

Nontraditional Security Dilemmas on the Belt and Road*

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Abstract

Nontraditional security (NTS) cooperation has been seen as a ready focus for multilateral dialogue, soft-power enhancement, and positive military diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific. Some actors have responded to NTS threats by embracing various approaches including “military operations other than war” (MOOTW), as well as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) interventions. These responses are also testing grounds for military capacity, indicating power projection and forward deployment abilities. NTS operational capacities can become part of a spiraling security dilemma that undercuts the claimed benefits for military diplomacy and cooperative security approaches. Growing Chinese and Japanese NTS capacities are now part of a wider Indo-Pacific dynamic along the Maritime Silk Road (MSR). China’s need to provide for NTS along the Belt and Road includes the expanded use of private security companies, “paramilitary” maritime deployments, and PLA units. NTS threats, including the calibrated use of armed force, are now important components within Chinese defense and foreign policy. Japan sees these capacities as part of its wider contribution toward “proactive peace” and security through development in the Indo-Pacific region, but Tokyo is also aware of its role in boosting Japan’s soft power. NTS dilemmas intensify during acquisition of dual-use assets and when traditional security competition already exists, e.g., threat perceptions of Chinese military assertiveness. Carefully managed, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents an invitation for security cooperation. However, it also risks new forms of military competition and increasing securitization of developmental and environmental issues, a well-known problem for NTS as a conceptual and operational category.

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Introduction: Where Security Cooperation and Military Competition Meet

Many have seen NTS cooperation as a ready focus for multilateral and multi-level dialogue, soft-power enhancement, and positive military diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific region.¹ Actors have responded to NTS threats militarily by embracing approaches such as MOOTW, HADR interventions, as well as post-disaster recovery and stabilization operations. Indeed, military forces have a long history of emergency relief, logistical support, initial reconstruction roles, and even nation building, usually after the end of a military conflict or multilateral interventions, e.g., experiences at the end of World War II, reconstruction roles in the former Yugoslavia, the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq.² However, recent NTS operations are also a testing ground for showcasing military capacity, including intelligence and logistic operations that support power projection and forward deployment abilities. Chinese, Japanese and Indian doctrines and operations have increasingly featured NTS elements over the last two decades, e.g., via antipiracy operations, UN support operations, and international HADR deployments in reaction to natural disasters. In part, the desire by such states to be seen as “net security providers” rather than security threats has driven this trend.³ Actors also use such operations as an avenue for low-risk bilateral and multilateral cooperation, serving as confidence and trust building measures.⁴ In turn, observations of HADR and MOOTW operations also provide competing states with information on the strengths and weakness of the state engaging in these activities, a form of “secret reconnaissance,” which was of particular concern to China in its antipiracy deployments from 2008 on.⁵

In general, NTS concerns go beyond the defense of the state to a wider assessment of risks to the population as a whole and their extraterritorial national interests.⁶ Such transnational security threats provide motives for great power cooperation but also generate divergent, even clashing, views of how such issues should be resolved.⁷ Wider NTS challenges, such as resource depletion and climate change, have driven decades of diplomacy via the United Nations (UN) and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, while transnational organized crime, illicit goods, and money laundering have increasingly engaged global and regional organizations, e.g., via the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and related groups such the ASEAN Defense Minister’s Meeting (ADMM) and ASEAN Defense Minister’s Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus).⁸ Likewise, across the Indo-Pacific, diverse groupings use HADR operations as a focus of, or means toward, maritime cooperation. Such cooperation is a central component of the ASEAN

Regional Forum (ARF) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) agendas.⁹ This collaboration is a priority area for the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Action Plan for 2017–2021 (being developed via the organization’s “Cluster Group” on Disaster Risk Management) and the France–Australia–NZ (FRANZ) maritime cooperation agreements. Disaster relief is also a component in numerous multilateral naval exercises such as the MILAN and KOMODO exercises. In so far as NTS issues are seen as *soft* security issues, policy makers often treat them as “low-hanging fruit” where cooperation can readily be used as confidence and trust-building measures (CTBM) among the parties involved.¹⁰

However, NTS operational capacities can also become part of a spiraling security dilemma that undercuts the claimed benefits for military diplomacy and cooperative security approaches.¹¹ Cycles of capacity building have already been observed in Chinese and Japanese NTS operations and are now part of a wider Indian Ocean dynamic along the MSR. This can be seen in China’s participation in antipiracy operations in the Indian Ocean and off the coast of Somalia, an early indication of Beijing’s ability to maintain small naval task forces operating at a long distance from their bases, though their rules of engagement were rather limited and conservative.¹² Though often relatively small (usually two combatants and a supply ship), China, between 2008 and 2018, sent a total of 30 task forces as part of wider antipiracy operations, escorted over 5,900 ships in the western Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden by 2017 and sent vessels to evacuate Chinese and other foreign nationals from the conflicts in Libya and Yemen.¹³ These operations are pretexted on humanitarian grounds, protecting sea lines of communication (SLOC) and cargo shipping, which now includes sizable numbers of Chinese cargoes and China’s growing merchant marine fleet. Though such operations do provide shared regional security and economic benefits, one can also view these operations as “impure public goods” in that they differentially serve other ends such as power projection and enhanced diplomatic influence.¹⁴ Moreover, these trends have created considerable concern from Indian and Australian observers, who see this as a wider pattern of maritime power projection, especially when combined with threat perceptions based on the so-called “String of Pearls” and MSR investments, which give the People’s Republic of China (PRC) increased access to ports and fueling points across the Indian Ocean.¹⁵

