

Imperialism in the Indo-Pacific— An Introduction

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Indo-Pacific is a term with a long history within the imperialist lexicon. It originated in the writings of Karl Haushofer, the leading German geopolitical theorist, in his 1924 *Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean* and numerous other works.¹ Haushofer was a German military attaché in Japan in 1908–1909, and traveled widely in East Asia. As a result of these experiences, he was to emerge as a major geopolitical analyst. He served as a brigade commander in the First World War, rising to the rank of major general by the war's end. Rudolf Hess, who had been Haushofer's aide-de-camp and later his student, was one of his chief disciples. In 1920, Hess joined the Nazi Party. Following the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch, when Adolf Hitler and Hess were confined to the prison in the Fortress of Landsberg, Haushofer instructed both of them in geopolitics, while Hitler dictated *Mein Kampf* to Hess. A decade later, when Hitler came to power in Germany, Hess was appointed Deputy Führer of the Nazi Party. A special professorship in defence geography was created for Haushofer at the University of Munich.²



Map showing locations of select strategic U.S. military installations (indicated by stars) along the first and second island chains in the Indo-Pacific.

The designation of the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical region arose in Haushofer's global imperial strategy, aimed at carving out a new "Pan-region" (similar to Pan-America under U.S. hegemony) in the Far East, to be led by Germany,

¹ ↪ Karl Ernst Haushofer, *Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002).

² ↪ Derwent Whittlesey, "Haushofer: The Geopoliticians," in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Edward Meade Earl (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 384–411; Derwent Whittlesey, *The German Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1942), 70–78; Holger H. Herwig, *The Demon of Geopolitics: How Karl Haushofer "Educated" Hitler and Hess* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016); John Bellamy Foster, "The New Geopolitics of Empire," *Monthly Review* 57, no. 8 (January 2006): 2–6. Whittlesey's work indicates that Hess was an "aide-de-campe" to Haushofer, but this is not present in other accounts. Whittlesey, "Haushofer: The Geopoliticians," 408.

Japan, and Russia/USSR. The goal was to overcome British and U.S. colonial control of the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific regions, with the object of creating a new Indo-Pacific imperium under German-Japanese hegemony that would be capable of countering at the global level the dominance of the Euro-Atlantic super-region by the old colonial powers. In contrast to the Euro-Atlantic, Anglo-American imperialist control of the Indo-Pacific was seen by Haushofer as vulnerable to a German-Eurasian alliance. Haushofer thus grounded his analysis in the notion of an “imperialistically disputed Pacific.”³

Haushofer’s ideas attracted enormous interest in the United States up to and during the Second World War. In the view of Hans W. Weigert, writing in the Council of Foreign Relations publication *Foreign Affairs* in July 1942, Haushofer’s *Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean* was “the Bible of German geopolitics,” commonly considered in the United States to be a “super science.” At West Point, it was held that Haushofer had made possible Hitler’s victories in both peace and war. In Weigert’s *Foreign Affairs* article, Haushofer was condemned for having destroyed “the unity of the white race” in his advocacy of an alliance with Japan and other Eurasian powers against Britain, the United States, and France. (Haushofer himself was a racist, characterising France as a “half-African power” and employing the notion of the “master races.”) “The German-Russian non-aggression pact of August 9, 1939,” Weigert observed, “was Haushofer’s greatest triumph.” It raised the possibility of a Central European-Eurasian alliance, and a global dominance of the “World Island” of Eurasia of the kind warned against by Halford Mackinder, the British founder of geopolitics.⁴ In 1939, following the Nonaggression Pact, Haushofer wrote: “Now finally, the collaboration of the Axis powers, and of the Far East, stands distinctly before the German soul. At last, there is the hope of survival against the Anaconda policy [the strangling encirclement] of the Western democracies.”⁵

Haushofer reveled in the “externally brilliant deeds of imperialism.” Rather than being the enemy of humanity, as pronounced by “Marxist materialists,” imperialism was for him a manifestation of the Darwinian struggle “for the preservation of life,” a product of the “will to power,” and the drive for “living space” (*Lebensraum*). He admired not only what he saw as the exceptionally violent history of U.S. imperialism, but also the accomplished “mirror writing” of U.S. geopolitical thinkers such as Isaiah Bowman, who managed to reflect the image of U.S. imperialism back so that it appeared to be anti-imperialism. In reality, U.S. imperial power, both actual and potential, Haushofer insisted, was then “unsurpassed” in the world.⁶

So frightening was Haushofer’s geopolitical analysis to the dominant colonial powers in the West, during the wave of decolonisation struggles after the Second World War—together with Haushofer’s exposure of the true nature of British and U.S. imperialism—that the term geopolitics was effectively banned from public discussion in Western Cold War ideology for decades. However, in the early 1990s, following the demise of the Soviet Union, a much more “naked imperialism” resurfaced in the quest for U.S. unipolar world dominance. More recently, as Timothy Doyle and Dennis

³ ↪ Haushofer, *The Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean*, 1, 10, 209–10, 217–20; Timothy Doyle and Dennis Rumley, *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 28–39.

⁴ ↪ Halford Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1919), 186.

⁵ ↪ Hans W. Weigert, “Haushofer and the Pacific,” *Foreign Affairs* 20, no. 4 (July 1942): 732–42; Robert Strauss-Hupé, *Geopolitics: The Struggle for Space and Power* (New York: G. P. Putnam Sons, 1942), 152; Franz Neumann, *Behemoth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), 144; Foster, “The New Geopolitics of Empire,” 4. Haushofer’s influence waned rapidly in Nazi Germany following Hess’s flight to Britain. Haushofer had clearly opposed (though we do not know how openly) Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union, along with the Empire of Japan’s invasion of China, as both conflicted with his notion of a new Eurasian imperium. He was confined for a short time in the Dachau Concentration Camp, and his son was involved in the attempt to assassinate Hitler. The U.S. military arrested him at the end of the war and interrogated him. He committed suicide shortly after. Foster, “The New Geopolitics of Empire,” 5.

⁶ ↪ Haushofer, *Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean*, 1, 10, 14, 208–11, 217.

Rumley wrote in *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*, classical geopolitics has been fully “‘exhumed’ in the new Cold War context” posed by U.S. confrontation with China.⁷

Nevertheless, throughout the Cold War years (1946–1991), geopolitics, though not publicly advertised as such, had formed the basis of the development of U.S. imperial grand strategy. Such views were associated with the likes of Nicholas Spykman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Dean Acheson, George Kennan, Paul Nitze, John Foster Dulles, Henry Kissinger, Eugene Rostow, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Alexander Haig—along with the Council of Foreign Relations, colloquially known as the “imperial brain trust.”⁸

As in the case of “geopolitics,” the term “Indo-Pacific” was effectively excluded from public discussion for many years due to its association with the Axis powers, and the original context in which it had appeared, which challenged British, U.S., and French colonialism in South and East Asia—even if arising from a rival imperialist perspective. Today, however, this earlier notion of the “imperialistically disputed Pacific” has been stood on its head. No longer aimed at challenging the U.S. and British role as imperial powers in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific, as in Haushofer’s original conception, the category of the Indo-Pacific now represents an imperial grand strategy for encircling and strategically containing China, conceived as a “revisionist power” that threatens the U.S.-dominated “rules-based order.”⁹ The United States in its documents in the last few years has declared itself an Indo-Pacific power, seeking to establish its sovereign rule in much of the region.¹⁰ As U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken declared in 2021, “the United States has long been, is, and always will be an Indo-Pacific nation. This is a geographic fact, from our Pacific coast states to Guam, our territories [colonies] across the Pacific.”¹¹

