



上海國際問題研究院

SHANGHAI INSTITUTES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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Volume No. 38

Jan. 2025

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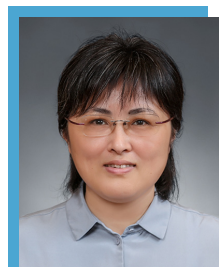
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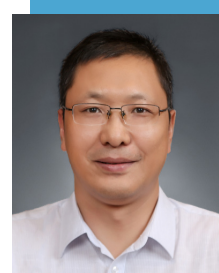
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Overview

In February 2022, the Biden administration released the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States. This strategy inherits the basic framework of the Trump administration's Indo-Pacific strategy, aiming to strengthen the United States (U.S.) dominance and further contain China's influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Over two years of implementation, the strategy has seen mixed results. While progress to different extents in areas such as politics, security, economics, and technology has enhanced the U.S. presence in the region, it has fallen short of its intended leadership objectives on the whole. The failure to meet the objectives of containing China and maintaining U.S. dominance in the Asia-Pacific region is attributed to three main reasons. Firstly, the U.S. has overestimated its own capabilities. Secondly, it has underestimated the pursuits of Asia-Pacific nations to safeguard their interests and seek regional stability and openness. Thirdly, it has undervalued China's significant influence in the region. Amid sweeping polarization and populism in America's political landscape, the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy itself is marked by remarkable uncertainties. With Donald Trump winning the 2024 U.S. presidential election, much of the political and security "legacy" of the Biden administration's strategy may be substantially inherited and even reinforced by the new administration. However, the great vacillation of Trump's international economic policies and Trump administration's disregard for human rights suggest that the economic and value-based aspects of the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy hang in the balance and are likely to be weakened. From a Chinese perspective, the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy is strongly colored by an intent to contain China and is viewed as a destabilizing factor for the Asia-Pacific region's peace, stability, and prosperity, rather than as a constructive force. For Asia-Pacific nations, it is facilitating for maintaining regional peace, stability, and development and serves the common interests of all sides to transcend regional divisions and jointly build an Asia-Pacific community with a shared future. Such a community requires synergistic partnerships and constructive engagement from all sides.

The term "Indo-Pacific" is a geopolitical concept fabricated by the U.S., aimed at erasing the widely recognized term of Asia-Pacific and thus further eliminating the effective framework of regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. While this concept was initially proposed by U.S. strategists in the early 21st century, it only rose to the level of national strategy under the Trump administration. The Biden administration has inherited and reinforced the Indo-Pacific strategy proposed by its predecessor.

This strategy poses considerable potential disruptions to the peace, stability, and integration of the Asia-Pacific region. Centered on maintaining U.S. hegemony, it unjustly portrays China as the primary challenge or even threat in the Asia-Pacific region. Based on the strategy, the U.S. has implemented a series of measures that severely undermine the post-Cold War peace, stability and security of the region, as well as its sound momentum of mutually beneficial cooperation. Asia-Pacific nations need to respond proactively under the guidance of the vision of building a community with a shared future.

CHAPTER I

Mixed Results: Evaluating the Biden Administration's Indo- Pacific Strategy

Chapter I

Mixed Results: Evaluating the Biden Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy

On February 11, 2022, the Biden administration issued the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, outlining five key objectives, namely to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific, build connections within and beyond the region, drive regional prosperity, bolster Indo-Pacific security, and build regional resilience to transnational threats. The document also proposed ten core initiatives to achieve these strategic objectives.¹ On February 9, 2024, the U.S. Department of State published a report marking the two-year anniversary of the release of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, asserting "accomplishments" in advancing the five objectives and ten initiatives. In particular, these accomplishments "reflect not only American leadership, but also an unprecedented level of cooperation with allies, partners, and friends across the region." In spite of the accomplishments, challenges have also grown.² Meanwhile, from the perspective of nations in the region, while the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy has made progress in areas such as politics, security, economics, and technology, fortifying the U.S. presence and influence to some extent, it has largely failed to achieve its goals. More critically, the strategy, which is centered on containing China, has heightened geopolitical confrontation and security risks in the region. It has disrupted the open and cooperative regional order and acted as a destabilizing force for regional peace, stability, and prosperity, rather than as a constructive power.

1 "The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States," The White House, February 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

2 "The United States' Enduring Commitment to the Indo-Pacific: Marking Two Years Since the Release of the Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy," U.S. Department of State, February 9, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-enduring-commitment-to-the-indo-pacific-marking-two-years-since-the-release-of-the-administrations-indo-pacific-strategy/>.

I Political Achievements

The Biden administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy outlines three primary political objectives. Firstly, "build connections within and beyond the region," namely to cement relations with regional allies and partners. Secondly, "advance a free and open Indo-Pacific," namely to advance regional governance. Thirdly, "shape the strategic environment in which China operates, building a balance of influence in the world that is maximally favorable to the United States," namely to contain China. Overall, the objective of cementing relations with regional allies and partners has been largely achieved, that of advancing regional governance has seen little success, and that of shaping the strategic environment in which China operates has been partially realized. Despite strengthened U.S. leadership over its Asia-Pacific allies, the overarching goal of achieving regional leadership has failed to be fulfilled.

1. Remarkable Success in Strengthening the Alliance System.

Firstly, prominent achievements have been made in building small-scale multilateral political and security alliances. While bolstering bilateral alliances such as those with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the Philippines, as well as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) with Japan, India, and Australia, the Biden administration has exerted itself to establish a batch of small multilateral political and security networks in the region, including many trilateral dialogue and cooperation mechanisms like AUKUS (U.S.-U.K.-Australia), U.S.-Japan-ROK (South Korea), and U.S.-Japan-Philippines together with the U.S.-Japan-Australia-Philippines dialogue mechanism. These small-scale multilateral mechanisms have considerably altered the traditional hub-and-spoke alliance structure of the U.S. dominated by bilateral alliances in the Asia-Pacific region, and reshaped its security architecture in the region.

Secondly, the U.S.'s relations with partners in the region have improved. Compared to the Trump administration, the Biden administration has substantially increased its diplomatic engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. By frequently participating in regional multilateral summits, conducting summit visits and high-level visits, and opening additional consulates, the U.S. has expanded its diplomatic presence and influence in the region, improved its relations with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), India, and Pacific Island nations, and consolidated practical cooperation with relevant partners in various areas. These intensive diplomatic efforts are an integral part of the Biden administration's strategy to shape the strategic environment in which China operates and compete with it for regional influence.

2. Lackluster Performance in Advancing Regional Governance.

Efforts by the Biden administration to "advance a free and open Indo-Pacific" have largely fallen short, characterized by high rhetoric but limited substantive outcomes. The goal of advancing regional

governance as outlined in its Indo-Pacific Strategy has basically come to naught.

Firstly, the Asia-Pacific region has not become "freer". While the Biden administration initially showed great enthusiasm for promoting democratic governance, as evidenced by hosting two consecutive editions of the Summit for Democracy, these efforts failed to produce tangible results. Over time, as realism has gradually dominated U.S. foreign policy, the Biden administration's commitment to advancing democratic governance has been weakened. It has invested substantial diplomatic resources to address issues such as Myanmar's democracy and the Rohingya crisis, which it deems as the core issues for advancing democratic governance in the Indo-Pacific. However, it has failed to secure broad regional support or achieve substantial progress. The administration also struggled with the human rights situation in Indian-administered Kashmir and was plunged in a dilemma between the advocacy of human rights and development of U.S.-India relations. Finally, it prioritized realistic interests over human rights concerns. Furthermore, criticism and sanctions by the U.S. targeting countries like North Korea, Myanmar, India, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Bangladesh did little to change their behavior and, instead, exacerbated tensions with these nations. The frustration in the policy of advancing democratic governance stems largely from perceptions of U.S. hegemony and interference in domestic affairs, which underlies this policy and prompts concerns and resistance from relevant countries in the region.

Secondly, the Asia-Pacific region has suffered a setback in openness. The Biden administration's exclusive practices in conjunction with its allies and partners in critical technologies and supply chains, particularly the practice where China—Asia's largest economy and the largest trading partner of Asian countries—is excluded, have disrupted the region's economic systems. The previously open economic system based on division of labor and cooperation in East Asia, built on comparative advantages and economic efficiency, has become increasingly complicated and inefficient. Geopolitical factors introduced by the U.S. have increasingly interrupted economic openness and cooperation in the region.

