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# Adrift in the Indo-Pacific

By Kara Bue and Zack Cooper

The United States is losing ground in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite the Trump administration's efforts to promote a "free and open" Indo-Pacific, regional trends are going against American interests. There is little reason to hope that these trends will reverse during the rest of the Trump administration. Instead, a new administration will be left to pick up the pieces.

## Core Contradictions

The Trump administration's central problem is that the President does not appear to support the strategy that his team has put forward. The National Security Strategy and the Defense Department's Indo-Pacific Strategy Report promote a regional approach based on strategic competition, strong alliances, economic prosperity, and shared values. But President Trump continues to undermine each of these elements.

President Trump has seldom embraced the "era of strategic competition" that his national security team has embraced. Instead, the President tends to speak positively about U.S. competitors, including Kim Jong Un, Vladimir Putin, and Xi Jinping. When asked whether he saw China as a "strategic competitor" – as it is labeled by his own National Security Strategy – Trump disagreed and said that he believed Beijing would be a "strategic partner."





The Malabar 2019 Photo Exercise. (Source: The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command  
- Photo by Courtesy of JMSDF Public Affairs)

Meanwhile, the administration's America First approach has damaged allied support for the United States. Many U.S. allies now see America as largely self-interested and unwilling to consider the interests of its allies and partners. President Trump often insists that U.S. allies should pay for the full costs of U.S. forces based on their territories, suggesting that the American military is a mercenary force. He also has publicly berated NATO allies for failing to pay their fair share. Far from building U.S. alliances to constrain strategic competitors, the result is a weakening of America's alliances and leadership.

On the economic side, the Trump administration's policies are just as confusing. President Trump remains focused on the current account balance, attacking China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and others for having trade surpluses with the United States. As a result, the administration has little in the way of a positive regional economic agenda. By cancelling the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the administration lost

one of its most effective tools for both shaping Chinese economic behavior and bolstering economic activity across the Pacific.

Perhaps the area of greatest concern for many allies and partners is the erosion of U.S. support for common values. It is not simply that human rights have not been high on the administration's agenda. The problems go deeper. President Trump has often appeared to go out of his way to undermine efforts to protect human rights. In Hong Kong, for example, President Trump suggested that this was an internal matter for Chinese leaders. And the administration has taken little action against major human rights violations, such as the Khashoggi case or the forced detention and mass "re-education" of at least a million Uighurs and other ethnic groups in Xinjiang.

These contradictions between the Trump administration's professed strategy and the President's own views are irreconcilable. Even the hardest working officials within the administration will struggle to overcome them, because they are fundamentally incompatible. As a result, the administration's Indo-Pacific approach is unlikely to succeed writ large.

Even the most critical observers must acknowledge that there have been a few bright spots in the Trump administration's engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Ties with Vietnam have improved, as evidenced by the docking of an American aircraft carrier at Danang port. Relations with the Philippines are another positive due to the U.S. willingness to return the Balangiga Bells and to include the South China Sea within the area covered by the U.S. treaty commitment. The Trump administration has increased the attention paid to the Pacific Islands, particularly through more frequent senior level visits. Further, the Trump administration has sought to bolster its support of Taiwan. In July, President Tsai conducted an extended transit visit to the United States, which included a well-

publicized stop in New York City – her first as President. That visit was shortly followed by the administration’s approval of a major USD 8 billion arms sale package to Taiwan involving 66 new F-16C/D fighter aircraft. Progress in these four areas is commendable.



Journey of Freedom, Democracy, Sustainability in New York, 2019. (Source: Youth Daily News)

What do these issues generally have in common? President Trump is minimally interested or engaged in them, leaving his advisors more latitude to pursue their preferred policies. As a result, his team has been able to implement elements of the stated Indo-Pacific strategy without significant interference from above. Elsewhere, however, President Trump is more engaged, and the results so far are negative.

## Losing Ground in Asia



Aviation Ordnanceman 1st Class Don Salice explains damage control capabilities to Vietnamese officials in the hangar bay of USS *Carl Vinson*. (Source: The U.S. Navy)

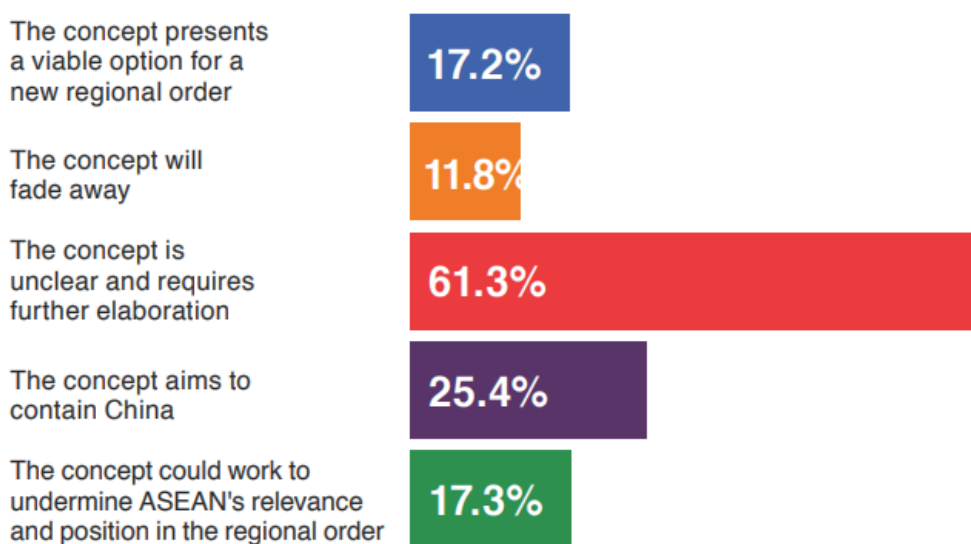
In Northeast Asia, Japan and South Korea are at loggerheads. As a result, trilateral cooperation is becoming more difficult and China, North Korea, and Russia are seeking to drive a larger wedge between the U.S. allies. Meanwhile, U.S. leaders are assigning Tokyo and Seoul burdens of USD 9 billion and USD 5 billion, respectively, for hosting U.S. military forces. These cost sharing demands are likely to create anger in Japan and South Korea, while also serving as a distraction from building allied capabilities to meet shared threats.

In Southeast Asia, there is little good news outside of Vietnam and the Philippines. Polls show limited support for the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy across the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). One reason is that countries within ASEAN increasingly feel stuck between the United States and China. Facing a more powerful China and an inconsistent U.S., most countries in Southeast Asia are



joining with Beijing or seeking autonomy, rather than aligning with Washington. Even Singapore has started to chafe publicly at the Trump administration's approach, with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong warning that Singaporeans are "anxious" about a "deeply divided and disgruntled" America.

**Figure 1: How do you view the Indo-Pacific concept?  
(ISEAS Poll)**



*Source: [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/TheStateofSEASurveyReport\\_2019.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/TheStateofSEASurveyReport_2019.pdf)*

Elsewhere across the Indo-Pacific, the stories are similar. Indian leaders are frustrated with American economic actions. Australians are debating the pursuit of independent defense capabilities. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison refused to support placement of intermediate range missiles in Australia, which Secretary of Defense Mark Esper had suggested publicly before talking privately with his allied interlocutors. Thus, throughout the region, leaders are debating whether they can or should continue to rely on the United States.

## Stuck in the Middle East and Afghanistan

To many Asian leaders, U.S. focus and forces still appear stuck in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Candidate and now President Trump argued for the end of the “endless wars” in the region, and this is perhaps the one area that Asia strategists tend to agree with the President. The National Security Strategy called for the United States to rededicate itself toward strategic competition with China and Russia, and to identify those countries as America’s top security concerns. This shift away from the Middle East and Afghanistan was similar to that promised by the Obama administration’s pivot to Asia, and remains supported by most observers in the Indo-Pacific region.

*Perhaps the area of greatest concern for many allies and partners is the erosion of U.S. support for common values.*

Here, however, the Trump administration’s inconsistencies have hamstrung its policies in the Indo-Pacific. President Trump remains engaged in discussions to forge a deal in Afghanistan, but the quick exit he had hoped for has yet to materialize. And the administration remains attached to an Iran policy that is sucking American time, attention, and forces back into the Middle East (as well as that of some U.S. allies). With limited increases in defense spending and an inability to prioritize among its regional commitments, the administration appears unlikely to commit more resources to the Indo-Pacific.

One example of this strategic distraction is the debate about deploying forces to the Persian Gulf to protect the sea lines of communication from Iranian interference. Although some in Washington are asking leaders in Tokyo, Canberra, and elsewhere to do more in the Indo-Pacific, U.S.

requests are once again pulling them back into the Middle East. Given that China remains largely focused on Asia, the U.S. can hardly afford yet another distraction. And neither can its allies.

## **China, China, China**



President Donald J. Trump unveils his new national security strategy during a speech in Washington in 2017. (Source: The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command)

Short-lived acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan said this year that his focus was “China, China, China.” But for all the administration’s tough talk, it has few results to show. Beijing has not agreed to stop its most problematic economic activities, including theft of intellectual property, restrictions on market access, unfair joint venture requirements, or massive state subsidies. Meanwhile, Beijing has engaged in repressive campaigns in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, increased pressure on Taiwan, and continued to expand China’s military posture through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

President Trump's primary interest regarding China is decreasing the bilateral trade imbalance. But with the U.S. dollar strengthening as global market volatility increases, the U.S. trade deficit with China is going up, not down. Contrary to President Trump's frequent promises, China has not increased purchases of U.S. agriculture and energy products. Meanwhile, tariffs by both sides are hurting consumers and slowing economic growth in the United States, China, and elsewhere.

One U.S. observer has stated that the Trump administration's approach

*President Trump's approach could be summarized as talking loudly but carrying a small stick.*

is "confrontational but not competitive." This is an accurate assessment. Too often the administration has threatened tough actions — against electronics companies such

as ZTE and Huawei, for example — only to withdraw these threats under pressure from China. As a result, President Trump's approach could be summarized as talking loudly but carrying a small stick. This strategy will not be sufficient to change the behavior of increasingly confident Chinese leaders. Nor will it make U.S. allies and partners more confident in the wisdom of supporting Washington's approach.

## **What Comes Next?**

Given all the challenges that the Trump administration faces in the Indo-Pacific, it is reasonable to ask what the next year (or five years) hold in store. Unfortunately, this assessment implies that the administration cannot escape its contradictions. President Trump's views are not likely to evolve; and he is not the only cause of the dysfunction within the administration. As positions within the administration have turned over, they are increasingly filled by people who are more willing to tell



the President what he wants to hear. This phenomenon appears to be getting worse, not better, as experienced leaders leave government.

Thus, the Trump administration's Indo-Pacific strategy appears destined to make little headway. The administration has succeeded in changing the debate on China. But it has failed to change Chinese behavior. It has failed to strengthen regional alliances. And it has also failed to build a shared consensus around the ultimate objective of its China policies. These tasks will likely fall to the next administration, whether that is in 2020 or 2024. The next team will have a tall task in front of them, one that they will have to accomplish in the face of diminished U.S. power and influence.