Japan, too, has deployed limited maritime forces beyond East Asia into the wider Indo-Pacific, though usually as part of multilateral or UN-mandated operations. This included sending ships into the Persian Gulf for controversial minesweeping roles in 1991, with further supply missions into the Indian Ocean through 2001–2010 in support of US operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as support for regional coast guard training and other initiatives via its dialogue

with ASEAN. This was an extension of Japan's "normalization" via cautious multilateral and humanitarian support roles, e.g., medical teams in Cambodia (1992–1993); disaster and relief teams to Indonesia, Thailand, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Thailand (2004–2005); reconstruction and engineering teams in Iraq and East Timor; as well as early disaster relief teams in western India (2001), Pakistan (2005) and New Zealand (2011), among others.¹⁶ In the wider context of Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF) modernization, this can be seen as a form of "proactive pacifism" that allows for overseas operations that actively support global peace. Thereafter, Japan gradually engaged an extended pattern of defense mobilization in relation to "gray areas," ranging from antipiracy operations to air and naval deployments in the East China Sea, checking China's claims to the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands and adjacent exclusive economic zones (EEZ).¹⁷

In this context, Japan from 2011 has maintained a logistics base with a port and airfield in Djibouti, backed up by a small number of ground troops. Japan's national defense guidelines from 2018 noted that beyond antipiracy efforts, the JSDF facility will help Japan cooperate in the long-term quest for "regional security."¹⁸ China opened its own logistics base in Djibouti in 2017, while the United States, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain also have bases in the county, with Saudi Arabia signing agreements for the possible future development of a facility.¹⁹ In some measure, these early Japanese and Chinese efforts could be seen as mutual shadowing and matching of extended deployment capacities, at least in the Indian Ocean, followed by a more direct form of strategic confrontation in the East China Sea.²⁰



(US Air Force photo by SrA Gabrielle Spalding)

Figure 1. Japanese-led field training exercise. US Army 1LT Nicholas Sereday, executive officer for Charlie Company 2-113th Infantry assigned to Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, gives a concept of operations brief to Japanese and US military forces during a bilateral field training exercise in Djibouti, Africa, 2 October 2019. The exercise was part of a Japanese-led noncombatant evacuation operation exercise, which also included African coalition partners.

NTS is not an uncontested category. Indeed, it is defined by what it is not, i.e., it is not traditional security, with its focus on interstate conflict, direct national defense, or waging conventional wars. A long list of “other” issues then get dropped into this NTS category, especially if they are transnational in character, originate from nonmilitary actors/factors, and are not easily dealt with by the direct application of military force, e.g., climate change risks, environmental and natural disasters, flows of illicit goods, undocumented migration, transnational criminal networks, and food and water security.²¹ Debates have continued since the 1990s (following on from the Copenhagen School’s work) on how these issues have been framed by national narratives and social discourses that prioritize specific nonmilitary challenges as “threats.”²² Likewise, such securitizations may mask competing rather than cooperative extensions of governance beyond state borders, using “risk” to mobilize domestic and regional responses.²³

Resource scarcity is an area where these mechanisms can be easily seen, e.g., the extension of concern over fisheries depletion in Southeast Asia has moved from national monitoring of EEZs toward a wider conceptualization of fisheries management across the South China Sea and the Coral Triangle. This can be seen as a legitimate extension of scientific approaches, allowing a shift toward sustainable use of shared fisheries, especially for offshore fish species that move across EEZs and open sea boundaries.²⁴ If successful, this approach could act as one CTBM to expand trust among regional states, a methodology explored via groups such as ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP). However, such trends could also intensify territorial claims via securitized monitoring of transnational fisheries under national resource rubrics and threat perceptions, e.g., as found in Indonesian, Vietnamese, and Chinese responses to “illegal” fishing in recent years.²⁵

Further, adopting an NTS agenda will not always lead to automatic cooperation in dealing with harder traditional security issues pretexted on issues of sovereignty and territorial control. This can be seen in ASEAN contexts, where NTS responses have been a way of enhancing regional security cooperation but have only slowly moved from CTBMs toward preventive diplomacy, with little ability to address China’s territorial claims or reduce tensions between the United States and China.²⁶ In this context, ASEAN has made serious progress in regional coordination for disaster risks governance since the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) in 2008 and the creation of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA). However, other NTS responses are more problematic, e.g., the problems of Southeast Asian air pollution (the Haze) driven by forest fires in Indonesia, have induced

serious attention from ASEAN mechanisms²⁷ since 1997, but the process remains controversial and incomplete.²⁸

Japanese and Chinese NTS agendas are often used as part of wider soft-power responses designed to enhance national prestige and expand international influence in the Indo-Pacific. In turn, this may help legitimate Chinese interests and presence along the MSR, as well as providing one platform for focused Japanese activism in the Indo-Pacific under the so-called “Abe Doctrine.”²⁹ Indeed, Chinese responses to NTS threats can be seen as a corollary of Beijing’s expanding global interests along the BRI and its numerous corridors. In the Indo-Pacific, the expansion of Chinese interests, presence, and comprehensive capacities has led to tensions with other states (especially Japan and India) and concern expressed in regional organizations such as ASEAN, the IONS, and the IORA. China is a dialogue partner to IORA and only became an observer to IONS from 2015 onward. There is no simple remedy for these problems during a period of geopolitical tension, driven mainly by clashing US, Chinese, Indian, and Japanese strategic preoccupations. However, a strong commitment to transparent, “permissive” operations directed toward shared and agreed problems may reduce trends toward competitive power projection as a form of strategic preemption (see further below).