3. Limited Success in Shaping the Strategic Environment in which China Operates.

The core objective of the Indo-Pacific Strategy proposed by the Biden administration is to shape the strategic environment in which China operates, and form a geographical situation in the Asia-Pacific region that is maximally favorable to the U.S. as well as its allies and partners. This essentially involves roping in more countries in the region to join the U.S. bloc to confront and contain China. However, over two years of implementation, this goal remains far from fully realized. While the Biden administration has bolstered the U.S. presence and influence in the Asia-Pacific region and succeeded to a certain degree in reinforcing the geopolitical containment of China by establishing small multilateral alliance networks and solidifying ties with partners in the region, its attempt to shape the strategic environment in which China operates has been considerably constrained by three factors.

Firstly, the U.S. has overestimated its ability to reshape the regional environment. The cornerstone of the Biden administration's strategy to shape the strategic environment in which China operates has

been its attempts to strengthen alliances and partnerships in Asia-Pacific. While some progress has been made in enhancing U.S. leadership over its regional allies, engagement with non-allied nations has been less effective. With protectionism raging at home, the U.S. has struggled to offer attractive economic and trade public goods to the entire region, apart from making security commitments to a select few allies. Compounding these challenges, global crises such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Israel-Palestine conflict have diverted strategic resources away to Europe and Middle East although the administration expected to invest more resources into the Asia-Pacific region and concentrate efforts on dealing with China. The U.S.'s overstretched commitments and resource constraints have hindered its ability to effectively shape the strategic environment in which China operates.

Secondly, the U.S. has underestimated the interest demands of Asia-Pacific nations. The policies of Asia-Pacific nations towards China tend to diverge fundamentally from that of Washington. Unlike the U.S., they generally do not perceive structural conflicts with China. While some nations have varying degrees of friction with China, their engagement with the U.S. is often aimed at balancing regional power and safeguarding regional stability by resorting to the U.S. as an external power rather than containing China. Most Asia-Pacific countries prioritize maintaining positive relations with both China and the U.S., seeking benefits from both. These countries are unwilling to get entangled in the geopolitical game between the two countries or pick sides between them. Aggressive U.S. efforts to implement anti-China policies have provoked concern and opposition from other nations in the region. Even its close allies such as Japan, Australia, and South Korea, which also take into consideration their interests in relations with China, remain cautious about fully aligning with Washington's radical policy towards China and getting embroiled into the fierce confrontation between the two countries, favoring cooperation with China.

Thirdly, the U.S. has underestimated China's influence in the Asia-Pacific region. As the world's second-largest economy and the largest trading partner for many Asia-Pacific countries, China wields tremendous influence in the region and will not subject itself to the manipulation of the U.S. Unlike the U.S., when dealing with neighboring countries, China adopts a diplomatic approach centered on building friendship and partnership, emphasizes respect for internal affairs and choice of the path for development by each country, adheres to open regionalism, dedicates itself to mutually beneficial cooperation, and forges ahead with integrated development. This strategy has earned China widespread respect, and most Asia-Pacific nations view China as a partner rather than a threat. According to a 2024 survey by Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, China has edged past the US to become the prevailing choice if the region were forced to align itself in the on-going US-China rivalry. In 2024, 50.5% of respondents expressed preference for China, a notable increase from 38.9% in 2023. The US as a choice dropped from 61.1% in 2023 to 49.5%.³ This marked the first time since the survey was launched that China's preference rating surpassed that of the U.S. This shift in regional sentiment is a blow to the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy that has been implemented for over two years.

³ Seah Sharon, et al., *The State of Southeast Asia 2024 Survey Report*, Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2024, p.5, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/The-State-of-SEA-2024.pdf>.

II Security Achievements

In the realm of security, the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy has stepped up efforts to assure the absolute security of the U.S. and its select allies at the expense of common and universal security of the region.

1. Strengthening U.S. Security Presence and Military Deterrence.

The Biden administration has cemented the U.S. military's deterrence in the Western Pacific, basically implemented the security measures outlined in its Indo-Pacific Strategy and fortified the U.S. security presence and military deterrence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Firstly, great progress has been made in forward military deployments. The Biden administration has prioritized deterring a potential conflict over Taiwan, which is a core element of its Indo-Pacific security strategy, and invested considerable efforts to bolster "distributed" forward military deployments. Apart from deployments in the Territory of Guam, the U.S. has enhanced its anti-ship capabilities in Japan, improved its logistical support capacities in Australia, established four additional military bases in the Philippines, signed a defense agreement with Papua New Guinea, and renewed Compacts of Free Association with several Pacific Island nations. Collectively, these measures have strengthened U.S. forward military presence across the Western Pacific.

Secondly, U.S. security alliances have been markedly fortified and Indo-Pacific-NATO security linkages have improved. The AUKUS alliance (Australia, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.) has advanced efforts to provide nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, and integrated the UK, a European power, into the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific framework. This has established a robust security "iron triangle" in the southern Indo-Pacific. The U.S.-Japan-South Korea trilateral mechanism has eased tensions between Japan and South Korea, two key U.S. allies in the region. Reinforced cooperation among the three nations in defense and intelligence has helped the U.S. buttress the Northeast Asian "iron triangle." Taking the Russia-Ukraine conflict as an opportunity, the Biden administration has expedited collaboration between the two major geographical blocs of Indo-Pacific and Europe, and facilitated the joint attending by Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand in the NATO summit for the first time. Meanwhile, the administration has fueled ridiculous rhetoric such as "Ukraine today, Taiwan tomorrow," encouraging NATO nations to involve themselves in affairs like South China Sea and Taiwan Strait.

Thirdly, Enhancing Military Capabilities of U.S. Allies and Partners and Increasing Military Pressure on China. The Biden administration has ramped up defense industrial cooperation with Japan, India, Australia, and South Korea, focusing on defense technology, advanced weapons development, together with joint production, procurement, repair and maintenance. It has also enhanced maritime military capabilities of the Philippines, Vietnam, and the Taiwan region of China through arms sales & transfers, military training, and financing. The U.S. has conducted frequent "freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs)," joint military exercises, and close reconnaissance missions in waters

surrounding China, while encouraging the Philippines to challenge China over disputes on reefs and islands in the South China Sea.

2. Sacrificing Common and Universal Security of Asia-Pacific, Exacerbating Tensions in the Region.

The security policies pursued by the Biden administration reflect a zero-sum, bloc confrontation-based approach that prioritizes security of the U.S. and its allies at the expense of security of other countries in the region by sacrificing their security interests and squeezing their security space. What has got strengthened is the unilateral and absolute security of the U.S. and its select allies, rather than collective and universal security of the region. These actions have not resolved U.S. security concerns but has exacerbated great power geopolitical rivalries and existing security challenges in the Asia-Pacific region, increasing the risk of conflict of the entire region.

Firstly, tensions in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea have exacerbated. By resorting to the idea of “Using Taiwan to Contain the Chinese Mainland,” the Biden administration has been reinforcing its political and security support for Taiwan, as evidenced by arms sales, training programs, and high-level interactions, and challenging the "One China" principle, contributing to rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait. In 2022, the controversial visit by then-Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan sharply escalated the risk of conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Since 2022, the Biden administration has positioned the Philippines as a proxy to counter China in the South China Sea. Encouraged by U.S. support, the Philippines has constantly engaged in provocative actions and confrontations at disputed sites such as the Second Thomas Shoal and Sabina Shoal, leading to escalating tensions in the region.

Secondly, risks of U.S.-China maritime incidents have risen. The measures implemented by the U.S. to "shape the strategic environment in which China operates" have further eroded security trust between the U.S. and China, increasing the likelihood of maritime conflicts. The U.S. has conducted frequent FONOPs, close reconnaissance activities, and joint military drills near waters surrounding China. These actions have increased the chances of U.S. and Chinese military forces coming into close contact, raising the potential for unintended maritime clashes. Weakening crisis management between the two nations has exacerbated the risk of maritime incidents spiraling into larger-scale military conflicts, threatening regional stability.

Thirdly, deterrence of North Korea by the U.S. has produced the opposite effect, inadvertently leading to renewed Cold War dynamics in the Korean Peninsula. Although the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy claims to pursue denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula through sustained diplomacy, in practice, it has largely abandoned attempts to negotiate with North Korea and been bent on military deterrence. After the initiation of Russia-Ukraine conflict, increasingly closed U.S.-ROK (South Korea) and Russia-DPRK (North Korea) military cooperation have brought the Korean Peninsula much closer to a militarized, Cold War-style confrontation, leaving the goal of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula increasingly unachievable.

