



Pacific Forum Update

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Issues & Insights is Pacific Forum's publication series that includes special reports (SR), conference reports (CR), and working papers (WP). These in-depth analyses cover a range of topics and are published on an occasional basis. The following have been published in 2025 and are available online [here](#).

[Issues & Insights Vol. 25, SR1 — Advancing a Rules-based Maritime Order in the South China Sea](#) Edited by Jeffrey Ordaniel and Jay Tristan Tarriela

At the 2024 Shangri-La Dialogue, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. emphasized resolving South China Sea disputes under international law and resisting attempts to undermine the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Against this backdrop, the Manila Dialogue on the South China Sea convened over 100 experts, officials, and thought leaders from more than 20 countries on November 6-8, 2024, aiming to promote a free, open, secure, and rules-based maritime order. This inaugural Track 1.5 forum, co-organized by government and academic partners, tackled topics including the role of coast guards in upholding maritime law, regional perspectives on legal frameworks, malign influence operations, and the responsibilities of external partners. Participants highlighted escalating threats to the rule of law in recent years and proposed actionable policy recommendations for littoral states and international stakeholders. This volume compiles key findings, policy prescriptions, and pathways to reinforce the legal order in one of the world's most strategically contested seas.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 25, WP1 — Keeping One at Arm's Length: The Missile & Nuclear Dimension of China's Counter-Intervention Strategy in the Western Pacific](#) by Collin Koh

Amid rising tensions in the South China Sea and around Taiwan, this paper examines how China's missile and nuclear capabilities underpin its counter-intervention strategy to deter or delay US military action in the Western Pacific. Drawing on Chinese military writings, Collin Koh analyzes the People's Liberation Army's intent to incapacitate American C4ISR networks through kinetic and non-kinetic attacks while targeting critical US military assets, particularly in Guam, to hinder reinforcements and isolate the battlefield west of the First Island Chain. The study explores China's expanding missile arsenal, including hypersonic weapons, and the nuclear dimension, notably its growing sea-based deterrent. However, Koh highlights that despite these advances, significant strategic and operational challenges persist for the PLA in sustaining campaigns beyond the First Island Chain,

suggesting potential limitations to China's ability to fully execute its counter-intervention aims.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 25, WP2 — Attaining All-domain Control: China's Anti-Access/Area Denial \(A2/AD\) Capabilities in the South China Sea](#) by Olli Pekka Suorsa

This paper provides a comprehensive assessment of China's rapidly advancing anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities in the South China Sea, where the People's Liberation Army (PLA) seeks to deter and repel US intervention and challenge regional claimants. Dr. Olli Pekka Suorsa analyzes the PLA Southern Theatre Command's integration of advanced sensors and long-range precision weapons - its "sensors and shooters" - to achieve all-domain control over the contested waters. The report explores the unlikely yet destabilizing possibility of weapons of mass destruction being employed in a regional conflict and examines the growing military imbalance between China, Southeast Asian claimant states, and US forces. Concluding with four pragmatic policy recommendations, Suorsa advocates for improved US force survivability, enhanced defenses, renewed focus on CBRN readiness, and collaborative capacity-building among allies and partners to preserve regional access and stability amid China's expanding military reach.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 25, WP3 — Game Theory: Negotiation Reputation, Payoffs and Impact on the SEANWFZ](#) by Karla Mae G. Pabeliña

This paper applies game theory to analyze the divergent approaches of China and the United States toward the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty and its protocol negotiations. Karla Mae G. Pabeliña argues that China strategically signals willingness to sign the protocol, enhancing its diplomatic reputation and aligning with ASEAN's desire to shield the region from nuclear risks. Conversely, the United States maintains a rigid stance on negative security assurances, risking perceptions of inflexibility and diminishing credibility in regional arms control and nonproliferation. The study models these dynamics as sequential games between ASEAN and each major power, highlighting how Southeast Asian nations, wary of great-power rivalry, might lean toward engaging China if it appears more responsive to regional security goals. As US-China strategic competition deepens and normative opposition to nuclear weapons grows in Southeast Asia, Pabeliña warns that space for constructive dialogue is shrinking, urging

ASEAN to assert its interests to maintain regional stability and neutrality.

