the problem. Mention the words “amphibious” or “amphibious force” to most people – even in the military – and it

conjures up images of the massive, bloody U.S. Marine/U.S. Navy assault on the Japanese-held island, Iwo Jima in 1945.

And there has not been another large-scale amphibious assault since the Incheon landing in 1950 during the Korean War. And it is doubtful even the United States could conduct something similar these days given resource shortfalls.

Thus, in a miles-wide leap of logic, naysayers take the least likely possibility on the broad spectrum of possibilities and declare amphibious forces useless or irrelevant.

This is akin to saying you do not need a knife because you will never use it to fight off a tiger. But there are many other things one uses knives for. The same is true with amphibious forces. They are useful for much more than another Iwo Jima.

Nonetheless, such thinking persists and the range of excuses is predictable:

- We have no enemies.
- We will not be fighting a war in the foreseeable future. It is unthinkable.
- “My service alone” can handle it all (so give us more of the defense budget).
- Today’s coastal defenses are too powerful – especially long-range anti-ship missiles and other precision weapons. And satellite surveillance means an amphibious force will be spotted and destroyed long before it nears the coast.

- There is not enough wherewithal anyway – not enough money for ships, manpower, and weapons.

The Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) appears not to have gotten the word – as it is building up a massive amphibious assault capability for use against Taiwan. The PLA is also readying to seize Japan’s Senkaku Islands when the time is right, just as the Argentinians managed an amphibious seizure of the Falkland Islands in 1983, before the British sent their own amphibious task force to retake the islands.

Even Saddam Hussein (from the next world) would be surprised to learn amphibious operations are passé. He thought American forces were coming ashore in Kuwait in the first Gulf War in 1990-1991, and was thus distracted when land-based U.S. forces swung around his flank and destroyed his army.

The point: Amphibious warfare has been declared prematurely dead more than once.

Within the Indo-Pacific, besides the much-feared PLA’s Taiwan invasion threat there are a number of plausible scenarios for deploying amphibious forces in combat situations.

*First, amphibious forces – particularly armed with long-range precision weapons – are useful for island and coastal defense, and if necessary to retake lost terrain. Malaysian forces learned a hard lesson in this regard in 2014 when a small band of Sulu insurgents seized a piece of Malaysian territory. Japanese amphibious forces are already fortifying several of Japan’s southern islands and a key role of Japan’s newly formed Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade is “island retaking.”*



*Second, amphibious forces are valuable as a mobile counterattack force, able to operate in the littorals, hard to target and armed with anti-ship and anti-air weapons. This is a role for which a “revamped” Taiwan Marine Corps is well suited – and given Chinese PLA’s preparations for a major amphibious assault on Taiwan, it is urgently required.*

*Third, there are the high-end amphibious operations for which the Republic of Korea (ROK) Marine Corps and Navy have been preparing for decades in the event of a Korean peninsula conflict.*

*Fourth, conducting small-scale amphibious and littoral operations in the context of an insurgency – such as the Philippine Marines have been involved in for years. Sri Lanka’s armed forces also gained considerable experience with such amphibious operations during their near 30 year conflict with the Tamil Tigers.*

*Fifth, there is the scenario of carrying out amphibious force interventions (humanitarian, restoring order, non-combatant evacuations) in locations where there is violent civil unrest such as happened in Timor in the early 2000’s, and there is a potential need to ‘shoot one’s way in’ and then defend oneself once ashore.*

*Sixth, there are potential uses of mobile amphibious forces in Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, the Andaman Islands and elsewhere to seize or deny key terrain for anti- access/area denial (A2AD) purposes – or to facilitate maneuver of naval and air forces. A2AD is not a Chinese monopoly – but works both ways.*

These are not contrived scenarios seeking a role for amphibious forces, and a military unable to conduct certain of these operations will find itself embarrassed – at a minimum. Nevertheless, amphibious forces often lack support even within a nation’s armed services.



## Lacking a “Natural Constituency”

A big part of the problem is that amphibious forces have no “natural constituency.”

For a military to have an amphibious capability each service – Army, Navy, Air Force – has to give up something – and also must cooperate in ways that senior officers frequently resist with childlike stubbornness.

Instead, each service instinctively defends what it views as its core interests:

Air Forces want fighters, bombers, and missiles. Navies want frigates, submarines, and aircraft. Armies want tanks, artillery, infantry, and Special Forces.

*With an amphibious force, a military can conduct operations seamlessly between the sea and land.*

If anything is left over in the budget it might go to amphibious forces.

Indeed, just about the only places in the Indo-Pacific where amphibious forces are something of a priority are Australia and the People’s Republic of China. The Australians have created a small but effective amphibious unit in recent years. And far outdoing the Aussies, the PLA is going “all out” to expand its Marine Corps and its amphibious ship fleet – for use in the region and beyond. It has already deployed PLA Marines to Djibouti, and more is to come elsewhere.

Even in the United States, the U.S. Marines are in a constant fight for resources – if not survival – despite their mythic reputation with the broader American public. And U.S. Navy amphibious forces are low on

the service's totem pole. One fairly notes that Tom Cruise in the movie Top Gun played an F-14 Tomcat pilot – not an amphibious ship skipper.

Amphibious forces may indeed be the unloved stepchildren, but this simply highlights the permanent requirement to “sell” amphibious capabilities. And selling means more than a “high-level visit” between a visiting U.S. General or Admiral and the local “amphibious force” commander, or hosting journalists to cover annual staged beach assault “VIP landings.”

Rather, what is needed is a year-round, coherent scheme to “educate” key constituencies – politicians, key officials, academics, the media, defense analysts, and business and citizen groups – both domestic and sometimes foreign. And pay attention to potential “allies” within one’s own services – some of whom are simply unfamiliar with amphibious forces.

Based on this author’s experience, an amphibious force commander will do well to turn things over to a few smart Captains and Majors and the results will be more than satisfactory.

## **Selling Points**

One generally sells amphibious capabilities on two things: Usefulness for *taking* lives or usefulness for *saving* lives.

The emphasis will vary from country to country. For example, the U.S., South Korean, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, and even Japanese amphibious forces have a reasonably well-understood amphibious “warfighting” requirement. In other places it is not so obvious or is myopically overlooked, and thus is considered a lower priority – along with amphibious forces in general.

However, besides the actual and potential combat roles for amphibious forces mentioned earlier in this article, there is another excellent – but often overlooked or underappreciated – selling point for demonstrating the usefulness of amphibious forces: That is -- ***Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR)***.

Natural disasters occur frequently throughout the Indo-Pacific region. According to the United Nations (UN) figures, from 2002 to 2011 alone, about 2.2 billion people in the region were affected by natural disasters and almost 750,000 were killed.

And amphibious forces (combining air/sea/ground capabilities that include specialized equipment, transport, communications, logistics and medical service capabilities) are ideally suited for disaster response. This is especially so when affected areas can only be approached from the sea, as often happens when roads and other infrastructure are damaged or rudimentary to begin with.

There are many examples of amphibious capabilities being brought to bear in HA/DR operations in the Indo-Pacific region. A few include:

*Operation Damayan (2013)*: Following Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, American, Japanese, Taiwanese, Korean, and other amphibious forces rapidly converged to lead the initial relief effort. By many estimates, this rapid amphibious response saved thousands of lives in the typhoon's aftermath and immensely reduced suffering.

*Operation Unified Assistance (2004)*: After the massive Boxing Day Earthquake and Tsunami that killed nearly 300,000, U.S. and other regional amphibious forces came from the sea to provide assistance throughout the region in affected areas in Indonesia, Thailand, Sri

Lanka, and Malaysia. Some estimate that hundreds of thousands of lives were saved from this HA/DR response.

*Operations Sea Angel I (1991) and II (2007):* U.S. Marine and U.S. Navy amphibious forces twice played the leading role in typhoon response in Bangladesh, saving tens of thousands of lives. U.S. Marine General Henry Stackpole who commanded Operation Sea Angel I once commented on the immense satisfaction this HA/DR operation gave him – in a career that also included more than a little combat.

