

“Global Hegemony”: America’s Grand Strategy in the Asia-Pacific

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Asia-Pacific is the US “[priority](#) theatre of operations” and lies at the heart of America’s grand strategy to assert global hegemony. The US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin last year outlined the region as “center of strategic gravity” to gang up regional states against China, while trying to claim Washington wasn’t splitting the region into hostile blocs.

The Biden administration still contends it doesn’t want competition with China to veer into a conflict; the US officials continue to accuse China of taking aggressive actions and tempting Asia-Pacific countries with a delusive “[gravitational](#) pull of freedom.” Within this grand strategy, the US intelligence community alleges China of [dominating](#) the region, driving [wedges](#) between America and its partners and extending Chinese influence, particularly in East Asia and the western Pacific while itself conducting military exercises around the sensitive regional waterways.

An explicit intent is to rally allies under the pretense of deterrence and protection against China, contain Beijing’s rise and reinstate the US role as the world’s [sole superpower](#). Japan’s major shift from a pacifist nation to a menacing force, signaling the biggest military posture since World War II, is [welcomed](#) and [praised](#) because the unprecedented defense budget increase will boost arms production and profit the US military-industrial complex.

Contrarily, China’s defense spending at \$224 billion is dwarfed by the US Department of Defense [budget](#) of more than \$1.7 trillion for the fiscal year 2023, which focuses on executing aggressive military plans and operations. In addition, America is a consistent threat to the region’s peace and stability as it has the largest [aviation](#) force in Asia-Pacific with more than half of its fighter planes comprising fourth or fifth generation models.

Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo last year suggested America must make “[three lighthouses of liberty](#)” (Israel, China’s Taiwan region and Ukraine) the hubs of new security architecture in the Middle East, East Asia and Europe and link these bastions with NATO and the new and expanded security framework of Asia-Pacific to form a “global alliance for freedom.”

His concept may hasn't officially been [endorsed](#) by the Biden administration; it has increased Europe's security dependence on the US, pitted Mideast countries against each other and is trying to take advantage of the Ukraine crisis to mend its [frayed](#) relations with its partners in Asia-Pacific. Washington is doing so by stoking tensions and increasing arms sales to regional states as well as reinvigorating the four-nation Quad and the trilateral AUKUS alliances not just to encircle China but to impose its [leadership](#) on the region.

Yet the strategy is backfiring. China's emergence as a peace-broker between Saudi Arabia and Iran is shattering America's great plan; the US efforts to use the Ukraine conflict as a conduit to restore its global hegemony is challenged by some [wealthy](#), powerful and democratic US allies that have maintained their autonomy.

Given regional organizations such as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the African Union are focused on regional development rather than catching "fever" of the US fixation with China, other Asia-Pacific states will be cautious of aligning too [closely](#) with Washington and may [pursue](#) an independent foreign policy.

The framing of competition with China by Republican Mike Gallagher, chairman of the House China Task Force, as an ["existential struggle"](#) is both misguided and risky. The committee "forged out of [paranoia](#) (and) hysteria" which tends to get locked into groupthink and xenophobic mindset as the US "actively" seeks to contain China and derail its technological progress. This approach will inevitably escalate tensions between China and the US and make engagement even more difficult.

Communication channels between the two militaries froze after China-US relations ebbed over America's hyperboles on the balloon saga. The US defense officials dubbed the lack of communication as ["destabilizing and dangerous"](#) yet by calling off the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's trip to China, shooting down a Chinese object with a missile, planting [NATO](#) clones such as the Quad and the AUKUS in Asia-Pacific, the US has exposed its petty-minded approach to circumscribe China and its inclination to shutter communication channels.

The Biden administration has clearly set out its ambition, which is to [implement](#) the 2022 National Defense Strategy to tackle the "pacing challenge" from China. As part of this strategy, a US-led systematic campaign is underway to attribute false [threats](#) to China with claims of Southeast Asian states likely to become ["wearier participants"](#) in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

But there's a catch: the US Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, the means to advance the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, is more of a showpiece for it actually delivers very [little](#) to the region, especially to ASEAN. In contrast, Chinese infrastructure and development projects such as the BRI and the Global Development Initiative are lionized by regional states, indicating Asia-Pacific doesn't want to become an avenue of a great power competition.

At the first [anniversary](#) of the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the Biden administration's primary focus remains the Quad and the AUKUS, both of which take frequent mentions in the latest State Department's report. But in Southeast Asia, nations have never [greeted](#) the military alliances with skepticism. They have criticized AUKUS for its propensity to trigger arms races in the region and remained concerned about these [anti-peace](#) and [provocative](#) security partnerships. As a result, the US grand strategy is condemned to failure.

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Featured image: A Harpoon missile is launched from the USS Shiloh, September 15, 2014. Image: US Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Kevin V. Cunningham

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