The next section of this article will explore NTS operations in the context of Japanese and Chinese soft-power agendas. This will be followed by a brief analysis of Chinese responses to NTS threats as part of Beijing’s expanding global interests, channeled through its expanding BRI agreements. The BRI opens up geo-economic corridors where China’s security concerns are intensified, even if these do not directly engage the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) itself. Beijing still mainly relies on local armed forces to protect Chinese investments, backed up in part by small amounts of military aid and a limited number of naval exercises and more regular Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) peace missions.³⁰ However, there are now increased pressures to acquire the “capacity to respond,” whether through upgraded military assets, expanded coast guards, special police units, militias, or private security corporations (PSC). The final section of this article will explore partial remedies to these problems. Such solutions rest on two approaches: where joint military capabilities are required they should function through UN, regional, or multilateral institutions, and where force is not required, there should be a rapid shift toward demilitarization, with civilian agencies taking up governance roles. When worked in conjunction, these two approaches can reduce the likelihood of NTS dilemmas being sustained, thereby undercutting the negative construction of shared NTS problems as interstate threats.

Japanese and Chinese NTS Responses as Soft-Power Enhancers

Both Japan and China use NTS responses, humanitarian missions, emergency aid, and developmental funding in support of national soft power, encouraging positive and friendly responses by partner nations and reducing past and present threat perceptions.³¹ Although, soft-power gains need not be seen as a part of a zero-sum game, competitive approaches to soft power are more likely when there already exist unresolved territorial disputes and where military modernization or existing power differentials have complicated security dilemmas. This is the case with the expansion of China's military capacities and the rise of its comprehensive national power, now projected more widely onto the Indo-Pacific stage via the security footprint of the BRI (see further below).³² Direct military competition by the PRC with the US and India in their respective spheres of influence in the Pacific and Indian Oceans has intensified this security dilemma, as have concerns over the geopolitical impact of China's comprehensive growth in national power, now closing in on US primacy as the second overall superpower in the Indo-Pacific.³³

Over the last three decades, Japanese foreign policy and security trends have emerged as a wider pattern of multilateral cooperation that can be summarized as "soft power through development." This was an extension of Japan's twenty-first-century focus on economic influence and civilian power, combined with limited but robust self-defense capacities. Tokyo updated this focus with Japan's Revised Aid Cooperation concept (February 2015) of "good" development as the best proactive contribution to peace, utilizing soft power, aid, and trade along with some hard-power capacities.³⁴ This approach combined shared "universal" values and actively promoted international peace and stability at the regional and global levels. Although linked to the rubric of a "free-and-open Indo-Pacific" from 2016, this was far less assertive than the US interpretation of the concept,³⁵ focusing instead on cooperative mechanisms with diverse partners. Japan's governance focus enhanced strategic development cooperation for economic growth, promoted human security, and sought to build strategic partnerships with small or island states with "particular" vulnerabilities, operating across 18 subareas.³⁶

This agenda included strong commitments on disaster relief and climate change, whereby Japan would provide assistance in disaster risk reduction and environmental/climate change management for small island developing states (SIDS). This links to Japan's ongoing role as a major developmental aid donor, circa fourth in the world overall in 2017 with increases of around 3 percent for official development assistance in 2019 over 2018.³⁷ Overall around 10 billion USD annually has been channeled into aid flows with a focus on poverty reduction and infrastructure development. Japan is also a major supporter of the Asian Development Bank

(ADB), as both a founding member and major shareholder in that organization (as of late 2018 Japan and the United States each held 15.6 percent of total shares).

Beyond financial aid, Japan's *Official Development Assistance Charter* (revised in 2004) and its updated *Development Cooperation Charter* (2015) support JSDF noncombat roles for disaster relief and coast guard operations, as well as cooperation with ASEAN on naval patrols and protection of sea lanes.³⁸ It was recognized that there was a clear link between security and the ability to sustain socioeconomic development:

In natural disasters and other emergencies, Japan will provide prompt assistance taking into account longer-term recovery and reconstruction. In view of the fact that threats to stability and security can hamper socio-economic development, Japan will also provide assistance to enhance capacities in developing countries such as: the capacity of law enforcement authorities including capabilities to ensure maritime safety; the capacity of security authorities including capabilities to combat terrorism and transnational organized crime including drug trafficking and trafficking in persons; and the capacity of developing countries in relation to global commons such as seas, outer space, and cyberspace.³⁹

Japan has long been active in global human security and sustainable development networks, with these agenda now part of soft power positioned within the idea of *proactive pacifism*, i.e., the idea of making a sustainable “proactive contribution to peace.” Development is thus seen as a way to aid global security, as a means to reduce transnational terrorism, and as a tactic for improving environmental outcomes and health security. This aid is not just focused on Asia. Japan has also pledged circa 30 billion USD (private and public) to help stabilize key zones across Africa through 2013–2019, allowing improved resource access and also serving as part of soft competition with the PRC.⁴⁰ This was based in part on the Yokohama Action Plan of 2013–2017, with targeted agriculture and health programs to Kenya, Morocco, Malawi, Kenya, Ghana, Zambia, and elsewhere.⁴¹ Japan has developed a regional plan for development within Africa, with subregional plans engaging a human security focus since 2015.⁴² More recently, Japan has partnered with India in an Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, seen by some as an unofficial counter to China's BRI operations in Africa and the Indian Ocean.⁴³