III Economic Achievements

The IPEF is the economic pillar of the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy, which essentially serves to maintain U.S. economic hegemony globally and in the Asia-Pacific region. While this strategy has achieved certain results, it faces deep-seated constraints due to the U.S.' lack of willingness and ability to provide long-term economic and technological public goods.

1. The Layout of the Biden Administration's Indo-Pacific Economic Strategy

Firstly, multilateral and bilateral approaches advance together. The Biden administration's Indo-Pacific economic strategy covers both multilateral and bilateral dimensions in the Asia-Pacific region. Multilateral efforts include promoting the establishment of the IPEF, which currently comprises of 14 members (the U.S., Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and Fiji); emphasizing leveraging the Quad mechanism (U.S., Japan, India, and Australia); deepening economic and technological cooperation with Japan and South Korea; and advancing agreements such as the U.S.-Japan-Philippines pact. Bilateral efforts include strengthening ties with five treaty allies in the region (Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand) and fortifying partnerships with India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, Vietnam, Taiwan of China, and Pacific Island nations.

Secondly, multiple objectives overlap. The Biden administration's Indo-Pacific economic strategy serves multiple objectives. First, to promote the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). This framework aims to establish new trade strategies that align with labor and environmental standards, while simultaneously addressing three areas, namely supply chains, clean economies, and equitable economies. These are collectively called the four major pillars. Second, the Biden administration has pledged to redouble efforts to assist regional allies in addressing infrastructure deficits. The U.S. has invested most endeavors into removing 5G and telecom technologies of Chinese companies such as Huawei from the Indo-Pacific market under the pretext of supplier diversification. Finally, the U.S. seeks closer cooperation with key regional allies to jointly establish rules for economic activities in the 21st-century.

Thirdly, there is a core focus on containment of China. The Indo-Pacific Strategy document released by the Biden administration makes no secret of its stance: "This intensifying American focus is due in part to the fact that the Indo-Pacific faces mounting challenges, particularly from China." On April 27, 2023, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan declared at the Brookings Institution that the U.S. would use a "small yard, high fence" approach to prevent China from obtaining sensitive technologies. These efforts are clearly aimed at curbing China's technological progress and economic growth.

2. Certain Achievements

Firstly, the relocation of trade away from the Chinese Mainland has made progress. (1) U.S. imports from China have witnessed a significant drop. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. imports from China decreased from \$504.653 billion in 2021 to \$427.525 billion in 2023, a decline of 15.3%. China has fallen from the top source of U.S. imports to third place. (2) U.S. imports from most of its allies and partners have risen considerably. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. goods imports in 2023 from Australia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, India, Singapore, Vietnam, and Taiwan of China increased by 36.4%, 9.4%, 22.0%, 19.0%, 14.0%, 39.2%, 12.2%, and 13.9%, respectively, compared to 2021. (3) Most of the U.S.' allies and partners have seen a decline in their dependence on China for exports and imports. See Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of Dependence on Goods Import and Export Between the U.S. and Chinese Mainland Among U.S. Allies and Partners in the Indo-Pacific

IPEFIPEF Members	Export Dependence				Import Dependence			
	On the Chinese Mainland		On the U.S.		On the Chinese Mainland		On the U.S.	
	2021	2023	2021	2023	2021	2023	2021	2023
Australia	33%	33%	4%	4%	27%	25%	10%	11%
Japan	22%	18%	18%	20%	24%	22%	11%	10%
South Korea	25%	20%	15%	18%	23%	22%	12%	11%
New Zealand	33%	28%	11%	12%	24%	21%	9%	10%
Indonesia	23%	25%	11%	9%	29%	28%	6%	5%
Malaysia	15%	13%	11%	11%	23%	21%	8%	7%
Singapore	15%	14%	9%	9%	13%	14%	10%	12%
Brunei	20%	17%	0%	1%	8%	10%	3%	4%
Thailand	14%	12%	15%	17%	25%	24%	5%	7%
Philippines	15%	15%	16%	16%	23%	23%	7%	7%
India	5%	4%	19%	18%	16%	15%	8%	6%
Fiji	6%	3%	20%	21%	15%	16%	11%	3%
Vietnam	17%	17%	29%	27%	33%	34%	5%	4%
Taiwan of China	28%	22%	15%	18%	22%	20%	10%	12%

Source: WIND. Note: Fiji's 2023 data is unavailable and replaced with 2022 data.

Secondly, the U.S. has forcibly shifted global and Asia-Pacific capital flows. (1) Global investments as well as those of the U.S.'s Asia-Pacific allies in the U.S. have witnessed a significant increase. According

to an International Monetary Fund (IMF) report, nearly one-third of global cross-border capital flowed to the U.S. from 2021 to 2023, up from 18% before the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from the U.S. Department of Commerce show that direct investment stock in the U.S. from Australia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, New Zealand, and India grew by 12.5%, 5.3%, 15.9%, 23.2%, 10.2%, 10.6%, and 33.4%, respectively, between 2021 and 2023. (2) Foreign direct investment (FDI) in China has been declining year by year. According to the World Investment Report 2024 released by the UN Conference on Trade and Development, FDI in China fell from \$180.967 billion in 2021 to \$163.253 billion in 2023, a decrease of 9.8%. The IMF reported that from 2021 to 2023, China attracted only 3% of global cross-border capital, down from the pre-pandemic figure of 7%. The Ministry of Commerce of China reported that in the first half of 2024, actual foreign capital use in the Chinese Mainland dropped by 29.1% year-on-year.

Albeit the progress, the U.S.' Indo-Pacific Strategy has not received effective support from international capital. (1) U.S. capital continues to flow into the Chinese Mainland. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. direct investment stock in China based on historical costs climbed from \$116.003 billion in 2021 to \$126.908 billion in 2023, a growth of 9.4%; (2) U.S. investment in major Asia-Pacific allies has declined. Data from the U.S. Department of Commerce show that in 2023, U.S. direct investment stock based on historical costs fell by 40.3%, 6.6%, 3.9%, 3.7%, and 27.5% in Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, and New Zealand, respectively, compared to 2021; (3) Actual direct investment of the U.S.' major Asia-Pacific allies in China has risen rather than decreased. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics, in 2022, actual direct investment in China from Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam rose by 3.4%, 17.7%, 63.1%, 66.7%, 58.3%, 1,843.1%, 2.6%, and 16.7%, respectively, compared to the previous year.

Thirdly, progress has been made in IPEF negotiations. The IPEF comprises four pillars of cooperation, namely Trade, Supply Chain, Clean Economy & Energy Transition, and Tax & Anti-Corruption. With strong geopolitical attributes and exclusivity, the IPEF effectively represents an "economic cold war" targeting China. Its goal is to build a U.S.-centered economic alliance system, forcing participants to choose sides between China and the U.S. In November 2023, the IPEF concluded substantive negotiations on the Clean Economy Agreement and the Fair Economy Agreement and signed the Supply Chain Agreement. In June 2024, the Clean Economy Agreement and the Fair Economy Agreement were officially signed. Only the trade agreement remains under negotiation.

Fourthly, efforts to decouple U.S. critical and emerging technologies and key minerals from China have intensified. (1) The Quad (U.S., Japan, India, and Australia) has actively pursued China-exclusion cooperation in critical and emerging technologies and their standards. At the first Quad Leaders' Summit in March 2021, the Quad Critical and Emerging Technology Working Group was launched. At the second Quad Leaders' Summit in May 2022, a new Memorandum of Cooperation on 5G Supplier Diversification and Open RAN was adopted, which focused on advancing China-exclusion technological standards cooperation through the Telecommunication Standardization Sector under the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and decided to form a new international standards collaboration network excluding China. (2) The U.S., Japan,

and South Korea have made concerted efforts to decouple China from the supply chains of critical and emerging technologies. At their first Trilateral Leaders' Summit in August 2023, they pledged strong cooperation in economic security and technology. Plans were laid to strengthen supply chain resilience by focusing on cooperation in semiconductors and batteries, technology security and standards, clean energy and energy security, biotechnology, critical minerals, pharmaceuticals, artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, and scientific research. (3) The U.S. and the Philippines are preparing a nickel agreement. The Biden administration is in talks with the Philippines, the world's second-largest nickel producer, to curb China's dominance in the global nickel processing industry. A trilateral arrangement is being considered, where the Philippines would supply nickel raw materials, the U.S. would provide funding, and Japan, South Korea, or Australia would offer smelting and refining technology.