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# Japan's Countering of the China Military Threat: Taiwan's Role

By Michael Shao-Cheng Sun

## Introduction

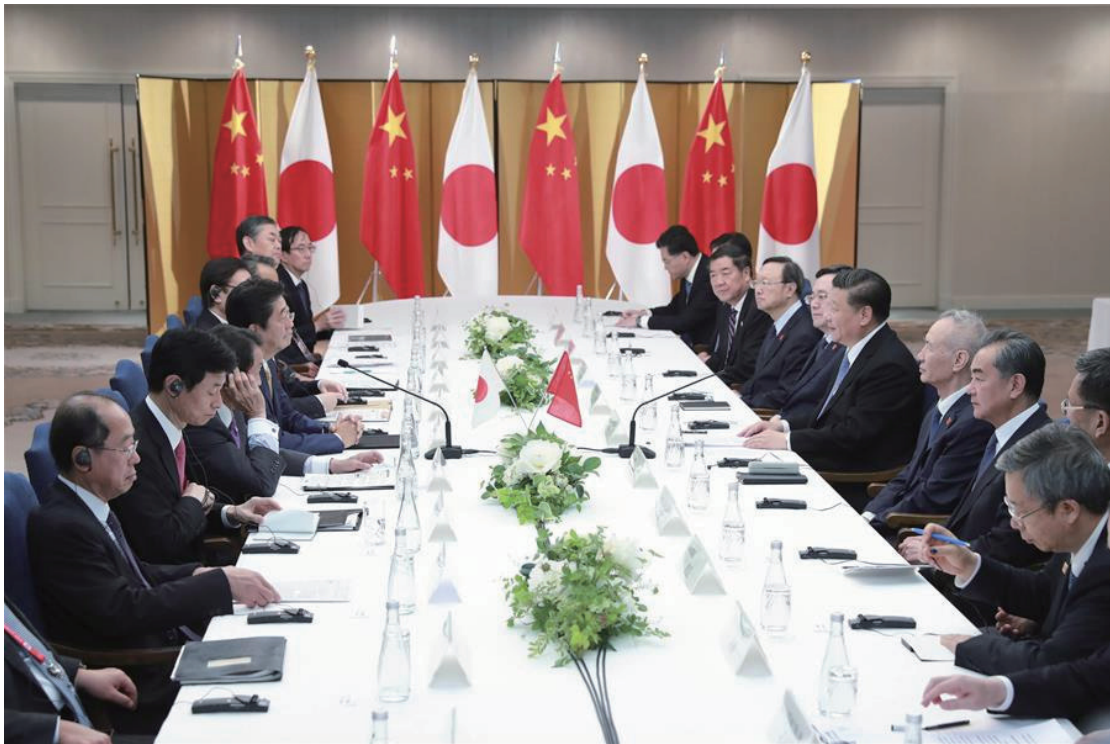
Chinese and Japanese relationships have been strained by Japan's wartime past, China's military modernization, and the Diaoyutai Islands dispute. Even though both governments have attempted to reduce these tensions due to the interests of lucrative trade, the historical animosity could easily break their fragile relationship. In recent years, Chinese government's escalation of People's Liberation Army (PLA) military activities (intrusions of vessels and warplanes into Japanese territories and militarization in the South China Sea) have posed a grave security concern to Japan.<sup>1</sup> On June 1, 2019, the US Pentagon released the "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report" (IPSR) that highlighted the development of a free and open Indo-Pacific region by working with the allies and partners. In support of US strategy, Japanese and US carrier groups jointly held a naval exercise from June 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> in the South China Sea.<sup>2</sup> Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen had a closed-door meeting

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<sup>1</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2018*, Retrieved October 22, 2018, from [https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/2018.html](https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2018.html); Stephen R Nagy, "Can China-Japan relations return to 'normal'?" *Asia and Pacific Policy Society*, <https://www.policyforum.net/can-china-japan-relations-return-normal/>.

<sup>2</sup> Franz-Stefan Gady, "US, Japan Aircraft Carriers Conduct Naval Exercise in South China Sea," *The Diplomat*, Retrieved June 12, 2019, from <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/us-japan-aircraft-carriers-conduct-naval-exercise-in-south-china-sea/>.

## China-Japan Relations at Odds



Chinese President Xi Jinping meets with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Osaka, Japan in June 2019. (Source: The State Council Information Office of the PRC)

with Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in her pre-election visit to Japan to nurture an interpersonal relationship for the further development of a comprehensive Taiwan-Japan relationship.<sup>3</sup> In countering China's mounting military threat, Tsai's administration called for a renewed security dialogue with Japan and establishing a permanent diplomatic mechanism to streamline bilateral communication.<sup>4</sup> This research first,

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<sup>3</sup> Lauren Dickey, "Taiwan-Japan Ties Deepen Amid Chinese Assertiveness," *China Brief*, Vol. 16, Issue 16, Retrieved October 26, 2016, from <https://jamestown.org/program/taiwan-japan-ties-deepen-amid-chinese-assertiveness/>.

<sup>4</sup> Duncan Deaeth, "Foreign Minister proposes joint Taiwan-Japan emergency response mechanism," *Taiwan News*, Retrieved March 15, 2019, from <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3658581>.

explores the current China-Japan relations by looking at their flashpoints of conflicts and examining China's military escalation, second, explains Japan's security strategy, and finally, suggests the roles of Taiwan within the framework of delicate China-Japan delicate relations.

China aims to realize the PLA's modernization by 2035 and to transform the PLA into one of the world's foremost military powers by 2050. Japan views the current PLA military activities as provocative. For example, China's sea and air power is expanding and routinizing its operational areas close to Japan and Diaoyutai Islands, and increasing its land reclamation in the Spratly Islands.<sup>5</sup> Owing to economic interests, Japanese Prime Minister Abe paid an official visit to China in October 2018 in the hope of lessening the growing tensions in its relations with China. While the visit was viewed as a success of thawing the previously frozen relationship, the bilateral relations remain fundamentally unchanged.<sup>6</sup> Some China-Japan developments deserve attention.

## **1) China-Japan stagnant relations**

The Chinese government has shown willingness to improve its relations with Japan but without much success. Japan's wartime atrocities have been the cause of its tension with China for decades. Particularly, the Nanjing Massacre has constantly become the trigger of China's nationalism. In seeking an improved bilateral tie, China's President Xi Jinping showed his restraint by sending verbal condolences instead of visiting the Nanjing Massacre memorial at the end of 2018. The lack of headline coverage for the Nanjing Massacre memorial also seemed to

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<sup>5</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2018*.

<sup>6</sup> Leo Lin, "Will the China-Japan Reset Continue in 2019?" *The Diplomat*, Retrieved January 31, 2019, from <https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/will-the-china-japan-reset-continue-in-2019/>.



send an Olive branch to Japan.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, China lifted its embargo on Japanese agricultural products in November 2018 due to the nuclear leak in Fukushima tsunami in 2011. However, Japan mobile phone carriers (SoftBank Group, NTT Docomo, and KDDI) have decided not to use Chinese equipment in their 5G networks due to rising cyber-theft concerns. China's goodwill gesture has been disappointed by Japan's sanctioning of electronic products.<sup>8</sup> China may retaliate against Japan's unilateral sanction.

## 2) US interference in China-Japan relations

In addition to a long history of mutual distrust, China-Japan relations are also restrained by the US-Japan alliance and the escalating US-China rivalry. In March 2019, the Abe administration delayed its plans to invite President Xi on a state visit to appease the Trump administration. This comes at a time when a trade war, Huawei's controversies, and criticism of China's violations of human rights in Xinjiang, have brought US-China relations to a low point.<sup>9</sup> The US-Japan

*As the US-China competition intensifies, the room of improving China-Japan relations is restricted by Japan's prioritization of the US alliance.*

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Minoru Satake, "Japan's 4 carriers to shun Chinese 5G tech," *Nikkei Asian Review*, Retrieved December 10, 2018, from <https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Companies/Japan-s-4-carriers-to-shun-Chinese-5G-tech> ; Leo Lin.

<sup>9</sup> Andrea A. Fischetti and Antoine Roth, "A Structural Constraint to China-Japan Relations," *Tokyo Review*, Retrieved April 12, 2019, from

alliance is vital to Japan's national security. Japan prioritizes its relationship with the US surpassing any other partners. Dealing with the Trump administration has become challenging as Japan faces increasing tariffs on its automobile exports to the US and spends greater expenses of supporting US forces in Japan.<sup>10</sup>

The Chinese government views the Japanese prioritizing for the US over China as the main cause of China-Japan tensions.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of Chinese leaders showing restraint in its relations with Japan, China still does not trust the US-Japan alliance. As the US-China competition intensifies, the room of improving China-Japan relations is restricted by Japan's prioritization of the US alliance.

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<https://www.tokyoreview.net/2019/04/a-structural-constraint-to-china-japan-relations/>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



President Donald J. Trump joined by the Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe arrive aboard the JS Kaga Tuesday, May 28, 2019, in Yokosuka, Japan. (Official White House Photo by Shealah Craighead)

## Japan's Security Strategy

The Japan National Security Strategy (NSS) has laid out principles to achieve its own security grounded on international cooperation. The National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), based on the NSS, conducts effective deterrence and responses to various situations. The Japan Self Defense Force (SDF) should be able to react to an attack on remote islands, ballistic missile attacks, space and cyberspace attacks, and natural disasters by holding training and exercises, promoting defense cooperation, ensuring maritime security, and implementing international cooperation.<sup>12</sup> In the Japan Defense White Paper, the Japan-US security arrangements, Japanese defense strategy and security initiatives are the cornerstone of Japan's security.

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<sup>12</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2018*.

## **1) The US-Japan security arrangements**

The Japanese government believes that the US-Japan alliance contributes not only to the stability of Japan but also of the Asia-Pacific region. As the security environment surrounding Japan becomes severe, the US enhancing its engagement with the regional countries has become critical to Japan's security. It is crucial to have the presence of the US Forces Japan (USFJ) and to be prepared to respond to emergencies. The Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation is the policy set forth concerning initiatives such as cooperation for regional security, and space and cyberspace cooperation to allow the US-Japan Alliance to function efficiently as a deterrent. In accordance with the guidelines, both countries will conduct more joint training and exercises, and joint intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) activities.<sup>13</sup> Two US-Japan security policy consultative platforms that are critical to Japan's security and US national interests are the US-Japan Security Consultative Committee and US-Japan Defense Ministerial Meeting. These security platforms focus on commitment to strengthening their alliance in the Asia-Pacific, North Korea's abandonment of nuclear weapons, monitoring China's increased activities in the East China Sea, and confronting China's militarization in the South China Sea.<sup>14</sup>

## **2) Japan's defense strategy**

The Japanese defense strategy has been viewed as a response to China's military power. Japan's National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) include converting two helicopter carriers into aircraft carriers,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



upgrading electronic warfare capabilities, purchasing land-based missile defense systems, and researching hypersonic weapons. In this NDPG, the most important change is the shifting of Japanese security posture from reactive to proactive and regarding China as an adversary.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the NDPG, the Chinese government also believes that the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (a dialogue between the US, Japan, Australia, and India) and Tokyo's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy are evidence of Japan and the West containing China.<sup>16</sup>

### 3) Security Initiatives

The Self Defense Force (SDF) engages in surveillance activities in the water and airspace surrounding Japan so that it can respond to contingencies. Information gathered through these activities are shared with other government agencies.<sup>17</sup> In addition to that, Japanese security initiatives include, first, preparation against intrusion of territorial airspace. The Japan Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) detects aircraft flying in the airspace surrounding Japan. In 2017, the ASDF scrambled 904 times. Among them, 500 were against Chinese aircraft. To respond to attacks on remote islands, SDF will actively detect signs at an early stage through ISR activities to secure maritime and air superiority.<sup>18</sup> The second initiative includes defense cooperation and exchanges with other countries. Japan will foster a cooperative mechanism through bilateral dialogues and exchanges. Recognizing the increasing need for international cooperation, Japan has enhanced

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<sup>15</sup> Leo Lin.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen R Nagy, "It's too early to write off the Indo-Pacific strategy," *The Japan Times*, Retrieved July 24, 2018, from <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2018/07/24/commentary/japan-commentary/early-write-off-indo-pacific-strategy/#.XSznROhKg2w>.