Of course, Japan's recent policies go beyond soft power and NTS responses into a more robust posture via the so-called Abe Doctrine and the use of the concepts of *dynamic defense* and *gray-zone engagements*.⁴⁴ Dynamic deterrence allows for counterstrike based on an integrated air warning and an improved defense control system within Japan, as well as some further southward positioning of JSDF assets. Beyond this, the policy supports selective deployments of Japanese forces overseas and permits overseas combat in defense of a friendly country or forces being at-

tacked.⁴⁵ Likewise, Japan's national defense guidelines from 2010 on allow stronger deterrence in dealing with diffuse threats that are less than armed attacks. Gray zones include "a broad range of contingencies that fall between peace and war—for example, disputes over territory, sovereignty or economic interests. Grey-zone contingencies typically involve a government decision to show a military presence or to attempt to change the status quo using physical means."⁴⁶ This situation can be applied to the tensions over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, where deployments of naval and air patrols occur on a regular basis, signaling rising military tensions between Japan and China, even if neither intends to escalate this situation into a direct military clash. With overlapping air defense identification zones and important resources such as the Chunxiao gas field at stake, it is not surprising that both countries have sought to stake a strong presence. From 2010 to 2015, the number of scrambles by JSDF interceptors against Chinese aircraft rose rapidly.⁴⁷ By 2016, the total Japanese interceptor scrambles peaked at 1,168, while in 2018 Japanese aircraft scrambled 999 times in response to Chinese and Russian aircraft, indicating a situation that was not war but certainly not peace either.⁴⁸ Bearing in mind that overall Japan is ranked around 9th–10th globally in its diverse military capabilities, this is a serious deployment of hard power that needs to be assessed in the wider strategic balance of the Indo-Pacific.⁴⁹

Gradual revisions of the *interpretation* of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution have allowed Japan a more active role across the Indo-Pacific region, including potential deployment of naval missile defense systems and advanced attack submarines, use of military satellites (after adoption of the Basic Space Law from 2008), enhanced cyber security, and stronger maritime cooperation with Indonesia and India.⁵⁰ However, it seems unlikely that Prime Minister Shinzō Abe will be able to actually revise the text (versus the interpretation) of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution by 2020. Doing so would need two-thirds support in parliament, a referendum, and stronger political support publicly: as of 2017, 46 percent of Japanese surveyed were against this, and through 2018–2019 there was limited support from coalition partners and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) for these revised policies.⁵¹ Here there is some trade-off between soft power and more assertive strategies. Even though Japan can be seen as gaining soft power globally, rising from seventh in global ranks in 2016 to around fifth in 2018 in the Portland Soft Power surveys, this was still limited by negative perceptions in China and South Korea, with Abe's doctrine eroding soft-power influence due to displays of military capability. Japan's rating with the *Soft Power 30* is largely based on cultural and technical factors, combined with extensive diplomatic, development, and aid programs, plus regional leadership on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (now

re-labeled the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) after the United States withdrew from the original agreement.⁵²

China, too, has long been aware of the growing reality of NTS threats and more recently has been willing to enter into international agreements to help collectively manage them.⁵³ Drug control, for example, has been a long-term focus of modern China, which saw itself as a victim of ruthless exploitation of the opium trade from the nineteenth century onward, with continued twenty-first-century flows from Myanmar and Afghanistan presenting current challenges.⁵⁴ These concerns have continued to shape the PRC's NTS relations with Southeast Asia. China entered into cooperative mechanisms to cope with transnational organized crime (from 2000) and signed the *Joint Declaration on Cooperation in the Field of Non-traditional Security Issues* with ASEAN in 2002, recognizing that a wide range of transborder issues needed pan-Asian cooperation, especially with neighboring states and groupings such as ASEAN, the ARF, and the SCO.⁵⁵ This has been folded into a combined military and diplomacy approach as part of China's emerging "new security concept" from 2002 onward:

The complex relationship between nontraditional security and China's national security and foreign policy is reflected in Jiang Zeming's words during the 16th National Congress of the CCP in 2002. He stressed that traditional and non-traditional security threats, especially terrorism, are interwoven and are having disruptive effects over the stable international environment that China needs for its own development. Consequently, the solution was to make the NSC operational through multilateral dialogues, such as the UN and other international organizations. . . . In summary, non-traditional security issues were not seen as threats to China's existence, but to the external environment it needed to develop. Consistently, the response advocated by the Chinese leaders is diplomatic in nature even if it has a limited military component. These were the very early stages of the securitization process.⁵⁶

Subsequently, NTS issues and protecting Chinese interests abroad have been given growing prominence in China's defense white papers and, since 2006, led to a strong emphasis on MOOTW as a crucial part of PLA missions, training, logistics, and research, including expanded peacekeeping operations.⁵⁷ It is important not to read this trend as "military operations short of war" along a spectrum using different levels of force but rather as a spectrum of diplomatic engagement that ranges from peacekeeping through to public dissemination of information. This can be broadly described as the public diplomacy of China combined with the "political work" within the PLA and other state agencies.⁵⁸ The PLA began to evolve conceptual, doctrinal, educational, and operational bases for the response to domestic and international emergencies, developed first with the Academy of