U.S. ally Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe led the way in this grand strategic transition by introducing the notion of the confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans in 2007, as part of an attempt to establish a strategic dialogue with India directed against China. However, the first use of the term “Indo-Pacific” by a major political leader in the post-Second World War period was in a speech given by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Hawai’i in 2010 as she prepared to

The fact that the new Indo-Pacific strategy was targeted directly at the People’s Republic of China was written in between every line of Clinton’s speech.

set off on a grand Asian tour, in which she presented the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical concept for a new, broader strategic alliance in Asia. Her speech and her entire Asian trip were meant as an overture to precede U.S. President

Barack Obama’s “Pivot to Asia” the following year. In Clinton’s speech, the “Indo-Pacific basin” formed the basis for the Indian Navy operating in conjunction with the U.S. Navy in the super-region, and particularly in the South China Sea, in a process of “comprehensive engagement” and “forward deployment.” The fact that the new Indo-Pacific strategy was

⁷ ↪ Doyle and Rumley, *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*, 49. Although Haushofer’s *Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean*, despite its immense influence, was essentially banned in the Anglo-American sphere and was not translated into English in the entire Second World War and Cold War period, a translation was published in 2002, under the editorship of Lewis A. Tambs, a diplomat in the Ronald Reagan administration who argued that Haushofer’s geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific was now essential to combatting China. Lewis A. Tambs, preface to Haushofer, *Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean*, xv–xix. On the resurfacing of a naked imperialism, see John Bellamy Foster, *Naked Imperialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2006).

⁸ ↪ Doyle and Rumley, *The Rise and Return of the Indo Pacific*, 32; Lawrence H. Shoup and William Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust: The Council on Foreign Relations and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977).

⁹ ↪ U.S. Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, 7, defense.gov. On the rules-based order and China, see John Bellamy Foster, “The New Cold War on China,” *Monthly Review* 73, no. 3 (July–August 2021): 1–20.

¹⁰ ↪ The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*, February 2022, 4, whitehouse.gov.

¹¹ ↪ Antony J. Blinken, “A Free and Open Pacific,” December 14, 2021, state.gov.

targeted directly at the People’s Republic of China was written in between every line of Clinton’s speech, even if not stated outright.¹²

Clinton’s 2010 speech was also designed to reinforce the resurrection of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) between the United States, Japan, Australia, and India. The Quad dialogue had been discontinued in the administration of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and was revitalised in 2010 by his successor Julia Gillard just months before Clinton’s speech. Hence, Clinton’s reference to the “Indo-Pacific basin” as the new field of operation of the U.S. military, in conjunction with India, was timed to add strategic significance to the revived Quad, signalling the potential for a wider alignment against China intended to include India (though India does not have a defence treaty with the United States).¹³ Despite being mentioned only briefly by Clinton, the dramatic shift that the reference to the Indo-Pacific represented was immediately manifest. The term was rapidly diffused, beginning in the following year, by the two pivotal U.S. military allies in the Western Pacific, Japan and Australia, as well as in U.S. strategic documents. However, under Obama, the Indo-Pacific was still conceived simply as an oceanic confluence, extending from the east coast of Africa to the Western Pacific outside of the sphere of U.S. sovereign power (aside from its colonies in the region—Guam and American Samoa).¹⁴

The 2017 National Security Strategy of the United States under President Donald Trump focused on the Indo-Pacific as

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the key strategic area globally, centred on a potential war with China.¹⁵ In accordance with this new conception, the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) was renamed the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM). The new strategic map of the Indo-Pacific delineating the operating field of USINDOPACOM underscored the Indo-Pacific as the primary strategic theatre for confronting China in what

is now widely referred to in U.S. governing and strategic circles as the “New Cold War” against China. Hence, USINDOPACOM (see Map 1) shifted the whole map of the Indo-Pacific eastward, as compared with the earlier conception under the Obama administration, now covering the area from the Western border of India to the Pacific coast of the United States. This encompassed the state of Hawai’i as well as U.S. colonial territories in the Pacific, bringing the United States squarely into the Indo-Pacific. It is this military-strategic map devised by USINDOPACOM that now dominates all strategic discussions of the super-region by the United States, marked by a string of bases, which, when combined with those in United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), are meant to constitute a “giant noose” around China.¹⁶ More economically oriented descriptions of the Indo-Pacific, such as Canada’s, do not include the United States (or Canada), but instead restrict it to “forty economies” in the region, including as a single entity the entire group of Pacific Island Countries, some of which are U.S. colonies/territories.

¹² ↪ Hillary Rodham Clinton, “America’s Engagement in the Asia-Pacific,” speech in Honolulu, October 8, 2018, state.gov; D. Gnanagurnathan, “India and the Idea of the Indo-Pacific,” East Asia Forum, October 20, 2012.

¹³ ↪ Clinton, “America’s Engagement in the Asia-Pacific.”

¹⁴ ↪ Doyle and Rumley, *The Rise and Return of the Indo Pacific*, 78.

¹⁵ ↪ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, 45–46.

¹⁶ ↪ “The Coming War on China: Pilger Says US Is the Real Threat in the Pacific, Not China,” Sydney Morning Herald, February 9, 2017.

Map 1. USINDOPACOM Map of the Indo-Pacific, Area of Responsibility



Source: "[About USINDOPACOM: Area of Responsibility](https://www.pacom.mil/About-Us/About-Us-Indo-Pacific-Area-of-Responsibility)," U.S. Department of Defense, pacom.mil.

The United States in its strategic documents has officially designated China as a "Revisionist Power," backed by Russia, which is labeled as a "Malign State," while the "Rogue State" label is applied to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea).¹⁷ China is seen as the principal enemy in the U.S. imperial grand strategy, since it is a rapidly rising economy—now the second-largest economy in the world, and likely soon to surpass that of the United States in that respect—and because of its refusal simply to accept the imperial "rules-based international order" dominated by the United States, introduced at the end of the Second World War. In the U.S. Department of Defence's 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy, it is stated that the primary strategic goal is to maintain the United States as the "preeminent military power," both in the Indo-Pacific and globally.¹⁸ This translates into U.S. efforts to slow China's advance while limiting its projection of power worldwide. Most U.S. strategies for winning the New Cold War directed at China are aimed at a strategic-geopolitical defeat of the latter that would bring down Chinese President Xi Jinping and destroy the enormous prestige of the Communist Party of China, leading to regime change from within and the subordination of China to the U.S. imperium from without.¹⁹

Ostensibly, these actions are to be taken in defence of the Indo-Pacific region itself in response to China's so-called "coercion and aggression."²⁰ Washington is, however, hard pressed to find instances of such aggression. It is true that

¹⁷ ↪ U.S. Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, 7, 11–

¹⁸ ↪ U.S. Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, 15–16.

¹⁹ ↪ See Matt Pottinger and Mike Gallagher, "No Substitute for Victory: America's Competition with China Must Be Won, Not Managed," *Foreign Affairs* (May–June 2024), 25–39; David Geaney, "What Would Victory Against China Look Like?," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, September 21, 2023; Foster, "The New Cold War on China," 16.