<sup>17</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2018*.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

bilateral defense relationships by joint exercises, and defense equipment and technology cooperation.<sup>19</sup> The third initiative is research and development for technological superiority. The Japan's Ministry of Defense (MOD) formulated the Defense Technology Strategy to ensure Japan's technological superiority and to develop advanced equipment in an efficient manner. Japan promotes cooperation in defense equipment and technology with other countries to enhance its defense production and technology.<sup>20</sup>

Japan's security strategy aims to respond to China's rising military buildup. In recent years, the SDF has actively enhanced military training, ensured maritime security, and improved international cooperation. The US-Japan security arrangements have become more robust to ensure Japan's security interests.

## **Taiwan's Role**

Japan had colonized Taiwan from 1894 to 1945. With the signing of the treaty with the Republic of China (ROC) in 1952, Japan returned Taiwan to the ROC. Since then, Japan followed the US in maintaining diplomatic relations with the ROC on Taiwan. In 1972, Japan recognized the PRC as the sole legal government of China and maintained its relations with Taiwan at an unofficial level.<sup>21</sup> Despite of unofficial relations, the bilateral trade and people-to-people exchanges have risen quickly. For example, in 2016, 1.9 million Japanese visited

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey W. Hornung, "Strong but constrained Japan-Taiwan ties," *RAND Corporation*, Retrieved March 13, 2018, from <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/strong-but-constrained-japan-taiwan-ties/>.

Taiwan while 4.17 million Taiwanese visited Japan.<sup>22</sup> Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu emphasized since both countries have mutual interests and face similar threats, there is plentiful room for closer cooperation on issues of maritime security, cyber-crime, natural disaster response, etc. <sup>23</sup> Looking ahead, both countries will likely be working on low-profile cooperation within existing frameworks because of Japan's one-China Policy. However, there are several efforts that Taiwan can do to improve relations with Japan.



President Tsai Ing-wen poses for a photo with a delegation led by Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association Chairman Mitsuo Ohashi. (Source: Office of the President, R.O.C. (Taiwan))

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Duncan Deaeth.

## **1) Building robust relations with Japan**

From a geo-strategic perspective, having robust relations with Japan is significant to Taiwan's security. Shortly after Tsai Ing-wen was elected president in 2016, Abe sent a congratulatory message, which is the first ever good-will gesture of such nature issued by a Japanese Prime Minister to a Taiwan president-elect.<sup>24</sup> President Tsai acknowledges the importance of collaborating with Japan in confronting China. After Tsai took the presidency, the two countries have made momentous diplomatic progress. In January 2017, Taiwan's Association of East Asian Relations changed its name to the Taiwan-Japan Relations Association. In March the same year, Japan's Vice Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications, Jiro Akama, visited Taiwan, who became the highest-level government representative to have visited Taiwan since 1972.<sup>25</sup> The name change of the association and official visit will provide further room for deepening bilateral cooperation and exchange.

## **2) Carefully managing differences**

In spite of improved Taiwan-Japan relations, some constrained ties require the two countries to work together. While Japan insists that Diaoyutai Islands are their territory, Taiwan argues that its sovereignty over the islands is indisputable based on location, historical evidence, geological composition, etc. Regardless of being unable to agree on the territorial disputes, the two countries concluded three decades of negotiations on a civil fishery agreement in April 2013. Under this agreement, the two sides have agreed to handle fishery issues stemming from overlapping Exclusive Economic Zones and to discuss resource conservation and common fishing rules. Furthermore, the two sides

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<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey W. Hornung.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



have exempted their fishing boats from each other's law enforcement agencies.<sup>26</sup> Though security cooperation between the two countries will take a long time to accomplish, it is apparent that prudently managing Taiwan-Japan differences are better than taking a confrontational approach.

### 3) Supporting non-traditional security cooperation

Despite the improvement in bilateral ties in recent years, there is a slim possibility that Tokyo is going to adopt an openly proactive stance on Taiwan. However, Taiwan government can encourage the Japanese government to create a mechanism with Taiwan for risk control at sea. This could be pursued through existing maritime dialogues. Another potential area would be coordination or cooperation on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief issues. At the end of 2016, the two sides held an inaugural maritime cooperation dialogue that focused on collaboration on maritime issues such as fisheries, scientific research, and collaboration of coast guards.<sup>27</sup> This maritime cooperation dialogue could further expand into security related cooperation.

*The Taiwanese and Japanese defense ties and economic cooperation are essential to confront China's assertiveness in East Asia and the South China Sea.*

Since 1972 when Japan shifted its recognition from the ROC to PRC, the one-China policy has become a roadblock for a robust Taiwan-Japan relation. As China is rapidly rising, Japan is facing a tremendous threat and its relations with Taiwan has become more flexible. Taiwan could

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

seek to build closer relations with Japan and engage in non-traditional security cooperation. Dialogues and exchanges of views are beneficial to improve bilateral relations if both countries can seek common ground while minimizing differences.

## **Conclusion**

When the relationship with China turns sour, Japan is inclined to work with Taiwan more to signal its displeasure with China. Despite Japan's increased attention on its relationship with Taiwan, Japan's one-China policy continues to impose limits of how far Abe's administration can push its tie with Taiwan while balancing its relations with China.<sup>28</sup> The Taiwanese and Japanese defense ties and economic cooperation are essential to confront China's assertiveness in East Asia and the South China Sea.

This research introduced Chinese-Japanese relations, expounded Japan's security strategy, and suggested how Taiwan can enhance its relations with Japan to secure Taiwan's interests. The main findings were as follows: First, Xi's administration has shown willingness to improve relations with Japan. However, the US-Japan alliance and the US-China intensifying rivalry have restrained China's and Japan's relations. Since Japan is not ready to accept China's leadership in Asia, Japan's defense strategy still aims to contain China's rise by increasing military training and ensuring maritime security, particularly working closely with the US. Second, Taiwan can be more proactive in improving relations with Japan by carefully managing differences and supporting non-traditional security cooperation. Constant dialogues, exchanges of views, and cooperation are helpful to enhance bilateral relations.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

There are several approaches to establish closer bilateral relations. First, Taiwan and Japan could develop better cooperation and exchange at various levels, such as humanitarian aid and disaster relief training, establishing information-sharing and response mechanisms to China's cyber-attacks.<sup>29</sup> Second, President Tsai emphasizes greater reliance on domestic defense development. Since Japan has a well-established defense industry, Japan could assist Taiwan in developing indigenous weapon defense systems.<sup>30</sup> Third, it is in Taiwan's and Japan's interest to maintain robust economic ties. Taiwan has expressed a strong interest to Japan to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Even though supporting Taiwan in this endeavor will be difficult politically, it would support Tokyo's strategy of maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific.<sup>31</sup> Finally, Japan has supported Taiwan's inclusion in international organizations, such as becoming a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), an observer in the World Health Assembly (WHA), and participating in the International Civil Aviation Organization. Japanese diplomats often express the importance of Taiwan to Asia-Pacific countries.<sup>32</sup> Japan could support Taiwan's efforts to participate in international organizations by bolstering Taiwan's foreign relations.

The main take-away of this study is that in countering China's growing military threat, both governments of Taiwan and Japan can skillfully and

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<sup>29</sup> Lauren Dickey.

<sup>30</sup> J. Michael Cole, "Why strengthening the Taiwan-Japan alliance makes perfect sense," *The Interpreter*, March 23 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/why-strengthening-taiwan-japan-alliance-makes-perfect-sense> .

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey W. Hornung.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

incrementally enhance and explore security exchange and cooperation for the sake of national and regional security.

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# A Constructivist Enquiry into the Problem of Piracy

By Candyce Kelshall

Piracy has been a long studied and well documented concept for centuries. In an era of intense globalization, the scope and reach of pirate activities has increased, and has a greater impact on a larger variety of actors and individuals. Though Taiwan has a limited history of dealing with Somali piracy, a thorough understanding of the nature of this problem is advised, as the applications of the methodology can be applied in order to address other contemporary security challenges.<sup>1</sup> This methodology aims to provide an alternative to realist and liberal perspectives when addressing security challenges. While commercial and merchant ship instances of piracy have been impacted by the continuing presence of anti-piracy multi-lateral operations, fishing and smaller vessels remain targeted in lower profile attacks. Several vessels have been attacked in March and April 2019. This aspect of Somali maritime activity has been grossly under reported.

This paper suggests that piracy might be viewed from a constructivist perspective as it might help with framing an understanding of the phenomenon from the perspectives of the actors involved. Identifying subjective meanings may be useful in understanding intentions and motivations of such actors. Such an approach may avoid the layering of

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<sup>1</sup> Government limited in fight against Somali pirates. (August 2, 2011). Retrieved from <https://safety4sea.com/government-limited-in-fight-against-somali-pirates/>; Ralph Jennings (2016, October 31). Taiwan ex-legislator helped free sailors held off Somalia. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/c5a54d4ab7d443939f40c63ea0331bb3>.



assumption which objective interpretations and existing understanding might imply. The purpose of this paper is to offer an updated methodological approach for addressing issues of piracy, which is grounded in international relations theory. This is proposed as the problem of piracy is an international problem that crosses borders and boundaries of international law. As instances of piracy are increasing, it is suggested that the current international law and multilateral approaches to dealing with this problem may not be adequate or appropriate, as these responses come from realist and liberal perspectives, which are superimposed over the actions or actors, who may not have the same origins.

There are three approaches which might be applied to the study of international relations. These are social scientific, historical and constructivist.<sup>2</sup> The social scientific approach uses the same methodology as the natural sciences - using objectivity to analyse issues at various levels such as the individual level, the domestic and national, the systemic level and global levels. It seeks to break down the constituent parts of an issue into dependent and independent variables. Such a positivist and empirical approach suggests singular truths.

The historical approach does not seek to understand all occurrences of an issue but approaches the unfolding narrative of an event to generate specific understanding of that individual occurrence by a detailed narrative. Assessments are valid only for the single issue under review.

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<sup>2</sup> Steven L. Lamy and John Masker, *Introduction to Global Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 18.

The constructivist approach is one in which there is no single narrative to explain international issues but instead the interests of actors shape occurrences and outcomes. Actors are constrained in their interpretation of events based on their specific existing norms, understandings and identities. Actors are therefore not free to act as they please but do so based on a limited menu of options which are informed by the prevailing interests and goals which shape the environment.<sup>3</sup> Where two discrete sets of actors are engaged in conflict there may well be two sets of norms and interpretations which are at odds. This paper suggests the constructivist approach to international relations be employed to frame situational awareness, in order to examine these two versions of “reality” which the security problem of Somali piracy presents.