These successful amphibious HA/DR operations resulted from a handful of amphibious proponents in key nations having the vision to build and maintain credible amphibious forces, despite many obstacles.



The U.S. Marines in the Cobra Gold 2019 exercises of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.  
(Source: The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command)

## HA/DR as a Selling Point? Really?

Oddly enough, one often notes skepticism towards HA/DR activities within many militaries. This is perhaps because such operations contrast with the “warrior” self-image. Indeed, military services sometimes seem embarrassed to be seen doing HA/DR operations.

This brings to mind the “we don’t do counter-insurgency” arguments from certain quarters within U.S. forces before the Afghan and Iraq campaigns within U.S. forces. “Only high-end warfare for us.”

*Amphibious forces must be able to conduct combat operations – and even HA/DR operations can take place in a dangerous environment.*

In effect, military leaders can resemble labor union bosses; declaring there are some things they just will not do – even though they can do them and to outside observers ought to be doing them.

But natural disasters and HA/DR are something citizens, politicians, media, academics, and defense analysts all understand – and can easily imagine happening – compared to “combat operations.” And they are the people that shape defense policy – and budgets.

Thus, if one wishes to “sell” the importance of amphibious forces – it is necessary to sell on the basis of activities and scenarios that “key audiences” understand and also value.

In a curious recent case, New Zealand’s government readily understood the justification for creating an amphibious force to conduct HA/DR

operations. But the military then had to convince the government that the force also needs a “combat” capability.

This is an important point that needs stressed – and repeatedly. Amphibious forces must be able to conduct combat operations – and even HA/DR operations can take place in a dangerous environment. Indeed, even an opponent with a few light machine guns can make life difficult, or impossible, for a landing force that is not prepared or geared for a fight.

### **HA/DR Response: A Political Liability or a Political Advantage**

If a military fails at or fumbles the HA/DR response, it inevitably embarrasses all but the most heartless or tone-deaf government – and can even be destabilizing.

And official and public perceptions will regard the military as “useless” or “inept” – and not deserving existing budget and resources.

Moreover, within the military an amphibious force’s already precarious position will become even more difficult.

However, conduct effective HA/DR operations and the government will benefit from an image of competence and looking after its citizens. And official and public perceptions of Marines and amphibious forces will take a positive turn.

As an instructive example, following Japan’s 3/11 tsunami/earthquake, the Japan Self Defense Force’s (JSDF) successful response to the HA/DR challenge transformed public opinions of the JSDF for the better. Even the Japanese government had to grudgingly concede the JSDF’s importance.

As importantly, this also contributed to political and official support for developing Japan's new amphibious force – along with an overdue appreciation of JSDF capabilities as a combat force to defend Japan's southern islands.

The Philippine government's handling of the response to the massive Typhoon Philippines Hayan (2013) that included Philippine and foreign amphibious forces provided a useful boost to the then-Philippine Government, whereas a fumbled response would have been a considerable blow.

Royal Thai Marines, Taiwan Marines, Indonesian Marines, and others have similarly garnered public esteem as a result of successful domestic HA/DR work over the years.

On the other hand, following Typhoon Nargis in 2008, Myanmar's regime refused to accept foreign assistance from amphibious forces and allowed nearly 200,000 citizens to perish. This did nothing for the regime's already sketchy reputation inside and outside the country – and added to pressure on the military junta running the country.

The Japanese Government was, in fact, fortunate to escape blame for the JSDF not having an amphibious force on 3/11 – the absence of which resulted in several thousand avoidable civilian deaths. This owed to decades of Japanese civilian leadership along with academia and a mostly hostile media slamming down any attempt to develop amphibious capability as being “offensive” and thus “illegal.” Even the so-called “Hokkaido Mafia” – the tank officers that dominated the Ground Self Defense Force hierarchy for decades had scant interest in an amphibious capability.



With some imagination, successful HA/DR work also can position an amphibious force to request additional resources – that are in fact “dual use” – and suitable for both regular warfighting amphibious operations and HA/DR operations.

These include:

- Amphibious ships
- Helicopters
- Assault amphibious vehicles (AAVs) and other amphibious vehicles
- Engineering equipment
- Communications – both hardware and systems that allow for joint communications between air, sea, and ground units
- Money – to include funding for exercises, specialized training, and more personnel

### **Persistent Institutional Resistance to HA/DR**

But despite the manifest value of a solid HA/DR capability, there is often even further institutional opposition within militaries to giving HA/DR its due.

Put simply, disaster relief is viewed as a distraction from the more important “warfighting” mission. And it is argued that if the Marine/amphibious force is training for or conducting HA/DR operations, it is not improving or maintaining warfighting skills. In short, it is seen as a zero-sum game.

As a result, some militaries tend to take a reluctant, half-hearted approach to HA/DR operations – looking at HA/DR as an “unavoidable burden” to be handled as incidents occur – and not as a priority. This leads to shortchanging on training, preparation, developing Standard Operating Procedures and the like.

However, a closer examination tells a different story.

Consider the overlap between HA/DR and “warfighting” skills. They are, in fact, 90%-95% identical.

A retired senior U.S. Marine Officer recently offered insightful comments on the use of “combat Marines” for HA/DR work:

*“When we sent a Battalion (from Camp Pendleton, California) to the Yellowstone fires (at Yellowstone National Park), the same complaints about ‘not training for war fighting’ were rampant.”*

*But consider the skill requirements:*

- Intelligence gathering on a dangerous enemy with tendencies but not entirely predictable*
- "Fire" team coordinated action*
- Small and medium unit leadership*
- Planning and maneuver*
- Difficult terrain logistics*
- Engineering*
- Communications*

- *Air support for both maneuver and "bombing"*
- *Field medical and sanitation*
- *24-hour operations*
- *Joint operations coordination*
- *Security and front line unit rotations*

*"Sounds like some of the best possible realistic training - just with different weapons."*

*"And as we know from the Japanese earthquake relief ferry planning, except for more disposable diapers and fewer bullets, (there is) virtually no difference between an amphibious assault and a relief landing into demolished infrastructure."*

## **Improving Joint Capabilities**

Moreover, HA/DR training is excellent training in "joint operations." Most regional militaries are deficient in this regard – and real world HA/DR is ideal for improving inter-service coordination that makes a military exponentially more effective.

## **Looking Beyond the "Operational"**

Combining amphibious forces and HA/DR also offers a nation unique opportunities for strategic and political advantages. In this regard, two scenarios are offered:

First, consider the political significance of Australia's and Japan's new amphibious forces joining to conduct serious combined training.

This might proceed as follows:

As a first step, using an HA/DR focus with the objective of being able to operate together on actual HA/DR operations, Japanese and Australian planners might put together and conduct a JSDF-ADF amphibious exercise (to be held bi-annually) – either in the vicinity of Australia, in Japan, or perhaps around Guam. Only the most churlish nations or opponents will object to training to save lives.

Such exercises are complex; so start small, and even a couple ships – say, the HMAS *Canberra* and a Japanese Landing Ship Tank (LST) – will do at the start.

Both sides will need to conduct the necessary joint planning that goes into the exercise, to include working out joint electronic communications, and then handle the essential “cross decking” of each side’s aircraft and personnel along with ship to shore movements during the execution phase of the exercise.

This is not easy, but it pays considerable dividends in the form of improved operational skill and confidence and a genuine ability to operate together – rather than in parallel – that does not yet exist between Japan and Australia, or between most other regional nations for that matter. And beyond the operational benefits, there is the significance of two of the region’s leading democracies (and former enemies) combining their military resources.

And afterwards, for a real pay-off, look for opportunities to join Japanese and Australian forces together in the event of a real-world HA/DR contingency – an event likely to occur in the Indo-Pacific region.

This might even lead to a measured effort to include other friendly regional nations’ amphibious forces to join in the Australia-Japan amphibious program. And looking out a few years, the Japan-Australia

amphibious linkage might serve as the nucleus of an amphibious “RIMPAC” (Rim of the Pacific Exercise) held in Darwin, Shoalwater Bay or even Guam.