²⁰ ↪ U.S. Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, 5.

It is the United States, which sees China's rise as a threat to its own global preeminence, with the Indo-Pacific super-region increasingly being viewed as the pivotal site in the New Cold War, that is propelling all of humanity toward a Third World War.

China, like any great power, has sought to consolidate its sovereignty and area of control in the South China Sea for strategic and economic reasons, thereby placing it in jurisdictional disputes with the Philippines and other nations. Beijing is also absolutely firm on its One China policy supported by almost every country in the world—

including, officially, the United States—which stipulates that Taiwan remains part of China, though with a separate governmental authority, with the expectation of its eventual reunification with the mainland. Yet, in the Indo-Pacific as a whole, none of this has led to fear of military aggression by China, with military spending per capita in nearly all East Asian states (including both those with defence treaties with the United States and those without), declining over the last decade or two—though Washington has sought to change this in the last few years.²¹ Rather, it is the United States, which sees China's rise as a threat to its own global preeminence, with the Indo-Pacific super-region increasingly being viewed as the pivotal site in the New Cold War, that is propelling all of humanity toward a Third World War.

The Indo-Pacific and the New Cold War

The shift in Washington's relations with Beijing, which began in 2010, was a reaction to the enormous success of the Chinese economy and the relative decline of that of the United States, coupled with perceived shifts in China's political-economic stance, in which it has been increasingly charting an independent course. As Yi Wen, economist and vice president of the Federal Reserve Board of St. Louis noted, between 1978 and the early 2000s, "China compressed the roughly 150 to 200 (or more) years of revolutionary economic changes experienced by England in 1700–1900 and the United States in 1760–1920 and Japan in 1850–1960 into one single generation."²² In 1978, China's per capita income was only one-third that of sub-Saharan Africa, with 800 million of the Chinese population in 1981 living on less than \$1.25 a day. By 2018, China's per capita income had climbed to the world's median income level, and the country has eliminated absolute poverty within its borders.²³ In 1953, China accounted for 2.3 percent of world industrial production potential, but, by 2020, its share of world manufacturing had risen to around 35 percent.²⁴ Today, China is the world's leading exporter, with its share of world trade at approximately 15 percent in 2020, compared to around 8 percent for the United States.²⁵

The Great Financial Crisis was a watershed.²⁶ Although China saw a huge decline in its external demand for goods, its economy turned on a dime while the rest of the world economy sank into a deep stagnation and only slowly recovered. China, with its large state sector, managed to come out of the Great Financial Crisis largely unaffected with a double-

²¹ ↪ David C. Kang, "Still Getting Asia Wrong: No 'Contain China' Coalition Exists," *Washington Quarterly* (Winter 2023): 79–98; David C. Kang, *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

²² ↪ Yi Wen, "The Making of an Economic Superpower: Unlocking China's Secret of Rapid Industrialization," Working Paper 2015-006B, Economic Research Division, Federal Reserve Board of St. Louis, August 2015, 2, stlouisfed.org. See also Cheng Enfu, *China's Economic Dialectic: The Original Aspiration of Reform* (New York: International Publishers, 2019).

²³ ↪ Yi Wen, "China's Rapid Rise: From Backward Agrarian Society to Industrial Powerhouse in Just 35 Years," Regional Economist, Federal Reserve Board of St. Louis, April 11, 2016; John Ross, *China's Great Road* (Glasgow: Praxis Press, 2021), 23; Yi Wen, "Income and Living Standards Across China," *On the Economy* (blog), Federal Reserve Board of St. Louis, January 8, 2018.

²⁴ ↪ David Christian, *Maps of Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 406–9; Paul Bairoch, "The Main Trends in National Economic Disparities Since the Industrial Revolution," in *Disparities in Economic Development Since the Industrial Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 7–8; Ben Norton, "China Is 'World's Sole Manufacturing Superpower,' with 35% of Global Output," *Geopolitical Economy Report*, January 31, 2024, geopoliticaleconomy.com. This paragraph draws on John Bellamy Foster, foreword to Cheng, *China's Economic Dialectic*, vii–xiii.

²⁵ ↪ Alessandro Nicita and Carlos Razo, "China: Rise of a Trade Titan," UNCTAD, April 27, 2021, unctad.org.

²⁶ ↪ On the Great Financial Crisis, see John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff, *The Great Financial Crisis: Causes and Consequences* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009).

digit rate of growth, at the same time that what The Economist dubbed as “the moribund rich world” was labouring to achieve any positive growth at all.²⁷ The shock in Washington was severe. Not only was China now the engine for world economic growth; by 2010, it had passed Japan to become the second-largest world economy. Nothing seemed to stop its rapid development. It had long been argued by theorists of deepening economic stagnation in monopoly capitalism that the sluggish performance of all of the mature capitalist economies, namely, the United States and Canada, Western Europe, and Japan, was associated with low levels of net investment due to an overaccumulation of capital at the top of the society and the decline in expected profits on new investment that this created.²⁸ In the wake of the Great Financial Crisis, mainstream economists such as Lawrence Summers jumped on to this analysis (without acknowledgment of its origins), writing of “secular stagnation.”²⁹ But while the countries of the imperial core of the world capitalist economy grew ever more slowly due to a lack of net capital formation (accompanied by the amassing of financial claims to wealth at the top of society), China was an example of the exact opposite, with historically high levels of net investment over decades, resulting in epoch-making growth rates.³⁰

Clinton’s Indo-Pacific grand strategy, followed by Obama’s “Pivot to Asia” in 2010–2011, was a response to this epochal shift in the world economy. In this situation, Washington was entangled in numerous contradictions. Not only was the United States, coming out of deep recession, eager to obtain a larger part of the economic value being generated in Asia, and particularly China, but at the same time it sought to slow the growth of Chinese power through a process of strategic encirclement, via enhancement of military bases, alliances, and partnerships; limitations on technology; and the attempted creation of trade agreements that would be to the advantage of the imperial powers while subverting China.

Nevertheless, the Obama strategy for U.S. leveraging of the various dimensions of power against China was still relatively cautious given political developments occurring in China itself. Beginning with the Seventeenth Party Congress in 2007, commencing in the second half of Hu Jintao’s decade as general secretary of the Communist Party of China and president of China, the dominant reformist wing (also known as the right) in China was increasingly challenged by conservatives (also referred to as the left). Although lines of dispute were not firmly set, the former identified more strongly with the market reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping, and furthered by his successor Jiang Zemin, while the latter were more state focused, and often hearkened back in various ways to Mao Zedong. This could be seen in the main lines of dispute, involving questions of how to define Scientific Development and a Harmonious Society. The latter issue revolved around Jiang’s Three Represents put forward in 2000, outlining the course of China’s advance. Here, a Harmonious Society: “[1] Represents the development trends of advanced productive forces; [2] Represents the Orientations of an Advanced Culture; and [3] Represents the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people of China.”³¹ The Three Represents were originally introduced as a response to the left, and were intended to continue the reformist path in the direction of liberalism/neoliberalism.

In contrast, the conservative approach was to raise up “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” and institute it as the key to both Scientific Development and a Harmonious Society. What emerged in the Seventeenth Party Congress, surprisingly, was an emphasis on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics as the defining “Banner Path” determining

²⁷ ↪ John Bellamy Foster and Robert W. McChesney, *The Endless Crisis* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 158-59; “The Next China,” *The Economist*, July 29, 2010.