*The constructivist approach is one in which there is no single narrative to explain international issues but instead the interests of actors shape occurrences and outcomes.*

## **The Constructivist Approach**

This paper suggests the importance of a constructivist lens through which the reconstruction of experiences and meaning from the discrete actions of the two groups of actors may be undertaken.<sup>4</sup> In fact,

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<sup>3</sup> Lamy and Masker, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Notion is taken to mean already existing understandings of a subject and concept is taken to mean the introduction of a new way of looking at the problem.

grounded theory constructivism, the research methodology used in this paper, rejects the idea of a single objective reality.<sup>5</sup>

The primary objective of this paper is to demonstrate that the relationship between our understanding of piracy and identifying acts as being such, may be dependent upon our socially constructed notion of the nature of Somali pirate actions.

A constructivist methodological approach, therefore, is an analysis of the interests, narratives, motivations and actions of the actors in this security problem. Such an approach proposes that there are two perspectives at play in Somali piracy and seeks to demonstrate that the conceptualisation of piracy is informed by different interests, which are dependent on who is doing the interpreting. The constructivist tool of interpretivism is therefore advanced to enquire into what the dominant interests are at stake, and how these interests inform the actions on both sides, both mitigator and pirate actors.

Less common approaches within constructivism, namely structuration and post structuralism might also be employed, particularly in examining the self-selected labels of the actors. While there are some distinctions between the two approaches, post structuralism and constructivism – both cover similar ground. One seeks to explain the dynamic between the actor and the structure of the environment and the other, the nature of the environment in which policy is made. Post

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<sup>5</sup> Constructivism is a research paradigm that denies the existence of an objective reality, "asserting instead that realities are social constructions of the mind." E. G. Guba and Y. S Lincoln, *Fourth Generation Evaluation* (California: Sage, 1989), p. 43, cited in J. Mills, A. Bonner and K. Francis, "The Development of Constructivist Grounded Theory," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2006, pp. 1-10.

structuralism explores the relationship of power and knowledge and might therefore be employed in explaining why normative arguments for piracy have become the dominant perspective on the part of the west. From this perspective, it might be argued that dominance and power determine the norms and interests which inform understanding, and the nature of our knowing, what piracy is. The lack of control and lack of power of the Somali actors, on the other hand inform an alternative understanding of their actions distinct from those of the western mitigators. Arguably, there is a lacuna in how the actions of Somali actors are perceived in the West, and how the actions are being rationalised by the actors themselves.

A constructivist approach therefore questions “the underlying assumptions supporting social and historical approaches to understanding” both Somali piracy and state responses to violent armed non-state actors<sup>6</sup> and therefore examines the interests of two parties who are attempting to gain power in a particular circumstance and time period. The pirates are over what appears to be at first glance, a conflict trap and the western mitigators (international rules-based system) seeking power over the pirates to protect and maintain their interests – commercial shipping. From a constructivist perspective, “meanings, symbols and identities are subjective and are used by individuals, groups and society to gain and maintain power.”<sup>7</sup> So the self-identification of the Somali pirates have to be ascertained and western perceptions of piracy, understood. This approach may help explain why the western narrative and responses framed by this perspective, when applied to piracy, might actually compound and not erode the security problem- at best they may temporarily mitigate the problem as long as a deterrent is present. Pirate attacks still occur off

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<sup>6</sup> Lamy and Masker, pp. 18, 67.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

the coast of Somalia and an international maritime presence (European Union Naval Force Somalia Operation Atalanta) remains in operation to deter Somali pirate activity. In the first half of 2019, The International Chamber of Commerce's International Maritime Bureau (IMB) Piracy Reporting Centre reported 78 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships worldwide.<sup>8</sup>



Somali pirates captured by the European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Somalia Operation Atalanta. (Source: EU NAVFOR)

## Basic Social Processes and Community Relationships

The constructivist approach to observing and understanding the different perspectives of Somali pirates and western responders suggests that basic social processes - as it applies to both groups - is

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<sup>8</sup> Seas off West Africa World's Worst for Pirate Attacks, IMB Reports (July 8, 2009). Retrieved from <https://iccwbo.org/media-wall/news-speeches/seas-off-west-africa-worlds-worst-pirate-attacks-imb-reports/#targetText=Gulf of Guinea world piracy hotspot&targetText=Armed pirates in these high, then used in another attack.>



deemed worthy of deeper enquiry. Basic social processes are actions which the individuals under study carry out and which have the same meanings for that group.<sup>9</sup> It is suggested that each of the groups being analysed - the western responders and the Somali pirates - have a set of distinct social processes. Identifying the dominant interests of each group may prove to be an important step in understanding the motivations of both factions.

The approach may also establish a model which defines and describes the actions of the pirate groups but also demonstrates the relationships of the pirates to their communities and the basic social processes in which they are engaged. This approach might demonstrate that a theory based upon the miscommunication of two distinct sets of motivating factors and paradigms in the two respective communities, Somali pirate actor and western responder, is valid.<sup>10</sup>

Grounded theory assumes a particular philosophical perspective and a specific set of assumptions for each distinct group of actors being examined. The overall paradigm of a constructivist enquiry might then be framed within this context. Having identified the possibility of two different conceptualisations of the security problem of piracy, such an approach might then explore the possible juxtaposition of the two distinct perspectives (Somali post-positivist, post-colonial actor contrasted with the positivist, realist perspective and rationale of the Western response.) The objective of this distinction is to focus on the

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<sup>9</sup> Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategy for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldin Pub, 1967).

<sup>10</sup> Backman K., "Challenges of the Grounded Theory Approach to a Novice Researcher," *Nursing and Health Sciences*, Vol. 1, 1999, pp. 147-153.

impact and consequences of the international responses to piracy in both the onshore and offshore communities.

A review of the data should ensure that nuances and deviations are allowed to reveal themselves and not be subsumed by the prevailing western norms and definitions regarding piracy. In examining datasets regarding piracy, it is important that small points of deviation from the characteristics of normative conceptualisations of piracy are noted.

Such deviations might be considered significant markers in the development of the nature of Somali piracy both on and off shore. Indeed, the very existence of pirate actors operating ashore is itself definitionally problematic. An examination of the existing definitions being applied to the problem might follow with a view to establishing whether these definitions do or do not adequately account for either the act or actions being observed. It is also significant to note that established definitions of piracy were being changed in order to account for the activity - rather than the activity being labelled appropriately - based on distinguishing anomalies as a basis for classification.

It is suggested that the activity which creates the security problem should not be shoe-horned into a category in order to make it familiar and manageable, in the absence of any other label that might apply, to enable the possibility of addressing it with existing methodologies that fit that particular definition.

An analysis of some of the key variables which must be applied before considering either definitions and or policy determinations, for an effective elimination strategy should follow. In this case the key variables which might be addressed are:

- Globalisation and its twin- grey area phenomenon actors,
- Theoretical paradigm dissonance or the existence of multiple realities operating in conflicting paradigms.
- The effects of the application of state violence on non-state actors.

These three variables, it has been determined, play a role in the structure- agent effect on the development of the problem of piracy whereby they both inform and create the nature and consequently the definition of the problem under investigation. One of the objectives of a constructivist investigation is the contribution of new knowledge and a consideration of how possible new typological classifications might encompass these considerations, thus contributing to the development and application of more rigorous, tailored and effective long-term approaches to this problem and similar problems involving non-state violent transnational actors.

The constructivist approach might be utilised where the data suggests that either the generation of a new scientific theory or the adaptation of an existing theory is required. The establishment of a clear hypothesis is necessary in order to apply the scientific method- in order to combine existing knowledge, assumptions and observation - to the problem of Somali piracy. In particular, it seeks to understand and ultimately address the cause of the phenomenon being scrutinized. Where the problem does not fit into current accepted scientific theory and is either unexplained in motivation, action, act or definition, this process seeks to derive both a classification and an understanding for the occurrences classed as piracy. Such a study might not be efficiently approached from a positivist perspective as one of the main suppositions of this study is that the behaviour of the Somali actors has a meaning or causative root

which originates in their social construction and an interpretation of a specific reality unique to themselves.

A positivist approach would reduce this interpretation to a single objective reality which is valid to both the western responder and the Somali problem actor. Constructivist analysis rejects this notion and instead uses an interpretivist approach in decoding the socially constructed meanings of the actions by both groups. The aim of the study therefore is to zero in or focus on a process or a system by which meanings and consequently actions can be determined.<sup>11</sup> In order to understand how Somali activity came to be named “pirate” a study might explore how the actors on both sides of the study experience their version of a normative “reality.” The problem of Somali piracy might thus be explored as a social phenomenon and not as an objective act. The aim is to understand this phenomenon from the perspectives and motivations of both sets of actors given the assumption that both sets of actors are informed by two sets of unique social constructs. The study is therefore interpretivist in nature while fully cognisant of the dangers or tensions inherent in attempted objective interpretation of subjective experiences of the two sets of actors.

### **Distinguishing between Normative and Counter-normative Understandings of Piracy**

For the purpose of this enquiry, piracy should be examined from two distinct perspectives, a normative and counter-normative conceptualisation. A constructivist study therefore relies upon the interpretation of meanings and interests as being distinct to the two

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<sup>11</sup> T. A. Schwandt, “Three Epistemological Stances for Qualitative Inquiry: Interpretivism, Hermeneutics and Social Constructionism” in N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, eds. *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003), pp. 292-331.

conceptualisations (Western and Somali actors). This process might begin with ontology which is taken to mean how we refer to basic beliefs about what piracy is, and the nature of reality from the normative view. This belief is the basis for developing an epistemology which defines the nature of the relationship between the enquirer, what is known about piracy and what counts as knowledge on piracy, and on what basis we can make these knowledge claims. "Having a particular ontological position constrains the epistemological position you can logically hold. Methodologies, in turn, express ontology and epistemology in terms of how we know the world or gain knowledge of it."<sup>12</sup> The perspectives being employed have to first be made abundantly clear.<sup>13</sup> The primary aim of such an approach is to distinguish between the two perspectives. Understanding how each faction views Somali piracy (how west views piracy and how Somalis view piracy) – ontology - will determine the nature of our relationship to it.

## **Is It Important to Ask If Piracy Changed or Evolved ?**

One means of answering the above question might be to focus on a small number of cases to understand how and why they occurred in the way that they did and also to derive meaning from the reality in which these cases occurred rather than simply accepting the "hegemon determined" label of piracy ascribed as a result of the western experience of these acts. The dominant perspective on the problem has arguably been

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<sup>12</sup> Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 13 as cited by Barbara M. Grant and Lynne S. Giddings, "Making Sense of Methodologies: A Paradigm Framework for the Novice Researcher," *Contemporary Nurse*, Vol. 13, Issue 1, August 2002, pp. 10-28.

