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# The Potential of a Unified Korean Armed Forces

## A Cultural Interpretation

COL MICHAEL EDMONSTON, USAF

*Since the foundation of the South Korean state in 1948, the rhetoric of unification has occupied a prominent place in its official vocabulary. Unification with the North was always presented as the great national goal, which any government should pursue at any cost.*

—Andrei Lankov, Director, Korea Risk Group

This article examines the prospect of a future unified Korean Armed Forces through the lens of culture. Korea provides an interesting subject for cultural study for a few reasons. First, the desires of South and North Koreans suggests that unification, while presently unfeasible, is likely at some point in the future. In the words of the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff about Korea, “Eventually, peoples do tend to unify, one way or another. It just has to be managed closely and carefully to avoid armed conflict.”<sup>1</sup> Second, American commitment to stability on the Korean Peninsula demands that the United States take some responsibility for what happens to the militaries of both sides if Korea unifies. Consequently, recommendations for American foreign and military support follow speculation on the possible military outcomes of a Korean unification.

This article first looks at three possible unification scenarios for the Republic of Korea (ROK/South Korea) and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK/North Korea): how they might unfold and what the consequences might be for security and stability on the Korean Peninsula. These scenarios include gradual reform leading to peaceful unification, war on the Korean Peninsula, and collapse of the North Korean regime and/or government. Regardless of the scenario, I assume that South Korea ultimately dominates the unification process. Therefore, I focus more on ROK strategies for unification in those scenarios, rather than those held by the DPRK. I also consider whether the current status quo is a possibility for the long term.

Second, the article explores the potential military outcome of Korean unification in terms of two variables: the fate of the North Korean People’s Army (KPA) in a ROK-dominated unification process, and the character of unified Korean Defense Forces (KDF) in a democratic, unified Korea.<sup>2</sup> My approach is both speculative and advisory. I examine the impact of different unification scenarios on the likelihood of the KPA being integrated into a unified military and follow



with a look at the KPA's expected contribution to the unification process should Korea wish to preserve peace within and project strength to its neighbors.

In exploring the character of a unified KDF, I examine three aspects that concern or derive from the respective cultures of the two Korean militaries. These aspects include operational culture, military sociology, and military professionalism. I speculate on each aspect based on the current security environment and how that environment can be expected to change during and after unification. Furthermore, I make recommendations for ROK (and later unified Korean) policy toward a KDF, with the objectives of promoting national unity and regional stability. Finally, I close the article with six recommendations for US policy and military support to the ROK during and after unification that promotes global and regional security but also respects ROK (and later unified Korean) national and military culture.

### **A Note on Culture**

A useful definition of “culture” for this study is “the total of the collective or shared learning of [a] unit as it develops its capacity to survive in its external environment and to manage its own internal affairs.”<sup>3</sup> In the Korean context, the cultural unit is the nation. However, military forces embody a culture within a culture because their shared learning is unique. This learning takes place in a combat environment rather than a national one (though civilians can also experience combat), and their internal affairs are highly structured and tailored to accomplishing assigned missions. These missions drive them not only to survive in the combat environment but also to triumph over the enemy—in cases such as Korea's, the opposing military forces. It is in this context that I explore the military outcomes of national unification—outcomes that depend somewhat on the unification scenario, but not wholly. These potential scenarios are the next topics of this article.

### **Korean Unification Scenarios**

To set the stage for a discussion of military outcomes of unification and the potential for a unified Korean armed forces, this section examines the nature and security implications of three possible unification scenarios: gradual reform leading to peaceful unification, war on the Korean Peninsula, and collapse of the North Korean regime and/or government. The article also considers whether the status quo is a possibility for the long term, concluding that it may not be.

### ***Gradual Reform Leading to Peaceful Unification***

B. H. Liddell Hart wrote that the problem for “grand strategy” is “the winning of the peace.”<sup>4</sup> For North and South Korea, unification is one way of winning the peace, but their national strategies for going about it are different because of the distinct identities, values, and preferences for national security belonging to each side. Nevertheless, there have been mutual agreements in the past pointing toward the possibility of a peaceful unification. Key instances of cooperation include the 1972 joint agreement between Pyongyang and Seoul “that reunification would occur peacefully without foreign interference” and the 2018 Panmunjeom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity, and Unification of the Korean Peninsula in which the two countries’ leaders committed to “bring a swift end to the Cold War relic of longstanding division and confrontation.”<sup>5</sup> The commitment includes willingness to hold meetings with the United States and China for establishing a peace agreement in place of an armistice agreement at the border between the Koreas. However, there are no timelines associated with this agreement, making it little more than a gesture of goodwill.

However, a question to ask here is whether the conclusion of a political agreement would be the beginning or the end of unification. According to the South Korean model, an agreement to unify the two states would follow a period of gradual reform not only in political areas but also in nonpolitical ones. The model incorporates three basic steps: “reconciliation and cooperation between the ROK and the North,” the “establishment of a Korean commonwealth,” and “complete integration of Korea through a democratic election.”<sup>6</sup>

Many of the political means of accomplishing these steps do not exist at the present time, so the ROK government has entrusted a longer-term, more subtle strategy to its Ministry of Unification.<sup>7</sup> This ministry aims to break down the psychological barrier between the two sides through economic revival in North Korea, the welfare of ROK citizens, and a thriving Korean culture—all of which contribute to building a foundation for national unification. The tasks associated with this strategy emphasize trust-building, small-scale projects, and practical measures.<sup>8</sup> Denuclearization and fostering relevant dialogue between the United States and North Korea are part of trust-building, and the administration of President Moon Jae-in counted the US–DPRK summits in Singapore and Hanoi during the presidency of Donald Trump as among its successes in the drive toward unification. Projects and practical measures carried out by the Ministry of Unification are incredibly diverse, spanning inter-Korean exchanges, settlement of humanitarian issues, joint cultural initiatives, settlement support of defectors, and educational programs.<sup>9</sup> The holistic approach reflects South Korea’s identity

as a liberal, democratic state, the cultural value it puts on interdependence and cooperation, and its broad approach to national security.

The commonwealth—step two of the South Korean model—builds gradually through advances in “diplomacy, economy, and security,” as well as the promotion of unified stances in “non-political areas,” toward conditions that would permit democratic elections and the establishment of a fully unified Korean government.<sup>10</sup> At that time it will be necessary to decide upon the fate of the KPA and the future of North Korea’s national defense architecture.

Of course, it is naïve to believe the North Korean regime in power today would tacitly agree to the South Korean model. Before the regime agrees to abide by the tenets of the model, it would likely have to dispose of its *Juche* (“self-reliance”) philosophy, its military-first policy, and the idea of *byungjin* (“the simultaneous development of North Korea’s economy and its nuclear weapons”)—all of which are pillars of the regime’s power.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the DPRK has its own model for unification—a model that is purportedly peaceful but that puts political agreement before rather than after reforms in other areas.

The DPRK model for unification, first advanced by Kim Il-sung, seeks to establish a central national government known as the Democratic Republic of Koryo that has “equal participation from both sides based on mutual tolerance of differences in ideologies and counterparts.”<sup>12</sup> The formula for reaching that model begins with a confederation of two governments that come together to direct political, diplomatic, and military affairs.

This plan sounds accommodating to South Korea, but Jacques Fuqua offers a different critique. He cites one of the principles of the model as an “overhaul of the South Korean government . . . to ensure its ‘full democratization.’”<sup>13</sup> This is clearly democratization in the socialist view, not the democratization that allows for citizens to elect a government and hold it accountable for its decisions. Consistent with this interpretation is the model’s requirement for South Korea to “abrogate its decades-long security relationship with the United States and fundamentally discard the democratic basis of its government.”<sup>14</sup> Fuqua also notes that the model offers no phases by which the confederation should form or a means by which it unifies into a single government. The model therefore appears to be a weak government like America’s original Articles of Confederation. If true, the interpretation begs the question of how North Korea will accomplish its version of “democratization.”

One should not dismiss the possibility of North Korea using military force to accomplish its political objectives. Although Young-ho Park believes “the North Korean view of national unification has been defensive” since the late 1980s and particularly in the wake of the reunification of Germany, the North Korea expert

Joseph Bermudez points to the KPA to suggest otherwise.<sup>15</sup> He writes that the KPA has devised “a number of basic interrelated political and military conditions” that “underlie [its] offensive war strategy and belief that victory in a war of reunification is possible.”<sup>16</sup> These conditions stem from lessons learned in the Korean War and the KPA’s perception of the ROK and the United States. The lessons include a quick war that prevents outside assistance, military isolation of Seoul, and exploitation of America’s perceived intolerance for high combat losses.<sup>17</sup> The odds of the DPRK actually carrying out such an attack are slim in light of its military capabilities and realization that the ROK and the United States have trained together for 65 years to oppose it. However, the possibility should not be discounted, and Park cites periodic North Korean provocations as evidence.<sup>18</sup>

### ***War on the Korean Peninsula***

The most likely precipitating event in a war scenario of unification is a military attack against the South at an opportune moment in response to a “precipitative” or even an accidental event.<sup>19</sup> The North may launch the attack while its military is still strong and the United States is distracted with another conflict. In such an event, it is fairly certain that the ROK and its allies would prevail, but not without substantial casualties.<sup>20</sup>

War with North Korea would bring to bear the manpower, technology, and strategies described in the discussion on national security preferences. Beyond a certain threshold, the aim of each side is likely to be unification of the country. For the ROK and the United States, that threshold has historically been the successful execution of the existing combined operational plan into its combat operations phase.<sup>21</sup> If the US–ROK alliance enters into that phase, deterrence has failed, as have attempts at preventing escalation following expected North Korean provocations.

For the DPRK, the threshold beyond which it will pursue unification can only be guessed at. Kim Jong-un seems to suggest the threshold is very low, but if one believes Kim Jong-un is rational in his decision-making—and there is an abundance of evidence from past provocations that he is—any quote to the contrary is more likely bravado than real intention.<sup>22</sup> The likelihood of the conflict favoring a ROK-US victory once US assets begin flowing into the theater after the first few months of combat makes it doubtful the regime will cross it. The wild card is, of course, the possibility of North Korea employing its nuclear weapons. The North is most likely to use nuclear weapons in a situation where ROK forces have crossed the 38th parallel, since such an invasion would pose the greatest threat to its existence. Therefore, it is to the benefit of the ROK–US alliance to take out any DPRK launch facilities at the start of the conflict, if possible. Taking out North Korean leadership will also be helpful for staving off a nuclear attack, since the



nature of the regime would seem to favor an assertive nuclear command and control structure—one that places the authority for execution in the hands of a select few political leaders.<sup>23</sup>

If such a decapitation of the regime is possible and use of nuclear weapons is no longer a credible threat, the political questions for pursuing unification become what sort of power any remaining government officials have to continue prosecuting the war. The military question likewise becomes what degree of cohesiveness exists in the North's remaining fielded forces. The answers to these questions are similar to those following the other possible scenario leading to a ROK-dominated unification: North Korean collapse.

### ***Collapse of the North Korean Regime and/or Government***

There are two types of collapse that could take place in North Korea: collapse of the regime, and collapse of the entire government. Clearly, the ROK will be able to spur political unification much easier when both happen. However, interviews that Korea scholar Bruce Bennett conducted in 2016 with a dozen North Korean elites who defected to South Korea suggest the former is much more likely than the latter.<sup>24</sup> In his book *Inside the Red Box: North Korea's Totalitarian Politics*, Patrick McEachern makes a similar conclusion following an investigation of changes in the DPRK's government over time. Drawing from a wealth of translated North Korean materials, McEachern states that, unlike the government under Kim Il-sung, the government under Kim Jong-il began to feature a more dispersed authority among individuals and institutions. As a result, Kim Jong-Il had to play the cabinet, the military, and the workers' party against each other to maintain power.<sup>25</sup> While there is evidence Kim Jong-un has consolidated his power somewhat, it is likely that removal of Kim Jong-un—either from within or from outside the country—would unleash that intra-government competition into the open in a bid for national leadership. Efforts at unification would have to confront this possibility.

Furthermore, even if ROK military forces are able to take over Pyongyang and prevent a replacement North Korean government from coming to power, there is a high likelihood of an insurgency in the countryside that will stymie stabilization efforts. Bennett contends that only the willingness of South Korea to offer safety, security, position, and wealth to North Korean military elites nationwide will remove this obstacle. However, doing so may be unpopular on both sides of the border because of the perception that those elites have exploited the population.<sup>26</sup>

These difficulties are among several reasons that some scholars are not optimistic about the potential of a North Korean collapse scenario to result in unification. The eminent Korea scholar and Columbia University political scientist Samuel S.

Kim states it is not realistic to expect that “South Korea has both the will and the capacity to absorb a collapsing North Korea politically, militarily, economically, socially, and culturally.”<sup>27</sup> Jacques Fuqua writes further that absorption of North Korea following its collapse is not a shortcut “to a multifarious process as complex as unification, which at once comprises human emotion, ideology, national security and well-being, and feelings of nationalism.”<sup>28</sup> In fact, he suggests there are no shortcuts to unification at all.<sup>29</sup>

However, it is important to distinguish between political unification and the sense of imagined community that the scholar Benedict Anderson<sup>30</sup> uses to define a state. The latter definition is what makes unification so multifaceted. South Korea’s unification model attempts to create this imagined community between the two Koreas ahead of political unification, potentially extending the timeline for decades. A North Korean collapse holds potential for the order to be reversed, so that the building of a unified Korean nation in the minds of its citizens follows the formation of a single government. The hasty formation of that government following either war or collapse of the DPRK is the thought behind a 2014 *Economist* article titled “Korean unification is less likely to be gradual and peaceful than nasty, brutish, and quick.”<sup>31</sup> However, there is another option for the future of the Korean Peninsula as well.

### *Continued Status Quo*

According to the status quo scenario, North Korea continues to survive indefinitely through a combination of rent-seeking, the pursuit of increasingly capable nuclear weapons under the military-first policy, regional brinkmanship, and inducement of concessions from the West.<sup>32</sup> The regime’s resilience over the last few decades in overcoming domestic catastrophes and its “intransigence and vituperative behavior” in the face of external pressures suggest the status quo scenario is perhaps even more likely than war or collapse.<sup>33</sup>

The one factor that seems to suggest the status quo cannot continue forever is that it has never really worked in North Korea’s favor and appears unlikely to do so in the future. As Michael Cohen states: “Pyongyang has lived with an unfavorable status quo for sixty years.”<sup>34</sup> Its best response to change existing conditions since developing nuclear weapons is what is termed nuclear compellence—“threats to respond with retaliation to the continuation of the status quo.”<sup>35</sup> However, in their treatise on nuclear compellence (also called “nuclear coercion”), Todd Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann argue from historical cases that “threats to use nuclear weapons for coercion usually lack credibility,” and even the possession of nuclear weapons do not significantly increase the chances that compellence of any type will be successful.<sup>36</sup>

However, Kim Jong-un's situation may not give him other options. Onerous sanctions, the continuing contraction of the North's economy relative to the ROK's, the further obsolescence of its weapons systems, and the increasing difficulty of preventing information about the outside world from reaching the population may cause North Korea's economic and geopolitical position to become more desperate with time, leading to even more escalatory threats.<sup>37</sup> These trends, paired with North Korean possession of a nuclear-tipped missile capable of reaching the United States, could make Kim Jong-un more willing to take risks in brinkmanship. If the United States or the ROK is unable to persuade Kim that any actions the US–ROK alliance takes in response to North Korean provocations are purely defensive, or else either power purposefully undertakes offensive action to force him to back down, another war on the peninsula becomes more likely.

If such a war does lead to unification, the fate of the KPA and the character of unified Korean Defense Forces will be at the forefront of Korean nation-building efforts. These are the respective subjects of the next two sections.

### **Military Outcomes: The Fate of the Korean People's Army**

This section speculates on the fate of North Korea's military under South Korea-led unification in different unification scenarios, as well as how a unified Korea should deal with the KPA if the state is to preserve peace within its borders and project strength to its neighbors. The section explores the degree to which the KPA might be integrated into a unified Korean armed forces; distinguishes between short-, medium-, and long-term employment of the KPA in a unified Korea; and makes recommendations regarding how to assimilate the KPA into a unified military. For purposes of this discussion, "short term" is one to two years, "medium term" is three to five years, and "long term" is greater than five years. In this section, "integration" refers primarily to the organizational incorporation of the KPA, whereas "assimilation" is concerned more with the psychological transformation KPA members would need to undergo to serve effectively in the armed forces of a democratic society. Assimilation, therefore, is more dependent on cultural change.

First, regardless of the means by which unification occurs, the KPA is unlikely to be integrated on a large scale into a single Korean military. Even if the political will exists to leverage the military as an institution for promoting national unity and identity, conditions following unification—short of an unforeseen external threat to the Korean Peninsula—will favor a large reduction in forces that discourages integration.

Second, however, the means of unification is still likely to determine the manner and degree of integration. Gradual unification under the South Korean model will provide the most favorable conditions for carefully managed, peaceful inte-

gration of any significant scope. These conditions are control of both the time and spatial elements of unification, which in turn are more likely to provide the opportunity to accommodate local North Korean political and military elites whose support will be needed for making integration succeed. This assertion is based both on scholarly analyses of the politics and sociology of the North Korean military and conclusions made from studies of other countries in which military integration has followed civil war.<sup>38</sup>

Collapse is the next most likely scenario to afford peaceful integration of the KPA on a significant scale. The ROK Armed Forces may have a valuable role to play in peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and administration of the KPA in the absence of DPRK leadership. Out of this mission will come the potential task of assimilating KPA members into the KDF. However, there are at least two factors that cast doubt on the prospect. First, in such a scenario, unification is likely to be an intervening condition in the military outcome, which depends more on the past relationship between the two Koreas than on the collapse itself. This relationship is likely to be less amenable to the integration of the KPA than if it had grown under the South Korean model of gradual unification. Second, it is possible that collapse of the regime could end in either a military takeover or an internal power struggle—especially considering that a complete collapse of the state is unlikely. Considering these potential outcomes, a collapse of just the regime might be the grounds of renewed civil war rather than the result of it, should the ROK intervene.

A renewed Korean War scenario will likely prevent assimilation of most if not all of the KPA into a unified military—at least in the short to medium term. The priority will be stabilizing and returning security to areas where fighting has taken place—a task that is likely to be too enormous for South Korea to take on alone. Therefore, international assistance will be crucial for stabilizing North Korea—and perhaps the entire peninsula—in the event's aftermath. Foreign powers intervening in North Korea during or following a war will likely seek a more influential voice in the fate of the KPA than during a collapse scenario, and the United States in particular will bring lessons from past nation-building efforts to bear on the issue. Exactly what these lessons are may depend on the administration in power, but from experience in Iraq and Afghanistan the US government will likely recommend against letting KPA members fade back into society with their weapons.

This is a good lesson regardless of the unification scenario, and it points to another aspect of the KPA's fate in the short term. In the intervening period between active North Korean control of its means of national defense and the assertion of control by a new unified government, there are several missions the KPA can assist with. These include security details at northern military bases, disposal of certain weapons, border patrol, and humanitarian assistance—all missions that



will help stabilize the state and lessen the burden on outside countries whose military forces would be less welcome in the former North Korea.<sup>39</sup> In particular, border patrol and humanitarian assistance may require ROK supervision considering reports of North Korean abuse against refugees in the past. Regardless, in view of the ROK's "projected demographic shortfalls," it is almost essential that the KPA assist with those missions. The KPA will also be more familiar with its own facilities, weapons, and equipment than the ROK armed forces or military forces contributed by outside countries would be.

Employing the KPA in these missions will also provide the ROK opportunities to prepare North Korean military forces for assimilation in the long term—if not into the KDF, then into society. Since the North Korean army has traditionally assisted the population with planting and harvesting during critical times, funneling many of its junior members into such jobs on a more permanent basis may be an available alternative to assimilating them into the KDF.<sup>40</sup> Assuming it is possible to arrange for such workers to be paid for their tasks, the choice may also assist with stabilizing the North's economy, particularly in the event of a collapse.

For those in the KPA who are interested, deemed worthy, and able to be accommodated into the KDF, the stabilization period will be useful for assimilating them. First, the ROK armed forces will have to shake from the KPA's collective mentality an image of the South as a population to be liberated. Depending on the manner in which unification unfolds, this task may be easy or hard. Regardless, it may take time to persuade the KPA of South Korea's peaceable intentions. Without regular access to media sources outside the country, mirror-imaging and government propaganda has likely shaped their perceptions of the ROK for decades.

Second, to make the KPA effective members of unified Korean military services, the ROK must imbue into them a spirit of cooperation with other countries and an attitude relatively free of social prejudice. While North Korea's military had worked secretly with other countries such as Syria and Iran to help them develop certain capabilities, the idea of collective security is foreign to the concept of *Juche*.<sup>41</sup> Norms for the equal treatment of military subordinates regardless of social background may also be absent in the KPA, so some degree of reeducation may be necessary for any to serve in the ROK armed forces.

Third, it will be necessary to disengage KPA members from the propagandized notions that the DPRK is the only true Korea and the Kim family is its rightful ruler. The dependence of three generations of Kims largely on maintaining a god-like image and possessing a strong military for power suggests that if a ROK-dominated unification scenario does unfold, the family will be out of the picture. Moreover, its legacy will likely be absent from the heritage of a unified Korean military. The next section explores what the character of this military might be like.

## **Military Outcomes: The Character of Unified Korean Defense Forces**

The character of the KDF will depend not only on inter-Korean dynamics—to include different national cultures—but also on regional geopolitics, how unification unfolds, and cultural differences between the South Korean military and the KPA, should the latter be integrated to some degree into a unified military. Accordingly, the first aspect of unified Korean military character is called “operational culture.”

### ***Operational Culture***

“Operational culture” encompasses what I call “orientation” and “role,” terms I have taken from a military typology set forth by the authors Anthony Forster, Timothy Edmunds, and Andrew Cottey in their study of postcommunist militaries. Based on their construct, today’s South Korean military, sometimes called the “South Korean Defense Forces” (SKDF), is “territorial defense”—that is, “primarily oriented toward national defense but also capable of contributing in a limited way to multinational power projection operations.”<sup>42</sup> For national defense, the SKDF focuses almost exclusively on the North Korean threat. However, the SKDF have participated in foreign operations periodically since sending two divisions to Vietnam in support of US objectives there in the 1960s. Therefore, aside from taking on domestic assistance roles before South Korea became a full-fledged democracy in the late 1980s, the SKDF has prioritized the role of national security against external aggression.

With regard to the North Korean threat, however, there are limits to carrying out this role independently. Per bilateral agreement, the United States still maintains operational control of ROK forces if war breaks out against North Korea. Some argue the delay in passing this control to the SKDF retards its emergence as a fully sovereign military. However, for the ROK to assume wartime control, three conditions must be met. There must be “a security environment” conducive to transfer, “the right mix of capabilities to lead combined ROK-US forces,” and “capabilities that can address North Korean nuclear and missile threats in the early stages of a regional provocation or conflict.”<sup>43</sup> The latter two of these conditions suggest the SKDF cannot be sovereign until it is fully capable against the North. However, attitudes in both SKDF leadership and the Korean Parliament regarding defense funding priorities may have to change before operational control transfer can be achieved.<sup>44</sup> If a crisis erupts in the North that leads to military conflict and the United States still has wartime control, the SKDF may lose face. However, losses on the battlefield against the DPRK would have a much worse effect should the SKDF be ill-prepared to lead the fight. The most likely scenario

in war against North Korea—and perhaps the best solution if the United States still has wartime control of operations—is that US Forces Korea hand over control to the SKDF as combat concludes and stability operations begin. This will be a gradual transition that is dependent on conditions in each North Korean territory. As the transition takes place, new or expanded roles are likely to open for the Korean military that mold its future operational culture as a unified force.