*The following is a second proposal for using amphibious forces and HA/DR to improve operational capabilities while having out-sized strategic effects – in this case demonstrating support for Taiwan while helping the Taiwan Armed Forces break out of decades-long “isolation.”*

Consider the following:

Create a Central Pacific Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) Force—using U.S. and Taiwan amphibious forces to plan, train, and exercise for HA/DR operations—and respond when disasters occur. Locate the outfit in Taiwan and attach US officers—perhaps from the US Navy’s Seventh Fleet and 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit that are well versed and prepared for disaster response.

Taiwan already has excellent HA/DR capabilities—combining both civilian and military resources.

An advantage of using amphibious forces is that it is the equivalent of CrossFit training—exercising air, sea, and ground capabilities at the same time. And it exercises skills that are the same as for “regular” military operations—except for the shooting.

Do some of this joint training and Taiwan’s military skills will rapidly improve – as will the ability to operate with American forces—and vice versa.

The U.S. territory of Guam is a perfect training location, and there are other locales elsewhere in the South Pacific where Taiwan still has diplomatic allies.

To bring this to fruition will require Taiwan liaison officers at American headquarters in Hawaii. And the Americans can assign Chinese-speaking Marines and Navy officers as liaison officers to Taiwan forces. And each nation's amphibious ships making port calls in each other's ports will be a natural outcome as well.

Expect political and psychological knock-on effects in Taiwan, Washington, Beijing, and regionally.

First, it allows Taiwan's military to break out of 40 years of isolation that has stunted its development which has also been psychologically debilitating – to the military itself, the civilian population, and Taiwan's political leadership.

Second, it demonstrates Americans' "seriousness." Adversaries might reckon they have underestimated U.S. resolve. And friends like Australia, Japan, or the French and British might get involved. And maybe a few "undecided" nations will come down off the fence. People will also see that Taiwan is serious about defending itself.

There is precedent for all this. Taiwan Navy ships and Air Force C-130s delivered emergency supplies to the Philippines in 2013 after Typhoon Haiyan. And more recently, Taiwan military medical staff joined in U.S.-led HA/DR exercises in Kiribati in 2017 and the Solomon Islands in 2018—both nations that recognize Taiwan. In 2009, the USS *Denver* amphibious ship with heavy-lift helicopters provided assistance to Taiwan following Typhoon Morakot.

## **Summation**

Despite amphibious operations' manifest utility going back to at least Julius Caesar's amphibious campaign against pirates on the coast of Asia

Minor, one imagines that amphibious forces have always been underappreciated once the immediate need for them has passed.

Thus, the onus is on amphibious force commanders to explain themselves and drum up necessary support. And while warfighting capability is the primary requirement of amphibious forces – as it is with any military service – commanders should not shy away from humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) operations, or the preparation and training needed to carry them out effectively.

HA/DR offers military skills training that is largely identical to “warfighting” training, and it is also manifestly useful in its own right when employed to save citizens’ lives. Even more, HA/DR work enhances recognition of amphibious force utility on the part of key parties – particularly outside the military services – whose support is essential.

Finally, it is rare that an operational capability – “amphibiosity” – also has a potential political and indeed strategic effect – such as when foreign amphibious forces join together for training – and even when the training is for HA/DR purposes – as suggested in this article.

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*Grant Newsham is a retired U.S. Marine Officer. He was the first U.S. Marine Liaison Officer to the Japanese Self Defense Forces and was instrumental in the development of the JSDF’s recently formed amphibious capability.*

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# A 'China-India Plus': Continuity and Novelty in an Idea

By Prashant Kumar Singh

Narendra Modi was sworn in as India's prime minister on May 30, 2019, for a second term after his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the general election in May 2019. The continuity has raised expectations for the India-China relations during his second term. Modi's first term, which coincided with President Xi Jinping's first tenure, began on a promising note. The two leaders strove to further deepen bilateral cooperation. However, relations soon went south unexpectedly, which were driven back to normalcy in equally swift, yet thoughtful, moves.<sup>1</sup> Although

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<sup>1</sup> While Xi's visit to India in September 2014 and Modi's to China in May 2015 successfully underlined their desire for further deepening economic and people-to-people relations, relationship faltered on diplomatic and military fronts. The two countries crossed each other's path on the following issues: the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China's repeated technical holds on India's resolution in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 1267 Sanctions Committee to sanction Pakistan-based terrorist Masood Azhar, China's blocking of India's application for the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 2016, the 14th Dalai Lama's visit to Tawang in India's Arunachal Pradesh in March 2017. The two countries had a major military stand-off in India's Laddakh in September 2014. They survived the Doklam military crisis, from late June to late August 2017, which brought them dangerously close to war. After a cold silence of some months after the Doklam crisis, Modi and Xi held landmark "informal" summit in Wuhan, China. Separately, India objects to the CPEC, announced in April 2015, because it passes through Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK), which India considers as its own territory under Pakistan's



The Indian Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi at the first cabinet meeting, at the Prime Minister's Office, in South Block, New Delhi on May 31, 2019. (Source: Press Information Bureau, Government of India)

complex domestic and geopolitical processes wrote this fast-paced action-packed short story of ups and downs in relations, role of the personality of the two assertive leaders cannot be ignored.<sup>2</sup> The “informal” Wuhan Summit between Modi and Xi on April 27-28, 2018, was their personal intervention to end the bad phase in relations.

A lot can be postulated on macro level about likely aspects of bilateral relations, with reference to the political continuity in these two countries — Modi's second term and Xi's presidency without a term

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illegal possession. The Dalai Lama's visit to Tawang invited China's ire as it lays claim over Arunachal Pradesh.

<sup>2</sup> Prashant Kumar Singh, “Resurfacing of Divergence in India-China Relations,” in *East Asia Strategic Review: China's Rising Strategic Ambitions in Asia*, ed. M.S. Prathibha (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2018), pp. 35-72.

limit. However, this article delves into micro-theme — ‘China-India Plus’ format of bilateral cooperation, which has stemmed from the Wuhan Spirit that emanated from the Wuhan Summit.<sup>3</sup> The Wuhan Spirit affirms that bilateral relations interact with each other at multiple levels of international politics, with regional and international implications, which require them to work towards developing greater degree of strategic mutual trust. It reaffirms vital role of India and China cooperation in actualising *Asian Century*. It motivates the two countries to pass on the benefits of their developmental capacities to the less developing countries. Thus, ‘China-India Plus’ in Afghanistan,<sup>4</sup> a direct result of the Wuhan Summit and first example of implementation of the Wuhan Spirit in the region, has got strategic as well as developmental dimensions (to be highlighted separately). Incidentally, think-tank and civil-society advocacy for trilateral cooperation, involving China and India and any other South Asian country, predates the ‘China-India Plus.’ However, this is the first official endorsement of any such proposal.

Since ‘China-India Plus’ has flown from the “informal summit” between Xi and Modi, this nascent cooperation format may receive an advocacy push in coming months and years, particularly, after the second

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<sup>3</sup> “India-China Informal Summit at Wuhan,” Press Release, Media Centre, India’s Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), April 28, 2019, at [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29853/IndiaChina\\_Informal\\_Summit\\_at\\_Wuhan](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29853/IndiaChina_Informal_Summit_at_Wuhan) (Accessed June 06, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> K.J.M. Varma, “Wuhan Summit: India, China to Undertake Joint Economic Project in Afghanistan,” Live Mint, April 28, 2018, at <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/ETJ8tth0aj3TOX4ZEX3Gyl/Wuhan-summit-India-China-to-undertake-joint-economic-proje.html> (Accessed June 06, 2019).

“informal” summit proposed to be held anytime soon in India. Therefore, its potential in realising the Wuhan Spirit needs to be explored, which is a challenging as well as an exciting exercise. It is challenging because the budding ‘China-India Plus’ is without enough illustrative instances. It excites because it has sprouted from the Wuhan Spirit, pointing to new grounds to break.