²⁸ ↪ See Harry Magdoff and Paul M. Sweezy, *Stagnation and the Financial Explosion* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987).

²⁹ ↪ See Hans G. Despain, “[Secular Stagnation: Mainstream Versus Marxian Traditions](#),” *Monthly Review* 67, no. 4 (September 2015): 1–11.

³⁰ ↪ John Ross, “[U.S. Dooms Itself to Defeat in Peaceful Competition with China](#),” *MR Online*, May 8, 2014.

³¹ ↪ “What Is ‘Three Represents’ CPC Theory?,” n.d., [china.org.cn](#).

Chinese political development, and thus a victory for the left. Jiang's Three Represents were demoted, and were no longer seen as an independent contribution, but subsumed within Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, "now absorbing everything that came after Mao." Xi was later to characterise the "Theoretical System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" as the Second Historic Leap after Mao, with Xi Jinping Thought associated with Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era eventually attaining Third Leap status.³²

The strong comeback of conservatism/leftism in the Seventeenth Party Congress was followed by a further strengthening of leftism in the Party after the 2008–2009 Great Financial Crisis, which began in the United States. With the entire imperial core of the capitalist world economy, as well as the more dependent economies in the Global South, entering into a systemic crisis of unprecedented scale since the Second World War, the prestige of neoliberalism in China began to wane, though it remained strong among Chinese economists trained abroad. The shift away from Western conceptions could be seen in key articles in central outlets such as Red Flag Manuscript. A major manifestation of this was a sudden turnaround in analyses of the demise of the Soviet Union. From 1994 to 2008, the primary explanations for Soviet failure were a lack of market reform, institutional crisis, and ideological erosion, in that order, while party-building was barely evident. However, in 2009–2018, the first two of these explanations disappeared altogether, while the emphasis changed to failures with respect to ideological erosion and party-building, with added stress on bad leaders (that is, corruption).³³

Xi's rise to general secretary of the party and president was viewed by many as a victory for the right-wing reformists. In U.S. foreign policy circles, there was hope that Xi would be another Mikhail Gorbachev and expand privatisation of the Chinese economy and liberal reforms, which would end by bringing down the Communist Party of China.³⁴ In the initial years of his first term, Xi appeared indeed to many to be taking a reformist path. His "Chinese Dream" of China being strong again and moving on to become "a great modern socialist society" (after having "stood up" under Mao and having become "better off" under Deng) was often viewed as a purely nationalist stance.³⁵ But it soon became clear that for Xi, the Chinese Dream was completely in accord with Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, and that he was not only in agreement with the conservative (left) stance, but represented a "Gorbachev in reverse," who was dedicated to restoring the "Mass Line style party-people connection."³⁶ A key factor leading to Western enmity was Xi's introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, aimed at massive global infrastructure that would connect China in terms of geoeconomic relations to the Global South and to Europe.

If Obama's "Pivot to Asia" had been directed at enhancing the military and geoeconomic encirclement of China, the gauntlet had not yet been thrown down in a decisive way by Washington, as U.S. grand strategists still hoped for a new Gorbachev, who would internally undermine the party, weakening China and the global challenge it represented. By 2015, it was clear not only that Xi was sincere in advancing socialism in his New Era proposals, but that the tide had

³² ↪ Lin Le, "Chinese Politics Since Hu Jintao and the Origin of Xi Jinping's Strongman Rule: A New Hypothesis," Texas National Security Review (The Scholar) 6, no. 4 (Fall 2023), 38–40, 62–64, tsnr.org.

³³ ↪ Lin Le, "Chinese Politics Since Hu Jintao," 67; David Shambaugh, *China's Leaders: From Mao to Now* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021), 292, 297; Susan Shirk, *Overreach: How China Derailed Its Peaceful Rise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 160. One of Gorbachev's biggest mistakes, according to Xi, was to remove the military from the control of the Party. See Shambaugh, *China's Leaders*, 297.

³⁴ ↪ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders*, 317; Lin Le, "Chinese Politics Since Hu Jintao," 43; Shirk, *Overreach*, 42, 183–84.

³⁵ ↪ Xi, *The Governance of China*, vol. 3, 12; Foster, "The New Cold War on China," 10, 14–15. Although Xi's analysis is amazingly consistent, a stronger emphasis on "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," and specifically on social modes of governance, can be seen in the second volume of *The Governance of China* (2014–17) than in the first volume (2012–14). Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, vol.1 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2014, 2nd ed., 2018); Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2017).

³⁶ ↪ Shambaugh, *China's Leaders*, 317; Lin Le, "Chinese Politics Since Hu Jintao," 43.

turned against the reformists.³⁷ Republican strategists around Trump during his 2016 election campaign were the first to demand a New Cold War with China (while seeking détente with Russia). Democrats, in contrast, despite Obama’s call for a pivot, were still focused on Russia more than China.³⁸ But with the Trump initiation of a New Cold War, launching huge hikes in tariffs on China, increased sanctions, and a large military push, Democrats quickly got on board. China was therefore declared to be a “Revisionist Power” threatening the “rules-based international order.” This phrase, it

The “rules based-international order” stands for the main institutions (economic and military) of the U.S. global imperium.

should be clear, does not refer to international law, the Westphalian system of international diplomacy, the United Nations general assembly, the International Court of Justice, or even to the World Trade Organization (which the United States has now reduced to a nonentity by undermining its juridical process). Rather, the “rules based-international order” stands for the main institutions (economic and military) of the U.S. global imperium: from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and dollar hegemony, to the global system of U.S. military bases and alliances.³⁹

Just how far the New Cold War discourse in the United States, increasingly centred on the Indo-Pacific, has now gone can be seen in an article entitled “No Substitute for Victory: America’s Competition with China Must Be Won Not Managed” for the May/June 2024 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, written by Matt Pottinger and Mike Gallagher.⁴⁰ Pottinger was the former U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser in the Trump White House from 2019–2021. Gallagher was a U.S. Representative from Wisconsin from 2017–2024, and former chair of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party. He is now working for the corporation Palantir Technologies, a CIA-backed U.S. surveillance and data mining multinational with strong connections to the deep state and Israel.⁴¹ Pottinger and Gallagher strongly support the hawkish position of the Joe Biden administration toward China, but argue that it is still not hawkish enough, because it has not officially declared a “New Cold War” with China.

Largely ignoring the fact that the United States under the Biden administration has been clear both in words and deeds that it is involved in a strategic offensive against China, Pottinger and Gallagher, turning reality upside down, proclaim that “a cold war is already being waged against the United States by China’s leaders”—to which Washington has not sufficiently replied.⁴² Their evidence for this is that China has provided military support to Russia in its war with Ukraine in the form of gunpowder, semiconductors, unspecified drones, “and other wares.” Beijing, we are told, has prepared for possible military intervention against Taiwan (part of China). Moreover, China has exploited its control over TikTok’s algorithms to unleash propaganda against Israel following the Palestinian al-Aqsa Flood on October 7, 2023, while also using its veto power on the UN Security Council to block condemnation of Hamas. Additionally, we are reminded of the Chinese balloon that blew off-course across the United States (although this constituted no security threat), coupled with the claim, parroting the Trump administration, that COVID-19 was somehow a “China Virus” and may have originated in a Chinese laboratory—something that scientific investigators have by now entirely discounted.⁴³

³⁷ ↪ Lin Le, “Chinese Politics Since Hu Jintao,” 73–75; also see Xi, “A Bright Future for Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” August 20, 2014, *The Governance of China*, vol. 2, 3–17.

