



RCAS Commentary

US Strategy Won't Deter China's Rise

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February 22, 2023

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About RCAS

RCAS is a non-profit research organization focusing on the maritime issues and regional integration in the Indo-Pacific region. It is a newly-established institution founded in February 2022 by Dr. Nian Peng, Haikou, China. We, at the moment, have an international research team with resident/non-resident researchers from China and other Asian states.

RCAS seizes the opportunity that China is building Hainan Free-Trade Port in which the Hainan Island will become an important window for China's opening up to the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean to become a leading research institute and think tank on maritime affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. So far, RCAS focuses on the maritime disputes and maritime cooperation in the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, and various regional cooperation mechanisms such as BRI, LMC, RCEP and so on. It is committed to promoting the maritime cooperation, regional integration and academic exchanges in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has received a number of research funding from universities and foundations, and conducted research programs of the South China Sea(SCS) dispute, China-South/Southeast Asian relations, BRI in South/Southeast Asia, terrorism/anti-terrorism in Afghanistan, and so on. RCAS researchers have won various awards from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and the Hainan government.

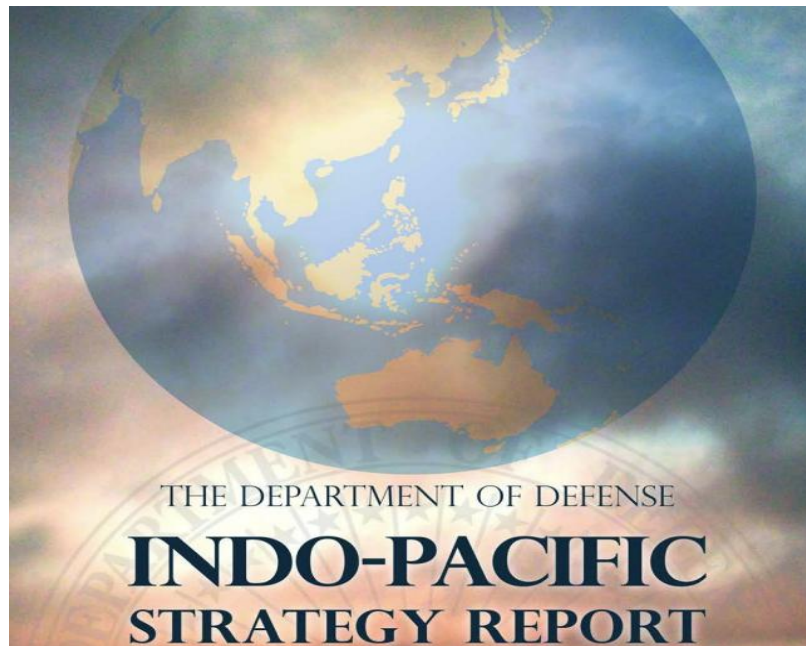
RCAS has published nearly 10 books in Chinese and English, and more than 20 papers on SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *The Uncertain Future of Afghanistan: Terrorism, Reconstruction, and Great-power Rivalry*(Springer Nature, forthcoming); *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives*(Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry*(Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic*(Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *International Pressures, Strategic Preference and Myanmar's China Policy since 1988*(Singapore: Springer Nature, 2020); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches*(2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988*(2021); *The Budding Indo-Myanmar Relations: Rising But Limited Challenges for China*(2019).

RCAS has also published hundreds of articles and been interviewed in various local and international media outlets such as Asia Centre in France, *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum(EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Lian He Zao Bao* and *Think China* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post(SCMP)* and *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN* and *Global Times* in China. RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the US, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places. Welcome to visit our website: <http://www.rcas.top>.

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After Joe Biden took office, US's "Indo-Pacific Strategy" (IPS)-which was officially proposed by former President Trump in November 2017-showed an new trend. This recent trajectory includes expanding overseas military bases to deter China's rise at sea, competing against its BRI infrastructure construction and decoupling China's supply chain in the Indo-Pacific region.



▲ The Department of Defense's New Indo-Pacific Strategy(Source: USNI News)

At present, the U.S. military focuses on building a "fire circle" of military deterrence against China around the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea (SCS) and the Indian Ocean. In the Taiwan Strait, the U.S. military has formulated a draft joint operational plan with Japan for Taiwan's "emergency". More recently, additional four military bases open to the U.S. army during U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's Philippine tour in February. It was speculated that these bases are located in the Luzon Island near Taiwan and the Palawan Island around the SCS, though the locations were not disclosed by the Philippine and the U.S. officials.

In the SCS, the U.S. military has resumed joint military exercises with the Philippines and sped up military cooperation with Vietnam. Starting around late last month, the US Navy and Marines Corps have conducted drills in the SCS amid heightened tensions between Washington and Beijing over the Chinese balloon incident. It is the second time that the US aircraft carrier USS Nimitz hold military exercise in the SCS in this year. In the Indian Ocean, the U.S. military held joint exercises with the Indian and Indonesian navies.

In addition, the U.S. military has consolidated maritime cooperation with the above-mentioned countries through arms sales, military aid and defense agreements. At the same time, allies such as Japan and Australia are also invited by the US to form a free and democratic alliance containing China's rise in the Indo-Pacific region.

However, this containment fence is imperfect. In fact, Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia do not welcome the US to build military bases and facilities against a third country on their territory, nor do they want to be deeply get involved in the fierce strategic competition between China and the United States.