Military Science (AMS), the National Defense University (NDU), the Army Command College (ACC), and other PLA teaching centers and within the Emergency Office of General Staff Development (GSD).⁵⁹ In parallel, the PLA and police units became more involved in “on-call peace arrangements” with the UN, eventually deploying over 30,000 personnel to 24 UN missions through 1997–2018, as well as creating a Peacekeeping Center in the Ministry of National Defense.⁶⁰ From late 2017, China registered 8,000 troops for the peacekeeping standby force of the UN, with 800 being made available for rapid deployment via the UN “Vanguard Brigade.”⁶¹

Diverse conceptualizations of MOOTW operations include different aspects of “deterrence, counter-terrorism, riot suppression, mass event management, border blockade, disaster rescue and relief, nuclear, biological and chemical rescue and relief, air and sea security, air and sea control, protection of maritime strategic communication lines, international peace-keeping, and overseas rescue and relief.”⁶² It is important to note what is excluded from MOOTW operations as well. The US military discontinued the term in 2006 but originally had 18 types of operations, including items not found in Chinese thinking such as “arms control and disarmament, enforcement of sanctions, enforcing exclusion zones, support for insurgencies, counterinsurgency, strikes and raids.”⁶³ Overall, China’s MOOTW principles are closely aligned to the noninterventionist stance of PRC’s foreign policy principles, with restrictions on intervention, enforcement, or targeted strikes against other countries. However, as Chinese interests via trade and geopolitical competition have moved from a regional to a global agenda, China’s security policies have had to move well beyond the framework of territorial defense and sovereignty claims. Rather, the PLA’s “new” mandated missions have a wide brief in protecting Chinese interests on the global stage, even if largely pursued by cooperative rather than by coercive means.⁶⁴ Although formally aligned with UN goals, such operations have a primary focus on China’s expanding economic and geopolitical interests.⁶⁵

These humanitarian operations have earned Beijing some credibility as an international actor able to respond to emergencies overseas. Thus, China has been engaged in seeking the protection or withdrawal of Chinese nationals during crises (natural and political) in the Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Lebanon, Chad, Thailand, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Sudan, the Gulf of Aden, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Libya (where over 36,000 Chinese citizens evacuated), Yemen, Japan, and Mali.⁶⁶ At first these were small, nonmilitary operations but, from 2011 on, began to include PLA support groups, aircraft, and PLA Navy (PLAN) ships, especially for major crises.⁶⁷ These figures reflect the growing number of Chinese people going overseas, including government officials, business persons,

contractors, tourists, students, engineers, workers, and potentially even farmers (as part of China's food security agenda).⁶⁸ China has about 30–40,000 businesses operating globally, and over 100 million Chinese travel abroad annually, sometimes to fragile or conflict-prone states.⁶⁹ This provides a direct and serious rationale for China's widening engagement in regional and global security processes. The situation has prompted the creation of a Department of External Security and a Small Group for Coordination on External Emergencies and created the demand for increased risk assessment capacities. This expanded circle of interests and capabilities have become embedded in the "holistic national security" (HNS) concept that was endorsed by Pres. Xi Jinping and the Central National Security Commission from 2015 on.⁷⁰

Support for MOOTW, sea-lane security, antipiracy, and peacekeeping operations was the rationale for the creation of a logistic support base and supply port at Djibouti in 2015. This support was also used to justify the building of infrastructure (including airstrips) on some of the islands in the South China Sea and for future improved access to Gwadar and nearby Jiwani in Pakistan; Bagamoyo, Tanzania; and other ports across the Indo-Pacific.⁷¹ Likewise, the Chinese have been involved in responding to international emergencies and disasters, e.g., in October 2005, the China International Search and Rescue Team arrived at the earthquake struck Balakot area in Pakistan, bringing with them a team of 49 earthquake experts, PLA engineers, and PAP (People's Armed Police) medical workers.⁷² In 2014, medical teams deployed to Haiti and to several West African countries fighting Ebola.⁷³ Since 2013, China has been involved in HADR operations in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, sending international rescue teams, medical teams, and a DNA testing group to the tsunami-hit countries, including deployment of its hospital ship *Daishan Dao* (also known as *Peace Ark*). From March 2014, China also deployed almost 20 PLAN and Coast Guard ships as well as air assets to search for the missing Malaysian Airline Flight 370, working with some 26 countries, including India.⁷⁴

China has historically been subject to major natural disasters, including floods and earthquakes that affect densely populated areas, leading to major reforms of its disaster risk reduction (DDR) strategies since 2008 and a willingness to cooperate internationally with the Sendai Framework (for disaster risk reduction). China also has ongoing trilateral dialogues with Japan and South Korea on these and related environmental issues (the Tripartite Environmental Ministers Meeting, TEMM, operating from 1999 on), agreements with ASEAN on disaster management cooperation (from 2014), plus limited "small-team" medical cooperation with the United States from 2013.⁷⁵

The PRC understands well the soft-power benefits and public diplomacy aspects of HADR responses:

It is common for MOOTW to come under public scrutiny. Positive media coverage about PLA MOOTW, thus, not only boosts morale but also inspires personnel to carry out their tasks well. Prompt dissemination and exchange of information is recommended to enhance troops' capacity; while timely news conferences are encouraged to promote situational awareness among the public, with comprehensive media coverage also employed to showcase PLA work style.⁷⁶

Overall, China's increased engagement in UN operations has been seen as supporting "system stability" in a world it describes as fraught by risk, hot spots, and increasing tension with the United States.⁷⁷ At the same time Beijing has rejected efforts to restrict China's access and use of the East and South China seas and responded to criticism of its BRI by seeking to address excessive debt, energy, and environmental issues that concern states such as Australia, India, and Japan (the "green development" agenda and BRI 2.0).⁷⁸ Another controversial area will be how far China needs to mobilize extra forms of security for its BRI economic corridors.