<sup>13</sup> H.J. Smyth and P.W.G. Morris, "An Epistemological Evaluation of Research into Projects and Their Management: Methodological Issues," *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol. 25, 2007, pp. 423-436.



derived by and for western knowledge. Understanding of the problem we might argue has been based on the effect of the activities of the Somali “pirates” on countries in the international rules-based liberal system. The context in which the realities and actions occur, or are seen from, becomes paramount.<sup>14</sup> One focus of a constructivist study might therefore not be limited to explaining or describing why the problem is occurring and how its nature was changing during the period under review but rather to understand why this change occurred and how varying perspectives of the same activity contributed to the nature of the change. One might argue that piracy is a specific set of actions conducted in a particular space in international waters. If the activities and locations are changing, then an interpretation of this change and its meaning and purpose ought to be considered and if possible, explained.

*Both piracy - the specific problem under investigation - and conflict do not occur in vacuums but in socially constructed contexts*

“Explaining” might be defined as describing how something works, and “understanding” might be defined as learning why it works that way. A constructivist study into Somali piracy would therefore seek to derive an understanding of why the problem of piracy was perceived as changing- by the actors-despite the label and description applied being objective and static (Piracy is piracy. It is an act with clear definitions

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<sup>14</sup> J. G. Carson, “A Task Analysis of Reading and Writing in Academic Contexts” in D. Belcher and A. Hirvela, eds., *Linking Literacies: Perspectives on L2. Reading-writing Connections* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), pp. 48-83.

and not an act which allows a dynamic range of interpretations).

A constructivist analysis suggests that both western responder and Somali actor interpret and determine their actions based on a reality which is specific to each. Interpretivism as a constructivist methodological approach might therefore be used as it supports the concept that realities can be multiple and relative to each actor.<sup>15</sup> This approach may help assess the suggestion that an escalation of intensity in conflict scenarios may be the result of exactly this dissonance between perceived realities and the interpretations of the experiences which inform mutual responses by both problem actor and the western rules based responder. A constructivist approach might therefore help develop an understanding that multiple realities - when viewed from a single western liberal rules-based, positivist objective perspective - might be missed and therefore unaccounted for, in western determinations of response strategy.

Such an approach suggests that if the behaviour displayed by the two sets of actors (western responders and problem actors) is understood to be occurring in two different conceptualisations of truth and situational awareness, this understanding might reveal set patterns in the development of this problem which were hitherto blocked from view by positivist definition and a single western reality perspective. These perspectives are distinct from each other but simultaneously occurring, both as the problem is unfolding and which emerge, as the constructivist methodology allows multiple perspectives and conceptualisations of the same issue to be investigated. This approach it is hoped, will reveal layers of action which were previously subsumed in definitional generalisation. While the aim is to generate or adapt existing scientific theory as a

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<sup>15</sup> Y. S. Lincoln and E. G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1985).

generality and this seems at odds with an interpretivist approach- the adaptation being suggested is that objective laws are possible but that the dynamic nature of these laws must be considered.

Both piracy- the specific problem under investigation -and conflict do not occur in vacuums but in socially constructed contexts. The relativity of time, culture, context and values held by the actors and responders are therefore important variables which “universal” laws must take into account since all conflict scenarios are dynamic and positivist labels cannot be fixed, given the fact that these occur as a result of social interaction.

Based on the assumptions in the chart above, a constructivist approach suggests that western responders have determined their response actions based on a single objective reality and positivist approach to dealing with the Somali problem.

It is suggested that an objective Western reality, based on the experience of the West, and the application of linear causal models to account for this experience cannot determine how to resolve the problem at root, because mitigation conceived in one reality will not be relevant or effective in another socially constructed reality. This methodological approach rejects the application of one dimensional causal models to account for problem behaviour as these models and assumptions pre-judge and imply one set of rigid accepted hegemonic meanings to actions and consequently result in a fixed or rigid response regardless of the unique paradigm which each scenario presents. By paradigm we refer to the uniqueness of context which constitutes a particular culture, set of norms, prevailing conventional wisdom and specificity of time in which the problem is occurring. There are dangers inherent in this interpretivist approach, in particular, polemical views which result from bias toward one group of actors since the method requires the researcher to take cognisance of each subset of actors, whilst attempting to

objectively categorise and classify the observations in order to discern meanings and motivations.

This has been accounted for by keeping the study grounded in “understanding” the situation rather than in trying to present outcomes and to solve the problem or to take a view on the question of right and wrong. While the researcher is using interpretivism based grounded theory to observe and collect information on each perspective (using constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling) and interpret actions based on social contexts and meanings, cognisance must be given to the fact that this is a western piece of research seen through and interpreted through western eyes. The meanings applied may be simplistically presented within the context of understanding available to the researcher who is not a member of either subset of actors. Awareness of postcolonial orientalism in the determination of meanings is therefore paramount. Such a constructivist approach does not seek to speak the truth but to present a truth situated between Somali experience and western responder experience in order to better view the problem not from within either paradigm but from a position where it is possible to view both realities (Somali and western responder) simultaneously.

**Figure 1. Differences between Positivism and Interpretivism**

<b>Assumptions</b>	<b>Positivism</b>	<b>Interpretivism</b>
<b>Nature of reality</b>	Objective, tangible, single	Socially constructed, multiple
<b>Goal of research</b>	Explanation, strong prediction	Understanding, weak prediction
<b>Focus on interest</b>	What is general, average, representative	What is special, unique or deviant
<b>Knowledge generated</b>	Laws, absolute (time, context and value free)	Meanings, relative (time, context, culture, value bond)
<b>Subject/ Researcher relationship</b>	Rigid separation	Interactive, cooperative, participatory
<b>Desired information</b>	How many people think and do a specific thing, and have a specific problem	What some people think and do, what kind of problems do they encounter, how do they deal with them

Source: A. M. Pizam and Y. Mansfield, eds., *Consumer Behaviour in Travel and Tourism* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

## **Developing a Framework for a New Maritime Violence Typology**

The data used for a constructivist approach should focus on selected pirate incidents which denote a change in tactics and direction from other contemporary and geographically relevant, “pirate” occurrences within the same geographical and temporal space. Incidents might be

simply presented in summary as physical evidence that demonstrate a marked change in behaviour by the problem actors. These incidents might be considered marker incidents. All incidents of piracy during the period under review need not be presented but rather, the cases which denote anomalies to the accepted international legal definition. Interpretivism as a constructivist, methodological approach allows for selectivity of this nature as the intention is to account for deviations from the generalisation.<sup>16</sup>



Pirates off Somalia (Source: United Nations)

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<sup>16</sup> In particular, the cases selected were selected on the basis of their being specific, unique and deviant from "piracy." The classification comes from the work of A. Pizam and Y. Mansfield, *Consumer Behaviour in Travel and Tourism* (New York: Routledge, 1999).



Data for these assumptions (for the theoretical sampling which will allow anomalies to be highlighted and separated as distinct from the general category of “piracy”) could then be collected and codified into various categories of activity for consideration within a maritime crime typology matrix.<sup>17</sup> Developing such a typology would involve a “recursive, theory driven comparative process in order to surface links and relationships among categories to construct a theoretical framework.”<sup>18</sup> In this way, the typology might reference and classify the anomalies observed in the development of the nature of Somali “piracy,” within the context of other maritime crime. In order to accomplish this, theoretical sampling should follow until theoretical saturation<sup>19</sup> which might surface the possibility of unacknowledged distinct phases of activity. Previously all activity in the area during the entire period under review was categorised under the heading of piracy as a single distinct set of actions and occurrences. This generalisation is what a constructivist approach might deconstruct with the aim of identifying how western mitigation might have inadvertently shaped

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<sup>17</sup> Theoretical sampling is “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges.” B. G. Glaser and A. L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967), p. 45.

Theoretical saturation occurs when the data reveals no further ambiguity. For a fuller discussion, see C. M. Kelshall, “Conceptualisations of Contemporary Transnational Threats: The Case of Somali Piracy and Its Threat Evolution. An Examination of How Conflict Mitigation Choices Can Worsen Conflict Scenarios” (Ph.D. diss., University of Buckingham).

<sup>18</sup> K. Locke, “Rewriting the Discovery of Grounded Theory after 25 years?” *Journal of Management Inquiry*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1996, pp. 241.

<sup>19</sup> M. Lewis-Beck and T. Liao, *The Sage Encyclopaedia of Social Science Research Methods*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004).

identifying how western mitigation might have inadvertently shaped these changes in the nature of the activity engaged in by Somali actors.

## **Understanding the Outcomes of Mitigation**

Viewing and observing actions from the perspective of differing social realities leads to the constructivist, interpretivist goal of understanding- not of simply recording or counting without reference to meanings and interpretations -as is expected in a positivist study of the same issue. In this case understanding the two realities and how this may have led to definitions and responses which may not be valid for one of the binary actors. It may also possibly account for actions or changes to the security problem which were unexpected.

From this perspective, a constructivist study develops an understanding of the reasons if any, for the actual outcomes of mitigation activity by western responders- in relation to the results which mitigation activity was projected to deliver.

While the outcomes generated would be specific to the culture, geography and particulars of this occurrence there are some generalities which might be discerned. A constructivist enquiry might distil these generalities into a reflective document which might inform policy and mitigation in similar scenarios in the future. The study therefore seeks to establish the possibility that a framework might be discernible within which we can classify and categorise the intentions as well as the acts and actions under investigation. Such a framework might be useful if applied in examining future occurrences where state response against non-state actors is a mitigation strategy. Such a framework must be dynamic in nature as constructivism suggests that there can be no static definitions for security problems as these indicate

a uni-dimensional and uni-paradigmatic approach to an issue.

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# Taiwan's Transition to an All-Volunteer Force – A Policy Assessment and Recommendations

By Vanessa Molter

## Introduction

In January 2019, Taiwan completed its seven-year transition from military conscription to an all-volunteer force (AVF)<sup>1</sup> system. Across partisan lines, Taiwanese administrations had supported a policy of gradually reducing conscription time from a peak of two years for the Army and three years for the Navy, Air Force, and Marines before 1990, to only four months of military training for Taiwanese males born after January 1, 1994. (There is no conscription for females.) (See Table 1)

As the one-year conscription since 2008 left only about nine months of active duty service after basic training, Taiwanese policy makers decided to further reduce conscription and introduce an all-volunteer force. Conscripts now enter the work force earlier and reconnect with society faster than before, reducing social costs and allowing for more freedom of Taiwan's youth. As a result, public support for an AVF policy

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<sup>1</sup> "All-volunteer force" is actually a misnomer for the Taiwanese case, where males are still subject to a four-month conscription period, although the active duty force no longer relies on these conscripts.

has been high, despite government officials, military leaders, and scholars disagreeing about the viability and sustainability of an all-volunteer force for Taiwan.

With an AVF, policy makers have argued, Taiwan can improve combat capabilities<sup>2</sup> by achieving a “highly skilled, innovative, high-tech force”<sup>3</sup> that experts maintain Taiwan requires for modern combat. This modern force, despite its higher cost, should thus enhance Taiwan’s defense readiness, as a smaller, better-trained force will be better suited to operate modern weapons.

**Table 1**

Year	1954	1990	2000	2004	2005
Service time	Army: 2y; Navy, Air Force, Marines: 3y	2y	1y 10m	1y 8m	1y 6m
	2006	2007	2008	2013	
	1y 4m	1y 2m	1y	4m training for those born after Jan. 1, 1994	

Source: Tse-Chun Pu, “Military Volunteer System of the Republic of China (Taiwan)” (August 2019).