³⁸ ↪ John Bellamy Foster and Robert W. McChesney, *Trump in the White House* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017), 32, 51–52, 84–85.

³⁹ ↪ Foster, “The New Cold War on China,” 7–9. On Washington’s effective destruction of the juridical process of the World Trade Organization, see Editors, “Notes from the Editors,” *The Jus Semper Global Alliance*, June 2024

⁴⁰ ↪ Matt Pottinger and Mike Gallagher, “No Substitute for Victory: America’s Competition with China Must Be Won, Not Managed,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2024): 25–39.

⁴¹ ↪ Caitlin Johnstone, “*Empire Managers Explain Why this Movement Scares Them*,” Caitlin Johnstone (blog), May 9, 2024, caitlinjohnstone.com.au.

⁴² ↪ Pottinger and Gallagher, “No Substitute,” 26.

⁴³ ↪ Pottinger and Gallagher, “No Substitute,” 27–30.

As verification of Chinese “aggression,” all of this is pitiful in world-historical terms. Placed against examples of actual massive U.S. military interventions abroad in the last thirty-five years, during which it has been involved in warfare, counterinsurgency, coups, sanctions, and embargoes on every inhabited continent, resulting in the deaths of millions, China’s so-called “aggressions” can hardly be said to weigh at all in the balance.⁴⁴ In an odd role reversal, China is charged by Pottinger and Gallagher with constituting an aggressive, dangerous, and not to be tolerated “threat” to the hundreds of U.S. military bases in Asia that currently encircle China itself.⁴⁵

Much of Pottinger and Gallagher’s attempt to justify a New Cold War against China is aimed at Xi directly, criticising him for claiming that the world at present is in “chaos,” which, in their warlike imagination, is taken to mean that Xi is maliciously “fostering global chaos” at the expense of the United States. Xi is to be condemned, moreover, not only for his role as “an agent of chaos” but for having “vilified Gorbachev,” who as head of the Soviet Communist Party presided over the destruction of the USSR. Xi should therefore be classified, Pottinger and Gallagher argue, as an “unrelenting foe” of the United States, responsible for “CCP [Chinese Communist Party] imperialism”—though “imperialism” in relation to what is not clear.⁴⁶ (It is notable that the official designation is the Communist Party of China [CPC]. This lays stress on the fact that the CPC belongs to China specifically rather than being part of an international entity. CCP, in contrast, is commonly used, incorrectly, in the West, particularly in the United States, often with the aim of very pointedly suggesting the exact opposite for propagandistic effect.⁴⁷)

It is absolutely essential, Pottinger and Gallagher pronounce, that opposition to China, and particularly, the Communist Party of China, be presented as what it is: a New Cold War, to be won or lost. “U.S. policymakers’ squeamishness about the term ‘cold war,’” they write, “causes them to overlook the way it can mobilise society. A cold war offers a relatable framework that Americans can use to guide their own decisions,” thereby “allowing the U.S. government...to recruit the next generation of cold warriors...[in] the context with China.”⁴⁸ U.S. war preparations against China, they propose, should be greatly expanded, augmenting “the U.S. military’s footprint” in the Indo-Pacific, and Washington should weaponise all of its political and economic relations in the strategic super-region. As just one aspect of this, the United States, they insist, should spend an “additional” \$100 billion over the next five years in the form of a “deterrence fund” in order to dominate the Taiwan Strait in Chinese territorial waters. Altogether, they call for a vast increase in “weapons and [military-]industrial base spending earmarked for the Indo-Pacific.”⁴⁹

A crucial part of Pottinger and Gallagher’s argument in *Foreign Affairs* is that Washington should be clear about the “end state” that it is aiming at in the New Cold War with China, which is nothing less than the end of Xi’s rule and the destruction of the Communist Party of China, replicating developments in the Gorbachev period in the Soviet Union. Rather than modelling himself after Gorbachev, as the Western powers hoped, Xi, they charge, has modelled himself after “Joseph Stalin.” The “end state” then to be promoted is the same as President Ronald Reagan advanced with respect to the USSR: to end “evil in the modern world” via the destruction externally and internally of the Communist Party of China in a final end to the Chinese Revolution, now seventy-five years old.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ ↪ David Michael Smith, *Endless Holocausts* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020), 208–9, 256–57.

⁴⁵ ↪ Pottinger and Gallagher, “No Substitute,” 35.

⁴⁶ ↪ Pottinger and Gallagher, “No Substitute,” 26, 28, 39.

⁴⁷ ↪ “CCP or CPC: A China Watcher’s Rorschach,” China Media Project, March 30, 2023, chinamediaproject.org.

⁴⁸ ↪ Pottinger and Gallagher, “No Substitute,” 37.

⁴⁹ ↪ Pottinger and Gallagher, “No Substitute,” 34–35.

⁵⁰ ↪ Pottinger and Gallagher, “No Substitute,” 38–39.

The fact that the Pottinger and Gallagher article on a stepped-up New Cold War against China appeared in the Council of Foreign Relations' flagship journal *Foreign Affairs* means that it has to some extent gained the bipartisan support of the U.S. strategic order. The Biden administration itself justifies its military buildup in the Indo-Pacific in terms of the needed defence of the nations of the super-region in the face of China's rise. This is seen as demanding a more aggressive "forward deployment" by the United States. According to the 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, China "seeks to become the world's most influential power," displacing the United States in that respect, and for that very reason it constitutes a danger to the countries in the Indo-Pacific and the entire world. Moreover, Washington's stated goal is to bring the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) more actively into the Indo-Pacific. Central to the entire Indo-Pacific strategy is building a strong relation with India within the Quad as a "net security provider."⁵¹ On top of this is the articulation of a strategy of general weaponisation, turning U.S. military assets into additional economic power, and economic power into military-strategic power.⁵²

As part of the New Cold War on China, the Biden administration has not only maintained the Trump tariffs that weaponised trade relations, but in May 2024 raised them to what the *Economist* magazine called "ultra-high" levels. The tariff on Chinese electric vehicles has quadrupled from 25 percent to 100 percent, while the tariff on solar cells has increased from 25 percent to 50 percent, lithium-ion batteries from 7.5 percent to 25 percent, and syringes and needles from 0 percent to 50 percent. Far from free trade, this is trade war.⁵³

Still, U.S. attempts to constrict China's development, rely ultimately on its strategic encirclement, building on its five defence alliances in the Indo-Pacific (with Japan, Australia, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand) as well as its numerous strategic partnerships. The object is to form a bloc confrontation, or what Haushofer in his very explicit geopolitics called an "Anaconda" strategy of constricting the adversary through military coercion.⁵⁴

In April 2024, the U.S. military began deploying in the Indo-Pacific a new intermediate-range land-based missile system, known as Typhon, which includes Tomahawk cruise missiles, Supersonic Standard Missile-6 (SM-6) multi-purpose interceptor missiles, and the Mark 41 ground-based vertical launch system. This is the first time that Washington has introduced an offensive, land-based mid-range missile system anywhere in the world since it unilaterally withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty with Russia in 2019, which had banned the deployment of all such missiles.