These roles are important to prepare for because of the likelihood of unrest in the North in any unification scenario, and they will be formative for a future KDF. First, the SKDF should prepare to expand its power projection role so that it can rotate forces in and out of North Korea regularly. Second, it will increasingly take on the role of domestic military assistance, to include providing basic services to the most beleaguered members of the North's population, augmenting governance where civilian authority is lacking, establishing security in the case of insurgent activity, and coordinating with Seoul in the conduct of an information campaign targeting the North Korean population.

The last effort is key. A lengthy counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign may follow a renewed war with North Korea, since total military victory will be both difficult and undesirable. South Korea will have to pay for whatever it destroys in the process of subduing the North. Pursuing a strategy of annihilation would also lose South Korea the moral high ground. Any destruction in North Korea resembling the “Highway of Death” that the US coalition left behind in Kuwait after Operation Desert Storm should be avoided. It would be much better for the SKDF to disable its opponent using nonkinetic or even nonlethal means, if possible. In any case, the words of Clausewitz are worth noting here: To lay the seeds for a healthy operational culture in a unified Korean armed forces, SKDF forces will need to examine the situation in North Korea and “establish . . . the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.”<sup>45</sup>

In any scenario that is not entirely peaceful, the SKDF—and later the KDF—may also need to be prepared to address security threats from China. Of the three external powers previously discussed in the context of Korean unification besides the United States, China is the most likely to intervene in North Korea during collapse or war. ROK and especially US military intervention in either scenario would violate China's policies of “peace and stability” and “resolution of issues through dialogue and negotiation” on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the SKDF or KDF may need to yield to diplomatic efforts by Korean and US governments with China to smooth the path to full political unification.

In the longer term, perhaps over a period of decades, there is one additional role that a unified Korean military will take on: that of nation-building, defined here

as inculcating national values into military members. The focus of nation-building will initially be any KPA members that transfer into the unified forces, but ultimately it will extend to recruits. Although the ROK still conscripts South Koreans to defend against the North, most advanced democratic nations have moved away from using the military as a nation-building institution.<sup>47</sup> A unified Korea would be unique if it continued to do so. However, in order to bridge the cultural, social, and economic gaps between the North and South after unification, the government should look at military service as one option through which young adults can develop social responsibility and a sense of patriotism in the new state. This prospect touches on the military's sociology, which is the next cultural aspect of military character discussed in this article.

### ***Sociology***

For the purposes of this article, "military sociology" is defined as the "peacetime character" of a military force and is primarily concerned with the issue of KPA integration: how the integration process will affect the military's social and organizational makeup, the success of the KDF's post-unification roles, and the military's relationship to the society from which it draws its members.

First, it is possible following a renewed war or a lengthy COIN campaign in North Korean territory that a unified Korean government will choose not to integrate any former KPA in its armed forces. After keeping enough KPA personnel on various posts to maintain security and accountability of weapons and equipment during stability operations and the transition to political unification, the SKDF may discharge them and hopefully connect them with means of civilian employment. A unified Korea largely under South Korean leadership may justify the decision in the name of military efficiency and effectiveness as well as the generally antagonistic view the SKDF holds toward the KPA.

Alternatively, there may be government leaders in Seoul who see "military integration . . . as a means for making renewed civil war less likely by reducing fear" in the minds of North and South Koreans.<sup>48</sup> Incorporating some personnel from the KPA would also "reduce the number of former fighters who have to be disarmed and integrated into the society."<sup>49</sup> The government will have to weigh the economic and societal burden of integrating the KPA into the KDF against that of integrating them into society by finding them civilian employment. The number of those incorporated into the KDF is likely to be very small regardless. However, any degree of incorporation will pit more immediate pragmatic considerations against questions about identity and ideology in the two Korean militaries. However, concepts of purely North Korean identity may be less developed in the mind of a KPA private



or sergeant than in the mind of a colonel or general officer. Therefore, the more junior ranks will be more easily molded by reeducation and training.

A third possibility—selective incorporation of KPA members up to senior leadership—is most likely in the case of a gradual, peaceful unification process. Leaving certain senior KPA leaders in place may be a concession to the North in exchange for accepting more democratic means of governance in the establishment of a Korean commonwealth—the second step of the South’s unification formula. After all, formation of the commonwealth assumes separate responsibility for security.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, as Bruce Bennett has concluded, accommodating Korean military elites is a precondition to peaceful unification.<sup>51</sup> Leaving them in charge of their military organizations or giving them authority over new units that form after unification may be easier than finding positions of similar influence for them in the civilian world and more ethical than just paying them off. However, it is important for leadership in a future KDF to ask whether former South Korean military members would be willing to serve under a commander from the North. Alternately, if KPA commanders are to continue leading only KPA members, will there be an unhealthy bifurcation of hierarchies in the KDF? On one hand, units with members of similar national background may have higher group cohesion. On the other, the most successful examples of military integration after civil wars have penetrated to the individual level rather than just the unit level.<sup>52</sup>

In the long term, integration of senior leaders into the KDF after unification should probably be the exception rather than the rule. It may be necessary to keep a few in the short term for their expertise in certain military missions that the ROK or unified government needs to better understand. However, the burden of reeducating them into the principles of serving under a democracy will more than offset the benefits of maintaining their expertise. Instead, it would behoove the government to find civilian positions of influence for them that have minimal political consequences.

Therefore, selective integration of only the more junior members is the preferred course of action. For them, “the importance of ideological and political values” will fade against the group cohesion that develops from serving alongside others with a military mindset.<sup>53</sup> As Florence Gaub concludes, “the military as an organization embeds . . . men in a surrounding that emphasizes, just like the values [of service], similarities over differences, and provides a common basis for understanding and cooperation.”<sup>54</sup> That said, any KPA members that serve in the KDF should be volunteers—that is, those with a positive disposition to serve under South Korean leadership—at least after the initial period during which they are needed to maintain security of weapons and facilities. A unified Korea

may choose to pursue conscription in the former North Korea at a later time, but forcing KPA members to serve after their state ceases to exist may undermine progress toward peace on the peninsula. Doing so may also compromise professionalism in the ranks, which is the next aspect I speculate on and make recommendations for the character of a unified Korean military.

### ***Professionalism***

Military professionalism concerns characteristics inherent to the institution such as expertise, responsibility, and corporateness—qualities defined by Samuel Huntington in his book *The Soldier and the State*—as well as the understanding and acceptance of a clear boundary between military and political authority.<sup>55</sup> Between South Korea's founding and its democratization in the late 1980s, three factors encouraged the SKDF to periodically transgress American-accepted civil-military professional boundaries. These factors were the North Korean threat, economic instability, and the SKDF's domestic popularity. However, the same North Korean threat, along with the professional influence of the US military and the fact that ROK military coups were generally “non-hierarchical,” helped preserve a high degree of professionalism within the SKDF that continues to this day.<sup>56</sup> That level of professionalism will be sustainable during unification and in a unified Korean armed forces if those forces can accomplish three things: effectively employ principles of mission command in stabilizing and securing North Korea, disarm and integrate former KPA members peacefully, and yield political decisions to a future unified Korean government once it is effectively in place.

The first two recommendations address how the SKDF can best demonstrate the professional characteristics of expertise, responsibility, and corporateness in carrying out two expected tasks during unification. “Mission command” is “the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based on mission-type orders.”<sup>57</sup> Whether the ROK military conducts operations into North Korea at an advanced stage of peaceful unification in the wake of a DPRK regime collapse, or as part of a wartime coalition, it will encounter dynamic situations in which it will need to rely on its organizational, technical, and leadership expertise. As the image-bearer of the ROK and an institution that will interface with some of the North Korean population before most other government institutions, it will need to remember that its responsibility is for the security and welfare of that population as much as for South Korea's. Finally, the corporateness of the SKDF should reinforce its unity in carrying out assigned missions.

Disarming and integrating former KPA members narrows the professional focus to a group with shared values and norms more similar to the ROK military's own than those of the general North Korean population. This comparison will

likely be more accurate the more specialized the KPA member is within the military profession, since entry into specialized jobs takes place through competitive selection, disciplined self-selection, or both. However, even for the basic recruit, “the military occupation provides its personnel with a stronger alternative in identity terms than do other institutions.”<sup>58</sup> It is up to the SKDF to capitalize on such common bonds for promoting peace and convince the KPA of benign intentions during disarmament.

However, the SKDF should also expect to encounter a much different psyche from its own, particularly after a war or collapse. “Nowhere else does the army mirror its society’s problems more clearly,” explains Gaub, “than in post-conflict states.”<sup>59</sup> Ideally, an information campaign targeting the KPA will precede disarmament, preventing surprises on the ground. The campaign should encourage local political and military leadership to become a stabilizing influence rather than a resistance force. However, the SKDF should anticipate renegade actions and respond in a way that is proportional, de-escalatory, and out of necessity. Doing so will set a positive precedent for the professional heritage of a unified Korean military.

Yielding political decisions to the ROK government—the third recommendation in this section—is a humble recognition of what does not fall within the military’s expertise. The SKDF may be called upon to initiate governance in areas where it does not exist after a war or collapse. However, Seoul will likely have plans for cities and towns to transition to civilian governance once they have met certain conditions of stability and security. It is important for the SKDF and the KDF after it to recognize ahead of this transition that “military governments do not bring economic development or political democracy and often result in the eventual weakening of the military itself.”<sup>60</sup> While the developmental state model of economic growth under Major General Park Chung-hee in the 1960s might offer a counter example to this assertion, the question is whether a military government is necessary to provide the needed stimulus for the lengthy task of closing the economic gap between North and South in unification. South Korea has come too far as a democratic state to risk the military’s professionalism again for achieving economic growth.

Nevertheless, the SKDF may be able to assist the local North Korean population alongside the KPA. Such considerations will benefit the domestic professional image of the future KDF in North Korea, even if there is a short-term sacrifice in terms of the expertise and corporateness embodied in more exclusively military roles.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, I have proposed that transitioning peacefully to unitary statehood from a condition of suspended civil war between the two countries is daunting enough that unification through war or the collapse of North Korea appears more probable. Regardless of the scenario, a unification process largely dominated by South Korea appears almost determined.

As the second half of this article maintains, the manner of unification is likely to be formative in the fate of the North Korean People's Army and the character of a unified Korean armed forces (the KDF). Gradual reform offers the best opportunity for the ROK military to integrate the KPA. War or state collapse offers less opportunity because of the increased chances of hostility and irregular warfare in the aftermath of either scenario.

However, even following the outbreak of war there are reasons to integrate some portion of the KPA into a unified Korean military. As a national institution bearing the state's image, the military is perhaps the most suitable vehicle from which to begin building the new Korean nation. Integrating the subjugated state's forces is a viable means to do so provided they can be reeducated into the societal and professional military values of a democracy like South Korea. Military integration will also demonstrate solidarity toward the population of both states, provide sustained employment to a number of personnel during the expected economic upheaval of the transition, and alleviate North Korean concerns that the SKDF is just an occupying force. Moreover, studies have shown that military cohesion tends to override former national allegiances when integration takes place at the individual level.

The SKDF can also prepare for unification in the role of domestic military assistance, assisting the KPA with economic support to North Korean territory, even if these activities temporarily compromise professionalism and capability in more exclusive roles. At the same time, the SKDF should brush up on irregular warfare capabilities through exercises simulating the aftermath of war or North Korean government or regime collapse. US training would be valuable in this capacity. This is but the first of several recommendations for the United States in helping to create an environment for the peaceful integration of select members of the KPA into a unified Korean military, that is, should Korea unify in the future.

## **Recommendations for US Foreign Policy and Military Support to the ROK during Unification**

As a stabilizing force in the dynamic northeast Asia region and South Korea's most enduring ally, the United States will play a vital role during and after any

Korean unification scenario. It should support a unifying Korea in a way that continues to deter external regional aggression, upholds the US–Korean alliance, and respects Korean culture, to include culturally determined aspects of the Korean military. The following six recommendations stem from this broad guidance.

Emphasize the enduring value of the US–ROK alliance for regional security, not just to defend against the DPRK. In accordance with the first condition, the ROK alliance should be the springboard from which the United States supports unification. The December 2017 US National Security Strategy states that its “alliance and friendship with South Korea, forged by the trials of history, is stronger than ever.”<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, since 2002 the United States and South Korea have promoted their alliance as a vehicle to improve stability in the region, not just on the peninsula.<sup>62</sup>

Urge the ROK to make unification dependent upon denuclearization, peaceful inter-Korean dialogue, a phased political process, and continuance of a limited but assertive US military presence in the ROK. For the United States, denuclearization is a global issue, not just a regional one.<sup>63</sup> However, some Korean scholars believe South Korea may be willing to press ahead with peaceful reforms leading to unification without the need for North Korea to fully denuclearize first.<sup>64</sup> If the unification process proceeds in this order, North Korea is likely to use its nuclear arsenal as leverage in the unification process, clouding discussions about common Korean culture and heritage that might promote unity. The United States should therefore push for denuclearization ahead of inter-Korean political agreements leading to unification. Only a continued US military presence in the ROK is likely to achieve this outcome, and it has the added benefits of preempting “the need for Japan to re-militarize” and acting as “a wedge to offset both China and Russia from bullying Korea on political issues.”<sup>65</sup>

Push for resumption of six-party talks if unification is imminent and include the future of a unified KDF in Asian security architecture discussions. If Korea unifies, the United States may have an opportunity to revitalize the Six-Party talks among the two Koreas, the United States, China, Russia, and Japan that took place between 2002 and 2009. These talks previously centered on denuclearization, and restarting them under the auspices of Korean unification has the potential to finally resolve the nuclear issue.<sup>66</sup> For the talks to take place, it is assumed that North Korea will have already collapsed, been gradually reformed, or been beaten in a war. Therefore, there should be little disagreement on *whether* the peninsula should be denuclearized. Rather, *how* to dispose of the DPRK’s nuclear weapons and facilities will be the center of the debate. This decision being made, it will be easier to discuss how to build a regional security framework around a unified Korea. The US-led 2+4 talks that took place in Europe following the reunification of Germany is one possible model. Although there isn’t a common

regional identity like that undergirding the European talks, part of the discussion centering on unified Korea should be whether the current Asian architecture needs to change to preserve regional stability.<sup>67</sup>

Retain a deterrent and balancing role for the US military against the DPRK and China during unification. Intervene to secure or destroy the North's nuclear weapons (if not already accomplished) should war break out or collapse ensue. The United States' balancing role stems not only from its manpower commitment and nuclear umbrella but also from overlapping Korean and US missile defenses and cross-domain deterrence among cyber, space, and the traditional physical domains. If war breaks out or North Korea collapses, nuclear deterrence in particular may be less effective, since the North Korean government is more likely to lose control of its arsenal and proliferation of weapons becomes more likely. This is a situation to be prevented, if possible.

Be prepared to assist the ROK with stability operations in North Korea, but in a way that respects culture. Considering that the United States will be sharing the wartime burden and at least have an advisory capacity, it may exert pressure on the ROK to shape unified armed forces according to its own mold. There are positive and negative aspects to this pressure. On the positive side, the United States has successfully integrated a diverse population into a military that is second to none professionally. This success has lessons for integrating the KPA. On the negative side, the United States may urge the ROK to adopt policies toward the KPA that leave local ROK military personnel at odds with local civilian and military leadership in the former DPRK. Granted, the military is perhaps the best institution through which to pursue North–South social integration since it is nationally based and not locally based. However, policy consequences may still be localized, and they will be felt long after US influence is gone.<sup>68</sup> For example, the United States and its military should consider the KPA's usefulness in taking on economic assistance roles such as agricultural planting when making recommendations for disbanding or integrating it.

Support the ROK's democratic, free-market narrative. This is a narrative that most of the world can resonate with and from which the ROK has emerged as an economic and political success story. Despite the rise of China, this story will continue to challenge the North Korean narrative, which really only resonates with an internal audience. Despite the apparent resiliency of the DPRK across decades, South Korean culture has been gradually seeping into North Korean society, and the effects are only known from the reports of defectors. It remains to be seen whether the status quo will continue, whether gradual reform will take place leading to unification, or a violence-laden scenario drives change on the peninsula. Regardless, culture will undoubtedly play a major role in the outcome. ♣

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# Ontological Power

## Narrative in a New Era of Competition

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With the dawning of great-power competition and the rebalancing of geopolitical power to the Indo-Pacific region, three Asian powers—China, Japan, and India—have forged new mechanisms to engage with and shape the international order via development cooperation. This article introduces ontological power, the creation of a narrative to communicate a specific world order, value system, and collective identity. While many are familiar with material power (economic and military) and soft power (culture and ideas), the effective use of ontological power to shape development, geopolitics, and international institutions represents the newest phase of twenty-first century competition and conflict. As the world reemerges from the COVID-19 pandemic and grapples with the horrors of a conflict in Ukraine, it is evident that control of information and, more importantly, control of the *narrative* is a critical twenty-first century center of gravity.

This article begins by defining ontological power, arguing that ontological power is a critical domain in a highly networked and interconnected world. Next, a case study of Japan, China, and India's development engagement in Africa illuminates the synthesis of ontological, material, and soft power in action. Through engagement with Africa's 54 diverse nations, regional blocs, and the African Union, these three Asian donor powers participate in defining the international order in their own terms. The case study allows a close look at the strategic narratives of each Asian power. China's brand of South-South cooperation defines a paradigm of development cooperation steeped in Chinese histories, values, and perceived destiny. India's brand of South-South partnership and its commitment to *strategic autonomy* offers partners increased agency and self-determination, and an alternative to extraregional influence in their development pathways. Japan's innovative forum diplomacy and visionary role as a bridge between Asia and Africa positions Tokyo at the nexus between great powers and emerging powers. As a paragon of triangular development cooperation, Tokyo is redefining twenty-first century development cooperation frameworks, norms, and values. Asian donors' ontological development narratives are disrupting established aid constructs and reshaping the international order. In this context, this article offers four tenets of ontological power and recommendations on how to command this newest domain of power in the era of great-power competition.

## What Is Ontological Power?

In international relations theory, the concepts of soft power, smart power, and sharp power have come into vogue recently. Joseph Nye (2009) defined soft power as the use of culture, political values, and foreign policy to co-opt rather than coerce. Smart power leverages tools across the spectrum of statecraft (e.g., DIME),<sup>1</sup> advocating a combination of hard and soft-power tools in crafting effective foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> Sharp power, on the other hand, is a criticism of the exploitation of soft power by authoritarian regimes—notably China and Russia—to influence, manipulate, and censor.<sup>3</sup> While these concepts are valuable, they overlook a domain of power that has emerged in a globalized and interconnected world—the role of a strategic narrative in shaping perceptions, inspiring alignment, and building legitimacy.

Ontological power is defined as the ability to influence the behaviors of others to align with or reinforce a nation's desired worldview. It centers on the creation of a “brand” that communicates an existential world order, value system, and collective identity to partners. Priya Chacko's work on “ontological security” highlights biographical narratives and core values as the drivers for foreign policy discourses and interstate relations in the globalized world. She argues that identity and narratives of civilizational exceptionalism reinforce perceptions of security as established hierarchies of power and established relationships are revised and challenged.<sup>4</sup> Analysts such as Andréa Worden have highlighted examples of ontological power such as the war of discourse in UN bodies and the efforts of Asian powers (especially China) to validate strategic narratives.<sup>5</sup> This and other formulations of ontological power will be explored in this article. Whereas victory in war established global power status in the twentieth century, the emerging powers in Asia harness strategic ontologies to win the war without fighting.

Tools of ontological power shape the norms, values, and national identity to conform to a nation's strategic development narratives. These tools include forum diplomacy, key-leader engagements, transfer of narratives, and institutional alignment. Asian powers employ shared historical memory (i.e., the Silk Road, anticolonial struggles, civilizational links), cultural values (i.e., peaceful development, noninterference, democracy), and societal identity (i.e., Southern hemisphere and non-Western identity) to establish strategic relationships with the developing world, especially in Southeast Asia and Africa. In Asia-Africa forums, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian leaders increasingly tout the use of ontological power, in concert with material and soft power. President Xi Jinping declared the “rise in China's international influence, ability to inspire, and power to shape” on the basis of China's national, cultural, and historical strength.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Japan and India proposed an Asia-Africa development vision based on “deep civilizational

links,” “common heritage,” and “commitment to democracy, openness, and the rule of law as key values to achieve peaceful co-existence.”<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, this article presents ontological power as a defining characteristic of Indo-Pacific powers. The following case study shows how established and emerging Asian donors’ twenty-first century development engagement presents a pathway to geopolitical power. The synthesis of ontological, material, and soft power sparks a new understanding of Asia and Africa’s role in the global order as geopolitical gravity shifts toward the Indo-Pacific region.

### Case Study: Asia-Africa Engagement

Africa is considered the “final frontier” for global development with diverse and vast untapped domestic growth engines. Speculation about Africa’s potential as the “next emerging market” is often couched in the context of growing Asian investment and increased South-South cooperation.<sup>8</sup> Impressive annual GDP growth trends have given momentum to the “Africa Rising” narrative. Rising stars such as Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Kenya have achieved annual GDP growth averages of 10 percent, 7 percent, and 6 percent over the ten years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>9</sup> Africa’s potential to contribute to the global economic value chain has led many scholars to speculate that Asian investment may make Africa the world’s next manufacturing and services powerhouse.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the 55 African Union members represent the largest voting bloc in the governing bodies of the UN system, accounting for more than a quarter of all votes. For its part, Japan, a top global donor, uses official development assistance (ODA) as its chief foreign policy tool to demonstrate an alternative brand of Japanese leadership both within and outside the established international institutions. For China and India, African development cooperation represents a strategy to define themselves as new types of global powers.

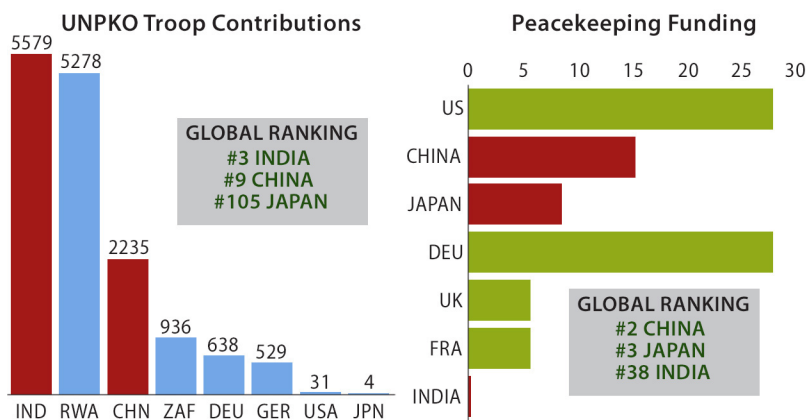
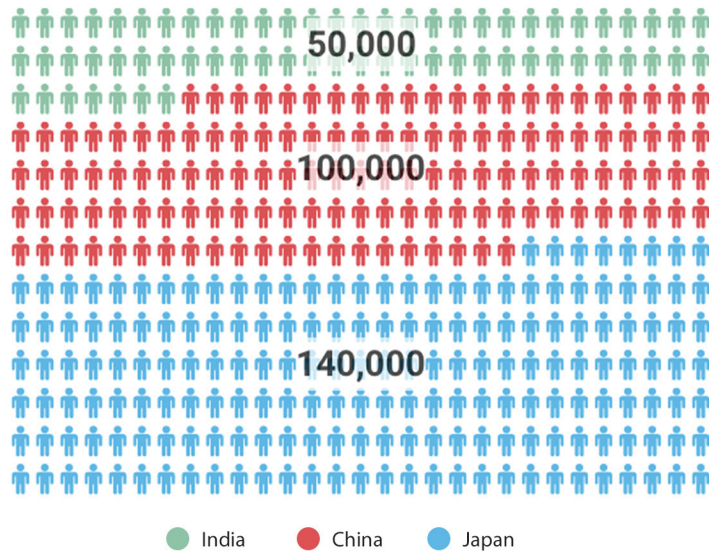


Figure 1. UNPKO Troop (2021) and Funding Contributions (2020–2021).