3. Constraints on U.S. Economic Leadership in the Asia-Pacific region

Despite certain successes of the Indo-Pacific Economic Strategy, the U.S. lacks willingness and capacity to provide long-term economic and technological public goods to the Asia-Pacific region. Meanwhile, the IPEF's inability to offer U.S. allies and partners greater access to the U.S. market undermines its appeal in advancing the framework and other multilateral or bilateral arrangements. For example, the inability to lower tariff rates for other member countries has cost the U.S. key bargaining chips and hindered the promotion of U.S.-style labor and environmental standards during negotiations.

In summary, over the past two years, the economic aspects of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy have faced mounting challenges, particularly in the following four areas.

Firstly, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy violates the laws of the market, reducing the efficiency of regional industrial cooperation and thereby limiting strategic alignment of regional nations with the U.S. The Biden administration's attempt to reshape regional supply chains on the production side has shifted them from "fully open" to "limited open" structures, inevitably leading to decreased production efficiency. The welfare losses caused by the so-called "re-localization of production" strategy often outweigh the benefits of previous international cooperation. In particular, backed by industrial advantages and technological strengths derived from its complete industrial classifications, China has established deeply intertwined and complex supply chain connections with the U.S. and most countries in the region. Potential "replacement nations" have to overcome severe constraints in industrial development, labor productivity, infrastructure, and business environment.

Secondly, U.S. commitments to aid or invest in Indo-Pacific infrastructure remain unfulfilled. The promise in the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy to "redouble our commitment to helping Indo-Pacific partners close the region's infrastructure deficit" remains at the rhetorical or document level. The pledge made at the Quad Leaders' Summit in May 2022 to provide over \$50 billion in infrastructure aid and investment to the Indo-Pacific region within five years is far from being realized. In June 2024, the IPEF launched a "Catalytic Capital Fund" to support financeable clean

economy infrastructure projects. However, the founding countries of the fund, including Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the U.S., are expected to only provide an initial contribution of \$33 million.

Thirdly, Indo-Pacific countries have significant concerns about the IPEF. Countries such as Vietnam and Malaysia hope that the U.S. will make more concessions and provide tangible assistance in areas like market access, climate change, and infrastructure development. Malaysia's former Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob urged the U.S. to "adopt a more active trade and investment agenda" with ASEAN. Notably, many countries in the region have close economic and trade ties with China and worry that constructing "China-exclusion" supply chains will inevitably harm their own interests. Moreover, the IPEF may lead to internal competition within the Asia-Pacific region, undermining long-standing regional economic cooperation mechanisms. Jacque Gao of Singapore's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) noted that although Southeast Asian countries have greatly benefited from U.S.-China competition, such as absorbing relocated supply chains and witnessing remarkable increases in FDI, they should not depend on either China or the U.S.

Fourthly, the establishment of new rules for containment of China has not gone smoothly. At the launch ceremony of the IPEF, President Joe Biden declared that the U.S. is writing the new rules for the 21st century economy. The IPEF is partly designed to leverage U.S. dominance in rule-making and its "first party" role at the top of supply chains to build a "technology alliance" excluding China. This alliance seeks to dominate the formulation of standards and regulations in areas such as the digital economy, labor, and the environment. However, these high standards and rules disregard the actual needs and development conditions of developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region, potentially increasing production costs and raising technological barriers, thereby hindering their economic development and industrial upgrading. Given that Asia-Pacific countries do not enjoy corresponding reciprocal treatment, such as access to the U.S. market, the IPEF is a testament to unfairness and imbalance. Prabir De, from the Research and Information System (RIS) for Developing Countries in New Delhi, noted that India may also be uncomfortable with the U.S. high standards, and that the IPEF talks about digital governance but the IPEF formulation contains issues that directly conflict with India's stated position.⁴ Phan Cao Nhat Anh, a researcher from the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, similarly pointed out that different arrangements by the IPEF members for environment and labor issues may render it difficult to reach a consensus on the framework.⁵ In September 2022, India announced its withdrawal from the IPEF trade agreement negotiations. In June 2024, India and Vietnam did not sign the IPEF Clean Economy Agreement. Furthermore, the U.S.'s goal of completing IPEF negotiations within 12 to 18 months has not been realized. Evidently, the Biden administration's efforts to establish new rules that contain China through the IPEF have encountered continuous frustrations.

4 "India Accepts Three out of Four Pillars of US-led IPEF, So Why Has It Stopped Short of a Total Agreement?" September 10, 2022, The Indian EXPRESS, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/us-ipef-india-accepts-three-pillars-stopped-short-total-agreement-8142554/>.

5 "IPEF: A New Way ahead for Vietnam," Vietnamnet.vn, January 30, 2024, <https://vietnamnet.vn/en/ipef-a-new-way-ahead-for-vietnam-2245030.html>

IV Science and Technology Achievements

The Biden administration has attempted to constrain China's technology industry and weaken its position in supply chains by means of measures targeting technology, raw materials, and production. However, the continuous imposition of U.S. technological sanctions on China has depleted its policy options. Furthermore, India and other countries in the region have limited capacity to provide strategic support to the U.S. in technology industry. Coupled with the increasing economic and industrial interdependence between ASEAN countries and China, as well as the growing benefits of their cooperation, the above two factors have imposed multiple constraints on the U.S. China-containment policies and made it unlikely for the administration to achieve its strategic objectives.

1. Building a Technology Alliance to Contain China

Firstly, the U.S. has been drawing countries in the region like India to establish a regional technology cooperation system aimed at containing China. Since 2018, its allies such as Japan and South Korea have gradually aligned with U.S.-led policies to curb China's technology development mainly through export controls and investment limitations. However, these containment efforts have not met U.S. expectations. To bolster the overall technological advantages of its alliance system and step up technological blockade of and competition with China, the U.S. has been recruiting partners like India, which offers significant technology application scenarios, to join its containment of China. India, driven by geopolitical tensions with China, aspires to gain U.S. support in areas such as technological innovation and transfer through strategic cooperation with Washington.

Secondly, the U.S. has been attempting to limit China's sources of critical mineral imports to undermine its industrial capabilities. Globally, China is the largest consumer of numerous minerals and holds a dominant position in refining and processing of minerals. However, due to its limited reserves and poor mineral endowments, some of China's minerals have seen a widening supply and demand gap, and its dependency on foreign markets for certain minerals, such as copper, chromium, aluminum, nickel, cobalt, and lithium, remains high. ASEAN and Australia are major suppliers of critical minerals to China. For example, Indonesia and the Philippines are its key suppliers of nickel ore and smelting products, Australia is its largest supplier of lithium concentrate, Australia and Indonesia are its major providers of bauxite, while Myanmar, Vietnam, and Malaysia are its main suppliers of rare earths. China is highly dependent on regional countries for these minerals. China boasts enormous scale and technological advantages in critical mineral processing industries, making it challenging for the U.S. to undermine its industrial position in basic industries during the efforts to decouple from China. Consequently, the Biden administration has emphasized critical minerals as a tool in its strategic competition with China. Under the Indo-Pacific Strategy framework, the U.S. has sought to build exclusive supply chains and cooperation mechanisms for critical minerals in the Asia-Pacific region to target China, including the Quad, G7, and IPEF. This strategy aims to restrict China's sources of mineral imports and its investment in mining projects, thereby creating conditions for weakening its industrial capabilities.

Thirdly, the U.S. has been committed to reconstructing the industrial chain, supply chain, and value chain systems of the Asia-Pacific region through cooperation mechanisms such as the IPEF. Since the U.S. launched a trade war with China, the industrial chain, supply chain, and value chain cooperation between China and ASEAN countries have become increasingly close due to geographical proximity and interdependence in industrial gradient transfer, which has had a profound impact on global industrial division and financial order. In response, the U.S. government seeks to erode China's industrial collaboration with regional countries, thereby bolstering its economic and financial hegemony.

2. Vigorous Construction of China-containment Technology Alliance

The Biden administration's technology industry policies under the Indo-Pacific Strategy framework focus on building mechanisms and expanding agendas in technology, critical minerals, and industrial chain collaboration.