In this article, the author argues that although the ‘China-India Plus’ proposal is novel in its format, it shows continuity in terms of underlying expectations and hope. It yet again articulates China and India’s long-cherished desire to use their developmental cooperation to make their strategic relations more stable. The article explains context and rationale of the proposal, provides some necessary informative inputs followed by enumerating gains that the proposal is likely to ensure and challenges it is likely to face. It concludes that although this proposal deserves investment by the two countries, dramatic gains may not be expected in the short-term. Hence, a realistic view is advised.

## **Context and Rationale**

The desire of making strategic relations more stable, through developmental cooperation, stems from the idea that bilateral economic and cultural cooperation cannot only foster material benefits, it can also be exploited to transform the nature of overall relations. The idea promises better strategic relations. It has its roots in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the ideas of *Chindia* and Asian Century appeared in the India-China discourse.<sup>5</sup> These ideas sought to reclaim Asia’s pre-

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<sup>5</sup> Yashwant Sinha, “Asian Security and China in 2000-2010,” Inaugural Address, The Fifth Asian Security Conference (ASC), Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA), New Delhi, January 27, 2003, at

colonial splendour in global geo-economics, resting upon complementarities in India-China economic ties and their collective

*Although the 'China-India Plus' proposal is novel in its format, it shows continuity in terms of underlying expectations and hope.*

bargaining power in the international economic order. These grand ideas were, in a way, also pushing for 'commercial peace,'<sup>6</sup> which, at a more immediate security-strategic level, emphasized transformation of relations by "accelerating cooperation" to disincentivise differences. Increasing trade and investment interdependence, making a common

cause on issues of common concern at multilateral fora and creating numerous dialogue mechanisms, have been the modus operandi of this approach.

This approach has yielded mixed results. Trade has indeed increased significantly. Back-of-the-envelope calculations inform that the two countries have signed more than 100 agreements and MOUs, which underline their developmental synergy. Similarly, they are engaging each other in around 40 dialogue formats within the governmental

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[http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/4161/Inaugural\\_address\\_By\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_Shri\\_Yashwant\\_Sinha\\_at\\_the\\_Fifth\\_Asian\\_Security\\_Conference\\_organised\\_by\\_the\\_Institute\\_for\\_Defence\\_Studi](http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/4161/Inaugural_address_By_External_Affairs_Minister_Shri_Yashwant_Sinha_at_the_Fifth_Asian_Security_Conference_organised_by_the_Institute_for_Defence_Studi) (Accessed June 06, 2019); Jairam Ramesh, *Making Sense of Chindia: Reflections on China and India* (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2005), pp. XII-130.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew A. Castle, "Globalization's Impact: Trade and Investment in China-India Relations" in *The China-India Rivalry in the Globalisation Era*, ed. T.V. Paul (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2019), p. 251.

domain and outside. They have cooperated in the WTO, for reforms in the IMF and on the climate change issue. They are leading members in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).<sup>7</sup> Their cooperation at multilateral fora has led to a general proposition that even though the two countries might have issues in their bilateral relations, they can still have constructive cooperation at global level.<sup>8</sup> However, critics point out that trade volume – which is lopsidedly in favour of China and only a fraction in its overall global trade – and low investment figures are not enough to ensure what is envisaged as ‘commercial peace.’<sup>9</sup> Similarly, a large number of the MOUs signed are not operational. Besides, as China is fast moving away from its developing status, their interaction at multilateral fora may also have limitations.<sup>10</sup> Importantly, the two countries have not been successful in extending their cooperation to their nearby regions.<sup>11</sup> Thus, as this view would hold, a series of

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<sup>7</sup> Feng Liu, “China-India Engagement in Institutions: Convergence and Divergence on Global Governance Reforms” in *The China-India Rivalry in the Globalisation Era*, ed. T.V. Paul (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2019), pp. 281-308.

<sup>8</sup> C. Raja Mohan, “RajaMandala: Speak frankly with China: Delhi needs a more agile—and more open— policy to engage with Beijing,” *The Indian Express*, July 5, 2016, at <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-china-foreign-policy-nsg2893904/> (Accessed April 21, 2017). In this article, Mohan indicated about the growing doubts about maintainability of this proposition.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew A. Castle, “Globalization’s Impact,” pp. 255-60.

<sup>10</sup> Feng Liu, pp. pp. 281-308.

<sup>11</sup> Hu Shisheng and Peng Jing, “The Rise of China and India: Prospects of Partnership” in *Emerging China: Prospects for Partnership in Asia*, ed. Sudhir T.

military and diplomatic stand-offs between 2013<sup>12</sup> and 2017 finally exposed the weakness in this approach. Nevertheless, mitigating impact of the desire for peace together with benefits of globalisation under the dictums that “cooperation can prevail over friction” and “that this world has enough space for the two countries to grow together” has, indeed, ensured tranquillity and stability in relations, for a large part in last two decades. Besides, weaknesses in their developmental partnership apart, significance of their overlapping geo-economic networking cannot be wished away.<sup>13</sup> One must not forget how the concerns about BRICS Summit in Xiamen, China helped them to tide over the Doklam crisis.<sup>14</sup> Thus, both overstating as well as understating the role of developmental dimensions of bilateral ties in managing the two countries’ strategic relations would be wrong.

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Devare, Swaran Singh and Reena Marwah, (London and New York and New Delhi: Routledge, 2012), pp. 348-374.

<sup>12</sup> A major military stand-off had occurred in Laddakh in April 2013 before Modi’s first term and barely a month after Xi became State President in March 2013, which indicates that even if Modi and Xi had to handle much of bad run in relations, causes had been brewing up before their terms. Prashant Kumar Singh, pp. 35-72.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew A. Castle, “Globalization’s Impact,” pp. 261-263.

<sup>14</sup> Abhijnan Rej, “India’s Clever Use of the BRICS Card in Doklam Standoff,” *LiveMint*, August 31, 2017, at <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/c4ws2jwOqP7ALa7Y0RbC1M/Indias-clever-use-of-the-BRICS-card-in-Doklam-standoff-reso.html> (Accessed June 08, 2019).





Leaders of BRICS nations in Osaka, Japan, in June 2019. (Source: Press Information Bureau, Government of India)

What would be more reasonable to argue is that while there is nothing fundamentally incorrect in this approach, by the military stand-off in Depsang in Ladakh in April 2013, strategic divergence had taken over the spirit of cooperation, and it was clear that this spirit was not able to cope up with the pace of the changing strategic scenario. Cooperation had not acquired as much substance as was expected, and was witnessing stagnation.

### **Wuhan Summit and the Emergence of ‘China-India Plus’**

The Wuhan Summit was a reaffirmation of the longstanding fundamentals of bilateral relations as well as a relook at them “from the strategic and long-term perspective.” It was an acknowledgement that

two countries are not yet another pair of ordinary neighbours but “two large economies and major powers with strategic and decisional autonomy, which have implications of regional and global significance... a positive factor for stability amidst current global uncertainties.” While the need of “a balanced and sustainable” trade and investment on the basis of complementarities was stressed, the two leaders notably emphasized “building on the convergences...in order to create **the broadest possible platform** [emphasis is mine] for the future relationship” as the two countries “have wider and overlapping regional and global interests.” Modi and Xi underscored the two countries’ capacity in “achieving global prosperity,” jointly “facilitating sustainable solutions for global challenges.” Here, relevant is that they underlined that “India and China, given their vast developmental experiences and national capacities, should join hands to take lead in offering innovative and sustainable solutions to challenges faced by humankind in the 21st century.” The two leaders “agreed to pool together their expertise and resources and create a global network dedicated to the challenges”<sup>15</sup> the larger international community faces. This is where, the author points out, that the ‘China-India Plus’ comes from.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The paragraph draws on “India-China Informal Summit at Wuhan,” Press Release, Media Centre, India’s Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), April 28, 2019, at [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29853/IndiaChina\\_Informal\\_Summit\\_at\\_Wuhan](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29853/IndiaChina_Informal_Summit_at_Wuhan) (Accessed June 08, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> The two countries did not issue any joint communique after the summit. The Foreign Ministry of People’s Republic of China (FMPRC) emphasised that “the two leaders drew a grand blueprint for the China-India comprehensive cooperation” and they “also instructed relevant departments on the two sides to come up with specific working plans and follow-up steps.” “Foreign Ministry

While the aforementioned bits have all along appeared in India-China interactions in some form or other, if one reads these bits, which emerged from the Wuhan Summit, in the backdrop of all that had transpired from 2013 to 2017 on the military and diplomatic fronts between the two countries, they point to a more clearly articulated major power perspective for relations – not merely a bilateral perspective – with a sense of more immediate joint responsibilities towards the international community. Thus, one can argue that in keeping with the long-standing strategic view of cooperation in relations, the ‘China-India Plus’ may be envisaged both as a vehicle of regional development as well as a confidence-building measure or trust-enhancing mechanism of higher order between the two countries in the region. Given that a trust deficit vis-a-vis each other’s objectives and intentions in regional contexts of Central Asia, South Asia, the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean region has run very deep, the ‘China-India Plus’ is a proposal which must be given a serious hearing.

