

U.S.-ASIAN OUTLOOK: ASSESSING KEY AREAS OF INTEREST FOR THE UNITED STATES

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Received: October 21, 2024 Revised: November 21, 2024 Accepted: December 05, 2024 Published: December 13, 2024

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of key areas of interest for the United States in the context of its relationship with Asian nations. The objective is to identify and evaluate strategic priorities and challenges shaping U.S. engagement in the region. The researcher employed a qualitative research approach using literature analysis of secondary data from credible academic sources, including articles, books, and policy reports on Google Scholar, to explore and critically evaluate key geopolitical, economic, and cultural dynamics in U.S.-Asian relations, identifying prevailing trends, policy debates, and strategic shifts. Results reveal evolving dynamics in trade relations, security alliances, and geopolitical shifts, highlighting both opportunities and risks for U.S. interests. Recommendations underscore the importance of fostering multilateral partnerships, enhancing diplomatic dialogue, and investing in economic resilience. The way forward emphasizes adaptive policy frameworks and proactive engagement to navigate complexities and sustain American influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Keywords: US, Asian Outlook, Middle East, China, Korea, Asia-Pacific region

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century is often referred to as the 'Chinese Century,' a period where the global balance of power may shift, and China rises as the dominant superpower, potentially replacing the United States. Situated at the heart of Asia, China is a central figure on the continent, often symbolizing Asia itself. However, the United States' interests in Asia are not limited to China alone, as the region is vast and dynamic, with diverse cultures that vary across borders. The Middle East, a historically turbulent area within Asia, plays a crucial role in global trade due to its vast resources, particularly oil. A disruption in oil production in this region could have far-reaching

consequences, with some even arguing that it could trigger a global conflict.

Asia is home to approximately 59.76% of the world's population, making it the largest population centre and the world's most significant market. The region is also a hub of powerful manufacturing economies, including China, Japan, and South Korea, which contribute significantly to global production. Additionally, countries like Singapore, often considered the corporate capital of the world, further highlight Asia's economic importance (Yeung & Liu, 2008). With its large population, abundant resources, and robust manufacturing capabilities,

Asia plays a pivotal role in shaping global prosperity and stability.

The importance of Asia to the United States cannot be overstated, as the region holds significant strategic, economic, and geopolitical value. Asia is home to some of the world's largest economies, including China, Japan, and India, and serves as a hub for global trade, technology, and manufacturing. Additionally, Asia plays a pivotal role in global security, particularly with regard to issues such as North Korea's nuclear ambitions, the South China Sea disputes, and the ongoing threat of terrorism. As such, Asia is a critical component of U.S. foreign policy, and the United States has long recognized the necessity of maintaining a strong presence in the region. However, the United States' approach to Asia has often been characterized by selective engagement, where it has chosen to intervene or form alliances in certain countries, sometimes at the expense of regional stability. A prominent example of this is the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, which had far-reaching consequences for the Middle East and the broader Asian region, contributing to political instability, sectarian violence, and heightened anti-American sentiment.

This approach has led to an apparent trust deficit between many Asian countries and the United States. Over time, nations in the region have become wary of U.S. intentions and interventions, questioning whether the U.S. is acting in the best interests of regional stability or pursuing its own strategic goals. As a result, the United States must tread carefully and be mindful of the historical and cultural complexities within the region. To rebuild trust and safeguard its interests, the U.S. must adopt a more nuanced and diplomatic approach that emphasizes cooperation, respect for sovereignty, and a commitment to peace and stability. This would involve not only addressing specific conflicts, such as the ones in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also engaging in multilateral frameworks that promote regional dialogue and mutual understanding. By tackling the trust deficit with caution and sensitivity, the United States can ensure its continued influence in Asia and foster long-term, constructive relationships with its Asian counterparts (Chan, 2013).