Firstly, with a focus on building cooperative mechanisms as well as proposals and actions, the U.S. works to contain the development of China's technology industry by means of technology cooperation and alliance with Asia-Pacific countries. In the Indo-Pacific Strategy report released in February 2022, the U.S. emphasized that promoting cooperation in critical- and emerging-technology areas as an essential component of its efforts "to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific." Following the alignment of South Korea and Japan with U.S. containment policies toward China, the U.S. has been vigorously encouraging India to join its China-containment technology alliance. In May 2022, the leaders of the U.S. and India announced the "U.S.-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology" (iCET) which is designed to enhance and expand strategic technology partnerships and defense industrial cooperation between the two countries' governments, enterprises, and academic institutions. At the inaugural iCET meeting in January 2023, the two sides identified biotechnology, advanced materials, and rare earth processing technologies as areas for future cooperation. On June 17, 2024, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval co-chaired the second meeting of the iCET in New Delhi. Both sides underscored their commitment to orienting our cooperation around breakthrough achievements in priority critical and emerging technology areas so as to ensure they stay at the leading edge of innovation; and they also resolved to prevent the leakage of sensitive and dual-use technologies to countries of concern.⁶

Secondly, the U.S. and its allies in the region attempt to restructure the regional supply system of critical minerals by focusing on bilateral initiatives and the IPEF. As a small and closed multilateral mechanism, the IPEF Supply Chain Agreement proposes establishing institutional mechanisms such as a supply chain council. However, due to its limited enforceability, the U.S. mineral supply chain layout in the region will still rely on previously established interconnected bilateral mechanisms established and led by the U.S. and its allies. For instance, in October 2022, Japan and Australia

⁶ "Joint Fact Sheet: The United States and India Continue to Chart an Ambitious Course for the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology," The White House, June 17, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/06/17/joint-fact-sheet-the-united-states-and-india-continue-to-chart-an-ambitious-course-for-the-initiative-on-critical-and-emerging-technology/>.

announced the establishment of a critical minerals partnership. In March 2023, the U.S. and Japan signed the U.S.-Japan Critical Minerals Agreement. In May of the same year, the U.S. and Australia pledged to strengthen bilateral cooperation under a Climate, Critical Minerals and Clean Energy Transformation Compact in order to support the expansion and diversification of clean energy and critical mineral supply chains. Moreover, India and Australia have also enhanced their bilateral critical minerals investment partnership. Notably, both the U.S. and Australia have been attempting to strengthen critical mineral cooperation with Vietnam, primarily because the latter is the world's second-largest rare earth provider. In March 2024, during the Vietnamese Prime Minister's visit to Australia, their bilateral relationship was upgraded to a "comprehensive strategic partnership," and both sides committed to promote cooperation in critical minerals through ministerial-level dialogues. As the U.S. and its allies increasingly position Vietnam as an alternative to parts of China's supply chain, critical minerals are becoming a key area of collaboration with Vietnam.

Thirdly, the U.S. government seeks to leverage developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region to develop mid-to-low-end industrial chains independent of China, while retaining the high-end segments of industrial chains within the U.S. or its core allies. In view of the difficulties in revitalizing the U.S. primary manufacturing and the failure to achieve the desired outcome of "decoupling" from China, the U.S. and its key allies, under the pretext of "de-risking," have attempted to alter their reliance on Chinese manufacturing and remove China from regional industrial chains by political means. Compared with China's comprehensive industrial chain capabilities, members of the IPEF tend to participate in supply chains based on their rich resource endowments, focusing on specific segments. The U.S. aims to use the internal division of labor and capacity-building among member countries to reorganize the regional production landscape, thereby facilitating the process of "de-Sinicization" in industrial chains.

3. Multiple Constraints on the U.S. Technology Containment Strategy Against China

Firstly, the tendency of independence of regional countries limits U.S. efforts to contain China's technology sector. Asia-Pacific countries attempt to avoid excessive involvement in U.S. technology containment of China, fearing it could harm their relationships with China and negatively impact their economies and related industrial chains. For instance, India, as a key target of U.S. engagement, has expressed enthusiasm for expanding technological cooperation with the U.S. but also faces differing perspectives in various sectors of its society. Some Indian scholars emphasize that the country should adhere to the principle of strategic autonomy, advocating "self-reliance" as a priority for its technological rise. They argue that India should remain neutral in the U.S.-China technological competition and strike a balance between deepening cooperation with the U.S. and maintaining national strategic independence.

Secondly, the level of technological cooperation between the U.S. and regional countries is limited. Given the relatively low technological and industrial capabilities of Asia-Pacific countries, the U.S. strategy of using mechanisms such as the IPEF to suppress China's technological development is unlikely to yield immediate results. Although the U.S. focuses on India as a pivotal partner in its

technology containment strategy, India's innovation capacity in frontier technologies remains limited. Challenges in technology transfer and intellectual property management have also hindered India's ability to deepen cooperation with the U.S., Japan, and South Korea in the technology sector.

Thirdly, the Biden administration has been beset with challenges in restructuring supply chains of critical minerals. China's advantages in supply chains of critical minerals primarily lie in its refining capacity and material processing capabilities. While the U.S. seeks to integrate the critical mineral resources of Asia-Pacific countries into the supply of materials for its domestic industries, such as electric vehicle manufacturing, it is unlikely that the U.S. can import large quantities of processed mineral products from countries in the region, particularly those without free trade agreements with the U.S.. In contrast, China's vast downstream manufacturing industry can absorb massive raw and refined mineral products from these countries. In fact, countries in the region underscore diversifying their partnerships and resist following in the steps of the U.S. policy of "de-Sinicization."

CHAPTER II

From Biden to Trump: The Potential Trajectory of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy

Chapter II

From Biden to Trump: The Potential Trajectory of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy

Political polarization and populist trends sweeping the U.S. have brought about tremendous uncertainties to the Indo-Pacific strategy itself. With Trump winning the 2024 U.S. presidential election, much of the Biden administration's political and security "legacy" under the Indo-Pacific Strategy may be inherited and reinforced by the new Trump administration to a considerable extent. However, the economic and values-driven aspects of this legacy face uncertainties and might weaken. Furthermore, the local dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region and the evolution of U.S.-China relations are crucial factors influencing the future trajectory of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy.

I The Complexity of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy

The political principle that "Politics stops at the water's edge" was once considered a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy. In the absence of a powerful external adversary, foreign policy often aligns with domestic political agendas. However, amid the increasing polarization in the U.S. political landscape, the Republican and Democratic parties view each other as real enemies. The disappearance of liberal factions within the Republican Party and conservative factions within the Democratic Party has further intensified partisan divides, leading to even greater opposition between the two parties. Consequently, U.S. foreign policy has also become heavily polarized based on partisan divides. Studies in recent years show that Democrats and Republicans have grown further apart on

international issues.⁷ Amid escalating political polarization, U.S. leaders, in pursuit of narrow partisan or group interests, have let go radical populist and anti-intellectual currents unchecked. This has not only resulted in social division and confrontation but also fueled anti-globalization sentiments.⁸

On the other hand, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy was initially proposed during Trump's first term and subsequently inherited and developed by the Biden administration. Both parties share significant common ground on the strategy, with the greatest consensus being that China is the primary adversary, and the U.S. should contain and restrict China by strengthening its presence and leadership in the Asia-Pacific region, thereby shaping a regional geopolitical environment favorable to itself. In light of this, Trump will definitely continue advancing the Indo-Pacific Strategy in his second term, potentially with the following characteristics.

Firstly, Intensified Confrontation with China and Exacerbated Geopolitical Divisions in the Asia-Pacific region. The Trump administration's perception of China is likely to be even more negative than Biden's, viewing China as an existential threat to the U.S. and a more dangerous enemy than the Soviet Union, rather than a mere competitor. Trump is expected to abandon the Biden administration's policy of "strategic competition" with China, opting instead for a harsher "Cold War-style" confrontation. He also advocates disengaging from Europe and the Middle East to focus on countering China. Against this background, the Indo-Pacific region, as the frontline of U.S.-China rivalry, will see an intensified anti-China stance in Trump's strategy, with increased pressure on countries in the region to align with the U.S. in security, diplomacy, economics, and technology. This will undoubtedly exacerbate U.S.-China geopolitical tensions in the region, narrowing the strategic space for Asia-Pacific countries to remain neutral. Consequently, these countries may find it more challenging to benefit simultaneously from both the U.S. and China.

Secondly, military and security measures may further step up, leading to fiercer regional tensions. The Biden administration has sought to influence China's foreign policy by shaping its external environment, and this also applies to the Indo-Pacific Strategy, which thus encompasses political, security, economic, and technological dimensions. In contrast, Trump is expected to abandon this comprehensive approach and instead bolster military deterrence against China to maintain U.S. dominance in the region. Although Trump and the "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) faction within the Republican Party generally oppose further overseas military engagements, bracing military deterrence against China remains a shared objective of foreign policies upheld by Republicans. This trend could lead to heightened regional security tensions and an accelerated arms race in the region.