Issues & Insights Vol. 25, WP4 — China’s Underwhelming Effort to Undermine NATO’s Nuclear Deterrent by William Alberque

This paper critiques China’s recent campaign to challenge the legality of NATO’s nuclear sharing arrangements under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), arguing that Beijing relies on outdated and inaccurate claims previously debunked by historical records and legal analyses. William Alberque examines China’s 2024 reports alleging that NATO’s arrangements violate the NPT, placing this narrative within China’s broader strategy to weaken US extended deterrence and security guarantees, particularly amid the NPT review process. The study underscores that NATO’s nuclear sharing was openly debated during NPT negotiations and is explicitly permitted under the treaty, a position documented in extensive archival evidence. Alberque contrasts China’s current stance with Russia’s earlier but now-abandoned efforts to discredit NATO on similar grounds, highlighting that China’s arguments also raise unfounded fears of US intentions to replicate NATO’s nuclear sharing model in the Indo-Pacific. The paper concludes by reaffirming the strategic value of U.S. nuclear guarantees in preventing proliferation and maintaining global security.

Issues & Insights Vol. 25, WP5 — The US and Its Indo-Pacific Allies Edited by Rob York

This volume highlights the research of Pacific Forum’s James A. Kelly Korea Fellows and other emerging scholars, examining diverse challenges shaping US alliances across the Indo-Pacific amid intensifying US-China competition. Alexander Hynd and Max Broad analyze the Washington Declaration of 2023, finding that while it reaffirmed the US nuclear umbrella over South Korea, it has done little to curb Seoul’s latent nuclear ambitions. Tom Ramage explores South Korea’s expanding pursuit of critical minerals in Africa to secure supply chains and counter China’s dominance in the sector. Florence Principe Gamboa assesses how the Philippines must navigate a potential second Trump administration, balancing unpredictability with the need for consistent security cooperation. James JB Park discusses the prospects for revitalizing the UN Command as South Korea grapples with demographic decline and regional security risks. Rei Koga investigates differences in foreign direct investment (FDI) regulation between Japan and Australia, driven by strategic culture and intelligence institutions amid China’s rise. Daeun Choi delves into Kim Jong Un’s evolving nuclear strategy, revealing a shift toward tactical weapons targeting South Korea and complicating denuclearization efforts. Finally, Kendrick Farm examines South Korea’s dilemma in maintaining its dual identity as a US ally and global semiconductor powerhouse, emphasizing the need for securing rare earth supplies and diversifying supply chains to sustain economic resilience and strategic autonomy.

Issues & Insights Vol. 25, SR2 — Southeast Asian Views on Rising US-China Strategic Competition and Implications for Strategic Stability, Deterrence, and Nonproliferation Edited by David Santoro

This special report presents diverse Southeast Asian perspectives on the region’s central role in the escalating US-China strategic competition, drawn from a Pacific Forum workshop held in Bangkok. David Santoro highlights Southeast Asia’s underexplored role on the front lines of strategic rivalry, where regional actors see rising risks of crisis and conflict, including nuclear dimensions. Renato Cruz De Castro reviews ASEAN’s Cold War strategy of “equibalancing” and argues for revitalizing ASEAN’s goals, institutions, and security cooperation to maintain regional cohesion amid deepening geopolitical divides. Ngo Di Lan compares eight Southeast Asian countries, revealing divergent strategies from Vietnam’s and the Philippines’ strong security ties with the US, to Indonesia’s and Malaysia’s balancing acts, to Cambodia’s and Laos’ closer alignment with China. Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto explores four futures for the region from precarious peace, to possible US-China reconciliation, to covert warfare, to outright confrontation emphasizing the need for ASEAN to combine multilateral diplomacy with minilateral security cooperation. Karla Mae G. Pabeliña examines China’s nuclear modernization and its muted reception in Southeast Asia, arguing that regional states largely reject nuclear deterrence logic and remain focused on disarmament, while cautioning against forcing the region into nuclear debates. Finally, Alvin Chew analyzes Southeast Asia’s growing interest in nuclear energy for clean power, arguing the US has a unique opportunity to partner with regional countries, leveraging its regulatory reputation and commercial nuclear technology, while navigating challenges in safeguards, waste management, and competition with Chinese and Russian state-backed nuclear industries.