### **The Examples of the ‘China-India Plus’ Cooperation**

As of now, the two countries’ joint training programme for ten Afghan diplomats at the Foreign Service Institute in New Delhi is the only example in this regard. This programme was inaugurated in October

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Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference,” May 02, 2018, at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1556224.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1556224.shtml) (Accessed June 08, 2019); Also see, “China, India Reach Broad Consensus in Informal Summit,” *Xinhua*, April 29, 2019, at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/29/c\\_137145546.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/29/c_137145546.htm) (Accessed June 08, 2019).

2018.<sup>17</sup> The intention for China-India cooperation in Afghanistan was declared immediately after the Wuhan Summit last year. Then, it was expected that the two countries will extend their joint assistance to Afghanistan in fields of agriculture, medicine, poverty reduction and capacity-building, where the two countries have proven capacities.<sup>18</sup> Afghanistan was a right choice for initiating 'China-India Plus' as political sensitivities do not come in the way of their cooperation in Afghanistan the way they may be perceived, say, in Nepal, at least from the point of view of India's strategic concerns. Since the two countries suffer the spill over of instability in Afghanistan, they have a reason to jointly wade through, to the extent possible, in Afghanistan to stabilize security situation in that country. Collaborative efforts will increase their manoeuvring space there.

Before Afghanistan, one would, incidentally, recall that India and China cooperated to establish Wind, Tide, Current Measurement System to Enhance Navigational Safety at a Singaporean port under the Cooperative Mechanism of the International Maritime Organization during 2009-10.<sup>19</sup> Thus, even though the two countries have joint

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<sup>17</sup> Geeta Mohan, "India, China Begin First Joint Afghan Project," *India Today*, October 16, 2018, at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/india-china-begin-first-joint-afghan-project-1368738-2018-10-16> (Accessed June 09, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> "India, China Likely to Jointly Undertake Projects in Afghanistan," *The Economic Times*, May 07, 2018, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-china-likely-to-jointly-undertake-projects-in-afghanistan/articleshow/64057491.cms> (Accessed June 09, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> Please see, "Cooperative Mechanism", at <http://www.cmsoms.com/?p=td&id=9> (Accessed June 09, 2019). The author thanks Cmde

capacity in “achieving global prosperity” and their vast developmental experiences and national capacities can offer “innovative and sustainable solutions” together to the international community, the instances of ‘China-India Plus’ are scarce.

## **Possible Gains**

One can envisage that this format or mechanism of cooperation has some obvious benefits, which may prove substantial in long term. Firstly, it may ensure greater welfare for developing countries. Secondly, it may as well foster material benefits to the two countries where they can have collaborative commercial projects. Incidentally, ‘China-India Plus’ is in line with China’s advocacy and search for third-party market cooperation. Thirdly, this format may act as a great confidence-building measure at two levels: between India and China and then equally importantly, it will reassure smaller countries in the region vis-à-vis India-China relations. Fourthly, as the two countries display deep divergence when it comes to their connectivity conceptions and initiatives,<sup>20</sup> ‘China-India Plus’ can help them to

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Abhay Kumar Singh (Retd.), Research Fellow, IDSA, to call his attention to this instance of India-China joint cooperation in Singapore.

<sup>20</sup> India has declined to endorse China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) due to its objection to CPEC, which is a part of the BRI. It did not accept the invitation for international BRI Forums in 2017 and 2019. In India’s conception of connectivity, connectivity initiatives and projects should show respect for countries’ sovereignty, should not be unilaterally pushed and should follow equitable revenue model, which does not create debt trap for the recipient countries. In India’s view, the BRI fails to pass these tests. “Official Spokesperson’s Response to a Query on Participation of India in OBOR/ BRI Forum,” MEA, May 13, 2017, at <http://www.mea.gov.in/mediabriefings.htm?dtl/28463/official+spokespersons>

circumvent frictions on this issue. For example, if 'China-India Plus' can be made to be co-present in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) countries, it will be a notable contribution towards stability and prosperity across the regions. While BRI is a Chinese initiative, whereas AAGC is powered by India and Japan. Fifthly, 'China-India Plus' needs not only to flow out to third countries, it should also flow in, meaning a capable third country, say Japan, should be encouraged by the two countries for collaborative projects with them for their own domestic development. The cumulative effect of this format of cooperation, if given a full play, would be that it will reduce trust deficit in India-China relations in the regional contexts to a great extent in the long run.

## Identifying the Bottlenecks

However, this format will have to overcome two main difficulties. On the operational side, different bureaucratic cultures and the issue of availability of resources would be a problem this format would have to grapple with.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, strategic mistrust will play its role in terms of choosing issue-areas of cooperation and the countries for cooperation. Thirdly, Africa has also been alluded as a possible area for 'China-India Plus' cooperation, after Xi and Modi visited Rwanda within 24 hours of

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+response +to +a +query +on +participation+of+india+in+oborbri+forum  
(Accessed June 09, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Instructive in this regard is egregiously slow pace at which the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Corridor has progressed. It has not shown any notable progress. Even though later the India-China divergence over CPEC-BRI may have impacted it too, difference between China's expectations of fast execution of the project and slow decision-making and execution pace in India were too visible all along.

each other's visit on their way to BRIC Summit in South Africa in July 2018.<sup>22</sup> However, this author has gathered impression from his participation in deliberations on this topic with his Chinese counterparts that it is South Asia that somehow appeals to their imagination for 'China-India Plus.' After Afghanistan, it is Nepal that is the most indicated country for a possible 'China-India Plus.'<sup>23</sup> Incidentally, Nepal on its part has emerged as a strong votary of China-India-Nepal trilateral cooperation or now 'China-India Plus.'<sup>24</sup> However, the Himalayan terrain poses its own challenges for large-scale projects. Engineering has its complications leading to increased financial overheads, and consequently, commercial sustainability and the impact on the local market are difficult to determine. India's strategic concerns also make fruition of any 'China-India Plus' project in

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<sup>22</sup> Abhishek G Bhaya, "Beijing Moots 'China-India Plus' Cooperation as Xi, Modi Attend BRICS Summit," CGTN, July 5, 2019, at [https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414f314d444d79457a6333566d54/share\\_p.html](https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414f314d444d79457a6333566d54/share_p.html) (Accessed June 10, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Also see, Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "China reaches out to India for joint projects in South Asia," *The Economic Times*, October 16, 2018, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/china-reaches-out-to-india-for-joint-projects-in-south-asia/articleshow/66228489.cms?from=mdr> (Accessed June 10, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> Prashant Kumar Singh, "Can India Stomach an India–Nepal–China Trilateral?" *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, June 15, 2018, at <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/can-india-stomach-an-india-nepal-china-trilateral/> (Accessed June 10, 2018).