Thirdly, the U.S. may adjust its alliance system, with Japan and Australia becoming the leading force of the Indo-Pacific Strategy. Under Trump's leadership, the U.S. will continue to emphasize its system of alliances and partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region to counter China and maintain the trajectory of multilateral cooperation established during the Biden administration, in an effort to counter China. Trump may also pressure U.S. allies, such as Japan and South Korea, to shoulder more of the financial

7 Gordon M. Friedrichs, and Jordan Tama, "Polarization and US Foreign Policy: Key Debates and New Findings," *International Politics*, No 59, 2022, pp.767-785.

8 Wu Zhicheng, *The Century of Unprecedented Changes Unseen in a Century and the Evolution of International Community Conflicts*, *Social Sciences International*, Issue No. 4, 2023, p. 56.

burden for U.S. security expenditures in the region and take on greater responsibilities. Meanwhile, Trump may impose additional tariffs on Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN countries, citing their trade surpluses with the U.S. and accusing them of “taking advantage of the U.S.” Despite these potential frictions, the asymmetric interdependence between the U.S. and its Asia-Pacific allies will prevent such issues from fundamentally destabilizing their relationships. During Trump’s first term, Japan, South Korea, and Australia, in the principle of “choosing the lesser of two evils,” adopted a strategy of compromise to maintain stability in their relationships with the U.S., accommodating some of Trump’s demands. The U.S. also established the Quad mechanism (U.S.-Japan-India-Australia). However, due to Trump’s transactional attitude toward U.S. allies and his persistent extortion of U.S.’ allies and partners in military expenditure, economic & trade issues, etc., these countries including Japan and Australia are expected to strengthen ties among themselves to hedge against the uncertainties of a Trump-led U.S. government. The Indo-Pacific Strategy itself is closely tied to the interests of Japan and Australia. To create a "latticework" of alliances, the Biden administration has also been fostering deeper cooperation among these allies and partners. Should Trump resume his policies towards the region from his first term, Japan and Australia will likely seek to address an unpredictable U.S. administration by enhancing their mutual relations and solidifying their ability to shape the Indo-Pacific order.

Fourthly, economic strategy may be further weakened, while looming tariff wars and "decoupling and breaking the chain" policies will render the Asia-Pacific economic order more volatile. The IPEF is the weakest link of the Biden administration’s Indo-Pacific Strategy. The main reason why this framework has not been well-received by Asia-Pacific countries is that the Biden administration cannot offer what they desire most: access to the U.S. market. Trump and his supporters firmly believe that the U.S. has "suffered losses" in foreign free trade. During his campaign, Trump repeatedly emphasized his intention to impose high tariffs on all trade partners. Meanwhile, Trump himself has little interest in regional multilateral cooperation. Even if his diplomatic team continues promoting policies similar to those under the IPEF, their effectiveness would be greatly diminished. Therefore, after Trump assumes office, the Biden administration’s IPEF might be scrapped, much like the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was during Trump’s first term. Trump might resume the geopolitical attributes of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, while seeking direct economic decoupling from China. Former National Security Advisor of the first Trump administration Robert O’Brien proposed in *The Return of Peace Through Strength: A Defense of Trump’s Foreign Policy*, an article published in the July/August issue of *Foreign Affairs* in 2024, that higher tariffs should be imposed on China and stricter export controls be applied to any technology that could benefit China. Former U.S. Trade Representative of the first Trump administration Robert Lighthizer suggested revoking China’s permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) status, enabling the U.S. President to impose discriminatory tariffs on China without restriction. Since the U.S. started to levy massive tariffs on China from 2018, the original bilateral trade pattern between China and the U.S. has gradually shifted into a trilateral trade pattern: “China–Third Parties–U.S.” The supply chain and industrial chain structures in the Asia-Pacific region have been continually adjusted amid intensifying U.S.-China geopolitical competition. The most notable change has been the shift of international supply chains from the Chinese Mainland to "friend-shoring" and "near-shoring" countries favored by the U.S. ASEAN countries and India have emerged as the main third-party beneficiaries in this trilateral trade pattern. After Trump returns to power, he is likely to employ tools such as tariffs, export controls, and rules of origin to

push manufacturing back to the U.S. while seeking to restrict China's ability to export to the U.S. via third parties. This will undoubtedly bring tremendous challenges and uncertainties to economic cooperation and development in the Asia-Pacific region.

II The Local Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific Region

The local dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region have a significant impact on the development direction of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy. Firstly, countries in the region have their own assessments of the strategy in several key aspects. (1) The stability and sustainability of the strategy, both of which could be undermined with Trump's return to power; (2) Whether the strategy could provoke direct military conflict between China and the U.S. and severely harm regional countries' interests and regional peace; (3) Whether the strategy can deliver what regional countries truly desire, such as access to the U.S. market as well as investments, development funds, and technologies from the U.S.; and (4) whether the strategy genuinely represents U.S. attention to the demands of regional countries. From the perspective of Southeast Asian nations, while successive U.S. administrations have consistently proposed strategies targeting the region and emphasized shifting their strategic focus to the region, U.S. diplomatic investments in the region have remained limited in practice.

Secondly, major regional countries and organizations have launched policies in response to great power competition and its impact. After the Trump administration takes office on January 20, 2025, its policy towards China, while maintaining the overarching goal of containing and suppressing China, will likely undergo adjustments in terms of focus, scope, and intensity. Consequently, the U.S. strategy for great power competition with China and its impact on the Indo-Pacific region will also change. The policies of major regional countries and organizations in response to this will directly influence the development of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy. On the one hand, the perspectives and stances of regional countries and organizations on "choosing sides" and "bloc formation" are of significant importance. Following the implementation of the Indo-Pacific Strategy under the Biden administration, most countries in the region and ASEAN, while not explicitly opposing the strategy on the whole, have consistently rejected taking sides between China and the U.S. and have firmly opposed the trend toward bloc formation in the region. On the other hand, it remains in question whether ASEAN, as the most important organization in the region, still holds potential to play a stabilizing role through mechanisms such as "10+1," "10+3," "10+6," and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), or is capable of maintaining the region's economic and security stability while ensuring that hot security issues in the region remain unaffected by external powers and great power competition.

Thirdly, unexpected hot issues concerning global economic and security landscape may also affect the development of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy. The U.S. foreign strategy often reflects reactions to specific unexpected events at the level of specific policies. Therefore, first and foremost, unexpected hot issues concerning economy and security in the region will become key factors influencing the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy. It is foreseeable that if such unexpected hot issues arise, U.S. strategic and policy circles will engage in fierce debates between "intervening" and "preventing strategic overextension." Given the current U.S. political landscape, its administration will ultimately strike a balance between these two approaches when making decisions. Furthermore, unexpected hot issues outside the region

may also affect the development of the Indo-Pacific Strategy. For instance, the phased "escalation" or "de-escalation" of the Russia-Ukraine conflict or the Israel-Palestine conflict has exerted great impact on the strategy. The Indo-Pacific Strategy has been designed to maintain U.S. global hegemony, thus tightly linking the Indo-Pacific, Eurasia, and the Middle East. The challenge for the second Trump administration lies in how to maintain its investments in the Indo-Pacific without being overly drawn into affairs of Eurasia and the Middle East amid the relative decline of U.S. hegemonic power.

III The U.S.-China Relations

The structural factors leading to challenges in U.S.-China relations will not disappear simply because of a change in administration. However, whether these factors can be effectively managed to avoid catastrophic impacts on U.S.-China relations will highly depend on the new U.S. administration's policy towards China. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy is deeply intertwined with its strategy towards China, and in this sense, the development of U.S.-China relations is another critical factor influencing the trajectory of the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

On the one hand, the Republican and Democratic parties share a high level of consensus in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy. First proposed by the Trump administration, the framework was largely inherited and further strengthened by the Biden administration. Therefore, in general, the U.S. Indo-Pacific policy framework centered on containing China and aimed at reinforcing U.S. political, security, and economic influence in the region is unlikely to change. (1) Adherence to Fierce Competition with China. Both parties view China as the primary strategic rival of the U.S., with containing China being the core objective of advancing the Indo-Pacific Strategy. Both parties advocate for all-encompassing and intense competition with China to limit its regional influence. (2) Emphasis on Building the System of Allies and Partners. It is regarded by both parties as a critical pillar to cement the Indo-Pacific alliance system for maintaining U.S. influence in the region and competing with China. Both parties will also continue to urge NATO countries to participate in Indo-Pacific affairs. Although Trump tends to bully U.S. allies, the cooperation relationship between the U.S. and its allies will not undergo fundamental change. (3) Fortifying U.S. Military Presence in the Asia-Pacific region. Being concerned that the military power comparison between the U.S. and China will experience any changes unfavorable to the U.S., both parties advocate for maintaining a strong U.S. military presence in the region, developing nuclear deterrence, and reallocating more U.S. global military resources toward the region. Both parties may promote expanding AUKUS to include more U.S. allies and partners like Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and India and incorporate these countries into advanced military technology cooperation under its second pillar. Both parties are committed to imposing military pressure on China by sticking to FONOPs, carrying out joint military exercises with allies, and supporting allies in building their capabilities to counter China. (4) Emphasis on Offshore Balancing and Unwillingness to Engage in Direct Military Conflicts with China. Although both parties emphasize fierce competition and confrontation with China, neither of them expects to see direct military conflicts between the two countries. When it comes to regional security issues like the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait issues, they prefer a situation where countries like the Philippines, Vietnam, and Taiwan of China confront China on the frontlines,

while the U.S. provides comprehensive support and plays an offshore balancing role. (5) Reshaping Regional Supply Chains. Both parties will continue pursuing policies of "de-risking" and "decoupling" in economic and technological relations with China. They aspire to redirect global supply chains from China to the U.S. and its allies, pressuring allies to join U.S. efforts to block China's access to advanced technologies.