In the case of Typhon, the missile system serves multiple purposes, carrying both nuclear and non-nuclear "payloads." The Typhon system of missiles currently installed in Northern Luzon in the Philippines, in the first island chain south of Taiwan, has a range of more than 1,600 kilometres (in case of the Tomahawk missiles), capable of reaching the east coast of China, the Taiwan Strait, and People's Liberation Army bases in China. Although the new system was introduced into the Philippines on "temporary" basis, there is no certainty, according to the U.S. Congressional Research Service, that its deployment will not be permanent, while the U.S. Army Pacific commander has indicated that the United States intends to install permanent Typhon systems in the Indo-Pacific. Beijing considers the present deployment of such missiles to be

⁵¹ ↪ The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States*, 5, 13, 16.

⁵² ↪ The linkages being made between military power and economic power, essentially weaponizing all economic relations with respect to China while seeking to use the leverage of U.S. war-making power to gain additional economic advantages, is very clear in recent statements by Blinken. See Editors, "Notes from the Editors," *Monthly Review* 75, no. 7 (December 2023).

⁵³ ↪ "Biden Outdoes Trump with Ultra-High China Tariffs," *The Economist*, May 14, 2024; Michael Roberts, "Tariffs, Technology and Industrial Policy," *The Next Recession*, May 20, 2024.

⁵⁴ ↪ Tami Davis Biddle, "Coercion Theory: A Basic Introduction for Practitioners," *Texas National Security Review* 3, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 94, 109.

a major provocation that may generate a strategic arms race. These deployments by Washington of intermediate-range, land-based missile systems in the Indo-Pacific thus clearly mark a dangerous escalation, threatening a Third World War.⁵⁵

Yet, all evidence confirms that most nations in the Indo-Pacific have decreased their military spending over the last decade and have no real fears of military aggression from China, with whom they have experienced growing economic interactions, spurring shared growth in the region.⁵⁶ The main disturber of the comparative peace in the Indo-Pacific is therefore widely believed to be the United States, which has as its explicit goal the maintenance of its hegemonic imperial role, that is, its preeminence both in the Indo-Pacific super-region and the globe.

The main disturber of the comparative peace in the Indo-Pacific is the United States, which has as its explicit goal the maintenance of its hegemonic imperial role, that is, its preeminence both in the Indo-Pacific super-region and the globe.

Maritime Power and the Encirclement of China

Today, Washington’s “mirror writing” continues, especially in the context of the Indo-Pacific, whereby its imperialism is presented as anti-imperialism and foundational for maintaining “peace” in the region for seventy-five years—since the Chinese Revolution. We are told that the role of the United States in the region is one of advancing “freedom and openness,” offering “autonomy and options,” and establishing “rules-based approaches.”⁵⁷ Overall, the goals are to maintain “security” and “regional prosperity.” In this imperial grand strategy, geopolitics and geoeconomics are deeply intertwined.⁵⁸ Today, approximately “two-thirds of the world’s economy” has its basis here, which has prompted additional financial, political, and military investment in the region that Washington sees as “the world’s center of gravity.”⁵⁹

To succeed in its goals of “building a balance of influence in the world that is maximally favorable to the United States,” Washington tells us that it must protect its allies in the Indo-Pacific from the “bullying” and “harmful behaviour” of China.⁶⁰ This is an absolute necessity, as “the Chinese Communist Party (CCP),” the U.S. Department of State claims, “poses the central threat of our times,” aspiring to become both a regional and global superpower. Thus, China, we are told, “is not a model world citizen” but a “revisionist power,” and must be countered.⁶¹ According to Biden’s Indo-Pacific Strategy, this plan includes building on “ironclad treaty alliances”; forging greater connectivity “between the Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic” extending as far as nations within NATO; creating an “integrated deterrence” in “war-fighting domains”; increasing investments in improving U.S. military capacities and operations, including joint exercises with allies; and expanding U.S. military presence.⁶² Strategically, it means prioritising the “single greatest asymmetric strength,” which is the U.S. “network of security alliances and partnerships” in the region to “develop and deploy

⁵⁵ ↪ “The U.S. Army’s Typhon Strategic Mid-Range Fires (SMRF) System,” Congressional Research System, April 16, 2024; Xiaodon Liang, “U.S. Sends Once-Barred Missiles to Philippines Exercise,” Arms Control Association, May 2024; “China Resolutely Opposes US’ Deployment of Mid-Range Missile System in Asia-Pacific Region in Bid to Seek Unilateral Military Advantage: Chinese FM,” Global Times, April 18, 2024; Ashley Roque, “Army’s New Typhon Strike Weapon Headed to Pacific in 2024,” Northrop Grumman/Breaking Defense, November 18, 2023; Drago Bosnic, “U.S. Moves Previously Banned Missiles Closer to China and Russia,” Struggle/La Lucha, April 17, 2024.

⁵⁶ ↪ Kang, “Still Getting Asia Wrong.”

⁵⁷ ↪ U.S. Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, 7–8, 12.

⁵⁸ ↪ Doyle and Rumley, *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*, 69.

⁵⁹ ↪ U.S. Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, 4.

⁶⁰ ↪ U.S. Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, 5.

⁶¹ ↪ U.S. Department of State, “Chinese Communist Party: Threatening Global Peace and Security,” January 2021.

⁶² ↪ U.S. Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, 4, 10, 12–13.

advanced war-fighting capabilities” to protect citizens and vested interests.⁶³ The larger imperial plan involves the Anaconda stratagem, encircling China with U.S. military bases and using its various treaty alliances and security agreements as a basis to try to “contain China” strategically.⁶⁴ These actions, especially the revived formation of the Quad Security Dialogue, have raised concerns whether the United States is trying to create an Asian NATO as part of its New Cold War, something that has been repeatedly intimated by Washington.⁶⁵

Although the United States forcefully asserts it “is an Indo-Pacific power” with ties that stretch back hundreds of years, its strategic position in the region today—which includes actual colonies such as Guam and American Samoa, as well as dependencies and strings of military bases—is largely the historical product of the Spanish-American War, the Second World War, and the Cold War. One U.S. state, Hawai‘i, is depicted by the U.S. military as squarely within its USINOPACOM region of operations, which, together with U.S. colonies in the super-region, is meant to affirm the U.S. role as a sovereign power within the Indo-Pacific, as well as the preeminent military force.

As the United Kingdom started to “withdraw” from the Indo-Pacific in the mid-twentieth century, it signed a series of intelligence agreements to share information regarding China and the USSR. The UKUSA (United Kingdom-United States of America) Agreement was signed in 1946. This agreement was expanded in 1948 and 1956 to include Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, establishing the “Five Eyes” collecting and sharing defence, human, and geopolitical intelligence to coordinate efforts between intelligence agencies within and among nations. Its coordinated efforts were employed to monitor the operations of the Viet Minh in the War on Vietnam. The United Kingdom also established the Five Power Defence Arrangements in 1971 between itself and Commonwealth members Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Singapore, whereby the nations agreed to consult each other on potential threats in the region to ensure the “stability” of the Indo-Pacific.⁶⁶

In seeking to further expand its presence in the Indo-Pacific, Washington has asserted its naval power, both militarising allied nations against the purported threat of China and constructing a wider geopolitical infrastructure. Of the forty some nations within the Indo-Pacific, the United States, as noted, only has military alliances (defence pacts) with five nations: Australia, Japan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea (South Korea), and Thailand. These alliances, which are offensive more than defensive, have China, North Korea, and Russia as their principal targets.⁶⁷

Increasingly, the United States views India as a key player within its imperial grand strategy.