During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, Japanese, Chinese, and Indian development investment in African states grew rapidly along with their respective narratives. From 2011–2021, Japan committed to invest over \$90 billion (USD), China \$140B, and India \$16B in African development projects ranging from large-scale infrastructure, to digital networks and telecommunication, to medical and green technology. While the flavor of these investments varies widely from grants and development assistance (Japan) to loans and lines of credit (China and India), the impact on the African continent is undeniable.<sup>11</sup> Beyond economic investment, India remains a top contributor to African peacekeeping<sup>12</sup> with over 80 percent of its peacekeeping troops deployed to the continent and the largest contributor among Asian donor nations, with 5,579 troops deployed in 2021 in comparison to Beijing's 2,235 (see fig. 1). China is the second largest global contributor of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) funding (over \$15B), followed by Japan as the third largest contributor (\$8.5B).<sup>13</sup> The Asian powers are also heavily invested in human development. Through extensive scholarship programs, institutional exchanges, and training centers Japan, China, and India have trained hundreds of thousands of African citizens (fig. 2). Many of these training programs bring African youth, academics, politicians, and industry leaders to Beijing, Tokyo, and New Delhi, developing *de facto* ambassadors with a deep understanding of the core interests, history, and values of the respective Asian power. As the United States and other long-established donors withdraw from infrastructure and human capacity building in Africa, Asian states are leaning in. Japan, China, and India have chosen to cultivate a new quiver of geopolitical tools on the African continent. This strategy is underlined by the belief that, beyond spurring economic growth, development engagement in Africa advances national interests through the proliferation of worldviews and ontological values in the building of interstate relationships.

New viable development pathways are emerging. Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI),<sup>14</sup> and India's Security and Growth for All in the Region offer grand regional architectures steeped in rich cultural symbolism. Japan, China, and India have each established their own Asia-African forums. The Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and the India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS), have become the primary mechanisms for Asian donors to achieve strategic alignment with African partners. Africa, the final development frontier, has become the stage upon which to demonstrate a new leadership paradigm to the world.

## Africans trained by Asian Partners (2016-2021)



**Figure 2. Training commitments made at Asia-Africa forums from 2016 to 2021.**

The roots of ontological power reside in a well-told story—a compelling narrative that provides structure and coherence to the material and soft-power investment. Now we take a close look at the deployment of ontological power by China, Japan, and India in turn.

### *China*

The People's Republic of China's (PRC) relationship with African states is not new,<sup>15</sup> but its transition from primarily trade relations to a development-centered relationship has accelerated in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Since 2000, the China-Africa forum has steered China's innovation of development cooperation principles. Extensive bilateral and multilateral engagement through FOCAC has allowed Beijing to clearly define the rules of engagement for cooperation with a burgeoning Chinese power. While Beijing preaches non-interference and win-win cooperation, China's core interests—the "One China" principle, respect for sovereignty, and solidarity in international affairs—remain non-negotiable for partner nations seeking investment. Beijing's international brand centered on the Belt and Road and China Dream has evolved through experimentation on the African continent.

The “China Dream,” popularized by Xi Jinping in 2012, promises “national rejuvenation, improvement of people’s livelihoods, prosperity, construction of a better society, and military strengthening.”<sup>16</sup> In contrast to the individual pursuit of prosperity, the China Dream is fundamentally centered on national rejuvenation and the restoration of China’s pride and prominence. Xi draws on the glories of Chinese heritage and history to envision a future of power and prosperity that celebrates the characteristics and values of Chinese society.

The fulfillment of the China dream has been marketed in the developing world. The China Dream appeals to African states by highlighting China’s unique role as a development partner and developing country, and by drawing parallels with an “African renaissance” to advance “common development.” The African renaissance, popularized by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, calls for Africa to “rise from the ashes” and seek glory.<sup>17</sup> This dream has been incorporated into the bloodstream of the African Union, becoming a prominent facet of Agenda 2063.<sup>18</sup> In multiple forums, Xi Jinping stressed the parallel nature of the China Dream and the African renaissance, creating “one community connected by a common fate”<sup>19</sup> and urging nations to draw on uniquely African culture, heritage, and identity to propel the continent to *renewal* and international prominence. The PRC’s growth trajectory and ambitions to achieve prosperity and modernity with Chinese characteristics offers a compelling paradigm for African nations. As Xi boldly stated, Beijing’s narrative is “blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization,” reflecting Beijing’s newfound confidence as an ontological influencer on the global stage.<sup>20</sup>

The BRI is Beijing’s mechanism to operationalize the China Dream. Built upon the legacy of the historic Euro-Asian trade route, the “New Silk Road” is a multitrillion dollar whole-of-government strategy that envisions overland and maritime links connecting Asia, Africa, Europe, and beyond (see fig. 3).<sup>21</sup> China’s investment in the Suez Canal redevelopment, East African port infrastructure, and pan-African rail links show the extent to which the BRI narrative and ontological power are shaping the brick and mortar realities in African states.<sup>22</sup>

Capturing the spirit of the Silk Road, BRI uses historic memory to endow Beijing’s brand as one rooted in ancient glory and international cooperation.<sup>23</sup> Importantly, this narrative invokes a pre-Western period, where, according to the PRC, Chinese wisdom and philosophy contributed to constructive and mutually beneficial engagement with foreign states. As Xi elaborated, the narrative draws “wisdom and strength from the ancient Silk Road, which features the spirit of peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit.”<sup>24</sup> The value of Chinese wisdom as a positive contributor to human heritage resonates in the narrative, offering an alternative to “Westernization.”





**Figure 3. Map of Silk and Road Initiative released by China's Xinhua News Agency in 2014.** Published map as reproduced in English by The China Africa Project (Eric Olander, Cobus van Staden, and Matt Ferchen, "China's Ambitious New 'Silk Road' Trade Route Takes Shape in Africa," China in Africa [podcast], 16 June 2016, <https://www.chinafile.com/>.)

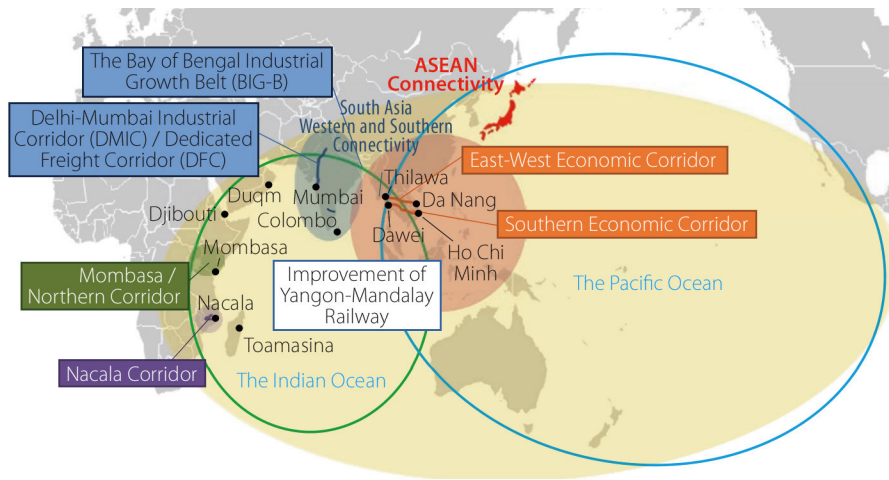
President Xi has taken deliberate steps to legitimize his vision. The publication of the Belt and Road action plan and establishment of the Belt and Road Forum were fashioned to advance the legitimacy of the BRI model and strengthen development policy synergy both within and outside established global governance structures.<sup>25</sup> Beijing has invested extensively in training African political elites, academics, scholars, and policymakers. The deployment of Confucius Institutes across the African continent, development of African states' digital and telecommunications infrastructure, and institutional entrenchment have resulted in the proliferation of Chinese language, culture, history, and values. China launched a CCTV<sup>26</sup> HQ in Nairobi in 2012 and now broadcasts in dozens of African languages, providing first-time service to many rural communities. Extensive media engagement has resulted in the training of African media professionals in China and the signing of at least 12 cooperative agreements linking Chinese and African media institutions. Deepening high-level engagement is a persistent objective of the FOCAC forum, resulting in the launch of the China-Africa State Governance Forum and the China-Africa Think Tank Forum in 2018 to promote Beijing's "diplomacy with Chinese characteristics" and outline core values and policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In 2018, the CCP Party Conference attracted 40 political party representatives from 36 African countries. According to press releases, the CCP training content includes coaching on "Xi Jinping Thought" and elaboration of China's core interests (One China Policy, Reunification with Tai-

wan, Party control of Hong Kong, bilateral resolution of disputes in the South China Sea, among others) to foster African government policy alignment with Beijing.<sup>27</sup> While often overshadowed by Beijing's multibillion-dollar railroad or energy investments in Africa, the increasing resonance of African narratives, social identity, and institutions with the BRI and the China Dream must not be overlooked. Drawing the China Dream and African renaissance into alignment has built legitimacy for Beijing's narratives beyond the African continent.

### *Japan*

Established in 1993, TICAD was the first Asian-African summit of its kind, allowing Japan to convey its national identity and development philosophy directly to development partners in Africa. Emerging powers, China and India followed Japan's lead and established FOCAC and IAFS in 2000 and 2008. As an established donor and OECD-DAC member, Japan achieved the status of a major development power through investment in TICAD initiatives. Japan distinguished its bold development paradigm and elevated a non-Western development philosophy through its leadership in African development issues via TICAD.

At TICAD VI in 2016, Prime Minister Abe announced Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision. Rooted in Abe's desire for the confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, FOIP embodies the strategic and effective use of development cooperation to advance Japan's position as a global influencer (see fig. 4). Africa offers an unharnessed growth opportunity and serves as the testing ground for Japan's proactive development engagement. Under the FOIP strategy, Tokyo plans to a) establish and promote fundamental principles of development engagement, b) promote quality infrastructure development, and c) ensure peace and stability.<sup>28</sup> The US government's official embrace of the FOIP strategy in political discourse and reorganization of command structures in 2018 further legitimized Japan's disruptive development narrative.<sup>29</sup> However, Japan differs from the United States in its approach by including Africa and the Western Indian Ocean in its Indo-Pacific construct, branding FOIP as a development pathway, and emphasizing triangular cooperation and soft-power engagement. These efforts align with Tokyo's promotion of a disruptive brand centered on the cultivation of ontological influence. Tokyo uses TICAD to tie FOIP initiatives with African and Indian Ocean agendas, to make the connection from "Asia to Africa a main artery for growth and prosperity."<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 4. Tokyo's framework for the realization of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" as illustrated in the 2018 Diplomatic Bluebook (MOFA 2018: 21)**

The distinctive features of Japan's ODA philosophy in Africa, centered on *ownership*, *partnership*, and *human security*, have proven to be influential in shaping emerging development principles. Most notably, after their debut in TICAD, Japan's development principles have been mainstreamed in global governance frameworks, such as the G20, UN SDGs, and AU Agenda 2063. Tokyo's extension of the FOIP vision to include African partnerships places Japan at the forefront of shaping twenty-first century African narratives in alignment with prevailing OECD-DAC values. Japan uniquely offers African nations a triangular partnership that links priority initiatives in Asia, Africa, and the UN. Japan's new Japan International Cooperation Agency, the world's largest bilateral aid institution,<sup>31</sup> exemplifies a mature and effective development institution and is central in brokering Asia-Africa cooperation in coordination with Tokyo's strategic national interests.

In contrast to Beijing, Tokyo completely avoids efforts to influence African media or journalism institutions. Rather than entrenching Japan's institutions in African states, TICAD is used to advance Japan's prominence in multilateral organizations, such as the UN, G20, and global financing institutions. During Japan's presidency of the G20 in 2019, Tokyo prioritized TICAD initiatives for quality infrastructure and health, demonstrating Japan's role as a global development leader. TICAD promotes the empowerment of African regional institutions such as the AU/NEPAD and Regional Economic Communities, to advance intra-Africa and Asia-Africa cooperation. Japan's approach distinguishes its core values and identity as a high-quality, principled development power. Japan's deployment of ontological power contrasts sharply with Chinese and Indian efforts.

As an established donor, Tokyo deepened cooperation in international governance institutions and leveraged the TICAD brand of high-quality technical excellence and sustainable human-focused development to elevate Japan's strategic narratives on the global stage.

## **India**

Although India is overshadowed in terms of the scale of financial investment, New Delhi's strategic regional approach and focus on niche high-end sectors offers African nations a viable partnership alternative. India's core interests of strategic autonomy, regional multilateralism, and international system reform speak to the pursuit of self-determination by African states in a postcolonial, post-apartheid world. Since 2008, India has reoriented its near neighborhood strategy to include African nations as a top foreign policy priority.<sup>32</sup> As such, African cooperation has spread from commonwealth states to a pan-African engagement approach. New Delhi's brand of South-South partnership, founded on the principle of human resource development, distinguishes India as a soft-power and ontological stronghold in the Indian Ocean and African region. New Delhi's strategy of providing high-tech solutions to address common development challenges and realize the aspirations of Africa's massive youth populations has allowed India to punch above its weight in Africa and on the international stage. From 2008 to 2019 IAFS has advanced a network and technology backbone that aligns Indian and African domestic development initiatives in sustainable energy solutions, solar power generation, pharmaceuticals, and digitization. Decades of investment in the Pan Africa e-Network, a massive information and communications technology satellite and fiber-optical network, has resulted in close cooperation between Indian and African institutions. With an additional \$15B investment in 2015, India's modernized e-network increases direct touchpoints with African stakeholders in academia, governance, medicine, and industry to consolidate Southern solidarity. Additionally, a half-century of Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation scholarships has resulted in generations of influential African leaders cultivated on Indian soil. New Delhi is becoming a heavyweight in attracting like-minded partners and friends on the African continent, evidenced by the alignment of India and African states in the UN voting records and policy alignment.

The twenty-first century creation of the Indo-Pacific regional order has positioned India as a counterweight to a swiftly expanding China. The growing material, ontological, and soft-power influence of China in Africa and the Indian Ocean sent shock waves through a zone of historical Indian influence. Former Prime Minister Singh's gentle approach of seeking common ground with a rising China has given way to Modi's more explicit and assertive foreign relations tactic.

This new posture is reflected in India's active disruption of Beijing's influence through the advancement of its alternative South-South development narrative. New Delhi progressively leverages ontological and soft-power strongholds in the Indian Ocean and African region to create a framework for regional multilateralism in domains of security, technology development, and governance. Both domestically and internationally, expectations of its emerging renaissance prod India toward self-realization as a global power.

Modi has proposed two major fronts to propel India into its new role of power within the Indo-Pacific regional order, aligning domestic and foreign policy agendas. The first aims to mobilize a massive youth population and deliver on the promise of opportunity for India and Africa's aspiring middle class. The second, Project Mausam, laid the strategic foundations for Modi's Security and Growth Across the Region vision. India's development narrative leverages historic anchors in Africa to cement an ontological alignment. These anchors include: 1) a shared geography making India the "insider" donor, 2) mutual historical heroes and martyrs that form the basis of shared emancipation legends, and 3) similar development states and conditions. These commonalities are vital in creating an aligned value system, regional interdependency between African states and India, and unity of effort toward international reform. They form the basis of New Delhi's formidable ontological power and ability to impart strategic disruption. Through multilateral economic, cultural, and security integration, India has compensated for its limited resources and enhanced its geopolitical weight in the international arena. Ultimately, both initiatives reveal the growing importance of the Africa-India strategic partnership as a pillar of Indian-led regional multilateralism.

Under the leadership of Japan's prime minister, Shinzo Abe, and India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership" between Japan and India was confirmed in 2015. With the landmark partnership, India's Project Mausam and Japan's "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" evolved into the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), a grand strategic vision that aligns with both nations' interests as a subset of Japan's FOIP vision. Like Beijing's Belt and Road, the AAGC emphasizes the alignment of development strategies against the backdrop of infrastructure and institutional connectivity. The AAGC reflects the growing synergy between Japan's TICAD narratives and India's IAFS narrative.

### **Ontological Power in the New Era of Competition**

The use of ontological power has great bearing on modern geopolitics and is shaping future engagement strategies. In a reflection on the tenets of ontological power, four key recommendations—control the narrative, build alignment, mar-

ket the brand, and invest in development—are proposed for consideration by policymakers and leaders in the military, business, and development sectors.

**Control the Narrative.** It has never been more evident that we live in a contested information environment.<sup>33</sup> The ability to project and maintain a narrative is essential to national legitimacy and provides a political mandate. Reflecting on the current conflict in Ukraine, it is clear that the Putin administration has lost both the information war and the ontological war with severe impacts on national reputation and regime legitimacy. Although the battle continues to wage, the war has been lost and the damage to the Russian state (both material and reputational) is irreversible under the current system. On the other hand, China is much more sophisticated in its ability to control the narrative. Under the guise of the Belt and Road and regional security, Beijing has successfully established numerous military outposts in the South China Sea and secured access to dual commercial-military use ports in strategic locations in the Indo-Pacific (including Africa).<sup>34</sup> Despite being ruled illegal, Beijing has extracted support from development partners, including numerous African states, undermining the legitimacy of the 2016 International Court of Arbitration ruling.<sup>35</sup> Veiled in the narrative of security, stability, and prosperity, China's suppression of freedoms in Hong Kong and increasing aggression toward Taiwan have so far thwarted opponents. Beijing's skillful control of the narrative in a long war of attrition has proven a challenging problem for Western powers to overcome. The United States and its allies and partners must provide an alternative to challenge the hegemony of Beijing's development narrative. The Western world and key partners, such as Japan and India, have the essential ingredients of ontological power but have failed to effectively operationalize the narrative, build alignment, market the brand, and invest in development.

As a starting point, the United States can look at the successes of Japan in the broad deployment of the FOIP vision that extends far beyond a security strategy. In coordination with partners, the United States must tell the story of its core values, beliefs, and identity as the foundation for a compelling vision of the world order. An America first narrative or a narrative based on countering China or maintenance of the status quo will not be effective. The United States can reference historical development feats, such as the Marshall Plan, and learn from Japan and India in crafting a visionary development narrative aligned with the strategic interests of our nation.

**Build Alignment.** An effective ontological narrative must realize alignment across the whole of government and among allies and partners. Beijing's BRI and China Dream provide the developing world a blueprint for a community of common destiny. China's increasing policy synchronization with partner states means that Beijing is buffered from international isolation by a growing network of de-

velopment partners. At the same time, as liberal institutions such as the UN, OECD, EU, and even NATO grapple to define their mandate in the twenty-first century, the United States recognizes the critical role of a robust system of allies and partners to deter and win future wars. The existential threat that built cohesion in the post-WWII and Cold War era has atrophied. A US-led ontological narrative must be developed in concert with strategic partners to achieve alignment and bolster critical international institutions and alliances. Furthermore, the United States must deliberately invest in the maintenance of alliances and partnerships and the development of new partnerships. This requires the United States to demonstrate commitment, be present at the table to shape the narratives in international organizations and institutions, and prioritize key-leader engagements. Alignment with nonprofit organizations and even the private sector can be a force multiplier for US ontological power.

**Market the Brand.** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has demonstrated extreme prowess in marketing Ukraine's narrative and harnessing ontological power. Despite an obvious mismatch in military power, Zelenskyy has made impassioned appeals to global audiences with each message meticulously aligned to the core values and existential security of his audience. Zelenskyy echoed the words of Winston Churchill in the darkest hour in his speech to the British parliament, he invoked Pearl Harbor and 9/11 to energize a US audience, he reflected on the aftermath of the nuclear crisis and pacifist ideals while compelling the Japanese parliament to build its mantle of leadership in the Pacific, and the list goes on.<sup>36</sup> The American brand still holds great appeal around the world; however, soft power is not a substitute for the deliberate promotion of the United States' ontological narrative. Beijing's compelling growth story and development model is capturing increasing market share outside of the Western world. The United States' brand must be paired with a concrete pathway for current allies and aspiring nations. As a starting point, the Quad (comprised of Japan, India, Australia, and the United States) should be the heart of an Indo-Pacific region development vision, rather than just a security-focused dialogue.

**Invest in Development.** The United States' post-WWII military campaigns and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been tactical and operational successes but strategic failures. One of the core failures was a lack of understanding of the limit of military operations to achieve political and social outcomes.<sup>37</sup> Recent military interventions have highlighted the risks of Department of Defense-led operations without a clear military objective and robust whole-of-government strategy. Instead, we can learn from partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific about the power of a development vision. Japan's post-WWII constitution limits its maintenance or projection of a military force; however, its extensive ODA budgets and decades of

development experience posture Japan as a global development power. Tokyo's model of proactive engagement is tackling social, environmental, and security challenges in some of the most challenging development contexts. It is evident that a strategic investment in development could headline US ontological power and increase security and stability. This strategy requires a compelling narrative to rally domestic and international support, significant long-term investment in development through USAID and the Department of State, and the rebalance of the Department of Defense within the whole-of-government apparatus.

The United States should not go head-to-head with China in an aid arms race, but rather, use ontological power in concert with our partners to offer viable alternatives and increased ownership in development. Rather than a zero-sum game (United States versus China), more development options and investment will increase growth potential and improve security while forcing Beijing's adherence to international environmental, social, and transparency standards. To secure US interests at home and abroad, we must tell the story of American core values, identity, and vision for a free and democratic world. Along with allies and partners—Japan, India, the EU, and beyond—the United States can ensure that it maintains a constructive great-power competition and deters a devastating conflict in the Indo-Pacific. ♣

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**Notes**

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12. In 2021 more than 80 percent of India’s UNPKO contributions were in support of African missions. India ranked as the number three contributor to African UNPKO missions, behind Bangladesh and Nepal (UNPKO 2021).

13. Funding values reflect contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations for 2020–2021. Reference: A/73/350/Add.1

14. The original English name, “One Belt One Road,” was rebranded to the Belt and Road Initiative in 2015.

15. Outside of a few exceptional examples, such as China’s TANZAN railway in the 1960s, China and India’s role as donors in African states was minor until the late twentieth century.

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21. Early maps and Belt and Road documents sought to bridge Asia, Africa, and Europe. However, in 2017 official geographical depictions of the Belt and Road were banned and the scope of the “vision” was expanded to include South America, Western Africa, and the Arctic regions.