Nepal more complex. If the newly envisaged cooperation format remains South Asia centric, it may not be palatable for India.<sup>25</sup>

## **Some Recommendations**

To overcome these problems, the format should be experimented and implemented first in more acceptable issue-areas of cooperation in capacity-building programmes in education, culture, health, agriculture, entertainment, combating diseases, disaster risk reduction and mitigation. Later, it can be gradually calibrated in other issue-areas, which require relatively higher degree of confidence. Besides, projects under 'China-India Plus' cooperation should not give the impression of being pushed unilaterally and should be jointly conceptualised. A major critique of BRI has been that it is China's unilateral initiative, without requisite consultation with other likely partner countries and broader stakeholders. In similar vein, willingness and the requirement of third party (recipient or host country for this cooperation) will certainly be the pre-condition for 'China-India Plus.' Moreover, to generate trust, countries should be selected for cooperation from across the regions, not from one particular region. For example, if Afghanistan has been chosen now, next could be Laos, Cambodia or Kazakhstan. Priority should of course be the adjoining regions. This cooperation could be strategically extended to select countries of Africa. When both of them have requisite resources, reach and inclination, they can take more

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<sup>25</sup> Aishwarya Kumar, "Modi-Xi Wuhan Summit: Will China-Nepal-India Trilateral Corridor Take Shape?" News 18, April 27, 2018, at <https://www.news18.com/news/india/modi-xi-wuhan-summit-will-china-nepal-india-trilateral-corridor-take-shape-1731245.html> (Accessed June 10, 2019).

liberal view for extending their cooperation in a generalised manner. However, one should not miss the larger point that the 'China-India Plus' is envisaged as a special purpose vehicle for cooperation whose objective cannot be just altruistic. The underlying expectations from it is that it would generate and enhance strategic mutual trust between the two countries by jointly working to extend benefits of their capacities and cooperation to less developing countries. Therefore, strategic considerations in selecting countries for cooperation under this format cannot be lost sight of. Selection of Afghanistan as the first target country speaks for itself in this regard. Finally, promoting 'China-India Plus' within the framework of regional organisations should also be given a thought as it will inspire more confidence among the two countries and the selected third country.

### **Conclusion: The Need of a Realistic Expectation**

The 'China-India Plus' idea is worth exploring in its various developmental and strategic dimensions, and it needs to be promoted. However, one should not over-emphasize the role the 'China-India Plus' format can play. It cannot be a panacea for curing strategic mistrust in India-China relations. It should be rather seen in light of the basic idea that continued cooperation and dialogue is always only way forward to transform and enhance the quality of bilateral relations. The answer to trust deficit could only be more cooperation and more dialogue. Thus, it should be seen as one more imaginative addition, which will complement other available formats and methods for enhancing cooperation and deepening mutual trust.



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# Strategic Implications of the *U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy* *Report* for Taiwan's National Security Strategy

By William Chih-Tung Chung

## 1. Introduction

The United States, on June 1, 2019, released its first-ever *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (IPSR), a vital document issued by the Department of Defense (DOD). It sketches the Donald J. Trump administration's strategic roadmap in the Indo-Pacific region, where it is regarded as "the single most consequential region for America's future." The strategic document was introduced in the same day when the then U.S. Acting Secretary of Defense, Patrick M. Shanahan, made his speech in Singapore at 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue. Shanahan deliberately avoided calling China out by name in his Singapore speech, but he seriously criticized "some in our region" for using a "toolkit of coercion" to undermine and destabilize the rules-based international order that represents "the greatest long-term threat" in the region.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Acting Secretary Shanahan's Remarks at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2019," U.S. Department of Defense, June 1, 2019, <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1871584/acting-secretary-shanahans-remarks-at-the-iiss-shangri-la-dialogue-2019/>



An F-35B aircraft attached to the Avengers of Marine Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 21 takes off from the flight deck of the amphibious assault ship USS *Essex* (LHD 2). (Source: The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command)

In the IPSR, however, Shanahan explicitly pointed out China, “under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party...seeks to reorder the region to its advantages by leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce other nations.”<sup>2</sup> Least surprisingly, the IPSR’s perspective of China’s threat corresponds to the 2017 *National Security Strategy* (NSS) and 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS), which both regard China as “a strategic competitor.” Nevertheless, China is the prioritized strategic competitor in the IPSR, because “inter-state strategic competition is the primary concern for

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<sup>2</sup> “Message from the Secretary of Defense” of “The Indo-Pacific Strategy Report,” U.S. Department of Defense, June 1, 2019, [https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/31/2002139210/-1/-1/1/DOD\\_INDO\\_PACIFIC\\_STRATEGY\\_REPORT\\_JUNE\\_2019.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/31/2002139210/-1/-1/1/DOD_INDO_PACIFIC_STRATEGY_REPORT_JUNE_2019.PDF)

U.S. national security” and China is the only competing state being mentioned in the “message from the Secretary of Defense” of the IPSR. That China appears on a central theme of the IPSR is echoed in Shanahan’s first full day on the job as the acting Secretary of Defense when he imposingly called up senior leaders at the Pentagon to “remember China, China, China,” this should be the top issue for DOD to focus.<sup>3</sup>

While the U.S. endeavors to counter China’s challenges in a variety of areas in the Indo-Pacific region, Taiwan is affirmed as a “reliable, capable, and natural partner of the United States” in the IPSR. It is worth noting that the

*Taiwan is affirmed as a “reliable, capable, and natural partner of the United States” in the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report.*

IPSR surprisingly refers Taiwan as a “country” with no mention of the “Republic of China.” Consequently, the IPSR perhaps has been the first-ever U.S. official strategic document explicitly calling Taiwan as a country since Washington terminated its diplomatic relations with Taipei in 1979. The IPSR emphasizes the essentiality of the U.S. commitment to upholding the provisions of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) that is “part of a broader [U.S.] commitment to the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific.” The IPSR states that a “strong, prosperous, and democratic Taiwan” is included in Washington’s strategic blueprint in the region to pursue “the rules-based international order,” which is the vital interest of the United States. Given China’s continued pressure

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<sup>3</sup> Ryan Browne, “New Acting Secretary of Defense Tells Pentagon ‘to Remember China, China, China,’” *CNN*, January 2, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/01/02/politics/shanahan-pentagon-first-day-china/index.html>

campaigns against Taiwan, the IPSR expresses the necessity of U.S.-Taiwan partnership for Taiwan to counter China's threats. As Beijing has never renounced the use of military force to annex Taiwan, the report's section on "Taiwan" highlights the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, Randall G. Schriver's remarks, to demonstrate Washington's policy on the cross-Strait relations, that "a strong and secure Taiwan can deter aggression, defend the Taiwan people and hard-won democracy, and engage on its own terms with the PRC." Amid the American-Sino escalated competitive relations, that the President Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy clearly recognizes and emphasizes Taiwan as an important strategic state-partner presents Taipei a rare strategic opportunity to craft an asymmetric diplomacy against Beijing's strategy that undermines Taipei's sovereign status and coerces Taiwan into unification.



The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf (WMSL 750) is on patrol of the Western Pacific Ocean on Jan. 22, 2019. (Source: The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command)



## 2. Three Strategic Pillars of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy

Being compared to *the 2017 NSS*, using only three pages outlining a relative new concept of “Indo-Pacific” strategy and its related “priority actions” (“political,” “economic,” and “military and security”), the 55-page IPSR presents a new, detailed, and clearer blueprint of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, which enabled Shanahan to claim “We have more than a strategy. We have a plan” at the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue. The subtitles of the IPSR, three interrelated “efforts,” namely “preparedness,” “partnerships,” “promotion of a networked region,” construct a strategic triangle arrangement to pursue Washington’s overall strategic goal in the Indo-Pacific: “sustain American influence in the region to ensure favorable balances of power and safeguard the free and open international order.”<sup>4</sup>

### Preparedness

According to the IPSR, preparedness, firstly, is defined as “to increase lethality,” which is referred to as “a Joint Force” that “is prepared to win any conflict from its onset.” Efforts of preparedness are about resources, which are pursued and employed to construct the “lethality, resilience, agility, and readiness” of the Joint Force. This also requires “experimentation and exercises” to test evolving war-fighting concepts and capabilities that will help to create a virtuous cycle inspiring additional ideas and innovations to meet the demands of high-ended competition for the Joint Force. Furthermore, preparedness involves “defense posture,” which is a “visible manifestation of U.S. national interests” and makes up “the network of U.S. forces and capabilities that are forward-deployed in the region.” In short, preparedness represents

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<sup>4</sup> “The Indo-Pacific Strategy Report,” U.S. Department of Defense, June 1, 2019, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/31/2002139210/-1/-1/1/>



an advantage of military hard power to deter, fight, and if necessary, to neutralize competitors' actions, which try to advance their goals through forces.