<sup>2</sup> “Ministry of National Defense Press Release Regarding the Media Coverage of ‘Combat Capability Impacted by the Cancellation of Conscription?’” Ministry of National Defense (MND), Republic of China (ROC), February 16, 2019, <https://www.mnd.gov.tw/english/Publish.aspx?title=Defense%20News&p=76066>.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Mazza, *Taiwanese Hard Power: Between a ROC and a Hard Place* (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 2014), p. 211.

In an AVF, personnel changes are much less frequent – minimum enlistment for volunteers is now four years – which allows for better training and a build-up of experience among service personnel. As a result, Taiwan can invest more into training service members, and achieve a better-trained force with a higher level of expertise. As opposed to conscripts, who only undergo a few months of basic training, volunteers receive an additional two to six months of specialist training. In fact, average service time<sup>4</sup> has increased from 2.73 years in 2016 to 3.30 years in 2018 when new all-volunteer conscripts completed their minimum four-year service.<sup>5</sup> This service time increase also allows for longer use of specialist’s capabilities, reducing education expenses.

However, the all-volunteer policy lacks military leadership support. Some senior officials grudgingly express that they do not consider the AVF to be a good policy for Taiwan and wish instead that (longer) conscription were still the case.<sup>6</sup> In light of this criticism, current AVF policy implementation efforts and challenges need to be assessed to determine how policy implementation and sustainability could be improved to enhance Taiwan’s defense readiness.

## **Taiwan’s Current Efforts**

To achieve a successful transition to the AVF, Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense (MND) has raised salaries for military personnel, through both an increase in base pay as well as the introduction of a

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<sup>4</sup> A service time of less than 1 year is weighted as 0.5 years in this calculation.

<sup>5</sup> Data provided by the MND upon author’s request (MND, ROC, August 14, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, all also stated that it is the government’s decision they cannot change and need to accept.



system with attractive bonuses and benefits. For example, the base salary for a voluntary enlisted Private1 (requires secondary education degree) is now NT \$34,340,<sup>7</sup> exceeding salary expectations of even new university graduates at NT \$33,053.<sup>8</sup> In addition, according to data published by Taiwan's Ministry of Labor, 77% of recent university graduates<sup>9</sup> earn NT \$45,000 or less (See Figure 1),<sup>10</sup> below entry-level base pay for officer base (requires undergraduate degree) of NT \$48,990.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "National Army 2019 Volunteer Soldier Selection Guide (國軍 108 年志願士兵甄選簡章)" (Recruitment Center of National Armed Forces, June 21, 2019), [https://rdrc.mnd.gov.tw/userfiles/files/05 志願士兵/第 2 次修頒國軍 108 年志願士兵甄選簡章.pdf](https://rdrc.mnd.gov.tw/userfiles/files/05%20志願士兵/第2次修頒國軍108年志願士兵甄選簡章.pdf).

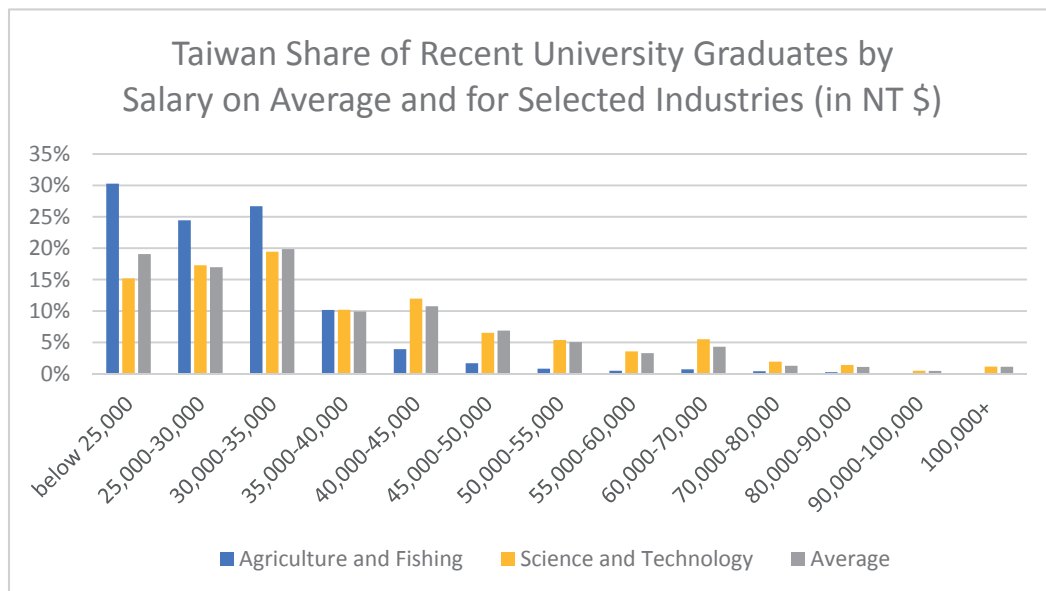
<sup>8</sup> Yi-chu Tsai and Frances Huang, "Anticipated Starting Salaries for New Graduates NT\$33,053: Survey," March 2, 2018, <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aeco/201803020018.aspx>.

<sup>9</sup> Graduated within the last five years, including both undergraduate and graduate degrees and paying pension.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Labor, "College Graduate Full-Time Salary Scale as of April 2019 (108 年 4 月底大專畢業生全時工作薪資統計表)," "Salary Market and Employment Navigation for College Students, Labor Pension Contribution Inquiry (薪資行情及大專生就業導航 勞工退休金提繳查詢)," accessed August 30, 2019, <https://yoursalary.taiwanjobs.gov.tw/salary/cgi-bin/cognosisapi.dll>.

<sup>11</sup> "Career Path and Salary Explanation (生涯願景與薪資待遇說明)," Recruitment Center of National Armed Force, July 20, 2018, <https://rdrc.mnd.gov.tw/EditPage/?PageID=3ada0d3c-245c-4db0-8d97-2e53736d4668>.

**Figure 1 – Ministry of Labor Graduate Full-Time Salary Scale / Author's Calculations**



Moreover, retention incentives introduced in 2015 offer up to NT \$100,000 for volunteers who extend their four-year minimum service by 3 years.<sup>12</sup> Additional bonuses and incentives include combat job allowances, off-island allowances for those serving on postings on Taiwan's small offshore islands, cyber warfare pay and more.

In addition to pay increases, the MND introduced further benefits aimed at improving personnel's quality of life. The major areas it has targeted are military barracks renovation, improving living facilities, reconstructing retirement homes, and re-issuing combat equipment. In 2018, 32 military barracks were renovated, which affected 684 families, and living facilities were improved in 401 cases.<sup>13</sup> Further benefits include increased cooperation with civilian schools to expand education

<sup>12</sup> Pu, "Military Volunteer System of the Republic of China (Taiwan)."

<sup>13</sup> Pu.

opportunities for military personnel, with 71 diploma programs offered in addition to 50 certification programs in twenty categories. Education opportunities have also expanded with a growing Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program, which went from only seventeen participants in 2016 up to over 700 participants in 2019.<sup>14</sup>



Commencement of the R.O.C. Air Force Academy. (Source: Youth Daily News)

Concurrent with these benefits, the MND has boosted its recruitment efforts. In 2016, Taiwanese university and high school students and faculty still had little knowledge about military job tasks and responsibilities.<sup>15</sup> To counter this problem, the MND has established partnerships with 139 colleges and 506 senior high schools and

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<sup>14</sup> Pu.

<sup>15</sup> Pu.

vocational schools,<sup>16</sup> a pillar in the recruitment strategy. To strengthen these partnerships, senior military officials are now visiting schools in addition to recruiters. Recruitment officials are also considering offering financial and other incentives to school officers and teachers to encourage students to enlist.

*The number of volunteers in the Republic of China military has increased from 124,000 in 2014 to 158,000 in 2018.*

The MND's efforts seem to be paying off, as the number of volunteers in the Republic of China military has increased from 124,000 in 2014 to 158,000 in 2018.<sup>17</sup> However, the AVF policy faces several challenges and threats to a successful and sustainable implementation.

## **Challenges to a Successful All-Volunteer Force System in Taiwan**

### **1. Excessive Cost**

As a result of the AVF transition, personnel expenses have increased by 11.4% from NT \$149 billion (US \$ 4.74 billion) in 2014 to NT \$166 billion (US \$5.29 billion) set aside for personnel expenses in the 2020 defense budget. Since the current number of 158,000 volunteers is still

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<sup>16</sup> "Ministry of National Defense Press Release Regarding the Media Coverage of "Conscription Cannot Be Fully Abolished, Difficult in Recruiting Reserved Non-Commissioned Officers, Recruitment Is Unable to Maintain a Long Period of Stable Manpower"," MND, ROC, July 8, 2019, <https://www.mnd.gov.tw/english/Publish.aspx?title=Defense%20News&p=76462>.

<sup>17</sup> Pu, "Military Volunteer System of the Republic of China (Taiwan)"; "Press Release," July 8, 2019.

well short of the targeted 188,000, personnel expenses will likely continue on this increasing trend. The MND has furthermore declared it intends to continuously improve pay and allowances for personnel, including an increase for combat jobs pays and further education and training incentives.<sup>18</sup> This might prove necessary because, as the United States experience shows, personnel cost in an AVF steadily increases since the military competes for talent with the civilian economy.<sup>19</sup> Growing personnel expenses are now less problematic due to the recent 5.2% defense budget increase to NT \$358 billion for 2020,<sup>20</sup> up from NT \$340 billion in the current year.<sup>21</sup> The budget for non-personnel expenses in 2020 at NT \$192 billion indicates a continuation of an upward trend that began at NT \$171 billion in 2018, after a stagnating between 2014 and 2018. (See Figure 2)

Such an increase could help to alleviate widespread worries about budgetary tradeoffs and decreased overall defense readiness<sup>22</sup> caused

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<sup>18</sup> Pu, "Military Volunteer System of the Republic of China (Taiwan)."

<sup>19</sup> Phillip Carter et al., "AVF 4.0: The Future of the All-Volunteer Force" (Center for a New American Security, March 28, 2017), <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/avf-4-0-the-future-of-the-all-volunteer-force>.

<sup>20</sup> "2020 Central Government General Budget and Subsidiary Unit Budget and Summary Table (109 年度中央政府總預算案暨附屬單位預算及綜計表)" (Executive Yuan, August 15, 2019), <https://www.ey.gov.tw/File/2C34DE4673F1785E?A=C>.

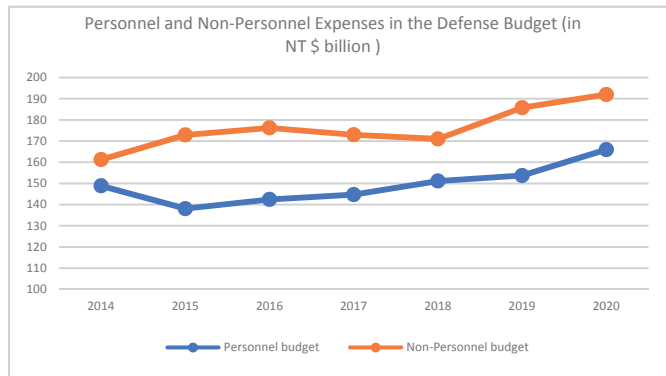
<sup>21</sup> "Statutory Budget Book of the Ministry of National Defense, 2014-2018 (103-108 年度國防部所屬單位法定預算書表)," MND, ROC, October 30, 2017, <https://www.mnd.gov.tw/Publish.aspx?p=71877&title=政府資訊公開>.