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# Japan–Republic of Korea Relations and Two-Level Games

## Exploring Historical Issues of Conflict and Their Impact on the Ability for the Governments of South Korea and Japan to Fortify Bilateral Relations

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### Abstract

Bilateral relations between the Republic of Korea and Japan reached an alarming state of degradation between the years of 2015 and 2019. The two countries faced escalating disagreements that impacted economic, military, and cultural ties. By examining the state of several standing issues of conflict during this time and the language used by the national leaders of both countries to describe actions of each other in speeches to domestic audiences during this period, this article argues that bilateral relations degraded due to the poor management of two-level games by the political leaders of the governments of South Korea and Japan.

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Robert Putnam's political theory on two-level games builds on the concept that governments work to satisfy politics at both domestic and international levels.<sup>1</sup> Political leaders face the difficulty of reconciling their interests—and those on whose behalf they are negotiating—and the international consequences of their fixed investments in domestic politics.<sup>2</sup> Putnam points out that as both nations exercise sovereignty several variables complicate the successful execution of domestic policy and bilateral relations. The rationality of a player in one level of policy could be interpreted as impolitic on another, or a decision maker could upset the entire operation if they are unsatisfied with the progress of policy for the level in which they are involved. Other potential pitfalls include the forming of unexpected coalitions facilitated by strategic moves executed at one table and potential consequences on international bargaining positions caused by the institutional arrangements that strengthen decision makers at home.<sup>3</sup> He ultimately argues that when central decision makers engage to maximize satisfac-

tion of domestic pressures and ignore the development of foreign consequences, bilateral relations suffer.

After reviewing 167 speeches and briefings delivered by President Moon Jae-in and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, several cases came to light supporting the argument that bilateral relations between South Korea and Japan suffered due to Abe's and Moon's engagement in their respective two-level games. Annually recurring occasions for speeches of both political leaders were particularly critical in revealing a pattern of behavior and the evolution of South Korea–Japan relations between the years of 2014–2019. The year 2014 is included to incorporate interactions prior to the establishment of the Comfort Women Agreement in 2015. The analysis will consist of introducing highlights and patterns in speeches made by the heads of state and developments surrounding several difficult issues impeding bilateral relations and presenting them through the two-level frame. As these speeches were directed toward a domestic audience, it strengthens the point that the speeches were designed to motivate a nationalist sentiment and appease domestic stakeholders at the cost of bilateral cooperation.

The issues that will be highlighted are the topics of forced labor, comfort women, and the Japan Self-Defense Force. These difficult issues are all founded in the early to mid-twentieth century, stemming from the period of 1910–1945 when Imperial Japan colonized the Korean Peninsula. The issues can largely be grouped into two categories. Forced labor and comfort women are difficult topics because the issues are concerned with acknowledging the treatment of the colonized, and the Japan Self-Defense Force is a difficult topic because it concerns Japan reconciling with its past imperial militarism. The Annual Policy Speech to the National Diet, Japan's bicameral legislature, was particularly indicative of the evolution of current affairs from Prime Minister Abe. For South Korea, speeches made by President Moon on occasions including Memorial Day and Liberation Day maintained a consistent tone regarding Japan by which to measure deviation of attitude over time.

### **President Moon Jae-in**

President Moon was elected in 2017, following his predecessor being impeached and later convicted on corruption charges.<sup>4</sup> President Moon's time in office can be categorized into two phases, with his initial time in office focused on reform and his later time refocused on bilateral cooperation. Moon ran for office on several platforms including economic growth, national political reform, and renegotiating the 2015 Japan–South Korea Comfort Women Agreement. In 2018, he also dedicated a national holiday to the memory of comfort women, which further reneged the terms of the 2015 agreement. His initial time in office

was largely focused on appeasing his domestic audience and came at the cost of neglecting bilateral cooperation with Japan. President Moon's efforts to clarify that his statements made to domestic audiences at the time were not intended to spark diplomatic dispute further illuminate this divide in intent versus impact.<sup>5</sup>

Looking at speeches made by President Moon to domestic audiences in reference to relations with Japan, his speeches made on Liberation Day and Memorial Day were most consistent and pertinent in their references, and the specific examples that follow will outline the theme of neglecting bilateral cooperation. In 2017, President Moon noted that "Resolving historical issues should be based on compensation and the restoration of honor to the victims," and that obstacles to relations with Japan were founded in the Government of Japan's (GOJ) "inconsistent acknowledgement of its history."<sup>6</sup> In 2018, President Moon formally rejected the terms of the 2015 agreement and expressed hope that the GOJ would "genuinely reconcile with its neighbors" through "sincere self-reflection and reconciliation."<sup>7</sup> That same year, he also expressed intent to "develop Korea–Japan relations in a forward-looking manner."<sup>8</sup> Finally in 2019, President Moon iterated that the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan must "firmly join hands while reflecting on history" to become "genuine friends."<sup>9</sup>

There are three main takeaways from this period of President Moon's incumbency. First, in the eyes of the South Korean public, historical issues with Japan remain unresolved. Second, the criteria for the establishment of a bilateral alliance are founded on Japan's acknowledgment of history, self-reflection, and restoration of honor to the victims of World War II (WWII). Third, even if a genuine friendship between the two countries is not possible based on the aforementioned criteria, it is possible to establish positive relations with a future-oriented perspective.

Looking to speeches referencing relations with Japan made in the second half of Moon's term, there is a notable shift in tone. In 2020, on the occasion of the 75th Liberation Day, he vocalized his interest to "work with Japan to protect universal values of humanity, the principles of international law and democracy based on the separation of powers."<sup>10</sup> He also believed that joint efforts by both governments to respect individual human rights would "become a bridge for friendship and future cooperation between the people." In 2021, regarding issues based in history, President Moon implored to "resolve [the issues] through actions and practices that are consistent with universal values and the standards of the international community," further determining that the GOJ and Government of South Korea (GOSK) will "[set] an example of the cooperation expected between neighbors."<sup>11</sup>

A clear shift can be construed in the second half of Moon's term in office. Regarding relations with Japan, language emphasizing exploring joint solutions and recognizing standing agreements returned. Moon continued to vouch for both

countries to work together to explore diplomatic solutions that will satisfy the victims of WWII. Further, there was a shift in the framework used to describe the foundation of bilateral relations with Japan. The language used was much broader, speaking to universal values as well as involving the international community as a mediator for difficult issues, while focusing on maintaining messaging of building future cooperation between the two countries. President Moon appealed to the GOJ based on the standards and expectations of the international community and customary law as well as appealing to the people of South Korea, pleading to allow the GOSK to work to resolve difficult issues in accordance with the standards of the international community. The situational context for this plea concerned developments surrounding the topics of forced labor and comfort women and will be explained later.

### **Prime Minister Shinzo Abe**

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe took office in 2012 and resigned in 2020 due to health concerns, making him the longest serving prime minister of Japan. He was known for his nationalist and right-wing political ideology. Prime Minister Abe had worked to move Japan out of the postwar era, calling for Japan to assume a more active role in regional defense and security. This was a contentious topic in the region as there is a popular fear that Japan will return to an imperialist state if given the opportunity to do so. Because of Abe's nationalist and conservative ideological beliefs, his pursuit of these efforts continued regardless of regional support and opinion. By not offering any concessions to allay these fears, he also neglected bilateral cooperation with South Korea.

The speeches Prime Minister Abe made to the National Diet in reference to relations with South Korea were most consistent and revealing of the state of bilateral relations. In 2014 and 2015, the ROK was identified as the "most important neighboring country," and it was stated that the GOJ would "continually engage in dialogue" to improve relations.<sup>12</sup> However, 2015 also marked the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII, where notably Prime Minister Abe stated that "history is harsh" and that "what is done cannot be undone."<sup>13</sup> This speech was largely received as insincere across the region because although he used remorseful language, there was no apology made.<sup>14</sup> Abe stuck with his refusal to apologize even through the announcement of the agreement on comfort women came in late December 2015. Instead, the Japanese foreign minister spoke on his behalf, relaying "his most sincere apologies and remorse to all the women who underwent immeasurable and painful experiences and suffered incurable physical and psychological wounds as comfort women."<sup>15</sup>

The references made to the ROK during this time were generic but neutral. The fact that Abe referred to South Korea as the most important neighboring country seems like an obvious choice as the ROK is the only neighboring country with democratic principles. From his speech on the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII, it is clear to see that Prime Minister Abe was not interested in entertaining any additional self-reflection on engagements of Imperial Japan. In short, during this time, Tokyo was pursuing cooperative relations for the sake of furthering the desire to establish peace in the region.

In 2016, Prime Minister Abe introduced the concept of shared “strategic interests” with the ROK and emphasized the importance of “building cooperative relations” for the sake of establishing “peace and prosperity in East Asia.”<sup>16</sup> This statement tied the importance of cooperative relations with South Korea to the ultimate state of peace in the neighboring region. A North Korean nuclear threat was reintroduced through nuclear weapons testing that took place in January 2016 and reestablished the importance to both Japan and South Korea of handling this shared threat in the interest of regional security. In 2017, Abe again noted ROK as the “most important neighbor” to Japan and expressed his interest to “deepen a cooperative relationship” with a “future-oriented” perspective. Abe also mentioned mutual trust for the first time, which could be interpreted to reflect growth and positive progress made between the two governments.<sup>17</sup> In 2017, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) engaged in the launching of ballistic missiles and other activities, which sidelined further exploration of historical issues between Japan and South Korea.

Abe’s speech in 2018 relayed intent to deepen cooperative relations with a future-oriented perspective built on trust but notably omitted the ROK’s importance as a neighboring country or shared strategic interests.<sup>18</sup> This proved to be a significant year for DPRK–ROK relations with the joint Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity, and Unification of the Korean Peninsula and relation building between North and South Korea. On the other hand, Japan and South Korea clashed over a South Korean Supreme Court decision and a military radar spat that took place in December. Furthermore, in 2019, references to South Korea were omitted entirely. The evidence is clear that Abe had downgraded the importance of South Korea–Japan relations through the evolution of his annual policy speech to the nation. It was also a reflection of domestic attitudes surrounding developments of difficult issues between Japan and ROK at the time. The development of bilateral relations seems to have been abandoned in 2019 due to the greater interest in appeasing domestic concerns.

Considering the ongoing issues of ROK Supreme Court decisions ruling the issuance of compensation for forced labor and the unresolved military radar dis-

pute from December of 2018, which will be detailed below in Issue I and Issue III respectively, there is no shortage of opportunities for mutual cooperation to work through conflict. However, Prime Minister Abe attempted to utilize the opportunity of strife and seize the political opportunity to appeal to domestic constituents to further his own interests. For example, the approval rating for Abe's cabinet rose six points following the radar spat, and a public opinion poll taken by the *Nihon Keizai Shinbun* reflected a desire from the Japanese public for the government to assume a "strong response" to the issue.<sup>19</sup> Conflict with South Korea ultimately provided Abe an opportunity to further his "life's work" of revising the Japanese constitution by motivating the public for change and action. He further clarified this direction in the conclusion of his 2019 policy speech, in which he urged the Diet to "draw a clear path for the future" by engaging in conversation with the Commissions on the Constitution to determine the "ideals" for the nation that serve as a "guidepost towards a new era."<sup>20</sup>

In 2020, the language referencing relations with South Korea returned, again identifying the ROK as the "most important neighbor which shares fundamental values and strategic interest" with hopes to "uphold promises" made between the two countries and build "future-oriented Japan-ROK relations."<sup>21</sup> The language more closely mirrored that of President Moon's speech in 2020, and the efforts toward bilateral relations appeared to be restored and unified. Both countries once again deliberately emphasized a balance of building trust and a future-oriented relationship.

### **Issue I: Forced Labor**

Forced labor refers to involuntary labor performed by Korean citizens in Japanese companies and industry on behalf of the Japanese Imperial Army leading up to and during WWII. The two countries ostensibly resolved the issue in 1965, when both governments came together and ratified the 1965 Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Cooperation Between Japan and the Republic of Korea. This agreement, however, has not stopped South Korean victims from pursuing civil suits seeking redress or the South Korean courts from upholding these victims' rights to seek reparations, and subsequently, numerous cases have been filed and ruled in favor of the South Korean plaintiffs over the years.

In 2015, victims filed a civil suit against the Nippon Steel and Sumimoto Metal Corporation for wartime labor compensation, and the courts ruled in favor of the South Korean citizens named in the suit. In 2018, the South Korean Supreme Court upheld this lower-level court ruling and further, in 2019, approved the seizure of assets of the Nippon Steel and Sumimoto Metal Corporation. In re-



sponse to these developments, the GOJ toughened export control regulation on chemicals important to the ROK manufacturing industry. The GOSK then countered by threatening to withdraw from the General Security of Military Information Agreement, which was enacted in 2016 and allows for the sharing of intelligence among Japan, ROK, and the United States regarding DPRK activities.<sup>22</sup> The GOJ refuted the ruling as a violation of the 1965 Agreement. The South Korea Supreme Court has asserted that the 1965 treaty did not terminate individuals' rights to claim damages. Notably, the two countries also did not meet during the 2019 G-20 Summit in Osaka because of tensions and disagreement surrounding the proceedings of the Nippon Steel forced labor suit.<sup>23</sup>

The foreign minister of Japan underlined that the decision overthrew the legal foundation of cooperative relations that Japan and the South Korea had developed since the normalization of diplomatic relations.<sup>24</sup> The foreign ministry of South Korea accused Tokyo of politicizing the issue, warning that “excessive political emphasis” and statements made by policy makers do not help in the future-oriented relationship between the two countries.<sup>25</sup> These statements capture the fundamental differences in foundational needs for Japan–ROK relation building in each country.

These civil suits convolute the successful execution of relation building because the nature of the suit is contentious, bleeding into other sectors of business and escalating to international consequences. In August 2021, a seizure of assets was ordered against Mitsubishi Heavy Industries for a separate ongoing suit.<sup>26</sup> Ultimately in November 2021, these suits were dismissed following a public statement by President Moon recognizing the 1965 treaty as the ultimate authority for wartime compensation matters. However, it is likely that cases of this nature will continue to be filed as long as victims are alive.

Looking toward public interest and domestic attitudes toward the issue, in 2019 provincial and city governments in Gyeonggi-Do and Seoul announced proposals to require the use of stickers on school products that were made by Japanese companies that had benefited from forced South Korean labor during WWII. The intent behind the plans were to discourage the purchasing of goods and services from “war crime companies” and encouraged cutting ties with such corporations.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately these proposals were not actualized.

The forced labor issue illuminates numerous examples of domestic politics and interests directly impacting bilateral relation building. As a democratic nation, the head of state cannot control citizens' legal actions; however, Seoul must walk a fine line between supporting the narrative of victims' rights and pursuing future-oriented relation building with Japan. In this regard, 2019 was a low point for the issue, with political consequences attributed to the issue including missed G-20 summit meetings and a threat to withdraw from critical intelligence agreements.

## Issue II: Comfort Women

Comfort women are those who were forced to serve as sexual slaves for the Japanese Imperial Army at military controlled “comfort stations” set up across Japanese-occupied territories. According to historical research collected by the Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights, as many as 200,000 women were involved in this trade.<sup>28</sup> These women were recruited under the pretense of employment opportunities supporting the war economy and were coerced and abducted through the use of violence to themselves and their families.<sup>29</sup> The conditions of the comfort stations were austere, and the women were subject to forced prostitution under conditions that were habitually traumatic. These women were also subject to horrible violence if they resisted their situation, and the proximity of the comfort stations to the frontline of battle meant increased exposure to the general threat of death.<sup>30</sup>

In 2015, a formal agreement was drafted as a “final and irreversible” settlement between South Korea and Japan.<sup>31</sup> The GOSK promised to no longer criticize Japan on the issue of comfort women with the agreement that the GOJ would express responsibility and apologize to the victims of WWII and provide financial care for the now elderly victims.<sup>32</sup> At the demand of the Japanese government, the settlement referred to the Korean victims as “victims of comfort stations of the Japanese military” instead of “sexual slaves,” despite the conditions under which the women were forced into their positions.<sup>33</sup> Following the settlement, the Japanese government made efforts to commence financial reparations, but the efforts were poorly received by the South Korean public, which was more interested in receiving official reparations instead of financial reparations. This, combined with a turnover in South Korean leadership, escalated public criticism of the deal. President Moon ran on the campaign platform to renegotiate the 2015 Agreement and appointed a government panel that in December of 2017 found that the settlement ultimately failed to encompass victims’ rights and demands.<sup>34</sup> In March 2018, President Moon described the Japanese Imperial Army’s use of comfort women as a “crime against humanity,” which warranted a response from the chief cabinet secretary of Japan that the remark was “extremely regrettable.”<sup>35</sup>

In August 2018, Taiwan and South Korea engaged in protests on behalf of the memory of comfort women. Following this, a new monument was unveiled in Seoul, and a national holiday was established to commemorate the “Memorial Day for Japanese Forces’ Comfort Women Victims.” President Moon noted that the commemoration was initiated to restore honor and dignity to the women victims through the preservation of records and sharing their memory, while also sharing his hope that these actions would not spark further conflict with Japan.<sup>36</sup>

This is obviously a difficult issue due to the nature of the offenses and because the GOJ and Japanese people view efforts to honor the victims by sharing their memory as inflammatory. This view is due to the Japanese government's position that historical accounts surrounding comfort women are inaccurate and largely exaggerated. Tokyo denies that the women were forcibly recruited and rejects the categorization of "sexual slaves" for the women.<sup>37</sup>

The comfort women statues are also an interesting sticking point for the issue, as the monuments themselves are an effort to preserve the legacy of the comfort women, but the circumstances surrounding their implementation could be considered provocative. The first statue was erected in 2011 and placed directly outside of the Japanese embassy in Seoul. Statues continue to pop up every few years in numerous cities around the world, and always incite a negative reaction from the Japanese government. In 2017, the city of San Francisco, California, erected a statue commemorating comfort women, which prompted the city of Osaka to end its 60-year sister city relationship with San Francisco in protest over the statue.<sup>38</sup> Most recently a comfort woman statue was erected in the city of Pyeongchang, consisting of a young girl wearing a traditional hanbok and a male figure with a striking resemblance to Prime Minister Abe kneeling in a position of sincere apology.<sup>39</sup>

Like the forced labor issue, there has also been a trend of South Korean comfort women victims filing civil suits against the Japanese government. In a shocking move, the Seoul Court ruled in 2021 that the GOJ must pay reparations to comfort women, and this news elicited a reaction of bewilderment from President Moon.<sup>40</sup> The reaction was no doubt informed by Moon's concerns regarding the potential proceedings and the probable escalating bilateral consequences if the suit continues. Also of note is that the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs who oversaw the Comfort Women Agreement during its negotiations and ratification was none other than Fumio Kishida, who, was elected prime minister of Japan in October 2021.

The elections of both Prime Minister Kishida and President Moon, based on their involvement and stances regarding the comfort women topic, reflect domestic public opinions and attitudes on the issue. This public opinion hinders the political flexibility for either country on this topic, and as the civil suits and statues illustrate, this domestically driven political inflexibility has the great potential to negatively impact bilateral relation building. UN-driven research and investigation on comfort women reflects the international system's stance on the matter, which the GOSK could use to further drive a wedge between the two countries and hinder bilateral relations. As of August 2021, there are 14 women recognized by the GOSK as former comfort women who are still alive.<sup>41</sup> Comfort women will undoubtedly continue to be a difficult topic between Japan and South Korea, especially while the victims are still living.

### Issue III: Japan Self-Defense Force

Following the end of WWII, the United States drafted the Constitution of Japan and included Article 9, a clause outlawing war as a means to settle international disputes and banning the existence of Japanese armed forces with war-making potential. Because of this, the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) is technically an extension of the national police force and exists in a legal gray area. The topic of Article 9 is difficult. Not only are regional neighbors, including South Korea, concerned with the potential militarization of Japan but the Japanese public is also divided on the issue of abandoning the pacifist principles of the postwar era.<sup>42</sup>

Prime Minister Abe had stressed the desire to evolve Japan's role in regional security and made progress in reinterpreting Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution to actualize this vision. Throughout his tenure, Abe vocalized a goal for Japan to pursue a proactive contribution to the peace and stability across the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>43</sup> This approach was prompted as a direct response to the evolving threat environment for Japan, including the rise of China and a desire to redistribute burdens shared by the US–Japan Alliance.<sup>44</sup> For the Abe administration, the main objective of a reinterpretation was to produce a military capable of addressing independent and Alliance-based threats and making positive contributions to regional security and stability.<sup>45</sup>

Efforts to relax constraints on the Japanese defense policy first commenced in the 1980s, and proponents have categorized such endeavors as a process to normalize Japan's role as a security actor.<sup>46</sup> Traditionally, Japan has maintained a defense-oriented policy through interpreting the right of self-defense according to its constitution. In 2015, legislation was relaxed to permit Japanese forces participating in UN peacekeeping operations to carry weapons to protect and rescue civilians as well as permit the JSDF to participate in internationally coordinated operations.<sup>47</sup> The legislation also introduced the concept of aiding an ally under attack from a third party, enabling the JSDF to have the ability to utilize force when an attack against an allied nation threatens the survival of Japan.<sup>48</sup>

In 2018, Prime Minister Abe began a campaign intended to amend Article 9, calling for the addition of an explicit reference to the JSDF to establish a formal legal status for the individuals serving.<sup>49</sup> In March 2018, the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan presented seven draft constitutional proposals to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in accordance with his plan to amend Article 9. Although a team of policy makers came together as a constitutional reform task force, even they were unable to unanimously agree on a proper way ahead for the future status and role of the JSDF. Internal struggles and disagreement have translated to uncertain public opinion. According to public polls, distrust of the reform stem from a lack of trans-

parency regarding intent and motivation for the change.<sup>50</sup> Other fears are attached to the abandonment of the foundational intent of postwar pacifism that will occur if new language is introduced to the Constitution and Article 9.<sup>51</sup> The JSDF is globally one of the top-10 well-funded and well-equipped military forces in the world, yet it lacks a definite status of legality in its national constitution.<sup>52</sup> The United States maintains a productive partnership with the JSDF and will benefit from increased utility of the joint forces. The future of JSDF involvement in regional conflict and US-allied threat response rely on the fate of these proposals.

Looking to the state of relations between Japan and South Korea, there was a significant incident between a South Korean naval vessel and an unarmed Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force patrol aircraft in late 2018. Japan accused the South Korean warship of locking fire-control radar on the Japanese aircraft.<sup>53</sup> South Korea refuted this claim, asserting the humanitarian nature of their original mission to aid in the rescue of a North Korean ship out of international waters and claiming the Japanese aircraft had flown at a low altitude that could be interpreted as threatening toward the warship.<sup>54</sup> Both sides have released video recordings from the incident to support their claims and refute the other. Japanese and South Korean delegates met in Singapore in January 2019 with intentions to resolve the dispute; however, negotiators abandoned the talks after the defense ministers were unable to reach a mutually satisfactory conclusion.<sup>55</sup>

Again, we see that 2018–2019 was a low point in bilateral relations, stemming from domestic political efforts to reshape military efforts in Japan. By making decisions to appease the domestic public without considering or caring for international opinions, there is a definite consequence to bilateral relations. The GOJ does not necessarily owe the GOSK an explanation for the proposed alterations to Japan's national defense strategy, but the historical context means considerations should be made for the regional reaction to their efforts. However, despite this conflict, the relationship has since improved, and the South Korean defense minister identified Japan as a crucial security partner in 2021.<sup>56</sup>

## **Analysis**

As the speeches and controversies reflect, the political leaders of South Korea and Japan engage in a delicate two-level game. Examining the state of standing conflicts and the language used by the national leaders of both countries to describe actions of each other in speeches to domestic audiences over the past several years, it is clear that bilateral relations are degrading due to poor management of two-level games by the political leaders of the South Korea and Japan. Abe and Moon faced the challenge of reconciling their interests and the interests of the general public with the international consequences of their commitments in do-

mestic politics. The annual speeches presented a pattern of behavior that both leaders are neglecting to manage the foreign consequences that develop as a result of their domestic investments, and, therefore, the second level of bilateral relations suffer. Variables such as the political ideology to which they subscribe and campaign promises to domestic constituents presented as roadblocks for misinterpretation on the level of bilateral cooperation. At other times, statements made to unify the public at a domestic level had consequences of being received in an inflammatory manner and impacted bargaining positions that depended on mutual trust, going so far as to encourage the neglect of opportunities for joint discussions.