On the other hand, however, the Biden administration's strategy for great power competition with China has failed to address a critical question: "What is the ultimate outcome of this competition?" Under such circumstances, its Indo-Pacific Strategy has inevitably triggered strategic anxieties among countries in the region regarding choosing sides" and "whether the U.S. and China can coexist peacefully." This is indeed the case. Whether a reelected Trump administration can answer this question remains uncertain. While there are some realists within the Republican Party advocating for pragmatic policies towards China, there are also highly ideological factions calling for a regime-change policy towards China. How these factions will contend and how Trump will balance these divergent intra-party positions are still unknown. Given the current exceptional bias as well as emotions and whims regarding China in the U.S. strategic policy circle, it is unlikely that the Trump administration's policy towards China will undergo a positive shift. This is also why its Indo-Pacific Strategy will continue to prioritize containing and suppressing China.

CHAPTER III

Beyond Containment: Building an Asia-Pacific Community with a Shared Future

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Nowadays, the most formidable challenge confronting the Asia-Pacific order lies in maintaining and advancing the robust momentum for development gained by the region after the Cold War, while avoiding regional division, confrontation, and conflicts. Both the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific are geopolitical concepts introduced by the U.S. during different historical periods. These two concepts cover extremely broad areas whose countries and regions diverge enormously from each other in politics, economy, and culture, and neither of them is a geopolitical plate with inherent unifying cohesion. However, in practice, they carry distinct political symbolism. The Asia-Pacific concept emerged after the Cold War, reflecting the spirit of openness and inclusiveness, mutual benefit, and peace and cooperation among countries on the Pacific Rim with diverse political, economic, and cultural systems. This concept has been widely accepted by regional countries. Conversely, the Indo-Pacific concept has emerged as an extension of the U.S. policy for strategic competition with China in recent years, characterized by intense geopolitical games, zero-sum competition, and bloc confrontation. Rooted in maintaining U.S. hegemony, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy has made an unfounded accusation of China as the main challenge or even a threat to the region. The measures launched under this strategy have severely undermined the peace, stability, and security as well as cooperation based on mutual benefit and win-win that the Asia-Pacific region has enjoyed since the Cold War came to an end. Asia-Pacific countries must remain vigilant toward the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy and actively respond under the framework of building an Asia-Pacific community with a shared future.

I Safeguarding Regional Peace and Stability

After the Cold War ended, the Asia-Pacific region has effectively established a regional order that prioritizes development and is based on multilateral consultation. As the Cold War drew to a close, the primary focus in the Asia-Pacific region shifted rapidly toward economic development and improvement of inter-state relations. Although the military alliance system that the U.S. had built in the Asia-Pacific region during the Cold War did not dissolve, it was no longer adaptable to the region's post-Cold War political and economic development agenda.

Following the Cold War, the Asia-Pacific region has gradually developed a multilateral consultation mechanism centered on ASEAN. While this institutional arrangement lacks strict legal constraints like the European Union (EU), it has effectively balanced relationships between large and small countries, accommodates nations with diverse political systems, development stages, and cultural backgrounds, representing a post-Cold War regional multilateral cooperation order with Asia-Pacific characteristics. Within this order, maintaining regional peace and stability is a shared consensus, fostering economic development is a core priority, and treating countries of all sizes equally is an intrinsic principle. Based on these “common understandings,” ASEAN, composed of small and medium-sized countries, has played a central role in regional affairs, becoming a hallmark feature of the post-Cold War multilateral cooperation order in the Asia-Pacific region.

However, as the U.S. drives its Indo-Pacific Strategy, the regional order established in the Asia-Pacific region during the post-Cold War era has encountered increasingly formidable challenges. Firstly, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy shifts the region's priority from economic development to security confrontation, undermining the foundational logic of maintaining peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. Secondly, the strategy creates a narrative of “great power competition,” resulting in divisions and bloc confrontations in the region. Thirdly, by reviving the previous alliance system, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy has further tied U.S. allies through economic, political, and security means, and extended its influence to other Asia-Pacific nations. As a result, the U.S. allies in the Asia-Pacific region has had even less freedom in joining regional security cooperation, while the interests of member countries of ASEAN and other regional organizations have become divided. The fortified U.S. alliance system in the region has substantially marginalized ASEAN which used to play a central role in regional affairs, putting the Asia-Pacific multilateral cooperation framework centered on ASEAN at the risk of being sidelined. Evidently, the ultimate goal of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy is to reimpose a U.S. hegemonic leadership on the Asia-Pacific order, fundamentally altering the region's post-Cold War order of multilateral cooperation with equal participation by countries of all sizes.

Upon the advent of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy, many Asia-Pacific countries have been increasingly concerned about the possibility of being marginalized. ASEAN nations, in particular, hope to maintain ASEAN's central role in regional cooperation. In June 2019, in response to the intensifying U.S.-China competition and the introduction of the Indo-Pacific Strategy by the U.S. and Japan, ASEAN countries launched the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific at the 34th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok. This regional response to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy reflected ASEAN's desire to enhance cooperation across a broader Indo-Pacific region and underscored its determination to avoid being marginalized amid great power rivalry while maintaining and reinforcing its central role in

regional collaboration. The document proposed a regional vision distinct from that of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy, positioning the Indo-Pacific as a region for dialogue and cooperation rather than competition under an ASEAN-centered framework. A report from the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute showed that 46.8% of respondents in the region continued prioritizing bolstering ASEAN's resilience and unity to withstand the pressures of U.S.-China competition.

II Safeguarding the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Framework

The goal of “shaping the strategic environment in which China operates,” which was proposed by the U.S. to suppress China, dealt a heavy blow on the economic cooperation framework that has developed in the Asia-Pacific region since the Cold War ended. Currently, many economies in the region remain heavily reliant on external markets, underestimating the impact of U.S. “decoupling and breaking the chain” policies and its so-called “reshoring of manufacturing” on East Asian countries and the entire region. Some even idealistically believe that they can benefit from U.S. “decoupling and breaking the chain” policies. In reality, U.S. trade protectionism and “decoupling and breaking the chain” efforts seek to fundamentally alter the rules of international trade and even international economic operations established over the past few decades, creating challenges for all Asia-Pacific nations that still cling to these rules. Therefore, whether to maintain trade rules or to ensure sustained regional development, Asia-Pacific countries should work more vigorously to prevent the U.S. from disrupting regional supply and industrial chains and foster closer economic cooperation to mitigate associated risks resulting from U.S. policy changes.

Through mechanisms like the IPEF, the U.S. attempts to reconstruct rules and reshape supply chains for the sake of de-sinicization, but these initiatives neither meet the practical needs of Asia-Pacific countries nor benefit ASEAN's central role and unity among its member states. On the one hand, the U.S.-led new “security”-oriented digital economy rules and technological alliance systems fail to address the diverse needs of ASEAN members and obstruct the healthy development of their digital economies by overtly targeting and excluding China. On the other hand, the U.S.-dominated IPEF could disrupt existing trade and investment mechanisms and undermine ASEAN cohesion. While the proposals of IPEF in areas such as trade, supply chains, and clean economy cater to some ASEAN countries' economic and industrial needs, receiving positive responses from seven ASEAN nations (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), its exclusion of Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar—countries with close ties to China—might lead to divisions within ASEAN. Additionally, the IPEF's competition with existing mechanisms like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) could escalate unnecessary rivalry and conflicts. Lastly, shifts in U.S. attitudes have hindered substantial progress in trade negotiations, a critical component of the IPEF, raising doubts among participating countries about the sustainability and effectiveness of U.S. policies under the Indo-Pacific Strategy in the future.