## **Partnerships**

Secondly, partnerships are about constructing the U.S. bilateral security relationships with other states in the region. Based on the extent of their relations with the U.S., partnerships of the IPSR have been classified as allies, partners, and aspiring partners within seven categories: “modernizing alliances,” “strengthening partnerships,” “expanding partnerships in the Indian Ocean region,” “expanding partnerships in Southeast Asia,” “sustaining engagements, strengthening foundations,” “revitalizing engagement in the Pacific islands,” and “engagements with other allies.” Accordingly, the central theme of partnerships is about “interoperability,” which refers to cooperation and reciprocity together for establishing equitable burden-sharing relations, to deal with day-to-day competition, crisis, and conflict. Through a means of foreign military sales, information-sharing programs, regular military exercises, coast guard collaboration, and other security arrangements, partnerships are designed to connect allies and partners as “a multiplier force” to more effectively achieve peace, deterrence, and interoperable war-fighting capability for countries who share common values, e.g. respecting sovereignty, fair trade and rule of law, with the U.S.

## **A Networked Region**

Thirdly, promotion of a networked region, or “a networked security architecture,” is a mission-oriented scheme to pursue an American-centered multilateral security mechanism. It is designed by a means of augmenting Washington’s bilateral partnerships with trilateral and multilateral arrangements, strengthening regional institutions through

multilateral engagement, and cultivating intra-Asian security relationships. As the Indo-Pacific is a large and interconnected region involving different countries and issues, the networked region needs to provide a common ground to coordinate these regional state agents. The solution for this by the IPSR is rested on an idea of “partnerships with purpose” for the multilateral security mechanism, which allows allies and partners to work closely with the U.S. as a whole for assigned missions. The IPSR shows three examples of the networked region, namely the Enforcement Coordination Cell (ECC) to enforce the United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) sanctions, DOD’s Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Initiative (MSI) to build partners’ maritime capacity, and the U.S. Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) to improve partner’s capacity to support the U.N. peace operations. According to the IPSR, the networked region works to deter aggression, maintain stability, and ensure free access to common domains, and hence upholds the international rules-based order.

The strategic triangle arrangement illustrates the vital role of allies and partners, along with the U.S. military presence, in the IPSR. The DOD’s strategic document with diplomatic characters is unusual, but this does show Washington noting and exploiting a main weakness of the “Chinese dream,” the pursuit of China’s rising international influence, which significantly lacks allies and partners amid the U.S.-Sino competition. This explains why the IPSR claims the U.S. “long-standing security alliances and partners” as the “bedrock” of Washington’s Indo-Pacific strategy that provides “a durable, asymmetric strategic advantage that no competitor or rival can match.”

### **3. Strategic Implications of the IPSR for Taiwan**

While 24 countries are enlisted in the “line of effort: partnerships” section of the IPSR, Taiwan has been highlighted along with other three

countries, including Singapore, New Zealand, and Mongolia, which are “reliable, capable, and natural partners of the United States” and contribute “to U.S. missions around the world and are actively taking steps to uphold a free and open international order.”<sup>5</sup> Amid Beijing’s comprehensive threats against Taipei, the IPSR reaffirms Washington’s commitment to “faithfully implement the Taiwan Relations Act” and states the objective of the U.S.-Taiwan defense engagement being “to ensure that Taiwan remains secure, confident, free from coercion, and able to peacefully and productively engage the mainland on its own terms.”<sup>6</sup> Strategic implications of these statements to Taiwan are most remarkable for their clarity, in terms of China’s revisionist threat, Taiwan’s strategic role, and advancing Taiwan’s pragmatic diplomacy.

### **Affirming the China Threat**

The subject of escalated U.S.-China competition is in the front and center of the IPSR. The military document openly affirms that China is the primary security concern for the U.S. national security with regard to the “inter-state competition,” which is defined by “geopolitical rivalry between free and repressive world order visions.” The document then declares China as a “revisionist power,” with a bold headline in the chapter of “Indo-Pacific strategic landscape: trends and challenges.” The posture comes in the wake of China recasting the regional order, coercing other nations, and leveraging economic means to advance its strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific. In the case of cross-Strait relations, the IPSR alleges Beijing’s preparation for contingencies to unify Taiwan with the mainland either by military force or other forms of coercion. This accordingly will change the status quo in the Indo-

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Pacific fundamentally. The IPSR makes China a revisionist threat clearly that “as China continues its economic and military advance, it seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and, ultimately global preeminence in the long-term.”<sup>7</sup> With regard to Washington’s accusation as “the revisionist power,” Beijing responded that it was “groundless accusation” and “totally unacceptable,” and raised a counterattack calling Washington “practicing unilateralism, protectionism and bullyism.”<sup>8</sup> As Taipei regards Beijing as the most serious threat of its national security, Washington’s assertion of China as a revisionist threat and its primary security concern enables Taiwan to connect with the U.S. national security strategy fundamentally.

## **Identifying Taiwan’s Strategic Role**

Amid China’s revisionist threat and the salience of “allies and partners,” the IPSR underscores Taiwan’s strategic role within the U.S. national security strategy and does it in the way more clearly than the previous strategy documents released by the Trump administration. For the first time, since the termination of Washington-Taipei diplomatic relations in 1979, the U.S. military strategic document pays considerable attention to associate the partner-role of Taiwan to the U.S. vital national interest, namely “upholding the rules-based international order.” The IPSR states the U.S. commitment to Taiwan, which is indispensable to the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific. And the report goes further to acclaim Taiwan as an example of “strong partner”

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang’s Regular Press Conference”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), June 3, 2019, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xwfw\\_665399/s2510\\_665401/2511\\_665403/t1669120.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1669120.shtml)

country and hopes to “replicate in our new and burgeoning relationships in the Indo-Pacific.” This echoes Schriver’s statement at a public seminar that “the president’s [Trump] vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific suggests that there should be a key role for Taiwan.”<sup>9</sup> From a geostrategic point of view, the distinctive geographic position of Taiwan in the first island chain not only can constrain China’s access beyond the Western Pacific during crisis or war but can associate a significant role to China’s future development during peace period. Obviously, there are numerous common strategic interests between Washington and Taipei, and Taiwan can surely be a decisive factor, which is regarded as the most sensitive issue as far as Beijing’s concern, for Washington’s decision-makers in the case of U.S.-Sino competition as well as confrontation.

## **Advancing Taiwan’s Pragmatic Diplomacy**

The initiative of “a networked region” by the IPSR provides a precious access and opportunity for diplomatically isolated Taiwan to increase its participation in the international society. The networked region notably promotes an idea of “partnerships with purpose” to associate allies and partners to develop interconnected security relationships. As the Indo-Pacific becomes the priority theater of the U.S. national security strategy, Taiwan’s president Tsai Ing-Wen has proposed “three core principles,” namely “democracy, regional prosperity, and collective security,” as Taiwan’s approach to join the Indo-Pacific community

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<sup>9</sup> Russell Hsiao and David An, “Taiwan Is Ready to Serve as an Indo-Pacific Partner,” *The National Interest*, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/taiwan-ready-serve-indo-pacific-partner-23936>.

effectively.<sup>10</sup> The “three principles” of President Tsai’s approach enable Taiwan to connect with the U.S. by the shared values and interests of democracy, prosperity, and security under the IPSR’s grand design of a networked security mechanism. Putting it into practice, for example, Taiwan was able to hold a regional workshop for “Anti-Corruption in Public and Private Sectors,” which is part of the Global Cooperation and Training Framework (GCTF). This was notable and important for Taipei’s pragmatic diplomacy because Taiwan, for the first time, along with the U.S. and Japan jointly and publicly held the security workshop in the region.<sup>11</sup> While Washington expresses special concern on Taiwan’s diplomatic isolation in the IPSR, this is truly a new and positive development for Taipei to advance its pragmatic diplomacy, rested on substantial relations with purpose, against Beijing’s isolation by a means of Washington’s initiative of “a networked security architecture.”