As Prime Minister Abe oriented Japanese policy toward a more active role in the region, he was charged with convincing his public to move away from the mind-set of a postwar era. His policy efforts reflected a desire to instill pride by moving away from the cycle of revisiting and repenting for an imperialist past. Abe's positions on topics of comfort women and forced labor, and efforts to revise Article 9 of the constitution, all present endeavors aimed at leaving narratives of the past in the past. As Prime Minister Abe executed these intentions on the domestic level, the international nature of these topics resulted in international consequences.

On the other hand, President Moon sought ultimate and fulfilling closure for the victims and leaned heavily on the memory of Japanese colonialism. His presidential campaign included promises to renegotiate the terms of a bilateral agreement that took substantial mutual collaboration and buy-in before it was announced in the first place. His speeches repeated the sentiments of celebrating the independence movement and those who fought for it, while emphasizing the need to eradicate remaining sentiments of a pro-Japanese imperialist past. Moon's positions on comfort women and forced labor all reflect a desire to bring closure to victims of WWII. As President Moon worked toward his goals for the nation, the international consequences stemming from his interests negatively impacted bilateral relations with Japan.

## **Conclusion**

Historic memory is always fragmented and inherently inflammatory, as each country has a different story they would like to tell, and the people have different memories they wish to preserve as a part of their national cultural identity. Particularly when it comes to issues of conflict founded in history, appeasing domestic audiences in one level comes at the expense of fortifying bilateral relations on the second level. The years 2018 and 2019 were the lowest point in contemporary Japan–ROK relations, and the situation climaxed due to the mismanagement of two-level games by President Moon and Prime Minister Abe. As both governments were working to alleviate domestic pressures at the cost of bilateral cooperation;

with the ROK pursuing satisfactory solutions for victims of WWII outside of standing agreements with the GOJ, and Japan working to evolve into a more active regional role while neglecting earnest efforts at bilateral cooperation. Beginning in 2020 and on, however, there appears to have been a shift for the better, and the pursuit of fortifying relations seems to be a much more deliberate and unified effort.

There are several significant events to also consider. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on both nations has definitely played a role through delayed judicial proceedings and the prevention of large-scale gatherings and protests. The pandemic response occupied significant time and resources of both governments, which allowed for developments around the difficult issues to cool for a period as well. Finally, both countries have elected new heads of state. In Japan, Prime Minister Kishida was elected to office in October 2021. In the ROK, President Yoon Suk-yeol was elected in April 2022. Both parties are interested in resolving difficult issues in a way that does not generate diplomatic friction; however, we are yet to see the execution of these intentions. At the end of the day, the state of Japan–ROK relations depends on the leaders of both countries understanding the importance of appropriately managing two-level games through minding developments on historical issues and fostering future-oriented cooperation. ♣

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# Culture, Surveillance, and Power

## Understanding Compliance to Digital Pandemic Surveillance in Taiwan

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### Abstract

In both democratic and authoritarian regimes across the world, governments increasingly use digital technologies to monitor and alter the behavior of residents within their borders. While the tools employed are similar across various political systems, the ways in which individuals comply and resist government-sponsored surveillance depend on a myriad of factors. This article examines the ways in which young adults in Taiwan engaged with the widespread use of digital surveillance during the COVID-19 pandemic. How was compliance and resistance toward enhanced government-sponsored digital surveillance mediated between the state and young adults in Taiwan? Taiwan's unique political culture played a key role in ensuring compliance to state monitoring, and this article argues that young adults in Taiwan complied with pandemic surveillance out of the population's reverence for protecting society, peer and familial pressures, and a fear of social stigma cast upon those that carelessly spread the virus. To make this case, the article draws upon more than 50 hours of interviews and focus groups with young adults and state officials from Taiwan. It identifies key causal factors behind one of the world's most successful pandemic responses, which relied heavily upon the wide acceptance of digital pandemic surveillance.

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Political culture plays a significant role in a state's ability to achieve high rates of compliance with digital pandemic surveillance. Individuals maintain agency to either comply or resist state monitoring efforts, and attitudes driving surveillance-compliance decisions are shaped by social norms found within unique political cultures. The surveillance imperative of the COVID-19 pandemic brought comparative cases of culture's impact on compliance into stark relief. Regardless of the political system, individuals exercised their resistance to surveillance measures throughout the pandemic. For instance, in several Western democracies—such as the United States and United Kingdom—state efforts at establishing contact-tracing apps received insufficient uptake from their respec-

tive populations to effectively function and prevent the spread of coronavirus.<sup>1</sup> Under the authoritarian approach in the People's Republic of China (PRC), individuals resisted state surveillance by entering facilities with out-of-date screen-shots, effectively deceiving the state about their individual health status.<sup>2</sup> Taiwan's democratic government, in stark contrast, effectively used digital forms of surveillance to control and prevent the local transmission of COVID-19 for a world-leading 253 days. To understand the dynamics behind Taiwan's success in implementing surveillance widely accepted by its population, this article approaches the phenomenon from multiple angles.

It first observes the state's use of digital pandemic surveillance in Taiwan from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. A partial state perspective is then constructed through discourse analysis of more than 300 publicly available transcripts and an elite interview with Taiwan's current Digital Minister. Next, it provides explanatory factors from individual young adults; derived from a thematic analysis of interview responses with 18–35-year-olds in Taiwan. The combination of discourse from state and individual perspectives, as well as evidence reported by news media reports, triangulates the mediating factors behind individual compliance. The article's main findings are sourced from in-person and virtual semi-structured interviews with citizens, all of whom experienced the state's use of pandemic technologies inside of Taiwan in 2020–2022. The state's surveillance approach, designed in large part by the Republic of China's (ROC) Digital Minister, was carefully crafted to consider the comfort of and acceptability to the population. Still, this article finds that high compliance with digital surveillance involved more than individual obedience to state authority. Young adults complied with these technologies in large part due to Taiwan's unique political culture, which includes a high value on society, fear of social stigma for breaking rules, and moral arbiters that act in their private capacity to uphold state policies.

### **Taiwan's Pre-pandemic Posture and Surveillance Response**

Taiwan suffered a traumatic experience with SARS in 2003 that drove many changes contributing to its successful posture ahead of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup> During that period nearly 20 years ago, Taiwan's government was unprepared for the rapidly escalating crisis of a respiratory-related pandemic. The central government communicated crisis information differently than the municipal governments. Disjointedness in communication from entrusted authorities led to a traumatic decision to lock down an entire hospital unannounced.<sup>4</sup> In the end, 73 people died in Taiwan from SARS.<sup>5</sup> In the context of today's coronavirus pandemic—with an estimated 1.8 million global deaths—Taiwan's SARS casualties represent a much smaller number. Nevertheless, the SARS experience served as a catalyst for Taiwan's

government to reform regarding health emergencies.<sup>6</sup> In the aftermath of SARS, Taiwan's constitutional court charged the legislature to review the mistakes and establish a new mechanism, the Central Epidemic Control Center (CECC).<sup>7</sup> This 2004 institutional creation was meant to ensure that communication between government ministries and agencies was timely and citizens' input could reach the central government in the next pandemic.<sup>8</sup> Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan essentially established a pandemic emergency plan, streamlined crisis communications and command structures, and practiced it annually. As a result, at the onset of COVID-19, the state implemented a highly successful pandemic response that relied on the use of various digital pandemic technologies.<sup>9</sup> Taiwan's response stood out across the globe for its low individual resistance to digital surveillance measures and its lengthy period without local transmissions.

As a part of Taiwan's pandemic response, the ROC government overtly tracked the location of individuals arriving onto the island by commercial aircraft and ships from abroad. Each individual arrival underwent a mandatory quarantine scheme that involved location surveillance.<sup>10</sup> The state carried out this form of digital pandemic surveillance through tracking individual SIM cards found inside of their mobile phones. Citizens and foreigners alike, arriving in Taiwan from abroad, faced a compulsory quarantine period of 14 days in government-approved, and at times, government-directed accommodations.<sup>11</sup> During the periods where arrivals had an accommodation choice, these lodgings widely varied in quality and comfort from coastal resort hotels to more austere military camps. While in their respective periods of quarantine, individuals were not allowed to leave the confines of their assigned hotel room (i.e., not allowed to physically pass beyond their room's entry door). The state, from the national level down to street-level bureaucrats, used digital technology to ensure that individuals complied with quarantine boundaries. In addition to using individuals to physically monitor hallways and lobby areas, the state also relied on SMS text messaging from locally appointed monitors or quarantine leaders, CCTV cameras, and the location-tracing of cell-phones. Consenting to be tracked by these forms of surveillance was compulsory for every individual entering the island by air or sea.

## Digital Fence Concept Diagram (Taiwan)

### Companies involved (major ones)

== tracking level ==

1. Chunghwa Telecom (telecom): system level
2. Taiwan Mobile (telecom)
3. FETNET (telecom)
4. APNG (telecom)
5. TStar (telecom)

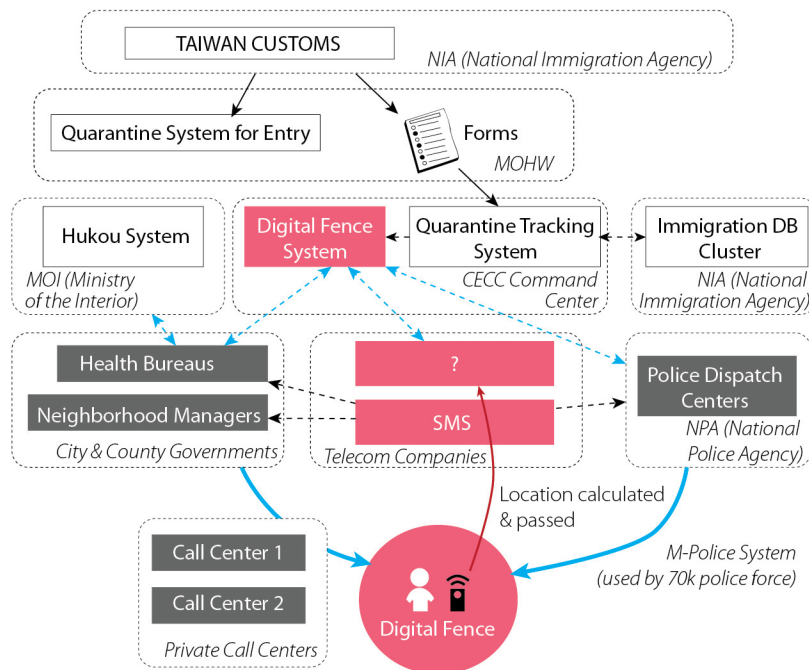
== interaction level ==

5. DeepQ (hTC group)
6. LINE (p2p messenger)
7. Private call centers

### Timeline

- Jan 28: Project kicked off
- Early Feb: Working ver. out
- Feb 14: Customs integration
- Mar 13: CECC Commander brief

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**Figure 1 Digital Fence Concept (Taiwan)**

Figure 1 is a graphical depiction of quarantine surveillance for new international arrivals into Taiwan from abroad. During the pandemic, Taiwan's government used a form of digital pandemic surveillance commonly referred to as an "electronic fence" or "digital fence," which essentially geolocated individual cell-phone handsets to enforce quarantines. Using Taiwanese SIM cards—which foreigners and returning citizens were obliged to purchase at the airport upon arrival if they did not already possess—the CECC ensured new arrivals remained in their place of quarantine through location monitoring, texting, and phone calls to

check in and inquire about travelers' symptom status. In addition to CECC monitoring efforts, other local officials (e.g., police, health bureaus, and neighborhood managers) checked in with quarantined travelers on a regular basis. Quarantined travelers who could not be reached in a timely manner received a knock on their door to verify their location. Of the 24 young adults from Taiwan interviewed for this study, 25 percent explicitly mentioned the police physically checking on them personally or on an immediate family member due to an issue with their mobile phone (e.g., dead battery, failed to answer phone call in time).

The CECC accounted for privacy concerns in selecting mobile positioning data as the primary form of quarantine contact tracing method.<sup>12</sup> The state's use of individual mobile phone signals for quarantine tracing first occurred when the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship docked in Keelung, Taiwan, in January 2020 and involved the tracing of 627,386 possible contact-persons.<sup>13</sup> The electronic fence concept used individual mobile signals on the nearest telecom base station to locate the rough position of the mobile devices. Quarantine tracking did not rely on GPS information; rather, it used the less precise base station method of geolocation. Government officials, to avoid privacy concerns, deliberately chose this method over others available that were considered more intrusive to Taiwan's population (e.g., electronic bracelets, IoT devices).

Taiwan's population complied with these forms of surveillance with little resistance, which contributed to the island's remarkably successful pandemic response compared to the rest of the world. Fewer than 1,000 fines were issued, which demonstrated an extremely high rate of compliance for its population size of 23 million. Unlike Singapore and Hong Kong, Taiwan neither threatened prison terms nor revoked permanent-resident status to achieve such high compliance.<sup>14</sup> Still, ROC government officials issued stern warnings about the monetary consequences of breaking these rules. In March 2020, Taipei city mayor Hou Yu-ih stated, "Those who are caught going out to places that have big crowds and are not well ventilated will be sent to centralized epidemic prevention facility and fined Tw\$1 million . . . I will not be soft handed."<sup>15</sup> The fine was doubled for those caught taking public transport. According to interviewees for this study, the potential punishment of high fines was well known.

Nevertheless, Taiwan's news media produced examples of resistance and individuals breaking the geographic confines of state-directed quarantine. The most egregious violators of the digitally imposed quarantine were fined as much as USD 30,000. Evidence of this resistance implies that individuals under these forms of state surveillance did not monolithically comply with state directives; instead, they used their own agency to abide or break the surveillance rules as they

saw fit. The question remained: What attitudes drove the decision to comply or resist with these measures?

In response to Taiwan's pandemic-response success, Digital Minister Tang Feng (aka Audrey Tang) was sought for numerous interviews by foreign governments, think tanks, and news media.<sup>16</sup> Tang is a unique individual to hold the role of Taiwan's first Digital Minister for several reasons—she is relatively young by government official standards and highly experienced in coding and developing software. She is well attuned to digital technology and thoughtful about its interface with Taiwan's population. In 2016, at the age of 35, Tang became the youngest cabinet member in Taiwan's history.<sup>17</sup> Tang's life story is remarkable in itself; that of an individual who was bullied in Taiwan's public schools and then convinced her parents to let her drop out of school at age 14 to self-teach with assistance from the Internet.<sup>18</sup> She was a key decision maker and architect of pandemic surveillance techniques in Taiwan; thus, an evaluation of her dialogue is critical to understand the phenomenon of high compliance.

A discourse analysis of Tang's speeches and an elite interview revealed the minister's perspective on developing and implementing digital pandemic surveillance. The ROC government's "SayIt" website contains more than 1,600 transcripts of the Digital Minister's speeches and meetings since taking office. Of those, this study examined 366 relevant speeches and interviews about the orientation of Taiwan's public toward digital pandemic surveillance. Why, in Minister Tang's view as a state official, was compliance so easily obtained from Taiwan's population?

The first theme that emerged was the government's deliberate use of *nonintrusive design* in the choice of digital pandemic surveilling methods. Minister Tang intentionally incorporated a concept called Calm Technology into the island's digital surveillance approach, which was aimed at choosing technologies most familiar to reduce anxiety in Taiwan's population. For example, quarantine communication between authorities and surveilled individuals relied on the previously existent and widely used method of mobile phone SMS text messages as opposed to mandating a new app download. Other notifications about the quarantine monitoring obligations closely resembled—deliberately and by design—emergency messages for earthquake and flood warnings, to which Taiwan's population is very accustomed. This practice, the minister asserted, made the public much more comfortable and trusting of government surveillance. Rather than introducing a new tracking technology (e.g., a Bluetooth dongle) that might create uneasiness in the surveilled subjects if it malfunctioned, the state designers kept surveillance schemes simple and well-known. Individual interviews with young adults confirmed that this approach contributed to their compliance decisions.

Official decisions about surveillance design also considered the unique political culture of Taiwan, including a desire to avoid invoking memories of past forms of authoritarian governance.<sup>19</sup> Tang admitted to “a debate within the team about whether to make contact-tracing mandatory and we found it would probably backfire because everybody remembered the martial law, and nobody wants to go back.”<sup>20</sup> This comment also revealed that Taiwan’s pre-democratic history of single-party authoritarianism factored into decisions around surveillance. Instead of contributing to the population’s proclivity toward obedience to government authority, the legacy of authoritarianism contributed to the state deliberately designing surveillance with individual privacy at the forefront. This kept the surveilled population assured that the government would not use these forms of surveillance to regress into a less transparent form of democracy. Political freedoms were hard fought and earned in Taiwan, and it was best to avoid raising the specter of backsliding into authoritarianism by mandating digital surveillance in every circumstance.

To allow nondigital tracing options, the concept of *participatory self-surveillance* ensured anonymity in high-risk places where people may not want to share their location with the government (e.g., bars and nightclubs). This handwritten contact tracing option provided a way for patrons to remain electronically anonymous by filling out a paper form that would only be used in the event of a positive case requiring further notification. As a result of having this nondigital option available, Tang suggested that young adults were more willing to provide details. This helped Taiwan fill tracing coverage gaps that could have occurred, especially in crowded places where individuals desired greater privacy.

Another distinct element of Taiwan’s digital pandemic surveillance technologies were measures taken to *increase government transparency*. ROC officials decided not to embed tracking technology within existing social media, payment, or communication apps. This was a key difference from the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) approach, which used “mini-apps” through the indispensable mobile-app platforms WeChat and Alipay. In contrast, Taiwan relied on the use of simpler forms of SMS messaging for checking in to venues and communicating with quarantining individuals. Tang discussed how Taiwan’s population already trusted their telecom provider would not spy on their messages and to always know their location, so it was more appropriate to leverage this trust than introduce a new app or wearable technology. In contrast to the PRC’s use of existing apps, with its known capacity for backdoor surveillance by the state, Taiwan’s SMS check-ins were reverse auditable. Tang referred to this level of transparency as “making the state more visible to the individual citizen,” as opposed to what she observed in the PRC system of “making the citizen more visible to the state.”<sup>21</sup>



To that end, the minister's team took additional measures to increase accountability of the state, including a concept called "radical transparency." That is, every speech and meeting that Tang holds is transcribed and posted on a state website, and therefore becomes a public record. Tang describes it as serving many purposes beyond clear record keeping. While the minister's words and those of additional attendees are documented, the idea that others are reading your words really drives the content of the meeting—even for lobbyists—toward the common good. As a result, according to Tang, attendees will want to be seen as acting in the public's best interest when future generations look back. Whether it truly affects a lobbyist's agenda, this state-led measure of transparency enhanced trust in the government. In interviewee responses for this study, young adults acknowledged their increased trust in such innovative measures put forth by members of President Tsai Ing-wen's administration.

The digital minister also hit upon a unique aspect of political culture that played a role in high compliance. Tang felt that nongovernmental pressure was a stronger form of power operating on individual attitudes than the fear of legal consequences. In the minister's view, compliance was achieved through peer-based or communal-based forms of power, as opposed to the hierarchical authority structure of the state imposing its policies on society. She relayed that politically speaking, anything top-down is more of a nonstarter for Taiwan's population. Tang's responses touched on how individuals in Taiwan's society also experienced peer and familial pressure in these measures. In practical terms, this nonstate pressure augmented the state's power to formulate and enact policy, which in turn led to attitudes of willingness to follow the government's use of surveillance.

The *fear of shame*, which could occur if one broke the rules and subsequently caused the virus to spread, was a significant consideration for young adults deciding to comply with digital surveillance. In fact, among questioned respondents, this concern to be shamed factored more into compliance decisions than the fear of legal consequences. The potential for social shaming was a powerful deterrent to exercising resistance behavior. Every interviewee spoke about cases of doxing where an individual's digital social life had been significantly impacted. This awareness suggested that young adults primarily wanted to avoid the alienation of friends and family beyond the potential legal consequences, and shame was a major contributing factor to complying with pandemic surveillance.

Along similar lines, the digital minister also weighed in on the power of *social norms* in Taiwan. Tang said, "Yeah, I think because it's a norm-based response where there's this strong social norm to protect oneself and then also protect others around you."<sup>22</sup> Acknowledging the existence of public shaming, Minister Tang also noted that the threat of being singled-out as the breakthrough case was a

factor in compliance. She stated, “there’s a strong kind of community norm around trying not to be the one that’s led to community spread happening.”<sup>23</sup> These references alluded to the doxing and shaming efforts being carried out by a combination of the media and netizens.

In the cyber domain, the term *doxing* is defined as “a form of cyberbullying that uses sensitive or secret information, statements, or records for the harassment, exposure, financial harm, or other exploitation of targeted individuals.”<sup>24</sup> In practical terms, doxing “involves taking specific information about someone and then spreading it around the Internet or via some other means of getting it out to the public.”<sup>25</sup> Doxing is a particularly potent and popular tool because it often uses publicly available information, and therefore—with some exceptions—is not usually an illegal activity.<sup>26</sup> In some cases, people in online forums can pool their talents, knowledge, and resources to crowdsource and collectively dox an individual’s behavior.

*Positive-case doxing* was a societal phenomenon that acted as a form of power against surveillance-resistance behavior in Taiwan’s young adults. When individuals tested positive for coronavirus in Taiwan, a small amount of personal information (e.g., family name, province) was usually released by the state to alert the surrounding population (e.g., city district, village) to the presence of COVID-19. The media would then report these cases and occasionally add details. Concurrently, netizens, seemingly curious or emotional about a COVID-positive individual potentially spreading the virus, would use online forums (e.g., PTT) to iteratively discover and spread additional information about the individual. In some cases, this iterative revealing of identity occurred until the person was fully exposed. Messages were posted about these individuals in online forums, where netizens normally discussed the behavior of positive-case individuals. If it was deemed morally justifiable (i.e., trying to earn an honest living selling goods), some positive-case individuals would be commented on with leniency. If the behavior included deceit or morally questionable behavior (i.e., the pursuit of gambling or sex), the comments would be more malicious—up to and including death threats. The details of these individual cases also mediated the aggressiveness of netizens revealing personal information. In other words, if the behavior was deemed more honest or innocent, netizens would not pursue the doxing as aggressively.