The Middle East remains a point of significant contention for the United States, largely due to its longstanding alliance with Israel. The U.S. views

Israel as the only true democratic state in the region and believes that its support is vital to ensuring peace and stability in the Middle East. This perspective has shaped U.S. foreign policy for decades, with unwavering support for Israel often taking precedence over other regional dynamics. However, this approach is increasingly being called into question. The Israeli government has repeatedly shown reluctance to adhere to U.S. requests or pressure regarding key issues, such as halting the expansion of settlements in Palestinian territories. Despite U.S. diplomatic efforts, Israel has continued to move forward with its settlement plans, often disregarding American objections. This growing divergence between U.S. policy and Israeli actions raises serious concerns about the effectiveness of the U.S.'s strategy in the region, and it may ultimately undermine American interests. The continuing support for Israel, without significant progress on resolving the Palestinian issue, risks alienating key Arab and Muslim-majority nations, potentially pushing them into opposition and jeopardizing the broader stability of the region.

To safeguard its national interests and avoid further regional destabilization, the United States must reconsider its approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The ongoing tensions over settlements and the broader issue of Palestinian statehood have polarized the Middle East, creating a climate of hostility that affects U.S. relations with many nations in the region. The lack of progress on a two-state solution, in particular, has led to growing frustration and resentment among Arab nations, further complicating U.S. diplomatic efforts in the region. In order to foster a more stable and peaceful environment, the United States must take a more balanced and proactive role in facilitating negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. By prioritizing a fair and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue, the U.S. can help to reduce regional tensions, rebuild relationships with key allies, and enhance global security. This shift in strategy is not only crucial for peace in the Middle East but is also vital for maintaining U.S. influence and credibility in a region that continues to shape global politics (Little, 2008).

1.1. Problem Statement

The United States' interests in the Asian region are multifaceted and encompass a wide range of economic, strategic, and security concerns. Asia is home to some of the world's most dynamic economies, including China, Japan, India, and South Korea, and is a crucial hub for global trade, technology, and innovation. Additionally, the region is pivotal to the U.S.'s broader geopolitical strategy, particularly in terms of maintaining a balance of power and ensuring stability in areas such as the South China Sea, the Korean Peninsula, and India-Pacific relations. However, these interests are increasingly at risk due to a combination of internal and external factors, some of which stem from perceived lapses in the United States' foreign policy, while others arise from the shifting power dynamics in the region.

One of the most significant challenges facing the U.S. in Asia is the rise of China, which is rapidly expanding its economic and military influence across the region. China's assertive actions, including its growing naval presence in the South China Sea, its Belt and Road Initiative, and its pursuit of technological supremacy, are challenging the established order and directly impacting the United States' long-standing alliances and partnerships in the region. In particular, China's expanding influence has begun to shift regional power dynamics, pushing smaller nations into China's sphere of influence and weakening the U.S.'s strategic position. Additionally, there are concerns about U.S. foreign policy decisions that may have inadvertently contributed to this situation, including inconsistent engagement with key regional powers, a lack of a clear strategy to counter China's rise, and the growing perception of U.S. disengagement under recent administrations.

To protect its interests and maintain its influence in Asia, the United States must take decisive action. This will require a recalibration of its foreign policy approach, one that strengthens alliances, engages more deeply with regional partners, and actively counters any attempts to destabilize the region. A more coordinated approach with key allies such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India is essential, particularly in areas such as trade, security, and technological development. The U.S. must also address internal challenges, such as improving its

economic competitiveness and technological innovation, to ensure it remains a key player in the region. Furthermore, the United States must develop a comprehensive strategy to engage China diplomatically, while simultaneously safeguarding its interests and ensuring that China does not reshape the region to its benefit at the expense of the broader global order. By acting proactively and with foresight, the United States can protect its strategic interests and continue to play a central role in shaping the future of Asia and the world.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How has China's facilitation of an agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran affected the regional balance of power in the Middle East and the influence of the United States in the region?
2. What are the implications of the United States' efforts to counter China's influence in the Asian region, particularly in terms of economic reliance, military alliances, and technological competition?