#### **4. Conclusion**

The IPSR represents the most detailed U.S. strategic document of its kind in the region and reflects the incorporation of the Trump administration’s global strategy to “make America great again.” Taiwan, for the first time, has been explicitly described as a trusted security partner “country,” which involves a significant role within Washington’s prioritized strategic theater, the Indo-Pacific region. In fact, the development of Taipei’s national security strategy, since 1949, has constantly taken account of the strategic environment which has

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<sup>10</sup> “President Tsai Attends Videoconference with U.S. Heritage Foundation,” Office of the President, the Republic of China (Taiwan), March 28, 2019, <https://english.president.gov.tw/News/5692>

<sup>11</sup> “Japan co-hosts a Taiwan-U.S. training workshop for the first time,” *Focus Taiwan*, March 26, 2019, <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aip/201903260007.aspx>

primarily been affected by the dynamics of Sino-American relations. And, like it or not in dealing with the cross-Strait confrontation, Taiwan's grand strategy has constantly been influenced by and to some extent subordinated to America's global strategy. As such, governed by the strategy of others, Taiwan's national security strategy has shown that Taipei only has limited room to make its strategic manoeuvre; indeed, its national security strategy has always been gauged in terms of the specific strategic environment in which it was operating. This explains, for example, why President Tsai Ing-Wen's administration has been keen to associate Taipei's national security strategy with Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy to increase its strategic options by a means of strengthening strategic relations with Washington against Beijing's annexation threat. Clearly, this is one of Taipei's most important strategic decisions amid the escalated Sino-American rivalry under Trump's administration. It must, however, also be noted that Taipei has achieved a reasonable security link to America, even at the height of Sino-American strategic cooperation in the 1970s and 1980s, not least by identifying common strategic interests with Washington and exploiting every opportunity arising from the conflicts and competition in US-China relations. Given the latest statement of Washington's national strategic mindset by the IPSR, it is a prudent choice for Taipei to proclaim maintaining the status quo between Taiwan and China across Taiwan Strait that shall surely incorporate with Washington to preserve the existing favorable regional order to sustain American influence in the Indo-Pacific.



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# Snapshots from the 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Han Kuang Exercises: The Taiwan Air Force Fighter Aircraft Landed on Freeway

By Hsiao-Huang Shu

**I**n May 2019, the Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of China (Taiwan) held the most important annual large-scale military exercise, “Exercise Han Kuang 35” (漢光 35 號演習), which was conducted in multiple regions in Taiwan, simulating a total invasion of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

In responding to the scenario of a total invasion of the PLA, Taiwanese Armed Forces carried out a strategy of “preserving warfighting capabilities, pursuing decisive victories in the littoral area, and annihilating the enemy in the beach area,” under a comprehensive defense concept. This strategy intends to break up the attacks and block the enemy landing forces through multi-layered interceptions and joint firepower strikes.

In the exercise, the “freeway emergency take-offs and landings” (戰備道起降) could be regarded as one of the most vital components. Without fighter aircraft’s survival under the first strike, the air forces will not be able to implement countermeasures to maintain air superiority against

attacks from air and sea. Preserving the capacity of the Taiwan Air Force is therefore essential to the defense of Taiwan.



F-16B fighter aircraft landing on the freeway in central Taiwan. (Source: Hsiao-Huang Shu)

Thanks to dual-use freeways and roads constructed in the twentieth century, the Taiwan Air Force has had routine drills on emergency take-off and landing since years back, along with exercises related to air defense of air bases and rapid runway repair (RRR). The latest resumption of such practice indicates that Taiwan is enhancing its combat readiness to confront a more capable PLA in recent years. So far, there are five contingency runways nationwide, including four on freeways and one on a regular road in Pingtung County in Southern Taiwan.

On May 28, the Taiwan Air Force's exercises on emergency take-offs and landings took place on the Huatan section in Changhua County in central Taiwan on the main north-south National Freeway No. 1 that runs along

the island's west coast. Three main fighter jets and one airborne early warning aircraft in the Taiwan Air Force successfully completed the drill. These were one Mirage 2000-5D from the Hsinchu Air Force Base's Second Fighter Wing, one F-16B from the Chiayi Air Force Base's Fifth Fighter Wing, and one F-CK-1D, commonly known as the Indigenous Defense Fighter (IDF), from the Taichung Ching-Chuan-Kang Air Force Base's Third Fighter Wing. In addition, Pingtung's Sixth Composite Wing joined with an E-2K airborne early warning aircraft. To protect the runway, two AH-1W attack helicopters and one OH-58D observation helicopter were sent by the Taiwan Army Aviation Special Forces Command. Meanwhile, a CH-47SD transport helicopter executed simulation on equipment and material hanging replenishment toward the runway.



F-16B fighter aircraft with Harpoon anti-ship missiles (AGM-84) taking off on the freeway in central Taiwan. (Source: Hsiao-Huang Shu)

Furthermore, to simulate air defense over the freeway, Patriot II/III and short-range sky-guard system were deployed at two sides of the freeway. Several types of logistic vehicles were standing by at two ends of the freeway for missile and oil supply. Also, a few Cardinal unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) made by Taiwan's National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCSIST) were conducting aeronautical surveillance.



The Taiwan Air Force's Indigenous Defense Fighter (IDF) taxiing on the freeway in central Taiwan. (Source: Hsiao-Huang Shu)

The 2,400-meter-long contingency runway sufficiently served the purposes of take-off (500 meters) and landing-roll (800 meters) distances. As an emergency measure to ensure safety, in addition to navigating equipment, the mobile aircraft arresting system was deployed at the end of the freeway.

Taiwan's National Highway Police Bureau and National Freeway Bureau assisted in traffic control and sign adjustment for the road closure

during the runway operation, which involved multiple military units as well as central and local government departments. President Tsai In-Wen also attended and oversaw the exercise.



E-2K airborne early warning aircraft taxiing on the freeway in central Taiwan. (Source: Hsiao-Huang Shu)

The weather forecast earlier for the day was heavy rain in the Changhua area, but luckily the weather remained partly cloudy since the traffic control began the evening before. Around 6:20 am on May 28, the first F-16B landed on the freeway successfully, followed by an IDF, a Mirage 2000-D and an E-2K. While the CH-47SD transport helicopter of the Taiwan Army carried out hanging simulation, AH-1W attack helicopter and OH-58D observation helicopter were patrolling above the runway. Four aircraft then one by one taxied back to the head of the runway for oil and missile supply and took off again at about 7:30 am, completing the entire exercise. The normal traffic resumed around 12pm when the exercise equipment was evacuated.

What was interesting is that, the F-16B numbered 6811 and the F-CK-1D (IDF) numbered 1611, both landed on the Huatan freeway for the first time twelve years ago. For Exercise Han Kuang 35, these two same aircraft landed on the Huatan freeway for the second time. This F-16B has recently completed the APG-83 radar upgrade. Lockheed Martin named the F-16 as F-16V for the same AESA radar upgrade. Taiwan's upgraded F-16s are currently under system verification.

The PLA lately has been pressuring Taiwan by flying aircraft around Taiwan's air space. Meanwhile, China's Eastern Theater has been equipping with J-16 aircraft. It is rumored that J-20 aircraft has also been deployed to the bases in China's Eastern Theater for testing, exerting increasing pressure on Taiwan's air defense. Since the functional advancement of F-CK-1(IDF) has been completed, after the upgrading to F-16V, Taiwan's Air Force will gain a leverage to balance the PLA Air Force, if the U.S. agrees to the arms sales of F-16C/D Block70/72 to Taiwan in the near future.

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## Submission

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