The Expanding Security Needs of the Belt and Road

China's increased need to provide for NTS along the Belt and Road includes the expanded use of PSCs, paramilitary maritime deployments of coast guard and other marine units, and the PLA's mandated new missions to protect Chinese interests and citizens beyond national borders. Indeed, the PRC is transforming operations toward a stronger and comprehensive maritime focus:

Today, modern China is at the turning point of becoming a truly maritime-capable nation in terms of the emerging capacities of the PLA Navy (PLAN), its development as a leading shipbuilder, its growing merchant marine, its interest in seabed mining for resources, and its huge fishing fleet (the world's largest for distance fishing). China is developing a comprehensive approach to its evolving maritime strategy, including a focus on oceanic resource management as well as security and legal issues. Several agencies other than PLAN are involved in this process including the Maritime Safety Administration (MSA), the Coast Guard of the Border Control Department, the China Maritime Police, the China Marine Surveillance (CMS), Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC), and Maritime Anti-smuggling Bureau.⁷⁹

Overall, China is increasingly engaged in the West and South Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and most recently the Arctic, now added as an "Ice Road" to the BRI.⁸⁰ Along the diverse corridors of the BRI, NTS threats and their manage-

ment are now important components within Chinese defense and foreign policy. Such operations have allowed China to build up its operational capacity to support peacekeeping and other roles in Africa and the Indian Ocean. In operations in Africa (including South Sudan, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of Congo), China has sent not only engineers and medical teams but well-armed and trained soldiers, with these units being given similar training to PLA special forces.⁸¹ These factors have led to an increasingly securitized approach that embraces the calibrated use of force combined with a civil-military responsiveness:

The fact that the PLA became the main protagonist of this process after an initial civilian response, from showing the flag in support of China's international standing, to more concrete actions to defend the country's interests and citizens abroad, shows how powerful the process of securitization has been. Ultimately, this process not only led to growing military activities abroad and the creation of the relevant institutional-legal framework, but it also caused a broader reconsideration about the use of force in foreign policy.⁸²

The United States, India, Australia, and Japan have observed these trends with concern. NTS dilemmas are likely to intensify over acquisition of dual-use assets, e.g., landing-craft, helicopters, helicopter-carriers, heavy-lift transport aircraft, mobile hospitals, expanded intelligence gathering via new satellites, and, in the future, transnational social monitoring via digital data and artificial intelligences.⁸³ Such dilemmas are most intense when traditional security competition already exists, e.g., threat perceptions of Chinese military modernization, expanded fields of operation in the Indian Ocean and parts of Africa, and an assertiveness in relation to Japanese and US challenges.⁸⁴ Access to the PLAN's logistic base at Djibouti and port-fueling agreements elsewhere in the Indian Ocean have long been seen as presaging a wider power projection capacity as China modernizes its naval forces—or even as the ground work of a future network of dual-use bases.⁸⁵

Massive investment into the MSR and the BRI, initially over 1.3 billion USD to be committed by various Chinese national and multilateral banks such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), demonstrates an increase in Chinese economic interests and activity across Eurasia, Southeast Asia, the South Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. These projects often cross, or are adjacent to, areas of recent or present instability, e.g., the New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor passes just north of Afghanistan and needs improved security in nearby Tajikistan, while the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor engages infrastructure projects in areas disputed by India and Pakistan and crosses through troubled Baluchistan in western Pakistan. Beijing has some 50 BRI and AIIB projects underway in the Middle East, including a comprehensive strategic partnership with Egypt and a strong presence in the Suez Canal Economic Zone. If the situa-

tion in Syria stabilizes, China may also consider further reconstruction aid and investment there beyond the 2 billion USD already pledged.⁸⁶

Although Beijing mainly relies on host countries' military and policing capabilities, China has been willing to provide some targeted nonlethal military aid and joint training opportunities. China provides small levels of military aid to wider Central Asia: circa 73 million USD to Afghanistan in 2016 (in the context of a dialogue on counterterrorism), and smaller amounts for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, mainly uniforms, accommodation, and training.⁸⁷ Beyond the biannual peace missions run via the SCO and exercises with Russia, China has also engaged in more targeted exercises, including the Silk Road Cooperation Joint Counter Terrorism Training for Special Operation Units (held in Sri Lanka in 2015), the Explore-2016 Joint Anti-Terrorism Training of Special Forces with Saudi Arabia, and the China-ASEAN Maritime Exercise-2018, plus a range of recent exercises with Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the European Union.⁸⁸ China is also a major exporter of weapons (5.2 percent of the global share), though well below the level of exports sustained by the United States and Russia (36 percent and 21 percent respectively). Through 2014–2018, China sold weapons to 53 countries, many of which are in the developing world and the Middle East, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Algeria, Thailand, Myanmar, and Turkmenistan.⁸⁹ China has sought to build its own network of military-to-military cooperation, as noted in the 2019 Defense White Paper:

Since 2012, China has held over 100 joint exercises and training with more than 30 countries. These engagements have covered traditional and nontraditional security fields, in locations extending from China's periphery to the far seas, and the participating forces have expanded from land forces to multiple branches including the army, navy and air force. Cooperation and exchanges in personnel training have intensified. Since 2012, the PLA has sent over 1,700 military personnel to study in more than 50 countries. Over 20 Chinese military educational institutions have established and maintained inter-collegiate exchanges with their counterparts from more than 40 countries. Meanwhile, more than 10,000 foreign military personnel from over 130 countries have studied in Chinese military universities and colleges.⁹⁰