Taiwan’s reverence for “society” is no surprise, and this values orientation added to their willingness to comply with state monitoring. A recent attitudes-focused Pew survey indicated that Taiwan’s public believes society to hold the most meaning in life. Moreover, this is a unique values preference among advanced economies in the world. In a November 2021 Global Attitudes Survey, the Pew Research Center collected views from participants in 17 advanced economies on the

question “What makes life meaningful?” Taiwan was an outlier on this list. Among those surveyed, Taiwan was the sole public to rank “society” as its first choice—over “material well-being,” “family,” “freedom,” and “hobbies”<sup>27</sup> (see fig. 2). This societal values orientation is an important facet of understanding Taiwanese attitudes and behaviors. Young adults who believe society has premier value are more likely to consider the collective benefit to society when developing their individual attitudes and behaviors.

**Table 1. Pew Research Center Spring 2021 Global Attitudes Survey. Q36**

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Australia	Family	Occupation	Friends	Material-well-being	Society
New Zealand	Family	Occupation	Friends	Material-well-being	Society
Sweden	Family	Occupation	Friends	Material-well-being/Health	
France	Family	Occupation	Health	Material-well-being	Friends
Greece	Family	Occupation	Health	Friends	Hobbies
Germany	Family	Occupation/Health		Material-well-being/General Positive	
Canada	Family	Occupation	Material-wellbeing	Friends	Society
Singapore	Family	Occupation	Society	Material-well-being	Friends
Italy	Family / Occupation		Material-wellbeing	Health	Friends
Netherlands	Family	Material-wellbeing	Health	Friends	Occupation
Belgium	Family	Material-wellbeing	Occupation	Health	Friends
Japan	Family	Material-wellbeing	Occupation/Health		Hobbies
United Kingdom	Family	Friends	Hobbies	Occupation	Health
United States	Family	Friends	Material-wellbeing	Occupation	Faith
Spain	Health	Material-wellbeing	Occupation	Family	Society
South Korea	Material-wellbeing	Health	Family	General Positive	Society/Freedom
Taiwan	Society	Material-wellbeing	Family	Freedom	Hobbies

Note: Opened question. Rank reflects where the topic fell in a list of 17 sources of meaning that were coded. See appendix A for more information.

Source: Spring 2021 Global Attitudes Survey. Q36. "What Makes Life Meaningful, News From 17 Advanced Economies" Pew Research Center. (Recreated by Air University Press for reader accessibility.)

Many young adults in Taiwan also pointed to *social pressure*, particularly from family and friends, as causal reasons behind their compliance with digital pandemic surveillance. When asked why she did not resist the government's use of technology, Lin first acknowledged the huge monetary penalty for violating the boundaries of quarantine confinement. She then quickly added, "And the social pressures . . . everyone will be pissed off at you, and this happens frequently through social media."<sup>28</sup> Another respondent, Zhao Yen, similarly described the social pressure to conform in protecting society. She said, "In Taiwan, the scrutiny of each other, you know, the societal scrutiny is quite high, and you can feel the pressure."<sup>29</sup> Brianna noted how the pressure to comply extends beyond one's family to society. She described her attitude toward this lived experience:

Government is one reason people comply, but the main reason is the public. If you don't scan the QR code and send a message to the government, people will look at you and say, "why didn't you do that?" Then they wouldn't stand with you. If I don't do that then, I feel guilty, I feel like I've upset someone.<sup>30</sup>

Others mentioned instances where they saw individuals ignore the QR-code scan, only to be publicly scolded by bystanders. This pointed to yet another unique aspect of Taiwan's political culture which upheld the compliance behavior of young adults.

Taiwan's value proclivity toward protecting society also includes a recent phenomenon of social justice arbiters known as 正义魔人 (pinyin: zhèng yì mó rén). This term can be translated as a "self-appointed justice arbiter" or "sanctimonious person," but young adult respondents from Taiwan also translated it as a "social justice warrior" or "social justice monster." Others described these private citizens upholding state policy as "having a fascination in social justice." While translations loosely vary, respondents always referred to instances in Taiwan's society where certain individuals (正义魔人) felt it was their duty to uphold rules and norms and confronted rule-violators in a form of on-the-spot public shaming. Interviewees also stated that 正义魔人 reported individuals for pandemic-policy misbehavior (e.g., not wearing a mask) by taking photographs and sending them to local government officials. Instead of going straight to the police, these individuals will take the first stand against behavior that is not aligned with state policy. The existence of these types of individuals, and their willingness to confront rule breakers, was widely known among the young adults interviewed and weighed on their compliance decisions.

## Conclusion

To contain COVID-19, many countries used digital surveillance to monitor the movement, proximity, and health status of individuals. The ROC used digital

pandemic technologies in a novel way, and Taiwan's population complied with these forms of surveillance with little resistance. In addition to deliberate efforts to design surveillance schemes that ensured comfort and minimized state intrusiveness, Taiwan's population experienced a combination of societal pressures that drove higher compliance with digital pandemic surveillance. Beyond the state's legal enforcement power, high compliance with these forms of monitoring technology also owed to the population's reverence for protecting society, familial and peer pressure to comply with the government policy, a fear of being doxed for causing an outbreak, and the unique aspect of 正义魔人. In concert, these factors converged to create Taiwan's unparalleled pandemic response, which included the wide acceptance of government sponsored digital surveillance to combat the global pandemic. Surprisingly, the fear of social stigma was a potent driver on individuals' compliance. Together, these sources of power acted in unison and in turn saved countless lives on the island of Taiwan in a privacy-protecting manner—a response very few other countries in the world experienced. 🌟

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## Rivalry Further Afield

### The Probable Consequences of Great-Power Competition in the West Asia and North Africa Region

ARUSHI SINGH

Scenario building has become an essential element for the advancement of the policy-making process. The aim of scenario building has been posited to be to invigorate diverse perspectives or illustrations pertaining to the future of a particular theme aimed toward assembling a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of probable future routes and likelihoods. Scenarios have been described as “archetypal images of the future that nevertheless often interpret current realities.” Scenarios are internally reliable, mutually distinct, credible narratives regarding a course from the present into the future. Scenarios may also encompass conflicting perspectives concerning the future; however, they can facilitate enhancement and innovation of policy advancement.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover scenario building, which is an evolving and unceasing process, helps to shed light on the drivers of change, their interactions and acute ambiguities. Notably, experts expound that scenario-building methodology is the means for the enunciation of distinct “futures with trends, uncertainties, and rules” over a particular time period. Scenario building likewise demonstrates each conceivable and feasible prospect and illuminates crucial trends, which becomes critical as it permits decision makers to be able to make an informed decision at the current time. Scenario methodology similarly works to promote the practice of erudition and “reperceiving existing assumptions,” thus enabling adjustment to a novel situation.<sup>2</sup>

Scenario building is observed widely in terms of its underlying dynamics involving “trends, continuities, discontinuities, and uncertainties” that intend to construct a collective framework wherein strategic assessment, multiplicity and increased understanding of peripheral transformations, distinct pathways, shifts, and opportunities is revived.<sup>3</sup> Policy makers also are better informed about the repercussions of various alternative futures and prodigious uncertainties about the trajectories as well as future security permutations. Consequently, the objective as well as process of scenario building is seamlessly complemented with the functional requirements of the military, political, and economic sectors.<sup>4</sup>

Scenario building takes special significance in the case of great-power competition that is transpiring in the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) region as immense understanding of the contemporary dynamics is essential to absorbing

its contribution to the subtle nuances of global great-power competition. Consequently, the variables considered for building scenarios have been slanted by most experts and strategic analysts to be highly likely to transpire, retain the potential to have most wide-ranging effects in the region, or can lead to consequences that will have a discernible impact on the global trajectory of great-power competition.

## **Regional Dynamics and Their Impact on Great-Power Competition**

Regional dynamics in numerous diverse theaters in the future will have the probability to generate global insecurity and contribute to great-power competition, especially as the conflicts in the WANA region continue to mount. Furthermore, regional dynamics have an outsized impact on great-power competition; for instance, the effect of non-Arab states such as Turkey, Iran, and Israel who are slowly accumulating more power in the region. Other developments promulgated by experts such as the breakdown of the House of Saud may inflict enormous damage geopolitically for the United States and its influence in the region and Egypt; the advent of a radical Islamist government might aggravate regional frictions. Disintegration alongside ethnic and religious schisms in Iraq and Syria could provide a haven to violent nonstate actors and an opening to Russia and China while democratic reform in these countries could bring them more in alignment with the United States.

### ***Scenario 1: Iran–Saudi Arabia Strains and Their Bearing on Great-Power Competition***

One of the more impactful of these regional dynamics concerns the sectarian disputes that have transformed into proxy wars between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Enormous amounts of resources, blood, and treasure have been expended by both countries in the past two decades to achieve supremacy and to actively deny the other country significant victories in the region. Both countries have been referred to as nationalist players seeking strategic advantage in places where there has been a power vacuum—particularly in Syria and Iraq. These developments have been called “the mobilization of a new animus” aided by the “instrumentalization of religion and the sectarianization” of political struggle.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, scholars have proposed that Saudi Arabia and Iran have strong inducements to preserve the existing enmity as the United States is thereby devoted to the defense of its allies in the region while the Islamic Republic is provided with an exterior “threat to legitimize its power.”<sup>6</sup>

There are also concerns that the new terms to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) will make Iran more assertive<sup>7</sup> as the United States is consider-



ing “wholesome rollback” of sanctions.<sup>8</sup> This also provided increased incentive to Gulf Cooperation Council countries to diversify their financial and military links with Russia and China while circumventing extreme dependence on the United States. Strategic analysts have stated that this possibly will drive some Gulf Arab countries to bolster security links with China or house Chinese military bases.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, great-power competition is likely to make the resolution of various conflicts in the region aggravated by sustained rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, improbable. The involvement of great powers has ensued in a deadlock and impotence pertaining to a joint approach that results in cessation of conflicts. Additionally, the subjugation of Saudi Arabia’s Shia minority has intensified as the government aims to inhibit the expansion of anti-Saudi violent nonstate actors both in the country and on the battlefield.<sup>10</sup> Experts have also observed that the Saudi government has not been preventing terror strikes directed at Shia in the country.<sup>11</sup> This could provide the pretext for a heavier push from Iran into Saudi Arabia and may result in another conflict for great powers to manipulate. Saudi Arabia’s rivals, Iran and Turkey, are attempting to utilize their ties with Syrian tribes for their own aims.<sup>12</sup> However, US withdrawal from the region might lead to a reassessment of “provocative politics and behavior,” especially as security and stability becomes a predominant aspiration due to the epoch of economic stress.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Scenario 2: The Israeli Rapprochement with WANA Countries and Its Effect on Great-Power Competition***

Notably, experts have postulated that the normalization of links between Israel and the countries in the WANA region has transformed regional interest subtleties and has shifted the balance further in the direction of the Gulf states’ anti-Iran alliance.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the most instant advantage of the normalization agreements is expected to be economic. However, China has acquired substantial leverage as the biggest trading partner of the region’s countries, which might be reduced owing to the reproachment and increase in regional trade especially by countries that are crucial to its the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) framework.<sup>15</sup>

There are also proposals that state that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) might come up as an alternative to China in projects that require funding in Israel due to US opposition and for the sake of better diversification opportunities for Israel. Experts likewise opine that Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain may demonstrate their ability to hold China liable for its regional policies including its support for Iran. These enhanced relations and increase in trade can also be an opportunity for US allies to pool their resources together for common goals, which is very likely to

free the assets of the United States engaged in regional conflicts to focus more on the great-power competition in the region. Thereby, decreasing China's potential to be able to free ride as the United States provides security in the region. The rapprochement has also amplified the perception of the persistent skill of the United States to appeal to allies and create partnerships between them. The United States can further focus on the Asian theater, which China is forced to pay more heed to than the WANA region.

Furthermore Russia, which has been selling arms to countries in the region and has been attempting to build ties through defense activities and exercises, can be forced to give a share to Israel, a powerhouse in respect to defense equipment. Therefore, the rapprochement in the future could provide an advantage to the United States at the expense of China and Russia.

### ***Scenario 3: United States Endures/Strengthens Influence***

By the mid-2020s, the United States has discarded the careful strategy of a “light footprint” followed by the Obama administration and is keeping a notable military presence in the region, which is ungirded by increasing regional economic and geopolitical linkages. Civil wars have provided the context for great-power intervention in the past years by Russia and China, which has likewise made brokering peace extremely arduous. Furthermore, both China and Russia are intensifying their engagement in the region.

These developments along with counterterrorism priorities can compel the United States to deploy armed forces and military hardware in the region to attempt to be able to compete in the burgeoning great-power competition. The United States can also increase its reliance on private military contractors (PMCs), which can risk the igniting of conflicts with China, Russia, and Iran in various hot spots across the region.<sup>16</sup> Despite risks, the plausible deniability and the reach gained through PMCs make them a compelling instrument of statecraft.

However, to deter and dissuade its near-peer competitors, US armed forces have been enhancing their capabilities in “cyber and electronic warfare and unmanned systems” as well as sharpening their abilities pertaining to intelligence collection.<sup>17</sup> Notably, the United States considers China to be “a three-pronged threat that’s strategic, commercial, and technological.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Saudi-Israel-US Partnership**

The Biden administration has spoken about Saudi Arabia “forging a historic peace with Israel.”<sup>19</sup> The United States, Saudi Arabia, and Israel share the same threat perceptions to an extent regarding Iran. All three countries have intelligence-

sharing activities between themselves, albeit clandestine in the case of Saudi Arabia and Israel. The partnership has been referred to as “a coalition of circumstance.”<sup>20</sup> Scholars have proposed that both Saudi Arabia and Israel have an interest in keeping the United States as an “active regional military hegemon.” Both countries are likely to push the United States to militarily defeat Iran.<sup>21</sup> This can lead to the intensification of great-power competition as there are economic interests of China in Iran regarding the BRI and Russia is a partner of Iran on various issues. Both Russia and China could provide Iran with weapons, PMCs, and further support. These actions could also prompt Tehran to have a Chinese or Russian military presence in Iran to deter and deny the US-Israel-Saudi partnership.

There could also be an expansion of the definition of terrorism from Saudi Arabia as nonviolent political rivals of the Saudi regime, who habitually also argue against normalization with Israel,<sup>22</sup> as public opinion of Palestine is still highly positive in Saudi citizenry.<sup>23</sup> This could drive US resources away from great-power competition disproportionately toward counterterrorism activities.

#### ***Scenario 4: Substantial US Retrenchment from the WANA Region***

Strategic analysts have propounded that “decline is a relative phenomenon” that can have two consequences, namely diminishing the leverage of the declining power and increasing the potential of military conflict as states attempt to navigate the status quo that is likely to mimic the novel and shifting power relations.<sup>24</sup> There is a perception in the United States that Washington has “strategically overinvested” in the region.<sup>25</sup>

The United States can attempt to decrease its presence and engagement in the region and practice offshore balancing as well as focus on reconstruction efforts. The countries in the region will be forced to rely more on China and Russia for their security and defense collaboration. Great powers can also utilize the “Mubarak scenario,” whereby enormous popular revolts can lead to political transitions and introduce new actors who can then work with other countries such as the United States and Muslim Brotherhood parties in Egypt and Tunisia to retain or enhance their influence in the region.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, persistent Russian and Iranian presence in Syria is likely to keep Assad in power. Russia might also be able to enhance its ties with traditional US allies such as Egypt and NATO ally, Turkey. China on the other hand will have to step up either as a security provider, which the countries in the region are likely to request, or keep its engagement limited to economic and strategic spheres.

### ***Scenario 5: Russia Increases Its Footprint***

In the past, Russia had become extremely important in preventing oil-price shocks in the region, which was able to provide the Kremlin with substantial leverage in the region.<sup>27</sup> However, following Russian adventurism in Ukraine and Kazakhstan,<sup>28</sup> the United States has emerged as the calming force in the hydrocarbon domain.<sup>29</sup> This has effectively led to involuntary ceding of critical ground by Moscow to Washington in a region where geopolitics is dictated by oil and gas. Furthermore, since US president Joe Biden came to power, the leaders in the region “have been working to reduce regional tensions by rekindling strained bilateral relations” that could reduce the maneuvering space for revisionist powers such as Russia.<sup>30</sup> These developments could serve as a motivator for Russia to try and reclaim its losses in the region since the invasion of Ukraine. Russian actions in Ukraine have also forced Russia to rely more on Turkey and Iran in the region to make up the financial damage suffered by the country as a result of its actions. Notably, a thorough understanding of the asymmetry in power will lead Russia to continue to engage in great-power competition with the United States and China in the region through “economic coercion and information operations,” which Moscow considers to be part of warfare. Russia has been trying to create a narrative that the United States was supporting Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and other violent nonstate actors in the WANA region while Russia has toiled with violent nonstate actors in Syria, Libya, and Lebanon. As the great-power competition intensifies, Russia’s cooperation with such groups will likely increase. Moscow can strengthen its attempts to dismantle stable geopolitical constructs in the region to the detriment of the United States. Experts have also promulgated that increased Russian presence in Syria may possibly constrain US counterterrorism missions.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Russia is likely to attempt to gain control of a choke point in the region such as the Bab al-Mandab strait and to acquire a bridgehead in Yemen and the strait, which could also provide access to the Horn of Africa and guarantee the security of Russia maritime missions and energy transportation routes. Moscow can cooperate with Saudi Arabia to acquire access to the north of the country while collaborating in the south with the Houthis. The Kremlin can also cooperate with Iran and its PMCs to gain a foothold in the country.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, in the future, countries in the region are likely to be compelled to change the “size, structure, and force posture” of their defense and security forces owing to emergence of new threats. This can provide an opening for increasing Russian influence especially in the technology and defense sectors, which have emerged as part of Russia’s arsenal to acquire greater presence in the region.<sup>33</sup> Moscow has

also offered to mediate in the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam dispute.<sup>34</sup> All these developments are likely to provide Moscow with an advantage in the great-power competition in the WANA region.

### **China and Russia in the Great-Power Competition**

Strategic analysts have propounded that the power struggle between China and Russia can lead to “tangible conflict, given their mutual interests in the region.” Russia has been in the region historically and has gotten “used” to the US regional influence while extensive Chinese influence is a relative novelty. Both countries maintain a “strategic partnership,” however, there has been the emergence of the WANA region as a fresh theater for impending hostility. Additionally, the expanded spread of Chinese arms may create frictions between both countries as they compete for the same niche arms market and nuclear exports to the WANA region.<sup>35</sup> Scholars have also opined that China and Russia are on a “collision course” in the region.<sup>36</sup>

#### ***Scenario 6: Russia Decreases Its Footprint***

As Russia becomes increasingly embroiled in its own neighborhood, Moscow can decrease its priorities in the WANA region. For instance, Russia has called the mercenaries from the Wagner Group, which was heavily involved in Africa and West Asia, to participate in the war in Ukraine to the detriment of Russian ambitions in the WANA region.<sup>37</sup> Notably, President Putin has already once exhibited his inclination to withdraw Russian troops from Syria.<sup>38</sup>

The withdrawal of Russia from the region can lead to a decrease in the power of Iran and destabilize the Assad regime as well as the position of Haftar. The Western countries can also employ stringent sanctions against Russian allies. There can also be reprisals against Russian allies in the region as was witnessed after the USSR withdrew from Afghanistan. The unrest caused by the reprisals can provide the space for US or Chinese allies to acquire more power and influence.<sup>39</sup> Countries in the region are also looking for alternatives to grain and oil imported from Russia and Ukraine, which could decrease dependencies over time.

Furthermore, Russia can lose control of its leverage over Saudi Arabia over the hydrocarbons as Russia not only controls its own hydrocarbons but also the reserves of Syria and Libya as well. Terrorism can also increase in the traditional Russian sphere of influence in Central Asia. This concern emanates from the capabilities and reach of countries in the WANA region such as Iran that have the power to cause disruption in Central Asian nations. As Russian influence deteriorates from the region, its leverage over these countries declines as well.<sup>40</sup>

Central Asian countries are at the “nexus of a number of interlocking regions,” including the WANA region, where Russian retrenchment can contribute to intensification of instability and the creation of a haven for violent nonstate actors.<sup>41</sup> Russia’s withdrawal is also likely to be the Russian abandonment of its great-power ambitions and will provide regional powers such as Turkey and Israel along with great powers the United States and China opportunity to thrive.

### ***Scenario 7: China Boosts Its Presence***

Scholars have promulgated that the “BRI is a sophisticated Chinese plan to transfer hegemony” from the United States to China short of warfare or conflict.<sup>42</sup> To obtain hegemony, China is likely to enhance its economic and military links with countries such as Qatar that share Beijing’s “normative synergies, threat containment desires, and China’s growing interest in extra-regional diplomacy.”<sup>43</sup> China has blamed the cold war mentality of its rivals for conflicts in the region—in sharp contrast to its focus on forming a new security mandate centered on burden-sharing and public goods, which is also likely to foster lasting stability and development.

The region has been reimaged by Beijing to subside in its nearest concentric circle outside of China. Therefore, the region has become a focal point for Chinese diplomatic efforts, which have been mainly exerted vis-à-vis under the BRI context.<sup>44</sup> As China increases its presence, it is likely to engage more in security and defense cooperation to guarantee the protection of its growing interests in the region. Additionally, China’s investment in strategic assets could lead to institution of “a platform for expeditionary military operations” in the region as well as a way to disrupt unfettered US access to the region.<sup>45</sup> Beijing’s interest in Israel could culminate in unfettered access to the region, which could provide it with a distinct advantage against its competitors. This is likely to raise the threat perceptions of the United States and Russia and can result in increased military buildup in the region.

### **China-Iran-Russia Nexus**

In sharp contrast, one of China partners has been focusing on irregular warfare. Iran has been able to obtain daunting irregular capabilities guided by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ Quds Force, which has assisted militias and proxies in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon. Tehran has also been able to preserve the “largest ballistic and cruise missile force” in the region due to Russia and China who also support the Islamic Republic on the United Nations Security Council.<sup>46</sup> Russia has also backed Iran’s request to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as well as the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges. Furthermore, the

China-Iran-Russia nexus has been referred to as a “new maritime power triangle” and a demonstration of power to the United States as well as its regional allies.<sup>47</sup>

The United States is likely to have to focus not only on the JCPOA but would also have to emasculate Iran’s irregular warfare in the region. However, the threat perceptions of the China-Iran-Russia nexus originate and are reinforced by the US practice of “predatory unilateralism.”<sup>48</sup> As long as these perceptions persist and are enforced by the actions of the United States in other theaters that affect all three countries individually, it provides the context for further China-Iran-Russia cooperation. Furthermore, the China-Iran-Russia nexus is also afforded a common cause and the motive to comparatively cost-effectively undermine US influence in the WANA region.

### ***Scenario 8: China Reduces Its Presence***

Beijing understands that it has isolated countries with its wolf warrior diplomacy and concerns have also been raised regarding the BRI. These developments have provided the United States with opportunities that it can easily capitalize on.<sup>49</sup> These events can also provide the pretext for diminishing Chinese presence in the region along with the Kindleberger Trap wherein China has to replace the United States as the guarantor of global public goods; however, it is incapable or unwilling to do so. Moreover, China is more likely to give precedence to its immediate neighborhood in its security considerations as opposed to the WANA region.

This, according to experts, can lead to the downfall of the “global system into depression, genocide, and world war.” China is going to feel the massive impact of its too-cautious approach as the biggest powers can get the most benefit from their contribution and the most harm from their refusal.<sup>50</sup> This can lead to Chinese withdrawal from the great-power competition and the region. As without strong security and strategic commitments, economic or other engagements become too risky and costly.