Issues & Insights Vol. 25, WP2 — Where the Atlantic Meets the Indo-Pacific Edited by Rob York

This volume argues that while China’s economic, technological, and military rise defines twenty-first-century international relations, Europe remains a critical strategic actor. Despite their geographic separation across Eurasia, Europe and China continue to interact: Beijing seeks engagement with Brussels even as European perceptions of the PRC grow increasingly cautious. The authors examine complex and overlapping security dilemmas across both regions. William Alberque challenges China’s proclaimed “no first use” nuclear policy, arguing that it functions as a rhetorical shield obscuring rapid nuclear expansion rather than a genuine restraint. Sari Arho Havrén highlights China’s expanding and at times destabilizing presence in the Baltic Sea, warning that combined PRC-Russia activities threaten not only NATO but also the autonomy of smaller European states. Martijn Cornelissen explores the implications of US pressure on European countries such as the Netherlands to diversify

away from China in semiconductor supply chains, advocating deeper engagement with Japan and South Korea as more sustainable alternatives. Technological and economic competition forms a central theme throughout the volume. Joon Sung Lee analyzes deepening US-East Asia semiconductor cooperation and Oorja Tapan examines US-India collaboration as a means of limiting PRC influence. Beyond technology, Thomas Shattuck assesses the constraints facing Taiwan-Philippines relations, despite shared concerns over Chinese behavior, and outlines pathways for navigating the limits of their unofficial partnership. Finally, Ziyi Yan examines China's concept of a "Global Community of Shared Future," noting that while rooted in longstanding PRC diplomatic rhetoric, it is increasingly perceived in Washington as a challenge to the existing international order. She urges the United States to better understand how China views itself outside Western international relations frameworks and to articulate a proactive vision for global order rather than reacting to Beijing's narrative. The volume contends that a more forward-looking US strategy, one that integrates Atlantic and Indo-Pacific perspectives, would strengthen stability and security on both sides of Eurasia.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 25, SR3 — Economic Security and Disinformation in a Fragmenting World](#) Edited by Akira Igata

This volume examines how rapid geopolitical shifts are reshaping economic security and the information environment as central arenas of strategic competition. As economic interdependence increasingly gives way to supply-chain diversification and resilience, and information flows become weaponized through disinformation and influence operations, the traditional boundaries between security, economics, technology, and governance are eroding. Bringing together seven policy-oriented contributions from emerging scholars and practitioners, the volume addresses two interconnected challenges: safeguarding economic security amid critical and emerging technologies, and countering disinformation in fragmented and polarized information ecosystems. Rather than merely diagnosing these non-traditional security threats, the authors offer concrete, actionable policy recommendations grounded in the evolving realities of the Indo-Pacific and beyond. By amplifying next-generation regional perspectives, the volume provides timely insights into how economic and informational power is exercised, contested, and constrained in an increasingly volatile international order.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 25, SR4 — Enhancing Semiconductor Technology Protections in India](#) Edited by Akhil Ramesh and Rob York

This special report presents eight policy analyses by India Technology Policy Fellows who spent ten months researching India's semiconductor ecosystem and its strategic implications for US-India cooperation. Supported by the US Department of State's Export Control and Related Border Security (EXBS)