<sup>22</sup> Carter et al., "AVF 4.0;" Michael Cole, "Taiwan's 'All-Volunteer' Military: Vision or Nightmare?," *The Diplomat*, July 9, 2013, <https://thediplomat.com/2013/07/taiwans-all-volunteer-military-vision-or-nightmare/>; Craig Murray and Kyle Churchman, "Taiwan's Declining Defense Spending Could Jeopardize Military Preparedness," *Washington: US-China*

by the AVF transition. Nevertheless, with the upcoming January 2020 presidential election, the budget increases could be reversed. Although the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) president Tsai Ing-wen has increased defense spending in the context of increased economic growth helped by the U.S.-China trade war,<sup>23</sup> a resolution to the trade war could slow growth and weaken the justification for this increased spending. Moreover, academics at the National Policy Foundation, a think-tank affiliated with the opposition Nationalist party (Kuomintang, or KMT) are urging defense budget cuts,<sup>24</sup> which could foreshadow the policy decisions of a KMT president.

As a result, the cost of the AVF remains a central challenge to its success in Taiwan. High personnel cost could force the MND to adjust its recruitment target of 188,000 volunteers or risk harming defense readiness, undermining the overall policy target.

**Figure 2 – MND Statutory Budget Book/Author’s Calculations**



*Economic and Security Review Commission, 2013; "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019" (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2019).*

<sup>23</sup> Ing-wen Tsai, "Facebook post on Tsai Ing-wen's page," Facebook, August 1, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/tsaiingwen/posts/10155986524506065>.

<sup>24</sup> Abraham Gerber, "KMT Academics Decry Military Spending," *Taipei Times*, May 16, 2017, <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2017/05/16/2003670684>.



## 2. All-Volunteer Force Quality

Another central concern is the quality of Taiwan's all-volunteer force. The AVF policy was introduced as a way to improve personnel quality by increasing the average duration of service and allowing for a small, well-trained force. However, chasing numerical targets, Taiwan's military officials do not (yet) emphasize personnel quality in their recruitment. In addition, under the AVF system, the military no longer has guaranteed access to highly educated youth. Previously, highly educated Taiwanese youth were required to serve for a year or longer, yet now they can opt to stay for only four months, instead finding high-paying jobs in the civilian sector. Subsequently, the AVF transition does not guarantee higher quality personnel and could even lead to a smaller, costlier, but lower-quality military force for Taiwan.

## 3. Decreased Reserve Force Readiness

Simultaneously, the AVF policy could negatively affect defense readiness through the reserve forces. In the Taiwanese system, former conscripts (and veterans) enter the mandatory reserve forces upon their completion of service. With decreases in conscription time, reservists are now less well trained than before, entering the reserve forces with only four months of experience. Taiwanese military officials argue that conscription was still preserved at a level that allows for necessary basic training, but a 2017 report by the RAND Corporation on Taiwan's reserve forces finds that the current training approach could be "inadequate for maintaining the readiness of (...) reserve units" who

*Even if problems with budget and quality are solved, Taiwan's demographics still pose a long-term threat to a successful AVF.*

engage in combat <sup>25</sup>. The same report also finds that the Reserve Command does not have the needed funding for frequent and realistic training needed to maintain reservists' skills (Easton et al., 2017), which might be alleviated by the recent budget increase. Moreover, concurrent with a smaller active duty force, the share of reservists with professional military experience is shrinking, affecting the reserve forces' overall quality.

#### **4. Taiwan's Unfavorable Demographics**

Even if problems with budget and quality are solved, Taiwan's demographics still pose a long-term threat to a successful AVF. Unless the MND can achieve recruiting an unusually high percentage of the working-age population,<sup>26</sup> it will struggle to fill its ranks and will be faced with uncomfortable policy choices in years to come. Around the introduction of the AVF policy in 2015, Taiwanese men aged 15 to 29 amounted to 2.438 million people.<sup>27</sup> For 2030, the estimate in the same age bracket is only 1.680 million, a sharp reduction.<sup>28</sup> (See Figure 3) Considering Taiwan's total fertility rate <sup>29</sup> of 1.175 children per

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<sup>25</sup> Ian Easton et al., "Transformation of Taiwan's Reserve Force" (RAND Corporation, 2017), X.

<sup>26</sup> If all males aged 15-29 are considered as the volunteer force recruitment pool, this would mean in 2020, 8.36% of this group need to enlist, which increases to 11.19% for 2030. Respective figures for the United States are 3.79% and 3.88% (at a force of 1.3 million) UN DESA / Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2019," 2019, [https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/..](https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/)

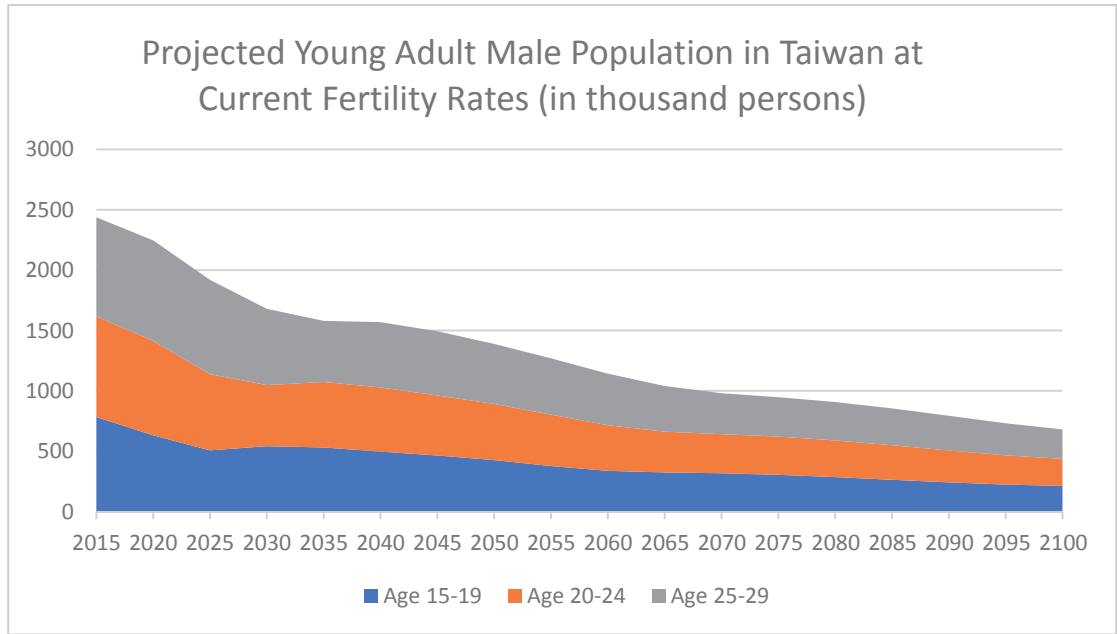
<sup>27</sup> UN DESA / Population Division, see Figure 2.

<sup>28</sup> UN DESA / Population Division.

<sup>29</sup> The total fertility rate equals the average number of children that would be born per woman if all women lived to the end of their childbearing years and bore children according to a given fertility rate at each age

woman,<sup>30</sup> the third lowest globally, this problem will likely not be solved any time soon.

**Figure 3 -- Author's Calculation / UN DESA Population Division 2019**



## 5. Risk of Deteriorating Civil-Military Relations

Last, the all-volunteer force policy could cause a further deterioration of Taiwan's civil-military relations. For instance, four-month conscripts complain that much of their service time is spent performing menial tasks or waiting (sometimes for hours) to use equipment shared with several others.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, incidents like this help to foster views that military personnel do not fulfill useful tasks. Under longer conscription periods, young Taiwanese men would typically undergo more rigorous training and serve on active duty, both experiences

<sup>30</sup> UN DESA / Population Division, "World Fertility Data 2017," 2017, <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/dataset/fertility/wfd2017.asp>.

<sup>31</sup> Author's interview with former conscript Lin Chung-hsien in Taipei, August 3, 2019.

which could improve their perceptions of military service. However, the conscription experience in the current environment might even lower the public's general support for the military in both budget and ideology. The fact that the young generations - who have not experienced war and question high military spending - first engage with the military in this less than ideal manner exacerbates the perception problem.

Moreover, recruitment officials admit that although students from various backgrounds are interested in serving, ethnic minorities and lower income groups as well as those with military family members are overrepresented among the new volunteers.<sup>32</sup> As a result, Taiwan's military without conscription is less representative of society, with certain population groups bearing a disproportionate share of the burden for defending Taiwan.

## **Policy Recommendations**

As discussed before, the MND has implemented various policy changes such as pay increases, facility improvements, and educational benefits to achieve a successful transition to the AVF system. Nevertheless, various challenges have put at risk the ability to achieve and sustain increased defense readiness through the all-volunteer force policy. Taiwanese policy makers can take various steps to address these challenges.

### **1. Improve Basic Training for Both Volunteers and Conscripts**

The AVF was introduced to ensure a higher quality in the Taiwanese military. But the foundation for criticism regarding the capabilities of

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<sup>32</sup> Author's interviews with the ROC National Armed Forces recruitment officials, August 2019.

active duty soldiers and reservists remains unchanged: inadequate training. Currently, conscripts in basic training only shoot a weapon a handful of times despite a training duration of multiple months. Moreover, conscripts in basic training are assigned unnecessarily inflated menial tasks, such as performing cleaning duties before going to sleep and the same ones again after getting up. It is unacceptable that young people – volunteers or not – are forced to spend months in training where they perform several such tasks instead of maximizing their learning and training for a better defense of Taiwan.



The “Path of Heaven” of the R.O.C. Marines Amphibious Reconnaissance and Patrol Unit. (Source: Youth Daily News)

To maximize trainee capabilities, Taiwanese policy makers should consult with education and learning experts to reform basic training in military tasks and standards. This improved training could also counter criticism from conscripts who complain their time was “wasted” by

serving in the military because of ineffective and tedious training.<sup>33</sup> Improved basic training would not only enhance capabilities of both active duty and reserve personnel but likely also support recruitment efforts by improving both the military's public image as well as the service members' job satisfaction. In conjunction with basic training, reservist training is also in need of reforms that in addition to reservist capabilities, reservist training could improve morale among Taiwanese civilians and bolster the public's confidence in Taiwan's ability to defend the homeland.

## **2. Develop a More Successful, Cost-Effective, and Resilient Recruitment Strategy**

### **a. Increase spending on recruitment**

Although pressure on recruitment has arguably increased since the AVF transition, this was not matched with an increase in the recruiting budget or change in recruitment strategy. Despite potentially unsustainable cost, the military's recruitment strategy still relies heavily on economic appeal for volunteers. Instead of continuous pay raises, increased recruitment spending could be a cost-saving way to recruit volunteers for the AVF. According to former US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness and Force Management Frederick Vollrath, investing more in military recruitment is an efficient and cost-saving way of increasing the number of forces.<sup>34</sup> This assertion is

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<sup>33</sup> Philip Tsien, "Begrudging Service," *Taipei Times*, July 19, 2018, <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2018/07/19/2003696933>; Author's interview with former conscript Lin Chung-hsien in Taipei.