Beyond this, China has also expanded the role of PSCs, which are yet to develop the legal structure to allow for Chinese to operate in armed private security roles overseas.⁹¹ In 2014, Chinese firms probably spent up to 8 billion USD on overseas security, engaging numerous security providers, including the Chinese Overseas Security Group, China Security and Protection Group, Control Risks, Beijing Dewe Security Services, Hua Xin Zhong An, and the Frontier Services group. These operated along various parts of the BRI, usually working with local compa-

nies and training staff.⁹² These groups have been involved in evacuations of Chinese workers (from Samarra, Iraq, 2014, from Juba, South Sudan, 2016) and even train for hostage rescue situations. However, there are certain risks in these trends:

Despite their nominally private status, Chinese private security companies tend to operate with the tacit support and encouragement of the Chinese government and are often staffed by former PLA officers with close, if indirect, ties to the Chinese authorities. This makes them complex, quasi-governmental international actors whose behavior is unregulated, since existing legal frameworks—both at the domestic and international level—do not clearly specify who is responsible for policing their operations.⁹³

Overall, these trends suggest a heightened role for China in providing direct and indirect means to enhance security along the BRI, operating at an almost global level. To avoid parallel threat perceptions, China might in theory evolve into a net security provider of shared “public goods” rather than a “security problem” at the regional and global levels. Although this may be achievable with targeted partners such as Russia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, and other Central Asian states, these enhanced operations have also generated enhanced threat perceptions. As such, they are part of an emerging security dilemma operating across NTS threats, focused not on the threats themselves but the means used to contain and control them. We can see this most clearly when we turn back to the limits of Chinese and Japanese cooperation in these areas.

China and Japan as NTS Partners and Competitors

Japan, via its historical expansion into mainland Asia in the early and mid-twentieth century and its place as the primary US ally in Asia in the twenty-first century, finds itself positioned as a strategic competitor with China. This adversarial relationship seems to be deepening despite strong trade flows (China was Japan’s second-largest trading partner in 2018) and past cycles of diplomacy aimed at improving relations. From this point of view, infrastructure development is becoming another area of geopolitical rivalry between Japan and China, with both countries using direct investment and different multilateral paths (the AIIB and ADB) to “enhance political leverage” and “diffuse specific ideals for development.”⁹⁴ Likewise, both countries have sought to provide security support roles for UN missions and selective provision of security services in the Indo-Pacific (see above). Both countries have been actively involved in antipiracy operations in the Indian Ocean and have opened support bases in Djibouti, alongside other countries.⁹⁵ These Japanese and Chinese maritime efforts can be seen as mutual shadowing

and soft power competition, rather than adversarial challenges across gray zones as found in the East China Sea.⁹⁶

For both countries, NTS challenges have been areas where humanitarian cooperation has been seen as a way of improving international relationships. Japan and China have both been subject to major natural disasters and have experienced serious earthquakes that have led to mutual patterns of emergency relief, plus an active exchange of scientific information through government agencies (the China Earthquake Administration and the Japan Meteorological Agency) and several universities.⁹⁷ For example, China's 2008 Wenchuan earthquake disaster led to large-scale government, NGO, and public responses from Japan:

Many people in China were touched by the fact that the support was obviously sincere and had been provided without delay. Given the historical distrust and animosity between China and Japan, the dedication and professionalism of the Japanese rescue and medical teams made a particularly positive impression. The story of Japanese help has become a significant factor in the improvement of the image of Japan in China. According to a survey taken shortly after the Wenchuan earthquake, 83.6% of Chinese liked Japan, a remarkable 73.6% increase compared to the previous survey.⁹⁸

Overall, environmental security has been seen as a useful area for cooperation and dialogue between China and Japan, even acting as a kind of "shock absorber" during periods of cyclic tension between the two states.⁹⁹

However, strategic and tactical tensions have also been experienced in the midst of complex humanitarian disasters as well. Perhaps the clearest case of tensions over HADR can be seen during the response to the March 2011 Fukushima disaster, which stretched Japanese and US humanitarian response mechanisms. Russia and China closely observed these mechanisms, "possibly allowing them to identify SDF skills and capabilities to balance against."¹⁰⁰ China did send a 15-member rescue team to the affected area and offered immediate material aid such as fuel, tents, and blankets, alongside aid mobilized by China's Red Cross.¹⁰¹ However, Japan declined further aid such as deployment of the PLAN *Peace Ark* hospital ship and special Chinese robots designed to operate in nuclear incidents. Two other important factors were engaged in relation to the Fukushima crisis. First, Japan was disturbed by close surveillance of its operations by Russia and China.¹⁰² Second, Japanese officials used the shortcomings experienced during the disaster to argue for the subsequent acquisition of dual-use mobile assets including Osprey aircraft and amphibious vessels, which raised concerns in China:

Because systems like airlift assets and amphibious ships can be used during both MOOTW and combat operations, Chinese officials and commentators have

criticized Japan's post-3/11 acquisitions as evidence of Tokyo's aggressive intentions. A Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson condemned Japan's 2013 decision to acquire RQ-4 reconnaissance aircraft (Global Hawk UAVs) and amphibious ships, arguing that Tokyo's actions "us[ed] the pretext of safeguarding Japan's own national security and regional peace for its military expansion." In recent years, China has stepped up its own development of remotely piloted reconnaissance aircraft and has continued to modernize its fleet of amphibious warfare ships, suggesting it is balancing against Japan's military expansion.¹⁰³