Program, the fellows conducted independent research, published topical commentary in major Indian outlets, and participated in a US study tour to engage with industry, government, and academic stakeholders. The resulting policy papers assess key aspects of India's semiconductor landscape from design incentives and intellectual property frameworks to supply-chain security, comparative competitiveness, legal and regulatory gaps, and just trade practices and offer concrete, actionable recommendations for strengthening technology protections, bolstering innovation, and enhancing resilient US-India semiconductor cooperation.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 25, SR5 — Saving Face to Saving Lives: Next-Generation Perspectives on Indo-Pacific Security Challenges](#) Edited by Brad Glosserman and Jeffrey Ordaniel

This volume showcases Pacific Forum's commitment to cultivating the next generation of Indo-Pacific security scholars through its Fellows and Young Leaders programs. Bringing together contributions from emerging analysts, the volume reflects a shared premise that global and regional dynamics have changed in fundamental ways, requiring a reassessment of long-standing analytical assumptions. The chapters explore both enduring and emerging security challenges through fresh perspectives: Angelo M'BA examines Philippine-China diplomacy over territorial disputes, warning that declining willingness to compromise may heighten tensions; Rupert Schulenburg analyzes why US allies are increasingly pursuing long-range strike capabilities amid doubts about extended deterrence; and Matthew Fessick investigates China's deepening ties with the Solomon Islands, highlighting the strategic and governance risks associated with law-enforcement cooperation. Natasha Fernando and Aparna Divya explore how smaller and middle powers such as Sri Lanka, India, and Australia navigate great-power competition through evolving notions of strategic autonomy and selective alignment. Truston Yu assesses China's efforts to mitigate its "Malacca dilemma," focusing on alternative maritime routes such as the Makassar Strait, while Dana Lee examines the role of "saving face" in Southeast Asian diplomacy through a case study of the Thailand-Cambodia Koh-Kut dispute. The volume underscores the analytical value and policy relevance of next-generation scholarship in understanding Indo-Pacific security challenges.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 25, SR6 — China and No First Use: Distract, Deny, Delay](#) by William Alberque

This paper examines China's proposal for a multilateral "No First Use" (NFU) treaty among the five nuclear-weapon states recognized under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, arguing that the initiative is strategically misleading and potentially destabilizing. While framed as a moral step toward reducing nuclear risks, the proposal excludes nuclear-armed non-NPT states, ignores the central logic of deterrence, and could incentivize conventional aggression by reducing fear of

nuclear escalation. Alberque contends that Beijing's renewed push for NFU is rooted in cynicism designed to deflect scrutiny from China's rapid nuclear expansion, avoid transparency and arms-control obligations, and delay coordinated international responses. Drawing on historical precedents, the paper shows how China has repeatedly advanced NFU proposals at moments when its nuclear activities faced international criticism. The study warns that broader adoption of NFU pledges particularly by the United States could embolden adversaries, weaken extended deterrence, disrupt regional stability in Europe and Asia, and increase the overall risk of conflict. Alberque concludes that China's NFU proposal is rightly viewed as a non-starter and urges states instead to press Beijing to reduce coercive behavior, increase nuclear transparency, and engage meaningfully in arms control.

[Issues & Insights Vol. 25, SR7 — Chinese Views on Korean Unification](#) by Rob York and Xiaoyi Ze

This special report examines how Chinese analysts interpret security dynamics on the Korean Peninsula amid persistent stalemate and growing calls from the United States and South Korea for Beijing to play a more proactive role. While the People's Republic of China opposes a nuclear-armed North Korea in principle and supports dialogue, its selective responses to Pyongyang's actions and reluctance to endorse measures it views as destabilizing have long frustrated Seoul and Washington. Drawing on a Pacific Forum survey of 18 Chinese experts based both inside and outside China, the study sheds light on PRC assessments of responsibility for ongoing tensions, prospects for Korean unification, and the potential impact of specific policy options on regional stability. Sponsored by the UniKorea Foundation, the report offers rare insight into Chinese strategic thinking and highlights both areas of convergence and enduring divergence between Chinese, US, and South Korean policy priorities on one of Asia's most enduring security challenges.