Although the Philippine government allows the U.S. troops to rotate in its military bases, it refuses permanent/quasi-permanent American garrison in the country. Ricardo Saludo, the former chairperson of the Philippine Civil Service Commission, even openly criticised President Ferdinand Marcos Jr for recently letting American ships, subs, planes and missiles use AFP(Armed Forces of the Philippines) bases.

Vietnam has limited its defense cooperation with the US under the “Four Noes” principles, i.e., “no alliances with foreign powers, no foreign military bases on Vietnamese soil, no allying with one country to counter another, not using force or threatening to use force in international relations”.

Indonesia has not allowed the US military to use its military bases until now. As Hugh White, a former Australian security and defence official said in his recent interview with the New York Times, “Militarily, access to the Indonesia bases will be an important asset of the US military amid the ‘Taiwan war’, but it is impossible”. Indonesia’s neutrality complicates Washington’s expanding efforts in Asia to counter China, he added.

When the IPS was first put forward, former US Secretary of state Mike Pompeo announced that it would provide \$113 million for new technologies, energy and infrastructure construction in the Indo-Pacific region. After Mr Biden assumed office, he proposed a grand initiative of “Rebuilding a Better World”-which emphasises that developed democracies will cooperate in providing support for infrastructure construction in developing countries to cope with the infrastructure financing gap of more than \$40 trillion, and promoted its connection with the “Blue Dot Network”-which is a mechanism to certify infrastructure projects that meets robust international standards.

These initiatives are claimed by the US as alternative options of BRI for the Indo-Pacific states, but they are far from materialized. Due to the debt default and a recession warned the U.S. Treasury Department in early January, it is highly doubt that whether the US can fulfill the promise and finance the much-needed Indo-Pacific infrastructure projects.

The BRI has made remarkable progress even during the pandemic, for instance, more BRI cooperation agreements, more trade, investment, employment in BRI route states. According to Chinese Commerce Ministry, up until January 2023, more than 200 cooperation agreements on jointly building BRI were signed by China and 151 states and 32 international organizations; by the end 2022, China’s cumulative investment in BRI route states are 397.9 Billion RMB, which creates 421,000 employment positions. Additionally, a number of BRI infrastructure projects has been constructed, mainly includes the China-Laos railway, the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed Railway and the Budapest-Belgrade Railway.

In March last year, Shanghai, one of the main center of China's supply chain, went into an epidemic lockdown, which undermined China's advanced position in the global supply chain massively. The Western media seized the chance to tout how Vietnam and India would catch up or even replace China in the global supply chain. Late last year, Susan Burns, the new U.S. consul general in Ho Chi Minh City, said Vietnam had become a critical part in the U.S. supply chain.

Recently, the United States and India announced the "Key and Emerging Technologies Initiative", aiming to strengthen the military, technology and supply chain cooperation and compete with China in military equipment, semiconductors and artificial intelligence. Before that, The leaders of Quad announced the 'Quad Semiconductor Supply Chain Initiative' at the September 2021 summit, designed to map capacity, identify vulnerabilities, and bolster supply-chain security for semiconductors and their vital components. So clearly, the United States is accelerating the pace of wooing allies and partners to decouple from China in the supply chain.

Yet, it is not easy to reach goals. On the one hand, the global supply chain is the result of long-term independent and autonomic allocation of market resource. Once formed, it is relatively stable and cannot be easily changed by a single country, even the super power like the United States. Despite the country can enhance its position in global supply chain through industrial subsidy and foreign support, it is still a long and challenging process.

On the other hand, both Vietnam and India are at the low position of the global supply chain, focusing on the rough machining of raw materials, processing with supplied materials and OEM. Natural resources and agricultural products still account for a large share in export commodities in these developing countries, and the proportion of manufactured goods is relatively low.

In addition, the poor infrastructure, complicated regulatory procedures, different industrial standard and rules and weak technology innovation capability are compost of the main obstacles

for India and Vietnam to take on a big role in the reconstruction of the US supply chain. India and Vietnam will struggle to decouple from China's supply chain, as both depend on Chinese economy.

*The article was first published at Bangkok Post, Thailand,
<https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2512196/us-strategy-wont-deter-chinas-rise>.*

About Author



Nian Peng is the Director at Research Centre for Asian Studies(RCAS), China. He holds a Ph.D. in Government and International Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University. His main research interests are in the areas of China-Southeast/South Asia relations, Belt and Road Initiative(BRI) and maritime security of the Indo-Pacific. He authored/edited six books-*The Uncertain Future of Afghanistan: Terrorism, Reconstruction, and Great-power Rivalry*(Springer Nature, forthcoming), *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives*(Springer Nature, 2022), *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry*(Springer Nature, 2021), *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the Covid-19 Pandemic*(Springer Nature, 2021), *International Pressures, Strategic Preference, and Myanmar's China Policy since 1988* (Springer Nature, 2020) and *Leng Zhan Hou Yin Mian Guan Xi Yan Jiu [A Study on Indo- Myanmar Relations after the Cold-War]*(Shi Shi Chu Ban She [Current Affairs Press], 2017). His refereed articles have been notably published in *Ocean Development and International Law*, *Pacific Focus*, *Asian Affairs*, *Dong Nan Ya Yan Jiu [Southeast Asian Studies]*, *Nan Ya Yan Jiu [South Asian Studies]* and *Nan Ya Yan Jiu Ji Kan [South Asian Studies Quarterly]*. He also contributes his perspectives to many think tanks and various local and international media outlets such as Asia Centre in France, *East Asian Forum* in Australia, *The Diplomat* in the USA, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Lian He Zao Bao* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post* and *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *Global Times* and *CGTN* in China.