2. Literature Review

This research article explores how the world is gradually being pushed into what some are calling "a new Cold War." A major factor contributing to this shift is China's growing influence, which presents a significant national security challenge for the United States. In response, the U.S. is likely to engage regional powers, such as India, to counter China's rise and attempt to contain its influence. Additionally, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), spearheaded by China, has raised concerns in the United States due to its potential to expand China's economic and strategic foothold across Asia and beyond (Schindler, DiCarlo, & Paudel, 2022).

Lensey (2007) argues in his doctoral thesis that China's rapid economic development, fueled by modernization, has led to an unmistakable military expansion. This growth has sparked both positive and negative reactions globally. The key question now is whether China's rise will ultimately undermine U.S. interests and turn China into a formidable adversary, or if it will serve as a regional stabilizer capable of addressing regional issues in Asia.

From a Japanese perspective, the U.S. commitment to the Asia-Pacific under the Trump administration appeared much stronger than many had anticipated during the election cycle. Despite his campaign rhetoric on reducing U.S. involvement in alliances across Asia and Europe, President Trump's policies in East Asia remained robust, focusing on strengthening alliances with Japan and South Korea (ROK). The U.S. approach emphasized bilateral cooperation on security matters, with significant diplomatic visits by key figures such as Secretary of Defense James Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in 2017. This strategy underscored the importance of U.S.-Asian partnerships in promoting regional stability and security (Yamaguchi, 2017).

This paper also examines the core drivers and events shaping U.S. foreign policy toward China and North Korea under President Trump, comparing it with the policies of the Obama administration. The shift in policy under Trump has been characterized by a focus on personalism and power politics, a significant departure from previous diplomatic approaches (Primiano & Spezza, 2020).

It is widely acknowledged that the Asia-Pacific region is emerging as the dominant force of the 21st century. The region is heavily influenced by Sinic culture, which encompasses significant philosophical, political, and strategic considerations that distinguish it from the Western-dominated global order, particularly that led by the United States. The U.S. has worked to establish strategic relationships with countries in this region, though for this approach to succeed, the U.S. must, as Sun Tzu advised, thoroughly understand its adversaries (Lai & Hamby, 2002).

Zafar (2022) discusses how the Obama administration shifted its foreign policy focus towards the Asia-Pacific, moving away from the Middle East. This shift was driven by the region's growing importance as a strategic and economic centre, particularly following World War II. However, as China's influence has risen, U.S. allies in the Asia-Pacific, particularly in Southeast Asia, now face security challenges due to China's assertiveness, especially in the South China Sea. The U.S. response has been the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy, introduced by the Trump administration, which seeks to counterbalance China's growing naval power

through Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) and regional partnerships.

The article further explores the long-standing U.S. interests in the Middle East, noting how the 2003 invasion of Iraq triggered a chain of events, including an insurgency that eventually spread throughout the region. Even after withdrawing from Iraq, the U.S. presence in the region remains influential. This involvement is largely driven by economic interests, such as the sale of military equipment to Middle Eastern countries. Nations like Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Egypt, all considered major non-NATO allies, purchase vast quantities of American arms. The U.S. also maintains significant military bases in these countries, with the 5th Fleet, headquartered in Bahrain, playing a crucial role in balancing China's increasing naval presence (Byman & Moller, 2016).

In brief, the evolving dynamics in both the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East highlight the United States' ongoing efforts to maintain its global leadership role. While China's rise poses significant challenges, the U.S. is actively reshaping its policies to safeguard its strategic and economic interests, forging stronger alliances, and navigating the complexities of an increasingly multipolar world.

3. Methodology

The research methodology regarding the salient issues in U.S.-Asian relations employed a qualitative strategy, which in this case is literature analysis in order to study existing scholarly views and concepts. This involved the intensive study of secondary data collected from reputable academic websites such as articles, books and policy papers which were found in Google Scholar to interpret and assess different opinions about some American-Asian relations. This helped in understanding the expanse of U.S. and Asian relations and their interdependence in different areas, while outlining dominant trends, important controversies and strategic changes. The use of secondary sources ensured that there was an overwhelming breadth of analysis covering different works of literature that have been published to answer the research questions.