The Biden administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy and its IPEF initiative have sparked concerns among regional countries about the potential erosion of their economic ties with China. Many Asia-Pacific nations suspect that terms like “de-risking” might translate into weakening economic links with

China or creating competing regional blocs. In May 2023, Singapore's then-Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Lawrence Wong, highlighted during the 28th Nikkei Forum in Japan that economic "de-risking" itself poses risks. He warned against the rise of protectionism confronting Asia and emphasized that "de-risking" should not come at the expense of broader economic interactions. He cautioned that a fragmented global economy would divide the world into competing regional blocs. Similarly, Indonesia's Trade Minister Muhammad Lutfi stressed that the positive impact of IPEF hinges on "being inclusive to all countries within the Indo-Pacific region" and "should not be perceived merely as a tool to contain other nations." Indonesia's viewpoint is widely shared within ASEAN, namely underscoring that IPEF must be inclusive and mutually beneficial, and particularly should not be detrimental to their economic relations with China. In the Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region released in December 2022, the South Korean government also emphasized that efforts should be made to prevent the overwhelming dominance of security concerns over economic issues. This testifies to Seoul's reluctance to blindly follow in the footsteps of U.S. regarding the latter's "de-risking" policies towards China.

III Building an Open Asia-Pacific Community with a Shared Future

Since the 1960s and 1970s, international relations, driven by spiraling globalization, have undergone many profound changes and evolved beyond the scope of traditional realist theories. The strengthening of alliances is no longer sufficient to fulfill the aspirations of Asia-Pacific nations for peace, development, and prosperity. Addressing regional issues requires solutions tailored to the practical needs of Asia-Pacific countries. The vision of building an Asia-Pacific Community with a Shared Future provides a more effective option for regional governance.

An Asia-Pacific Community with a Shared Future is a further extension of regional cooperation. The concept was first articulated by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the APEC Indonesia 2013 held in October, 2013 in Bali, Indonesia. Xi proposed strengthening the sense of Asia-Pacific community with a shared future. Afterwards, China has vigorously guided the regional cooperation of the Asia-Pacific region with the philosophy of building an Asia-Pacific community with a shared future featuring openness and inclusiveness, innovation-driven growth, greater connectivity, and mutually beneficial cooperation. This approach fully recognizes the collaborative efforts of Asia-Pacific countries to establish a regional cooperation system established after the Cold War ended, particularly the ASEAN-centered multilateral cooperation mechanisms, and seeks to deepen these efforts for solidifying and maintaining the peace and development of the region.

The concept of Asia-Pacific community with a shared future has gained broad acceptance across the region. In November 2020, during the APEC Informal Leaders' Meetings, participants adopted the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040, which calls for an open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific community by 2040. This vision highly aligns with the conceptual proposition of an Asia-Pacific Community with a Shared Future.

The vision of Building an Asia-Pacific Community with a Shared Future takes open regionalism as

its value pursuit, the fostering of a community sense as its foundation, the promotion of regional development and prosperity as its core, and the maintenance of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region as its premise.

Firstly, it adheres to open regionalism. The Asia-Pacific region is characterized by notable diversity in levels of economic development, political systems, and ideologies. Open regionalism is a critical attribute of building the Asia-Pacific Community with a Shared Future. President Xi Jinping once emphasized: “Openness is the lifeline of Asia-Pacific cooperation. We need to uphold open regionalism.” In November 2023, during the 30th APEC Informal Leaders’ Meeting, President Xi once again reiterated that “Openness and inclusiveness are the defining feature of Asia-Pacific cooperation.”

Secondly, it enhances the sense of a shared future. Amid the increasingly complex and hazardous cross-border challenges and risks, regional cooperation is required to possess greater organizational, coordination, and action capabilities. However, such mechanisms or capacities to jointly address these risks and challenges have not been put in place in the Asia-Pacific region. Currently, countries in the region primarily rely on their own strength and ad hoc arrangements for responses. This situation does not meet the Asia-Pacific’s aspirations for lasting peace, stability, and development. Thus, it is essential to enhance the sense of a shared future and elevate existing regional cooperation from specific interests to shared principles and identity recognition.

Thirdly, it consolidates an open Asia-Pacific economic system. Since the Cold War was over, the Asia-Pacific region has seen significant progress in trade and investment, liberalization and facilitation, as well as regional integration. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) took effect in January 2022, marking a significant leap forward in regional economic integration and free trade, giving a vigorous boost to the regional economic integration. However, looking into the longer-term future, Asia-Pacific countries need to further guard against the impacts from trade protectionism and the politicization of trade and economic issues by certain nations. The APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040 underscores the importance of a free, open, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent, and predictable trade and investment environment, reaffirms support for World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, and emphasizes efforts to advance regional economic integration and the Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) agenda. To this end, vigorous efforts should be made to accelerate the progress of the FTAAP, build connectivity networks, and take well-ordered steps to promote hardware connectivity, software alignment, and people-to-people exchanges under the guidance of the APEC Connectivity Blueprint.

Fourthly, it properly handles conflicts and divergences, and actively works to establish an Asia-Pacific security cooperation framework. The true interests of the Asia-Pacific region lie in achieving peace and development through unity and cooperation. Following the Cold War, relationships among Asia-Pacific nations have been adjusted in an orderly manner, keeping the region out of the chaos and conflicts experienced by some other regions. However, many conflicts and divergences remain unresolved, and once mishandled, they could undermine the peace and development over the past decades that the Asia-Pacific region has worked arduously to maintain. In light of this, the Asia-Pacific region must adopt a universal, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security concept

to oppose Cold War mentalities and bloc confrontations. On the foundation of existing regional cooperation, it is still necessary to reinforce mutual trust, resolutely build an Asia-Pacific security framework, and energetically explore solutions for disputes conducive to lasting peace and stability in the region.

IV Hoping for a Constructive U.S. Role

Ensuring peaceful coexistence among major powers is a key component of building an Asia-Pacific Community with a Shared Future. Such a community is based on open cooperation within the Asia-Pacific region and likewise entails constructive contributions from the U.S.

The U.S. should abandon its "hegemonic" mindset and actively participate in the Asia-Pacific regional cooperation process, making its contribution to regional peace and development. The U.S. needs to recognize that, since the end of the Cold War, its military alliance system no longer satisfies the needs of the Asia-Pacific region and cannot meet the aspirations of Asia-Pacific nations for peace, development, and prosperity. The U.S. must also acknowledge that it remains a crucial force in Asia-Pacific regional cooperation—not only due to its extensive economic ties with most Asia-Pacific nations but also because its political and military presence exerts a unique influence on the region's dynamics. Currently, the greatest obstacle confronting the U.S. in regional cooperation stem primarily from its inability to act at will, rather than from any effort to expel it from the Asia-Pacific region.

The 2024 APEC Leaders' Machu Picchu Declaration adopted in November 2024, emphasized APEC's commitment to building an open, dynamic, resilient and peaceful Asia-Pacific community by 2040 for the prosperity of all its people and future generations. Amid global upheaval and transformation, Asia-Pacific countries should join hands to uphold the vision of an Asia-Pacific Community with a Shared Future, foster regional partnerships based on mutual trust, inclusiveness, cooperation, and shared benefits, consistently advance regional cooperation, and jointly safeguard the peace and development of the Asia-Pacific region.

Acknowledgments

The *Mixed Legacy of the U.S. Biden Administration’s Indo-Pacific Strategy and Its Future* is the collective brainchild of the Center for American Studies as a 2024 SIIS Innovation Project. Each chapter of the report was authored by different staff members, with Dr. Mao Ruipeng serving as the compiler.

To facilitate the project, the Center for American Studies successively organized the seminar titled “Asia-Pacific Community with a Shared Future and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy: Comparison, Responses, and Prospects” in April 2024, hosted the seminar titled “Achievements and Prospects of the Biden Administration’s Indo-Pacific Strategy” in June, and hosted the seminar titled “Post-Presidential Election U.S. Foreign Policy Trajectory and Its Impact on International Affairs” in September. Following the report’s initial draft, valuable insights and suggestions were provided by Professor Wei Zongyou from the Center for American Studies at Fudan University, Professor Liu Aming from the Institute of International Relations at Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, and Professor Zhang Chun from the Institute of International Relations at Yunnan University. We hereby extend our sincere gratitude to all experts who participated in the seminars and reviewed the report.

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