China has since expanded its own development of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and modernized its amphibious warship capacities, suggesting ongoing balancing against Japan's military capacities. Recently this has included the PRC's commissioning of five Type-071 large landing ships and the building of a new Type-075 amphibious assault vessel, while UAVs, such as the SULA30 reconnaissance and Sea Cavalry SD-40 drones, are being developed and increasingly acquired for surveillance, reconnaissance, and limited strike roles.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, by 2018, China had become an active supplier of unmanned combat aerial vehicles, delivering 153 vehicles to 13 states, mainly developing and Middle Eastern countries.¹⁰⁵ One again, these patterns suggest cycles of cooperation and suspicion following periods of NTS cooperation, largely focused on demonstrated capacities, observed gaps, or acquisitions to fill such gaps.

Conclusion: Inclusive Multilayered Security Rather than Preemption

The well-known problem for NTS is that it reconstructs the field of possible *threats*, thereby expanding potentially inappropriate solutions derived from conflict experiences and military operations to developmental and environmental problems.¹⁰⁶ One noted example of this was the shift of Plan Colombia from its wider developmental, crop-substitution and policing origins (as originally planned in the late 1990s) toward a "war on drugs" model that ended up escalating regional violence, leading to an intensified "irrational war" model that Colombia would take decades to moderate.¹⁰⁷ Excluding the South China Sea and the East China Sea, where direct territorial claims are in conflict, competition in the Indian Ocean is indirect, concerned with the ongoing presence of naval forces, access to ports, and the relative power projection and soft-power influence of India, Japan, China, the United States, and to a lesser degree other states (Australia and Indonesia). In such a setting, "even the most-benign military deployments can amplify mistrust and arms racing, suggesting that capabilities—rather than intentions—play a more significant role in driving competition between rivals."¹⁰⁸

Solutions to these problems are simple in theory but complex in application, resting on two approaches: where force is required, this should function through UN mandates or multilateral institutions; and where force is not required, there should be a shift toward demilitarization of responses—even when viewed as security issues.¹⁰⁹ For example, a response to high levels of piracy requires armed, seagoing vessels to deter, destroy, or capture raiding pirates, often moving beyond EEZs into open seas. Over the last two decades, this has forced the creation of mixed international flotillas, engaging NATO, the European Union (EU), and Indo-Pacific navies, as well as regional frameworks such as the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against ships in Asia (ReCAAP). Through such frameworks, US, Japanese, Indian, Australian, and Chinese naval forces (ReCAAP now has 20 member states) have become shared responders to pirate attacks, and do provide improved SLOC security, while the UN, the African Union, and the EU have worked on reducing the land-based causes of piracy.

However, individual, uncoordinated task forces operating in remote oceans can equally be seen as power-projection demonstrations rather than net security providers. Even when designed to protect regional shipping, such operations still run the risk of being seen to wave the flag of national capacities. Instead, military forces should clearly distinguish and announce SLOC patrol operations versus other kinds of military exercises. Likewise, care needs to be taken to reduce reactive and competitive factors coming into play when framing MOOTW and HADR operations, with clear public diplomacy shaped to reduce cycles of follow-on competition.¹¹⁰ Where possible, such operations should avoid deployment into sensitive regions and be used to build wider people-to-people relations, e.g., via the coordinated deployment of multinational civilian responders.¹¹¹

Where major military force is not needed, there is a need to rapidly demilitarize operations after the initial period of emergency deployment. In part, this can be done by the handover of tasks to other government agencies as well as UN, civilian, NGO, and aid groups (30,000 civil society groups are now registered or liaising with the UN at different levels).¹¹² It also requires an improved flow from emergency and disaster response to aid, reconstruction, and then developmental phases.¹¹³ Only the early part of these tasks can be undertaken by HADR or MOOTW responses, though cooperation is also run through multilateral frameworks such as the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and AHA, with global preventive measures being developed through the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (from 2015). Demilitarization requires a widening of cooperation beyond the involved militaries to other agencies and a deepening toward cooperation among

nonstate actors, NGOs, civil society, and volunteer groups—thus, enhancing people-to-people engagement.¹¹⁴ In most cases, the aim should be to first demilitarize and where possible desecuritize responses as they come under effective international and then national management. Beyond this, sustained and appropriate economic aid and investment may be needed to help sustain struggling states or regions, depending on the size and type of ongoing NTS crises they face.¹¹⁵

Traditionally, NTS and humanitarian operations were seen as areas where cooperation was more likely than competition, and soft power viewed as easy to accrue through constructive use of military assets. However, given the complex geopolitical and geo-economic contexts of the Indo-Pacific and divided reactions to the BRI, these assumptions need further investigation.¹¹⁶ India, Australia, the United States, and, to some degree, Japan have remained highly critical of the lack of transparency and multilateral accountability found in many BRI projects. Beyond specific concerns such as environmental standards and levels of debt for poor and small countries, there is also concern about the geopolitical leverage China gains by leading a project that might transform at least three continents.¹¹⁷ In such a setting, even logical provisions against NTS threats along BRI corridors become two-edged swords, strengthening a web of security relationships in which China is the senior partner. Given the rising geopolitical tensions between the major powers of the Indo-Pacific, it is time for a calibrated review of the use of military diplomacy and HADR operation among competing states. ✪

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