In the effort to build a bigger strategic bloc, Washington has also been attempting to establish additional security partnerships with India, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Vietnam.

Increasingly, the United States views India as a key player within its imperial grand strategy, indicating that “India plays a vital role in achieving our shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific.”⁶⁸ Thus, in 2016, the United States established a Major Defence Partnership with India to elevate its military capacity and position it as a “net security provider” in the super-region. This arrangement provides India with “license-free access” to purchasing military technologies that the

⁶³ ↪ U.S. Department of Defense, Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, 12.

⁶⁴ ↪ Congressional Research Service, U.S. Defense Infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific: Background and Issues for Congress, June 6, 2023; Kang, “Still Getting Asia Wrong.”

⁶⁵ ↪ Doyle and Rumley, *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*, 53.

⁶⁶ ↪ Doyle and Rumley, *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*, 48.

⁶⁷ ↪ Doyle and Rumley, *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*, 64.

⁶⁸ ↪ U.S. Department of State, “[U.S. Security Cooperation with India](#),” January 20, 2021.

Department of Commerce oversees. The military defence trade with India, coordinated by the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs within the United States, increased “from near zero in 2008 to over \$20 billion in 2020.”⁶⁹ In addition to encouraging India to purchase Lockheed Martin and Boeing fighter planes, the United States has offered India, a non-treaty country, a Missile Technology Control Regime Category-1 Unmanned Aerial System.

In an effort to build on the existing treaties and attempts to bring India closer to the United States, the Quad was revived (once again) in 2017 with the stated object of limiting Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific. This informal security dialogue has primarily been between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. India’s presence is the key in what is referred to as the three-plus-one dialogue, since the other three are already part of the U.S.-directed military alliance system in the region. India has been a cautious participant, not wanting fully to support Western goals, disrupt its own position within the region, or take a role as a security front. Additionally, India signed a strategic partnership with China in 2005 to advance prosperity and peace, so it has multiple partnerships within the region. New Delhi has opposed proposals to expand Quad membership. Nevertheless, Quad collaborations have coincided with an increase in joint military exercises in the Indo-Pacific, which Washington sees as the precursor to an enlarged Indo-Pacific strategic bloc. The Quad challenges China’s maritime claims in the South China Sea. It is presented as a vehicle for promoting the interests of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and as the basis for political-economic development. In alignment with Biden’s overall “Indo-Pacific Economic Framework,” it is conceived as a counter to China’s Belt and Road Initiative.⁷⁰ To date, the Quad has not gained much traction as a means to advance larger goals, but persists as one of several strategic arrangements to challenge China.

The United States and three of its allies—Australia, Japan, and the Philippines, now collectively referred to as the Squad (not to be confused with the Quad)—conducted collective naval exercises in the South China Sea in April and May 2024. The Squad allies claim that these military exercises are intended to increase their “joint abilities” and “uphold the right to freedom of navigation and overflight and respect for maritime rights under international law.” The provocation is clear, as these operations took place within “China’s maritime border,” and are seen by China as part of Washington flexing its “gunboat muscles.”⁷¹

More significant is the network of military bases in the Indo-Pacific surrounding China, meant to maintain naval supremacy. The United States has long taken it for granted that it can move freely throughout the Indo-Pacific with impunity, even sending its military vessels and aircraft through the Taiwan Strait within Chinese territorial waters, using the justification that it is ensuring the protection and security of Asian nations and that it helps ensure free trade via the Trans-Pacific Partnership. This strategic presence is increasingly important to Washington, given the expansion in China’s naval capacity, and the enlarged trade between China and other Asian countries, which has reduced the relative economic role of the United States in the super-region.

According to the Congressional Research Service’s report U.S. Defence Infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific from June 2023, the United States has “at least 66 significant defence sites spread across the region”—otherwise specified as “the

⁶⁹ ↪ U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Security Cooperation with India.”

⁷⁰ ↪ Doyle and Rumley, *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*, 53–54, 59–61; Kang, “Still Getting Asia Wrong,” 90–91; White House, “Quad Leaders’ Joint Statement: ‘The Spirit of the Quad,’” March 12, 2021.

⁷¹ ↪ Vijay Prashad, “United States Assembles the Squad Against China,” *Struggle/La Lucha*, May 17, 2024.

These sixty-six “significant” U.S. military bases in the Indo-Pacific, designated by the Congressional Research Service, are only part of the defence infrastructure employed to encircle China—as the late John Pilger has noted, there are realistically some four hundred U.S. military bases surrounding China.⁷⁵ The bases in the Indo-Pacific are crucial to maintaining naval supremacy. They are seen as a significant component of strategically containing China. To this end, the United States is actively negotiating with host nations to establish additional base sites, either permanently or as contingency locations for support operations. Since 2011, it has secured an additional twelve base sites in Australia and the Philippines. New facilities and installations are being built in Guam and Japan. Between the fiscal years 2020 and 2023, Congress has appropriated \$8.9 billion to support the construction of new military sites in the Indo-Pacific. The Pacific Deterrence Initiative was proposed in 2020 and has been used to fund further investments to modernise, strengthen, and expand the U.S. military presence, capacities, and infrastructure under USINDOPACOM in order to enhance readiness against China and to assure allies of U.S. military support.⁷⁶

A key component of the network of U.S. military bases is the Compacts of Free Association, otherwise known as COFA. These international agreements between the United States and the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau were initially established in the 1980s, granting the United States exclusive permission to operate military bases on their lands. These island nations are all located between Hawai‘i and the Philippines. As a result, the negotiated agreements are critical to

One of the most recent and aggressive military bloc arrangements established by Washington is AUKUS, which includes Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

establishing and maintaining U.S. control over the main, uninterrupted, corridor through the central Pacific, as well as directly connecting to the network of military bases west of the International Date Line in the Indo-Pacific. The separate agreements were renewed and signed in 2023, extending these

rights over the next twenty years. In return, the United States will continue to provide financial assistance, which includes postal service, totaling over \$7 billion.

One of the most recent and aggressive military bloc arrangements established by Washington is AUKUS, which includes Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Established in 2021, AUKUS is premised on advancing military security beyond the focus of the Five Eyes intelligence agreement. There is much interest in pursuing technologies associated with cyber and electronic warfare. Additionally, a major focus involves both the United Kingdom and the United States helping Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines as part of expanding the latter’s military capacity. This agreement has sparked grave concern on the part of other Indo-Pacific countries, including Indonesia and Malaysia, about whether AUKUS will result in additional conflicts, nuclear proliferation in the Western Pacific, and deadly outcomes. Nuclear-powered submarines are viewed as a dangerous first step in the introduction of nuclear-armed submarines, in this case at the instigation of two Western nuclear powers. Initial conversations about expanding AUKUS have focused on Japan, which supports Australia receiving nuclear-powered submarines, and New Zealand, which indicated it might consider participating in the non-nuclear dimensions of the partnership.⁷⁷

Given the development of U.S. military and economic bloc infrastructure directed primarily at China, of which Beijing is acutely aware, it has sought to take actions to safeguard its own security. Nevertheless, Washington assures its allies that

⁷⁵ ↪ John Pilger, “There Is a War Coming Shrouded in Propaganda,” John Pilger (blog), May 1, 2023, braveneweuropa.com.