## **Violent Nonstate Actors and Their Influence on Great-Power Competition**

The region itself has been suffering from low oil prices and it is implausible to estimate that there will be a swing back to the prices seen in the second half of the twentieth century. This has led to limitations on payments and subsidies from countries in the region to their citizens. Furthermore, this likewise leads to a rise of conservative religious groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood affiliates and

other Islamist movements across the region who can provide social services and salvation and therefore emerge as a “direct threat to country and regime stability.”<sup>51</sup>

### ***Scenario 9: Upsurge of Violent Nonstate Actors and Its Impact on Great-Power Competition***

Regional stability has been challenged by violent nonstate groups owing to various conflicts, anarchy, and a security vacuum. Terror attacks have undermined democratic reform in Tunisia while terror groups struggled to take command of territory. In Algeria, groups oriented toward al-Qaeda have been involved in low-level guerrilla warfare. A significant number of fighters who went to fight ISIS were from North Africa.<sup>52</sup> In 2020, ISIS attacks were witnessed in Syria and Iraq with the group enhancing its online recruitment and getting hold of sizable stockpiles of funds as well as encountering the possibility of acquiring a foothold in these countries by taking advantage of the changing geopolitical dynamics. Furthermore, the underlying ailments that led to the establishment of ISIS are there including “lack of security apparatus, ethno-religious grievances and porous borders.” Iran’s proxy militias are also leading to frictions as well as deepening the divide in the region between the Shias and the Sunni. Furthermore, the pandemic in the short run has led to great powers focusing on their domestic concerns, which is likely to further empower emerging and affluent terror groups operating in the region.<sup>53</sup>

Notably, experts have noticed that while al-Qaeda and other groups traditionally have fixated on the United States, the focus on the “great enemy” is diminishing with US withdrawal from the region and the terror groups can’t utilize US credibility as a “lightning rod for anger” any longer. Notably, these terror groups are very canny, and show a capability to “flex across the battlespace.” This becomes extremely concerning to China, which aims to ensure the security of its BRI projects, and this could lead to greater security engagement by both Beijing and Moscow, which can further aggravate tensions between the great powers and propel the great-power competition to lethal levels.<sup>54</sup>

Subsequently, great-power competition has made scenario building extremely important for analyzing, predicting, and reacting to the unfolding of various future scenarios. Particularly, as Iran–Saudi Arabia strains seems to be exacerbated and both nations appear primed for feuding by the prospect of the lifting of sanctions on Iran and increased possibilities for Tehran under the Biden administration.<sup>55</sup> Concomitantly, Israel, a stalwart US ally, has been focused on rapprochement with WANA countries, which has been encouraged by the United States and has been the culmination of decades of Israel’s efforts to advance Tel Aviv’s aspirations.<sup>56</sup>



The United States, on the other hand, under the past two administrations has been concentrated on retrenchment from the region, which is slated to have dramatic effects on the region while encouraging great-power competition between Russia and China. While increased US presence in the region is expected to limit penetration by other great powers as well as constrain the severity of great-power competition while strengthening Saudi-Israel-US partnership, in contrast, substantial US retrenchment from the WANA region will be apropos to provide space for US near-peer competitors and great-power competition to thrive.

Some of the most probable scenarios have focused on China's policy, which is slated to "remain pragmatic and restrained" notwithstanding the increase or reduction in the regional presence of China. However, the China-Iran-Russia nexus appears to have been provided with significant justifications to collaborate as US allies strengthen their linkages. Russia is expected to preserve its diplomatic prowess while maintaining its military leverage in Syria and Libya. This can enhance the conflict of interests between Beijing and Moscow as China further expands into and monopolizes the region. However, decline in Russian presence can spell disruption for Central Asian republics and Russia's sphere of influence.

However, there are also important areas of convergence for China and Russia in the great-power competition such as in crushing US naval dominance in the Gulf and in defying sanctions against Iran. These aims require instituting diplomatic, economic, and defense bastions to draw from in the region. The region is likely to experience great-power intercession in regional conflicts that are "almost ubiquitous in civil wars, and that the resultant deadlocks and quagmires" necessitate the emergence of a credible external guarantor, which was previously undertaken by the United States.<sup>57</sup> ♣

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# Middle-Power Aid Rivalry in the Horn of Africa

## A Comparative Study of Emirati and Turkish Foreign Aid Policy in Somalia

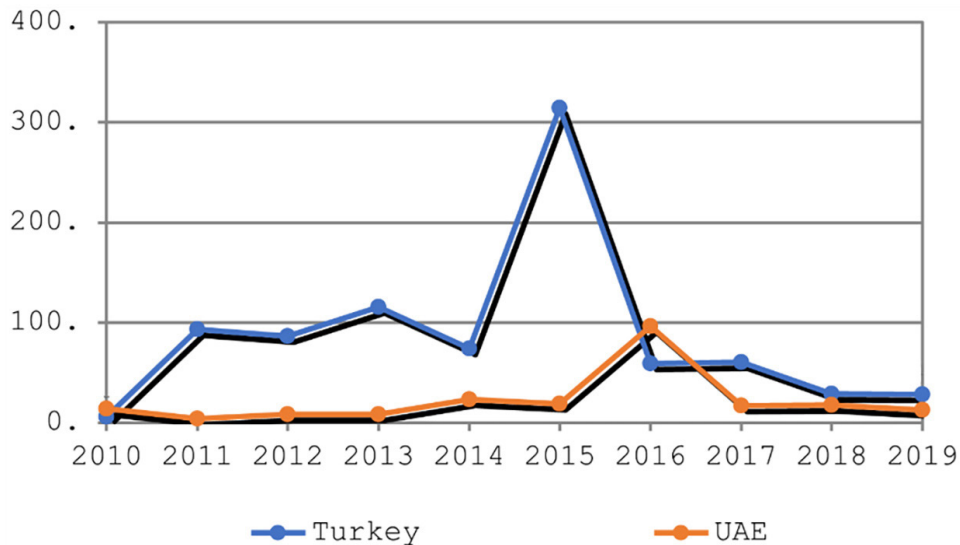
FABIO VAN LOON

The United Arab Emirates and Turkey exhibit vastly different approaches to aid giving in Somalia; their varying approaches reflect an intense economic, military, commercial, and above all, ideological rivalry. Turkey's activities in Somalia, and in the Horn of Africa more broadly, are geared at advancing President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's dream of Turkey's rise as an Islamic power. Leading the Turkish state away from its secular, democratic origins toward an increasingly religious and authoritarian system, Erdoğan has increasingly directed Turkey's international aid missions on religious and allegedly moral grounds; spreading a Turkish form of political Islam that has sparked a renewed competition with Turkey's secular rival, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In contrast, as an avowedly secular and absolutist state, the Emirates seeks to contain the spread of political Islam, an ideological populism that it attributes to the events of the Arab Spring. As a failed state, Somalia has become a central proving ground for this growing ideational and hegemonic confrontation between the two rival powers. As this article will seek to demonstrate, the radically different approaches employed by the two powers not only reflect greater strategic objectives but are inherently shaped by the domestic political circumstances that each respective leader is responsive to. This presupposition is founded in Bruce Bueno de Mesquita's selectorate theory, which posits that leaders must successfully respond to domestic constituencies to remain in power. Given this theoretical framework, this article will analyze the differences of these two cases through the realist presupposition of anarchic self-help, as well as the constructivist theory of state identity. In summary, the foreign aid of any state donor is fundamentally driven by the leader's pursuit of self-help but remains fundamentally buttressed by their ideological perceptions of political developments, both domestically and internationally.

As both the Turkish and Emirati cases demonstrate, an autocrat's dispensation of foreign aid is often tightly linked to an ideological framework that legitimizes and often moralizes their otherwise purely realist considerations. Following this observation, this article will assess how the religious moralism of Erdoğan's political Islam has driven Turkey's predominantly humanitarian engagements in

Somalia, and how the UAE's overt secularism legitimizes a realist approach that conditions humanitarian aid on the fulfillment of the monarchy's vital strategic interests. As this article will demonstrate, Erdoğan's religious and neo-Ottoman ambitions in Somalia have primarily driven Turkish aid toward supporting the Islamist government in Mogadishu. The UAE's more outwardly realist ambitions, supported by the perception that regional security is dependent on the containment of political Islam, has driven Abu Dhabi to almost exclusively pursue economic and military engagements with both the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the separatist regions of Somaliland and Puntland—using desperately needed humanitarian aid as an incentive for their cooperation.

These observations are empirically supported by the OECD's data on Emirati and Turkish official development assistance (ODA) disbursements to the FGS, which is presented in the graph below.



(Source: *Geographical Distribution of Financial Flows to Developing Countries 2021*, available at <https://doi.org/10.1787/a50961e5-en-fr>)

**Figure 1. Turkish and UAE ODA disbursements to The Federal Government of Somalia FY 2010–2019**

Understanding the political foundations of leadership in both Turkey and the UAE will therefore be the first object of this article and will serve as a frame to describe the forms of aid employed by both states. Submitting to the constructivist maxim that ideology and national identity inherently shape foreign policy making, this article ties foreign political action to domestic political survival, demonstrating the salience of state ideology in driving and vitally supporting a

leader. Understanding the unique content and form of these two foreign aid approaches is the final object of this article. The first two chapters are dedicated to exploring the philosophical underpinnings of each state's foreign aid policy; the final two chapters will explore the relationship between state ideology and the foreign aid dispensations provided to political actors throughout Somalia.

### **Turkey's Foreign Aid Philosophy: Spreading Political Islam**

As a political force “positioned between the state identity, civilisation and elements of power,” political Islam has grown to play a foundational role in the contemporary Turkish body politic.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Kemalist tradition of state secularism has not only been discarded, but it has also been completely overturned by the rise of a politically weaponized Islam supported by Erdoğan and his increasingly personalistic regime. Under his leadership, Turkish scholar Ozturk states that “Turkey brandishes Islam as both an end and socio-political means . . . gradually engender[ing] authoritarianism and trigger[ing] changes in the state identity.”<sup>2</sup> From his ascent to power in 2002, Erdoğan has successfully exploited political Islam, channeling it as a structural element of his domestic political power; one that invariably relies on his core constituency, Islamic civil society.<sup>3</sup>

Leveraging a conservative form of political Islam as a foundational fount of his own political legitimacy, Erdoğan has worked to promote Turkey as an Islamic power through the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, herein referred to as Diyanet). Established in 1924 by the first post-Ottoman governments of Kemal Atatürk, the Diyanet served as the mouthpiece of the Kemalist reading of Islam, a distinctly moderate interpretation of the religion that fit in with the scientific, positivist political tradition of Atatürk's political philosophy. As Turkey's primary “transnational religious state apparatus,” the Diyanet's activities both domestically and internationally reflect the religious interpretations and political posturing of the incumbent.<sup>4</sup> Under Erdoğan, the Diyanet has been revamped and repurposed to play a larger role in Turkish cultural and religious promotion abroad. As a tool for the AKP's conservative public diplomacy, the Diyanet has become a key political bulwark of Erdoğan's legitimacy. As such, Erdoğan has made a remarkable use of the Diyanet as a form of international Turkish soft power, aggressively expanding the Diyanet's budget and international presence in a manner that epitomizes the regime's “injection of Islam into foreign policy.”<sup>5</sup> In Somalia, and more broadly throughout the Horn of Africa, this policy translates to an approach that combines infrastructural investments with the construction of mosques, “offering both hardware and software.”<sup>6</sup>

Viewing Erdoğan's political legacy through the lens of political survival theory, it is unsurprising how central the ideology of political Islam is to his foreign

policy. Courting a conservative domestic constituency which prizes Turkey's image as a protector of the Muslim community (ummah), Erdoğan's legitimacy is vitally reinforced by the enactment of a foreign policy that supports these essential religious prerogatives. Citing Alexander Wendt's theory of national identity, Öztürk argues that "Islam occupies a central position in discussions of state identity, society and their perception around the world specific to Turkey."<sup>7</sup> However Erdoğan-inspired this approach might appear, the process of Turkifying a political form of Islam did not begin with his rise to power. As Gülenist scholar Öztürk notes, "[Post-Ottoman] Turkey's founding elite, harboring an understanding of civilization synthesized primarily with nationalism and positivism, sought to Turkify Islam in a manner that prioritised Turkishness and correlated religion with an institution loyal to the Turkish state."<sup>8</sup> Originating in Atatürk's Comtean approach to governance, which subordinates Islam to the prerogatives of the Turkish state, executives from Atatürk to Erdoğan have more or less controlled religious narratives in a bid to shape the Turkish national image both domestically and internationally. Naturally, Atatürk and Erdoğan represent two extremes; with Atatürk famously introducing the concept of state secularism through the government's control of organized religion and Erdoğan retooling religion through state organs to promote the interests of his own conservative constituency.

Furthermore, Erdoğan weaponizes religion to cement his own legitimacy and consolidate Turkey's authoritarian slide, a process largely legitimized by his increasing appeal among prominent Islamic civil society organizations.<sup>9</sup> Erdoğan has therefore tooled his own conservative brand of Turkish political Islam as a form of state ideology, a process accelerated by the unprecedented threat to democratic forces during the 2011 Arab Spring and the attempted coup d'état on 15 July 2016, the latter of which Erdoğan personally attributes to the religiously moderate, pro-Western Gülen movement.<sup>10</sup>

Following the events of 15 July 2016, Mandaville and Hamid argue "there has been a draconian crackdown on all entities and figures linked, no matter how tangentially, to what the Turkish government began calling FETO ('Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organization')."<sup>11</sup> Erdoğan has in fact made the crackdown on FETO a core element of his public diplomacy, announcing in a 2017 address that Turkey is

. . . making strenuous efforts to clear FETO from friendly and brotherly geographies in Africa. . . This herd of murderers, this organization, which was caught red-handed on the night of July 15, is no longer capable of hiding under the disguise of dialogue, service, education or trade. . . With the support of the Maarif Foundation, TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) and Türkiye Scholarships, we will ensure that this organization no longer poses a threat to our nation and friends.<sup>12</sup>



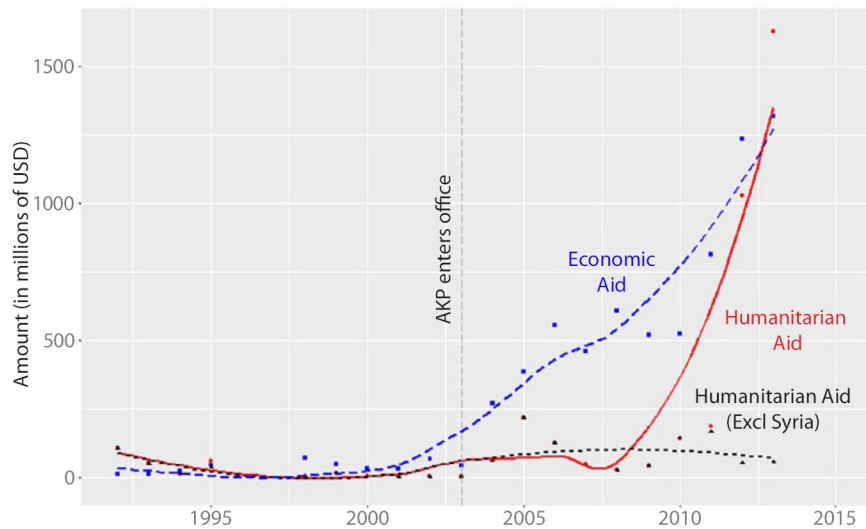
An event marred in infamy for the Erdoğan regime, the 15 July 2016 coup attempt has catalyzed the government's desire to project itself as a conservative defender of Sunni Islam, "revitalizing a distinctly Turkic model of civilizational Islam in which economic and geopolitical power go hand in hand with Muslim identity."<sup>13</sup> Naturally, this Islamic redefinition of the Turkish national image has assumed a central position in the crafting of Ankara's policies toward the predominantly Sunni nations of the Horn of Africa. Projecting the Diyanet as a form of soft power, "Erdoğan's government . . . [is seeking to] creat[e] a chain of 'loyalist Islamist republics' across the Arab world on behalf of 'the oppressed people' as the Turkish President has declared publicly."<sup>14</sup>

Studying the impact of domestic politics on emerging donors, Turkish scholar Kerim Can Kavakli argues that the rise of the AKP has caused a notable shift in Turkey's foreign aid policy. Specifically, he argues that

Before the AKP, the two main determinants of Turkish aid, aside from recipient need, were international alignments and ethnic ties. These factors lost their importance when the AKP came to power; Turkey began to give more economic aid to its trade partners and more humanitarian aid to Muslim countries.<sup>15</sup>

Using the Tobit estimator as a standard regression model to compare historical Turkish aid data from the pre-AKP era to the current AKP government, Kavakli's study demonstrates that religious identity has played a much larger role in Turkey's humanitarian aid disbursements under Erdoğan's rule.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Turkey has provided the majority of its foreign humanitarian aid in the Horn of Africa to Islamist allies such as Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and unofficially, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

As aforementioned, leadership in many of these countries, particularly Somalia, is being materially supported by Turkey, lending credence to the belief that Turkey exerts hegemony over their development. Seeing that "the AKP comes from the Islamist tradition," Kavakli argues that Islamic moralism has in part dictated the prerogatives of Turkish foreign aid giving, "which has emphasized the worldwide Muslim community (ummah) and attacked Turkish nationalists as 'ethnacist' (kavmiyetçi)."<sup>17</sup> The public morality of defending the ummah corroborates the findings that religion has become more prevalent in Turkish foreign aid policy. See the graph below for a visual representation of the increased humanitarian aid disbursements under the AKP's rule.



(Source: Kerim Can Kavakli, "Domestic Politics and the Motives of Emerging Donors: Evidence from Turkish Foreign Aid," *Political Research Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2018), 617.)

**Figure 2. Humanitarian and economic aid before and during the AKP's rise to power**

## The UAE's Foreign Aid Philosophy: Supporting Secular Absolutism

The UAE's core foreign policy objective is to contain and reverse the expansion of political Islam, a force to which it not only attributes the populist, destabilizing Arab Spring but, more broadly, to Salafi jihad.<sup>18</sup> From the UAE's founding in 1971, the nation has worked closely with its American and Western allies to monitor and counter populist Islamic groups throughout the Middle East; the most recent and perhaps most salient example being the UAE's fight to contain the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and its war against the Houthi rebels in Yemen. As Italian scholars Federico Donelli, and Giuseppe Dentice note, "political Islam constitutes the main threat . . . to its [the UAE's] own stability and regime survival. The Emirates' fear is that the rise of a government led by an Islamist political group could trigger a domino effect that would involve the Gulf monarchies—a fear supported by the presence on its soil of Al-Islah, a party affiliated with the MB [Muslim Brotherhood]."<sup>19</sup>

However, to fully understand the UAE's approach to Somalia, it is important to grasp the underlying philosophy of the sheikdom's ideological narrative in relation to the nation's geostrategic ambitions. The concepts which define the UAE's regional goals have been clearly and consistently delineated by Emirati officials in a myriad of public pronouncements. These conceptual goals are also outlined in

the Tolerance & Inclusion page of the UAE Embassy to the United States website, which states that

The UAE has a new vision for the Middle East region—an alternative, future-oriented model that supports moderate Islam, empowers women, embraces diversity, encourages innovation and welcomes global engagement.<sup>20</sup>

These “progressive”<sup>21</sup> goals are ideologically buttressed by the sheikhdom’s promotion of “Moderate Islam.”<sup>22</sup> Accusing radical Islamists of misrepresenting and distorting the true Islam, the UAE seeks to promote a form of the religion that is compatible with Western values, and more specifically, is supportive of a secular state.<sup>23</sup> In many ways, the UAE’s moderate Islam mirrors some of the secular goals of the religiously moderate Gülenist movement, which vitally supported Turkish soft power diplomacy until 2013. In fact, according to Abu Dhabi’s Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, the UAE seeks to promote the following:

- (a) Reviving the spirit of coexistence that used to preside in Muslim societies;
- (b) Reviving the humanistic values among all religions;
- (c) Resorting to scientific methodologies to correct distorted views on religion;
- (d) Encouraging the Ulema to preach tolerance and peace;
- (e) Enhancing the role of the United Arab Emirates in spreading peace, security, and prosperity in Muslim and non-Muslim societies alike.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, consistent with the belief that the Arab Spring was fueled by popular disenchantment with absolutism, the UAE has publicized these goals in a bid to market itself as a modern state that understands the perils of extremist ideology and stands firmly with the aspirations of the region’s youth. Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan’s cabinet made this policy clear in a 2019 statement:

The changes [Arab Spring] reflect what we have learned from events in our region over the past five years. In particular, we have learned that failure to respond effectively to the aspirations of young people, who represent more than half of the population in Arab countries, is like swimming against the tide. . . . We do not forget that the genesis of the tension in our region, the events dubbed the “Arab Spring,” was squarely rooted in the lack of opportunities for young people to achieve their dreams and ambitions. . . . We have also learned from hundreds of thousands of dead and millions of refugees in our region that sectarian, ideological, cultural and religious bigotry only fuel the fires of rage. We cannot and will not allow this in our country. . . . When the Arab world was tolerant and

accepting of others, it led the world: From Baghdad to Damascus to Andalusia and farther afield, we provided beacons of science, knowledge, and civilization, because humane values were the basis of our relationships with all civilizations, cultures, and religions. Even when our ancestors left Andalusia, people of other faiths went with them.<sup>25</sup>

As this statement demonstrates, the UAE's promotion of a modern, youth-oriented moderate Islam serves to counter the appeal of political Islam, and by extension, Turkey's activities in the region. To that end, the UAE's foreign aid has largely focused on supporting nations that support the regime's commitment to a secularist and absolutist form of governance—policies which Abu Dhabi believes are “essential to maintaining calm at home.”<sup>26</sup> Viewed as policies of stabilization, these policies are based on the belief that “your prosperity as a country depends on the security of your region. It depends on your neighbors, not only yourself.”<sup>27</sup> As a UAE official explained in a Crisis Group interview, “for us, stability in the Horn of Africa is very important. This is our main priority in the region.”<sup>28</sup> This view was recently corroborated by the UAE's Ambassador to the United States, Yousef Al Otaiba, who when asked about the UAE's regional goals, replied “what we would like to see is more secular, stable, prosperous, empowered, strong government.”<sup>29</sup> In emphasizing the need for a secular and strong government, the Ambassador's comments succinctly summarize the UAE's guiding philosophy, namely the perception that Islamism and weak states are inherently destabilizing. To this point, the aforementioned UAE official stated the following:

What we worry about is the sweep of ideology in our region's governance. We are worried about the Muslim Brotherhood and their threat to the neighborhood. . . . It's the calling of our time to overcome this regional situation.<sup>30</sup>

Considering these policy pronouncements, it is unsurprising that the largest recipients of the sheikhdom's ODA disbursements were released to Abu Dhabi's strategic allies, Egypt and Yemen; both countries receiving an annual average of \$1.81 billion and \$838 million in foreign aid respectively.<sup>31</sup>

The UAE's aid to Egypt is of particular relevance, especially as it relates to the country's relative wealth and stability in the region. Receiving 97 percent of the sheikhdom's aid to the North Africa region, the case of Egypt lends credence to Woods's theory of politicized aid in the context of emerging donors.<sup>32</sup> It is in fact difficult to evade the UAE's significant interest in supporting Gen. El-Sisi's stability as the Egyptian head of state.