<sup>34</sup> Frederick Vollrath, "Panel 2: Current Issues and Future Challenges of the All-Volunteer Force," *The All-Volunteer Force: A Symposium in Honor of Water Oi* (September 23, 2014).



supported by experimental studies conducted at the time of the US transition to an all-volunteer force.<sup>35</sup>

**b. Emphasize non-monetary benefits of service**

Moreover, the heavy reliance on pay disregards other factors potential service members consider when making their decision to enlist and re-enlist, which includes quality of life for military families. A study by the RAND Corporation found that the US Department of Defense's past neglect of the needs of service members and their families after the transition to an all-volunteer force led to a low level of enlistment and low quality in recruits in the US military before improvements were made.<sup>36</sup> As an AVF tends to be older due to longer service times, the share of those with dependents is higher as well.<sup>37</sup> In its recruitment strategy, the MND needs to consider such aspects for a better return on its investments. For example, it could highlight in the recruitment strategy non-financial benefits and incentives such as health insurance for spouses and dependents, improved family housing, and education benefits that can also improve career opportunities after retiring from service.

In addition, recruiters could emphasize moral aspects of service such as fulfilling one's duty and protecting one's country. If volunteers perceive their work as honorable, they might be willing to accept lower salaries than those attainable to them in other occupations. Given the low

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<sup>35</sup> Gus W. Haggstrom and Bernard D. Rostker, "An Analysis of Recruiter Productivity in the Air National Guard" (RAND Corporation, October 1974).

<sup>36</sup> Bernard D. Rostker and K. C. Yeh, *I Want You!: The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force* (RAND Corporation, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> Christopher J. McMahon and Colin J. Bernard, "Storm Clouds on the Horizon—Challenges and Recommendations for Military Recruiting and Retention," *Naval War College Review* 72, no. 3 (2019), p. 7.

prestige of the military in Taiwan's society, such a change in perception might be difficult yet should still be attempted through recruitment campaigns. Some successful examples to brand military occupations as honorable include videos shared on the MND spokesperson's Facebook page.<sup>38</sup> In one video, young soldiers explain their reasons for joining the military – duty, honor, patriotism, family – in their respective mother tongue, which includes Mandarin, Taiwanese, and Aboriginal languages.<sup>39</sup> Recruiters could show such videos in their visits to schools and promote them on their own online and social media presence.

### **c. Better support for veterans' transition to civilian life**

Another aspect that has been neglected in recruitment is ensuring veterans' smooth transition to civilian life upon leaving military service. This transition fundamentally affects perceptions around military employment and Taiwanese youth's willingness to enlist. In the US, successful veteran transition to civilian life was found as key to recruitment.<sup>40</sup> The MND now offers certifications and six-month training for military personnel who have served for ten years or more, which are meant to increase veteran employment opportunities beyond the infamous "three bao" – security (保全, bǎoquán), insurance (保險,

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<sup>38</sup> Military Spokesman's Facebook Page, accessed August 31, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/MilitarySpokesman/>.

<sup>39</sup> Military Spokesman, "All-round national army – All-round guardian (全方位國軍 全方位守護)" (April, 2019) <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=585389918623614>.

<sup>40</sup> Phillip Carter et al., "AVF 4.0: The Future of the All-Volunteer Force" (Center for a New American Security, March 28, 2017), <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/avf-4-0-the-future-of-the-all-volunteer-force>.

bǎoxiǎn), and funeral services (寶塔, bǎotǎ).<sup>41</sup> Considering that only 36 out of the 6,952 volunteers leaving the service in 2018 completed service times of 10 years and longer, with 89.2% leaving after 4 years or less, this measure does not affect volunteers at large.<sup>42</sup> A cost-effective way to support veterans could be helping them find and apply for jobs that fit their skills, support in writing applications, or even offering preferential tax treatment for companies that employ veterans. Veterans could also be hired as civilian recruiters by the MND, sharing their own military experiences with those interested in serving.

#### **d. Recruit more conscripts and veterans**

Conscripts could be a key recruitment demographic since they are both qualified to serve and exposed to the military. However, currently only unit-level recruiters interact with conscripts. Recruitment center personnel, who better understand the overall recruitment strategy, focus only on visiting schools and university campuses. Through also targeting conscripts by regularly touring conscript training sites and organizing recruitment events, recruitment center personnel could support unit-level recruiters.

The Taiwanese military should also consider its prior service personnel as a recruitment target. Returning service women and men would already have valuable knowledge and skills when starting their service, which reduces training expenses and increases the level of experience and expertise in the forces. Moreover, according to internal MND surveys, the most frequently cited reason volunteers leave the military

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<sup>41</sup> MND, ROC, "Career Planning," Recruitment Center of National Armed Force, July 27, 2018, <https://rdrc.mnd.gov.tw/EditPage?PageID=d19afef9-6bc9-4b00-96ef-51b0609dc595>.

<sup>42</sup> Data provided by the MND upon author's request.

before the end of their enlistment period is a failure to adapt to the military life.<sup>43</sup> Having lived a military lifestyle, veterans might find it easier to adapt and could thus be more likely to stay and succeed.

**e. Reach out to youth directly through social media**

Currently, the MND's recruitment strategy relies on partnerships with schools and universities, usually helped by so-called military instructors (教官),<sup>44</sup> military officials stationed at schools and universities. However, a proposed legal change would require that these military instructors leave campuses by 2023, weakening ties between the military and schools and their students.<sup>45</sup> If not revised as military recruitment officials hope, this law could undermine military recruitment and its effectiveness. To prepare for such a scenario, the MND should diversify its recruitment approach to better reach out directly to potentially interested youth.

One timely step is developing the military's recruitment social media presence and online strategy. Recent surveys show that social media and mobile device usage are very popular especially among Taiwanese

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<sup>43</sup> Data provided by the MND upon author's request.

<sup>44</sup> In Taiwan's unique system, a military instructor is stationed at most senior high schools and universities to help enforce discipline measures, teach all-out defense courses, and serve as a point of contact for students interested in military service.

<sup>45</sup> "Preview of the amendment to Article 8 of the 'National Defense Education Curriculum Contents and Implementation Measures for All Levels of Schools' 教育部公告：預告「各級學校全民國防教育課程內容及實施辦法」第8條修正草案" (The Executive Yuan Gazette Online (行政院公報資訊網), January 26, 2018), <https://gazette.nat.gov.tw/egFront/detail.do?metaid=96254>.

youth.<sup>46</sup> Establishing social media presences, for example in the form of a Facebook page or LINE account, could support military recruitment efforts together with the existing commendably mobile device-optimized recruitment website (rdrc.mnd.gov.tw). In addition, existing YouTube accounts of the MND could be better leveraged for recruitment for example through cooperation with popular Taiwanese YouTubers and other figures that have influence among young Taiwanese. Military recruiters should assess which kinds of videos are especially popular among the target demographic to decide which ones to promote.<sup>47</sup> An online recruitment strategy can help assess various ways in which recruitment can be aided through social media and online advertisement to find the most effective steps to take.

### **3. Increase Retention**

#### **a. Consider military family needs**

As mentioned above, service members strongly consider quality of life for their families when deciding on re-enlistment. Renovations of current military housing could help improve quality of life, but further efforts are needed. For example, the MND could help military spouses find employment after re-location or support with finding schools for service members' children. The MND should first conduct surveys among military families to understand which (cost-effective) policies would effectively advance their quality of life.

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<sup>46</sup> Jalen Chung and Frances Huang, "LINE Tops Other Social Media among Taiwanese Smartphone Owners," *Focus Taiwan*, February 2, 2016, <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/ast/201602020027.aspx>; "Survey: 90% of Youth on Social Media," *Taipei Times*, July 11, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Some videos have been viewed only a few hundred to a few thousand, while others count hundreds of thousands of views.

#### **b. Increase incentives for good leadership**

Leaders who create learning opportunities and try to increase their soldiers' job satisfaction are also contributing to increasing capabilities and improving retention. However, military officers presently have strong incentives to perform the more challenging, interesting tasks themselves rather than teaching their subordinates. If such a task is delegated successfully, officers are not rewarded, but still face punishment in case of a mistake. The MND should create incentives for good leadership, for example adding retention rates to the existing factors considered for promotion to a higher rank.

#### **c. Offer retention incentives aimed at well-trained key personnel**

In addition, the MND should consider allowing for (some) flexibility in pay, rank, and career progression for its exceptionally talented personnel. With a better-trained AVF, retention is even more critical, and such flexibility could allow for special accommodations of key personnel to increase their duration of service.

### **4. Educate the Public on the Threat to Taiwan**

Absent a threat to national security, serving in the military can seem like a waste of time. However, in face of an increasingly assertive and aggressive China, the threat to Taiwan's security is very real despite low public threat perception.<sup>48</sup> A public information campaign could address this by raising public threat awareness, which can help justify an increased defense budget and build public support for recruitment.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "White Paper: China's National Defense in the New Era" (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, July 2019).

<sup>49</sup> Albert Willner, "Implications of Recent and Planned Changes in Taiwan's Defense Posture," in *New Opportunities and Challenges for Taiwan's Security*, by Roger Cliff, Phillip C. Saunders, and Scott Harold (RAND Corporation, 2011), pp. 81–88.

## Conclusion

Taiwan has taken several commendable steps to achieve a successful transition to an AVF. Increases in personnel pay, recruitment efforts, as well as expanded education opportunities and improved facilities have led to continuous achievement of recruitment targets. The latest increase in the defense budget has further improved financial sustainability of an AVF in Taiwan.

However, several challenges remain. Personnel costs are likely to increase further, and could threaten the all-volunteer force's financial sustainability. Moreover, recruitment efforts have not yet been modernized and face a significant challenge posed by Taiwan's demographics and sharp reduction in available youth in the near future. It is not yet clear how Taiwan's military will adapt. Personnel targets may have to be lowered, or some alternate form of longer conscription introduced to support the AVF.

The threat posed to reserve force capabilities by less well-trained reservists has also not been mitigated. Taiwanese leadership needs to consider restructuring basic training for short-term conscripts and volunteers both to ensure maximum defense readiness and also to counter criticism that even short conscription is a waste of time. If the four-month conscripts experience their service time as rewarding and instructive, there could be more public support for re-introducing longer conscription should Taiwan's security environment and demographic challenges require it.

Overall, it is not yet evident the AVF transition has resulted and will result in the overarching policy goal of creating a more effective, better trained force that improves Taiwan's defense capabilities and readiness.



Taiwanese policy makers should avoid equating achieved recruitment targets with benchmarks for judging the success of the Taiwanese AVF transition. Rather, they should assess Taiwan's defense needs, and consider reserve force and recruitment budgets and training procedure as important components in this strategic structural shift. With capable reserve forces, an even further reduction of Taiwanese active-duty personnel could be plausible. However, at current readiness levels, a decrease in active-duty personnel would further impair Taiwan's defense readiness. Reforming basic training and diversifying the recruitment strategy should be the primary steps the MND takes to increase AVF sustainability and broaden future policy choices.

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## Submission

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