⁷⁶ ↪ Congressional Research Service, U.S. Defense Infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific, 22, 27, 30; U.S. Department of Defense, Pacific Deterrence Initiative: Department of Defense Budget Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, March 2024.

⁷⁷ ↪ Kang, “Still Getting Asia Wrong,” 91; Bonnie Denise Jenkins, “AUKUS: A Commitment to the Future,” remarks at the Atlantic Council, Washington DC, November 27, 2023, state.gov; U.S. Department of Defense, “AUKUS Defense Ministers’ Joint Statement,” news release, April 8, 2024. See also the U.S. Department of Defense website on AUKUS: defense.gov/Spotlights/AUKUS.

its Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons, previously known as AirSea Battle, offers an integrated approach that will “disrupt, destroy, and defeat” the defensive military strategies of adversaries, such as China.⁷⁸ There is little hesitation in U.S. military circles in referring to a possible Third World War in the Indo-Pacific, even though this would almost inevitably escalate into a thermonuclear exchange threatening all of humanity. For this reason, the New Cold War on China being pushed by Washington, centering on control of the Indo-Pacific, is a clear manifestation of what is now “the potentially most dangerous phase of imperialism.”⁷⁹

Late Imperialism and the Indo-Pacific

The essential reality governing current U.S. imperial grand strategy today is the sharp decline in U.S. economic, financial, and political hegemony in the world. Since the Second World War, U.S. capitalism has ruled the world economy by means of a “global hegemonic imperialism.” Now that this hegemony is waning in the period of late imperialism, Washington is facing a set of contradictions that are ineradicable within the system.⁸⁰

The U.S. drive to unipolar world power, following the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, was a reflection of the expansive tendencies of capitalism itself and its innate nation-state divisions. Imperialism is inherent to capitalism and represents its global face. Three decades into the drive to unipolar dominance, however, the situation is rapidly shifting toward a multipolar world. Although the United States is still the preeminent force for global destruction with its vast military power, its ability to translate that into a renewal of its economic and political power is limited. Military confrontations with other great powers today raise the issue of global Armageddon. As even the Republican strategist and virulent anti-China hawk Elbridge Colby, the principal author of the 2018 National Defence Strategy of the Trump administration, has recently acknowledged, the days of U.S. “primacy” as a hegemonic world power are gone: “a foreign policy of U.S. primacy is simply not possible.”⁸¹ To proceed in that direction then is a march of folly.

On top of all of this, the United States is confronted in the People’s Republic of China with a country that has seen the most rapid economic growth in all of history, based on a quite different social formation relying on the strengths of both the state and the market in the form of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. As a five-thousand-year-old civilisation, China represents a cultural as well as an economic challenge to the West, pushing for new global norms with its global civilisational initiatives. China, rather than seeking to create an opposing military bloc to that of the United States and its allies, has opposed the formation of all such “bloc confrontation.”⁸²

The U.S. response has been to translate China’s rise more and more into a security issue to be dealt with strategically. It recognises that if China’s overall economic reach in the Indo-Pacific were to expand more, the U.S. hold on what is now the industrial center of the globe would diminish proportionately, leading to the eventual downfall of the U.S. imperium. With decades of economic stagnation, arising from the monopoly capitalism behind it and with no visible way out, the

⁷⁸ ↪ Doyle and Rumley, *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*, 71; Douglas Stuart, “San Francisco 2.0: Military Aspects of the U.S. Pivot toward Asia,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 39, no. 4 (2012): 202–18; “New US Military Concept Marks Pivot to Sea and Air,” *Strategic Comments*, vol.

⁷⁹ ↪ Doyle and Rumley, *The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific*, 71; István Mészáros, *Socialism or Barbarism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 97.

⁸⁰ ↪ Mészáros, *Socialism or Barbarism*, 51–52. On the concept of “late imperialism,” see John Bellamy Foster, “*Late Imperialism*,” *Monthly Review* 71, no. 3 (July–August 2019): 1–19.

⁸¹ ↪ Elbridge Colby, “America Must Face Reality and Prioritise China Over Europe,” *Financial Times*, May 23, 2024.

⁸² ↪ “Chinese FM Expresses Solemn Position Regarding US’ Actions to Advance ‘Indo-Pacific Strategy’ Targeting China, Urging US to Stop Bloc Confrontation,” *Global Times*, April 15, 2024. On China’s trio of recent global initiatives—the Global Security Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative—see Editors, “*Notes from the Editors*,” *Jus Semper*, October 2023; and Editors, “*Notes from the Editors*,” *Monthly Review* 75, no. 6 (November 2023).

United States is unable to maintain its dominance solely by economic means. Hence, the U.S. capitalist class, together with those of its Western allies, is now threatening through its actions to bring the roof down on all of humanity.

In order to justify its escalation in the Indo-Pacific, Washington has had to portray Beijing as a threat to the nations around it. However, of the more than forty nations in the Indo-Pacific, only five have defence treaties with the United States, mostly the products of past wars. Indeed, the general perception of countries in the Indo-Pacific over the last decade or two has been one of increasing security, due to what is effectively seen as the nonaggressive stance of China and the increasingly integrated economic and trade relations. Although trade and territorial disputes naturally occur, China is generally seen in Asia as a source of collective economic development. It has signed more free trade agreements with Indo-Pacific nations than has the United States. It is also providing substantial development funds to other nations in the Indo-Pacific. China distributed \$36 billion in such funds in 2017, dwarfing the \$3 billion from the United States.⁸³ In general, the nations of the super-region see an integrated economy with China as a win-win solution, while they perceive the weaponisation of economic and political relations at the behest of the United States as a lose-lose proposition.

The nations of the super-region see an integrated economy with China as a win-win solution, while they perceive the weaponisation of economic and political relations at the behest of the United States as a lose-lose proposition.

As the highly respected international relations scholar David C. Kang has argued in *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century* (2017) and other works, there has been a general decline in military expenditures as a share of GDP in the largest East Asian states over the last couple of decades. Taking the eleven largest states, it has dropped to roughly half of what it was two and half decades before, declining from an average 3.35 percent in 1990 to an average of 1.8 percent in 2015—a trend that has continued.⁸⁴ This objectively points toward a sense of increasing, rather than decreasing, national security in the region. It is this climate of peace that the United States is threatening to disturb, not for the sake of East Asia but aimed at the preservation at all costs of its preeminence as a world power.

C. Wright Mills famously said, “the immediate cause of World War III is the preparation of it.”⁸⁵ The United States, facing the demise of its global hegemonic imperialism, is not only preparing for a Third World War; it is actively provoking it. There are signs, however, that a mass anti-imperialist movement is again emerging in the United States and in the other countries of the imperial core of the capitalist world economy, beginning with the Free Palestine movement in response to Israel’s genocidal war in Gaza supported by Washington. The world movement today must be anti-imperialist, anticapitalist, antiwar, and ecological. Since the alternative is global exterminism, it is a struggle that only humanity can win.

⁸³ ↪ Kang, “Still Getting Asia Wrong,” 84.

⁸⁴ ↪ Kang, *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century*, 1; Kang, “Still Getting Asia Wrong,” 81, 84.

⁸⁵ ↪ C. Wright Mills, *The Causes of World War III* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), 47.

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