Under that framework, it is easy to see how the Emirates continue to condition aid on the success of purely transactional economic and security relationships. This has proven especially true for Somalia and its autonomous regions, where

UAE aid efforts are given to the highest concessional bidder, as opposed to being channeled in the long-term interests of stability. This approach was arguably cemented by the tumultuous events of the Arab Spring, an event that heightened the monarchy's perception of regional insecurity, and in turn fueled Abu Dhabi's selective investments in strategic economic, commercial, and military capabilities throughout Somalia and the surrounding region.

The UAE has tasked its global logistics company, DP World, with carrying out much of its strategy to the region, establishing a policy that ties key port investments in Somalia and the autonomous regions on their strategic alignment in the Gulf rift. In fact, as was recently demonstrated by the UAE's rifts with Somalia and Djibouti, these allegedly private sector investments are highly conditional on the political relations between Abu Dhabi and the host country—highlighting the government's tight control on Emirati private sector business interests.

This relationship is made particularly evident by the nature of Emirati investments in Somalia, where humanitarian aid remains secondary and conditional on concessions made to DP World. In fact, as Telci notes, after the Somali parliament legislated against expanding DP World investments in the Horn nation's ports and Somali authorities seized an Emirati aircraft carrying \$10 million in financial aid allegedly destined for Somaliland and Puntland, the UAE “halt[ed] all humanitarian work in the region” and ended all military programs it held with Somali security forces.<sup>33</sup> The UAE's retaliation resulted in the closing of the UAE-run Sheikh Zayed hospital in Mogadishu, which provided free medical services to the city's residents. Despite the Somali federal government's pleas to reopen the hospital, the UAE has to this day withheld all necessary financial aid, instead opening two new hospitals in Somaliland, at Berbera and Burao.<sup>34</sup>

These policies exemplify the UAE's approach, which conditions humanitarian aid on strategic concessions, such as the sale of Somaliland's Berbera Port; highlighting the salience of strategic military and economic goals over the publicly declared quest for stability.

### **The UAE's Approach to Aid in Somalia**

The content and form of Emirati investments in Somalia differ significantly from those of Turkey. The UAE, as aforementioned, has channeled investments in Somalia as part of its core security and economic interests. Providing Mogadishu with a fraction of the aid it provides to Cairo, a much wealthier and close political ally of the Emirates, the UAE has used Somalia as an economic and military base of its “strategic extension” into the Horn of Africa.<sup>35</sup> Seeking to counter the hegemonic power of Iran, and in part, the extending influence of Turkey, the UAE has historically focused on building security and economic partnerships with factions

throughout Somalia; from the central government in Mogadishu, to the separatist Somaliland and Puntland. However, as aforementioned, diplomatic tensions emanating from Mogadishu's 2018 aircraft seizure of a UAE humanitarian assistance aircraft, and the resulting closure of the UAE-funded Sheikh Zayed hospital in Mogadishu have all but shattered relations between Abu Dhabi and the struggling federal government of Somalia. Given the lack of cooperation between the two states, the UAE has primarily channeled its aid to the separatists in Somaliland and Puntland. The most important and arguably controversial element of the UAE's foreign aid policy to the separatists in Somaliland has been the acquisition of Berbera Port, which the UAE obtained from Somaliland in 2016.<sup>36</sup> As a 2019 Brookings Institution brief explains, the sale of the port was conditioned on a series of deals, specifically "a seven-point economic and military pact, which also included a major highway, cargo airport, dams, a series of development projects, and security guarantees for Somaliland. Representatives of Somaliland assert the base is to be completed as soon as June 2019, though this remains unconfirmed."<sup>37</sup> According to the UAE's *The National*, the construction of the \$90 million, 16-square mile military base at Berbera was scrapped in 2020, whereas the port, run by the UAE's DP World, was opened in June of 2021. Despite conceding the development of a military base, the UAE's purchase of the Berbera Port was carried out ignoring "angry protests from Somalia's federal government in Mogadishu, [which says] concessions constitute violations of sovereignty, as they cut the federal government out of profits and oversight while giving Somaliland a hook in its decades-old bid for international recognition."<sup>38</sup>

Citing sovereignty violations, the Somali parliament enacted a resolution banning DP World from Somalia.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, Somalia's federal government was unable to enforce the legislation with regards to the UAE's purchase of the Port of Bosaso, located on Somalia's northern coast, which is currently under the control of the autonomous region of Puntland. Further extending "the UAE's strategic footprint in the Horn of Africa," Bosaso is a major economic and geostrategic concession for the UAE in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>40</sup> Similarly to the sale of the Berbera Port in Somaliland, the UAE's presence at Bosaso lends Puntland greater international credibility while securing strategic power projection for the UAE in the Gulf of Aden. Vying for domestic legitimacy as a regional stabilizer, the president of Puntland Said Abdullahi Dani has sought greater UAE investment in the autonomous region, recently stating: "We ask our UAE friends, not only to stay, but to redouble their efforts in helping Somalia stand on its feet."<sup>41</sup>

The nature of the agreements with both Somaliland and Puntland, which have jointly combined Abu Dhabi's economic interests with security assistance to the local government, reveal the true focus of the UAE's actions in the region.

Firstly, these investments highlight the UAE's strategic military interest in developing the Somali landmass as one of many "military perches on the African coast," with which it can successfully project power in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>42</sup> Sabotaging its relations with the Federal Government of Somalia by building military capabilities within the separatist Somaliland and Puntland autonomous regions, it is difficult to deny that the UAE's core interests do not align with the aforementioned principles of regional stabilization. Unsurprisingly, Turkey's state-run news agency, Anadolu, was quick to notice the Somali government's confrontation with the UAE, sharing a statement made by Somalia's Information Minister, Osman Dubbe, alleging that "The United Arab Emirates wants Somalia to be like Yemen and Libya and wants to create in Somalia displacement, violence, and backwardness . . ." <sup>43</sup>

The UAE's core approach is centered on expanding military and economic opportunities in the Horn that, as Jamal Machrouh notes, will "pave the way for the development of its national economy . . . [and] prevent any hegemonic inclination in the region."<sup>44</sup> The exclusive focus on these two areas of investment, as opposed to more humanitarian ODA flows, also points to the transactional nature of its interactions with the Federal Government of Somalia.<sup>45</sup> This transactional approach was evidenced in Abu Dhabi's UAE Foreign Aid 2015 Report, which attests that 92 percent of the UAD's aid was oriented toward development projects, with only 6.7 percent going toward humanitarian causes.<sup>46</sup> More broadly, the UAE's official reporting shows Somalia received \$31 million in aid in 2015, and that aid to East Africa comprised a mere 1.7 percent of official aid, 97 percent of it going toward nations in North Africa with Egypt in the lead at \$2.452 billion in aid received in 2015 alone.<sup>47</sup>

Viktor Marsai and Máté Szalai have classified the nature of the UAE's aid to Somalia as a form of "borderlandization," in other words engaging in policies that treat the Horn nation as a borderland for its own regional interests.<sup>48</sup> The authors refer in particular to the Gulf Crisis of 2016–17 in which the UAE pressured Somalia to align with the "anti-Brotherhood alliance," "in return for financial incentives and the reopening of a medical facility."<sup>49</sup>

This process of borderlandization, Marsai and Szalai argue, was therefore triggered by the "export of conflicts at two levels (interstate and transnational), as well as by using both political-economic incentives and ideological tools."<sup>50</sup> Unsurprisingly, the authors contend that this transactional relationship, particularly the UAE's dismissal of the Federal Government of Somalia in its complaints to UAE investments in Somaliland and Puntland, is a form of conflict-exportation that has ultimately caused regional instability.<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that the UAE's development-aid, buttressed by robust economic and political incentives "has not

taken place through coercion; local actors took part willingly, mostly motivated by short-term profits.”<sup>52</sup> Framing the discussion of Emirati aid to Somalia through the lens of transactional relationships, short-term profits and immediate political incentives, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the sheikdom’s approach to aid is focused primarily on the securitization of its near abroad. Having made these observations, the UAE’s approach is easily distinguished from that of Turkey, which has employed a much more long-term view of developing Somalia as an economic, military, and ideological ally in the pursuit of its own regional interests.

### **Turkey’s Approach to Aid in Somalia**

Contemporary Turkish aid to Somalia has been defined as a “multi actor and multi-track policy,” spanning virtually every area of the struggling nation’s development; with assistance ranging from the construction of schools, to the drilling of water wells, to the opening of the Erdoğan Hospital in Mogadishu.<sup>53</sup> From the data available at the time of the author’s writing, it is apparent that Ankara’s relations to Mogadishu are far broader, and far more intense than those between the UAE and Somalia, Somaliland, or Puntland.

Moved by the tragic events of the 2010 East African drought, which killed an estimated 260,000 Somalis, Turkey acted to quickly develop close humanitarian and development assistance to Somalia’s weak federal government in Mogadishu. As “the first non-African leader to visit the country in two decades,” Erdoğan’s interest in Somalia resounded internationally. Defining his humanitarian mission to the country in a 2011 Foreign Affairs article titled “The Tears of Somalia,” Erdoğan committed Turkey to an expansive humanitarian and institutional presence in the country, involving not only Turkey’s official development agency, TİKA, but the Ministries of Health, Development, Justice, and Interior, in addition to the Diyanet.<sup>54</sup> Through its intense presence on the ground, Gizem Sucuoğlu and Jason Stearns argue that Erdoğan has exploited the situation in Somalia as a means to not only fulfill his ambitions “as an emerging donor,” but as a means to achieve his desired “foreign policy ambitions [to portray Turkey] as a regional model and a model for the Islamic world.”<sup>55</sup>

In fact, as a leader whose domestic legitimacy is ideationally undergirded by the conservative forces of political Islam, it is perhaps unsurprising that Erdoğan’s disbursements to Somalia have revolved around moralistic and normative concerns.<sup>56</sup> In fact, as a representative of the Turkish aid organization IHH stated in April of 2016:

The political, economic, or geopolitical reasons [of Turkey’s involvement in Somalia] should not be overemphasised. The main driving force for Turkey is stand-



ing up to the challenge of responding to a famine in a Muslim country, especially during Ramadan, which has been leading to a loss of prestige in the Muslim world. The 2011 visit of current president Erdoğan served to boost the visibility of Turkey as a humanitarian actor and allowed it to carry the Somalia issue into the United Nations.<sup>57</sup>

As some Somali observers have noted, Turkey's Islamic identity has played an important role in legitimizing and deepening Ankara's assistance to the Somali people.<sup>58</sup> In fact, "as a Muslim state, Turkey is seen as an ally rather than an external power to be feared."<sup>59</sup> As aforementioned, Erdoğan has used international aid missions as an opportunity to promote Turkey as a defender of the Muslim world. As he noted in a 2015 election rally:

Despite all threats, we went to Somalia without any fear. We opened a modern hospital, a nursing school, and a mosque. . . . Turkey embraced Somalia, who everyone had left alone. Today, there is a Turkey that determines the global agenda. We will reach out to wherever we can reach out. We will reach out to the oppressed. We will do whatever a great state has to do.<sup>60</sup>

A closer reading of this statement, specifically Erdoğan's reference to the Somali population as "the oppressed" and to Turkey as "a great state" highlights his portrayal of Turkey as an effective liberator. Erdoğan's description of Turkey as a great power also speaks to his neo-Ottoman ambition to inject Turkish influence into the unstable, vulnerable region. On that note, Turkish officials have certainly not cautioned from tying Ankara's foreign aid policy to its role as Somalia's great power patriarch. In welcoming Somali officials to Istanbul in 2012, then-Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stated "You are home, Turkey is your motherland."<sup>61</sup> According to a Chatham House paper, the AKP's foreign policy favors "restoring the grandeur of the Ottoman Empire, highlighting official statements and writings that 'include fanciful assertions about Ottoman influence in Somalia.'"<sup>62</sup> Coupled with the construction of a military base in Mogadishu, Turkey's neo-Ottoman self-perception has been viewed by many locals as a "sign of power projection and securitisation."<sup>63</sup> In this respect, Turkey's "military involvement in the Horn of Africa cannot be seen in isolation from other foreign powers. . . ."<sup>64</sup> Unsurprisingly, in this respect, Turkey's great power designs have pitted its strategic interests in direct conflict with those of the Emirates, "heightening intra-Somali disputes and . . . contributing to increased instability."<sup>65</sup>

However, according to a broad collection of relevant literature on Turkish aid to Somalia, Turkey's public, religious morality is sincerely reflected in the approach taken by its officials in dealing with the local population. As one Somali minister is quoted as stating, "[the Turks] have knowledge of the country, they are

learning Somali, they are on the streets and they are driving the trucks. Who else can do that?”<sup>66</sup> In a 2014 interview released to TIKa, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud hailed the Turks as having a unique approach to aid, stating:

We have been constantly preaching to our international partners—“Don’t do the work for us, do the work with us.” This is the difference—the Turks are doing the work with us. They are training the Somalis, improving their capacity and introducing a new work culture to Somalia.<sup>67</sup>

This approach, founded in the religious moralism of the conservative AKP, has been well received by Somalis, many of which view “Turkey, as a new humanitarian donor ‘who talks to Somalis and stands beside them,’ [and] wants to foster an identity and image different from other donors, which are viewed with skepticism.”<sup>68</sup> As Mehmet Ozkan notes, “the common religion of Islam plays an important role in legitimizing Turkey’s presence in Somalia and in creating trust between actors, as opposed to Western actors.”<sup>69</sup> As Mehmet Ozkan and Serhat Orakci argue in an article for the *Journal of East African Affairs*, “the Islamic identity of Turkish NGOs was essential to their ability to deliver humanitarian aid in 2011,” a status that has allowed Turkey to “coordinate humanitarian projects with greater success than other countries.”<sup>70</sup> Directing aid efforts through the Diyanet, Turkey’s official aid body, TIKa, and the Turkish Red Crescent, Turkey’s humanitarian activities in the country have effectively projected Ankara’s distinctly Islamic identity. Overseeing the “distribution of copies of the Quran, sending local Imams to Turkey for training, and repairing ruined Somali mosques,” the Turkish mission has focused heavily on the promotion of a joint-religious identity with the Somali population, which Ozkan argues has come to view the Turks as “saviours,” with former prime minister of Somalia Abdiweli Mohamed Ali defining their involvement in the country as a “holy grail.”<sup>71</sup> It is noteworthy that Turkey’s diplomatic mission to Somalia is the only non-African mission present in Mogadishu, and that the Ambassador was not selected from the Department of Foreign Affairs. Hailing from the UK branch of Doctors Worldwide, an international NGO, Turkey’s mission is headed by Kani Torun, “a humanitarian worker with a sensitivity to Islam.”<sup>72</sup>

Alongside providing religious services, Turkey has effectively filled the security void created by the UAE’s withdrawal of support for the Federal Government of Somalia. With the Emirates now directing security assistance toward the separatist Somaliland and Puntland, Turkish forces are unilaterally training FGS security forces.<sup>73</sup> This alignment of proxies delineates the Emirati-Turkish rivalry and has advanced Turkey’s legitimacy as the effective supporter of Somalia’s humanitarian and infrastructural development. These efforts, combined with Turkey’s active role

at the United Nations in raising awareness on the situation in Somalia and its hosting of the Istanbul Conference on Somalia in 2015, an international forum aimed at rebuilding the failed state, have made Turkey the *de facto* protector of Somalia's struggling central government.

## **Conclusion**

As this comparative study has sought to highlight, the Turkish-Emirati rivalry in Somalia has produced two very different approaches to foreign aid. The Turkish approach, which engenders political Islam as a moral driver of its predominantly humanitarian aid, has succeeded in developing strong ties with the Islamist government in Mogadishu, whereas the UAE's aid strategy has focused on gaining favorable economic and military concessions for the regime, leading to a more sporadic, short-term focus. In this respect, the UAE's approach is demonstrably more realist in its form, as it is based on the immediate security considerations for the warring Gulf power. Prioritizing its military and economic interests in the Gulf of Aden, the monarchy dispenses aid to whomever will provide continued, generous concessions. This cost-benefit calculation was made abundantly apparent by the monarchy's severing of all ties to the FGS, in exchange for strong bilateral ties with Somaliland and Puntland; the separatist regions providing the UAE with considerable concessions in the Port of Berbera and Bosaso, unsurprisingly, two cities which have seen significant humanitarian investments on the part of the UAE.

Unlike the Emirates, Turkey's aid policy toward Somalia reflects Erdoğan's much more long-term interests. Committed to returning Turkey to its historic status as a regional great power, Erdoğan has gone to great length to deepen and intensify Turkey's involvement in the failed state—treating the FGS as its religious, economic, humanitarian, and military protectorate. As demonstrated in section two, the religious zeal of Erdoğan's core domestic constituency has led his administration to employ an expansive and muscular aid strategy vis-à-vis the Federal Government of Somalia—mobilizing multiple core Turkish government agencies in what is a highly diversified aid package. Creating economic incentives for Turkish nationals to invest in Somalia through a state-sanctioned approach, Erdoğan has revolutionized Turkey's philosophy to foreign aid giving—combining state capitalism with the often-unspoken prerogatives of political Islam in a model that Willem van den Berg and Jos Meester have defined as the Ankara Consensus.<sup>74</sup>

Seeking to counter the hegemonic inclinations of any state (especially those supportive of the MB), Abu Dhabi seeks to contain Ankara's influence in a profoundly ideational confrontation that spans the Horn of Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East. As a promoter of state secularism and the soft, moderate Islam

that has supported its absolutist system, the UAE dispenses aid to key strategic allies throughout the region. The alignment of regional actors, either in support of the UAE or in support of Turkey, has led to an all-out influence proxy war with Turkey that includes both official and unofficial state entities. Key examples of such include the UAE's support for the El-Sisi government in Egypt, to its support for Somaliland, and Turkey's support for the MB in Egypt and the Islamist government in Mogadishu.

Regional instability, and the perpetual of Somalia's failed state, can therefore be reasonably explained through the lens of exogenous influence, namely the economic and military assistance provided by two rivals such as Turkey and the UAE to opposing, and often warring factions. The attentive observer will note that foreign intervention in the region is not a novel development, with much of the current instability stemming from the protracted regional competition of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Similarly to the Cold War, the activities of contemporary regional actors are profoundly informed by state identity; be it political Islam or secular absolutism.

However, unlike the regional rivalry of the Cold War superpowers, the Turkish-Emirati case highlights the growing regional clout of middle powers in the ever-relevant context of foreign aid policy. As this article has outlined, the theory of emerging donors is alive and well, and will only become more relevant in a world of increasing multipolarity. ★

#### **Fabio van Loon**

Mr. van Loon is an accredited journalist and researcher with a background in US space policy, European affairs, and international law. As a graduate student at Texas A&M's Bush School in Washington, DC, and a graduate of LUISS University in Rome, he has worked for several US and Italian organizations, including the Consortium of Indo-Pacific Researchers, the Heritage Foundation, and the Rome-based foreign policy review *Atlantico Quotidiano*.

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# **Personal Relationships and Organizational Culture Awareness**

## **The Keys to Collaboration in Japan**

LT COL JAMES R. MERENDA, USAF

In my time in Japan as the Office of Special Investigations' Chief of Counter-intelligence at Yokota Air Base from 2010 to 2012 and as a Language Enable Airman Program scholar who has conducted multiple Language intensive training events and joint operations in country from 2013 to the present, I have seen firsthand how cultural awareness is an enormous factor in the success of joint operations. However, awareness of Japanese societal culture alone is not enough. To be successful in Japan, United States Forces Japan and other personnel stationed in country must make significant efforts to build interpersonal relationships and to gain a deep understanding of the organizational cultures and priorities of the Japanese units with whom they are operating.

US personnel in Japan are often adept at demonstrating standard Japanese cultural norms of business dealing. For example, Americans quickly learn to how to seat counterparts at a conference table based on their ranks, how to bow when appropriate and how to hand out business cards with the necessary levels of respect. However, these mundane, rote actions are often where attention to culture stops, and they are not enough. Japanese professional collaboration is built on the strength of individual interpersonal relationships. Therefore, US personnel whose cultural awareness is very shallow tend to be unsuccessful in developing operations and sharing intelligence because they have failed to build the relationship foundations upon which business can be conducted. Conversely, personnel who demonstrate a high degree of focus on preoperational relationship-building tend to do very well because they obtain the person-to-person buy-in from Japanese counterparts that facilitates successful operations.





(USAF photo by Airman 1st Class Anna Nolte)

**Figure 1. Cultural awareness boosts lethality and strengthens partnerships.** Col Shane Vesely, USAF (left), 353rd Special Operations Wing commander, shakes hands with Col Hidenori Ichigi, Japan Air Self-Defense Force (right), 2nd Tactical Airlift Group commander, in front of a US Air Force MC-130J Commando II while Maj Jacob McCauley, USAF (middle), 1st Special Operations Squadron director of mobility, looks on at Kadena Air Base, Japan, 28 October 2021. Partnership between the USAF and JASDF allows both forces to work together when responding to adversaries, ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Appropriate cultural awareness in Japan also gives due consideration and respect to how Japanese entities function internally and how they set their operational priorities. In Japanese governmental organizations, very little autonomy lies at the tactical level. This often makes Japanese public servants risk averse. Therefore, understanding the organization's power structure, decision-making procedures, and an individual counterpart's tolerance for risk is key to effective and efficient partnering because it enables US members to focus their lines of effort at the appropriate echelons. Further, in the world of counterintelligence and law enforcement, Japanese priorities often do not succinctly align with American priorities; criminal and privacy laws differ, and the governments' perceptions of critical threats to national security vary greatly. Cognizance of this, and the demonstrated willingness to support Japanese mission sets that do not necessarily fall into the American priority structure are important, because implicit or explicit

treatment of Japanese priorities as inferior will very quickly stymie collaboration by promulgating an insensitive and arrogant perception of Americans.

For these reasons, it is incumbent upon experienced personnel to help newly arrived members understand that effective cultural awareness is far more than knowing when to bow. Tactical leadership teams must guide their members to achieve their full collaborative potential by helping them to appreciate the necessity of individual relationship-building and organizational culture understanding. This level of comprehension is vital to successful international partnering with Japanese governmental entities. ★

**Lt Col James R. Merenda, USAF**

Lieutenant Colonel Merenda is the Commander, Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps, Detachment 150, University of Florida. He is responsible for overseeing the preparation of Department of the Air Force officer candidates through a comprehensive college program at the University of Florida and Santa Fe College, Gainesville, Florida. Merenda earned his commission in May 2001 through the AFROTC program at the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and entered active duty after completing law school at the same institution in 2004. Throughout his career, he has served in a variety of positions as an investigator, operations officer, and director of operations and has conducted and supervised felony-level criminal, fraud, and counterintelligence investigations and operations. He has commanded at the detachment and squadron levels and has led contingency units during three deployments to Southwest Asia. Additionally, as a fluent Japanese speaker and linguist, Lieutenant Colonel Merenda has led strategic interpretation missions for the Bilateral Defense of Okinawa Working Group and the Far East Tactics Analysis Team. Prior to his current position, Merenda was the Commander, Air Force Office of Special Investigations, 3rd Field Investigations Squadron, Joint Base San Antonio–Lackland, Texas.



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# The Great Power of Culture

Selected works from the AFCLC's Language,  
Regional Expertise, and Culture Symposium, 2021