This process encompassed several key steps, including information gathering, source selection,

data synthesis, content organization, and cross-referencing.

To initiate the information gathering phase, an extensive search was conducted across academic databases, online repositories, and reputable news outlets. Keywords such as "U.S. interests in Asia," "U.S.-China relations," and "Asian geopolitics" were used to identify relevant articles and essays. Both scholarly and policy-oriented sources were included to capture a comprehensive range of perspectives.

During the source selection process, a rigorous evaluation of the credibility and relevance of each source was undertaken. Factors such as author expertise, publication reputation, and the presence of empirical evidence were considered. Priority was given to scholarly articles published in peer-reviewed journals and reports from renowned think tanks specializing in international relations and Asia studies.

Once the sources were identified, a systematic reading and analysis were conducted. Each article and essay were carefully examined to extract key arguments, identify supporting evidence, and evaluate the strength of the claims made. Data, statistics, and case studies mentioned in the sources were noted for potential inclusion in the writing.

Simultaneously, a process of cross-referencing was undertaken to ensure a comprehensive and balanced analysis. This involved identifying common themes, points of agreement or disagreement, and evaluating the consistency of the arguments presented across different sources. Contrasting viewpoints and alternative perspectives were considered to provide a well-rounded assessment.

After the analysis, the data from the selected sources were synthesized. Similar arguments, patterns, and trends were identified and organized into cohesive categories. This step allowed for a holistic understanding of the different dimensions of U.S. interests in Asia, including economic, political, military, and diplomatic aspects.

The content organization phase involved structuring the writing in a logical and coherent manner. The synthesized information was divided into sections and subsections based on the key themes and subtopics identified during the analysis. A clear flow of ideas was established,

ensuring that the writing progressed logically and smoothly.

Throughout the entire process, a critical approach was maintained to minimize bias and subjectivity. Counterarguments and alternative viewpoints were actively sought and evaluated. Any potential limitations or biases in the sources were acknowledged, and efforts were made to balance different perspectives and provide a nuanced analysis.

Finally, the methodology employed for compiling the writing on U.S. interests in the Asian region involved thorough information gathering, rigorous source selection, systematic data synthesis, comprehensive content organization, and cross-referencing to ensure accuracy and balance. The inclusion of diverse sources and perspectives helped provide a holistic understanding of the complex dynamics shaping U.S. interests in Asia.

3. Results

The findings clearly show that the United States cannot afford to isolate itself or reduce its involvement in the Asian region. The U.S. has made substantial investments in Asia, but these are increasingly under threat due to China's rising influence and efforts to challenge American dominance. While China is rapidly growing and expanding its capabilities, it has not yet reached the technological parity of the United States. However, to maintain its position as a key player in the region, the U.S. must consider shifting its policies. Unquestioned support for Israel may need to be reassessed, and the U.S. should refocus its attention on other countries it has historically overlooked. Additionally, the United States should prioritize building more flexible, cooperative relationships throughout the region. Currently, the U.S. is often viewed as a "bully," pressuring countries to align with its interests rather than fostering mutually beneficial partnerships. This perception must be addressed if the United States is to secure long-term influence in Asia.

The role of Taiwan and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) allies in countering China's growing influence is pivotal. However, the United States' promise to guarantee Taiwan's security may be seen as an overstatement, as the presence of U.S. military forces alone might not be sufficient to match China's growing military

capabilities. It is essential for Taiwan to acknowledge the reality of China's power and avoid isolating itself from this geopolitical truth.

The United States also has crucial partners in the region, including Japan and South Korea, with whom it shares strong diplomatic ties and significant trade relationships. These countries, equally concerned about their sovereignty and security in the face of China's rise, play an essential role in maintaining regional stability. To address common challenges and counterbalance China's influence, the United States must continue to strengthen its alliances with Japan, South Korea, and other regional partners, ensuring robust cooperation across security, economic, and diplomatic fronts.

Another critical issue for the United States is North Korea's ongoing development of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). The previous U.S. administration escalated tensions with North Korea, which led to provocative missile tests capable of reaching the U.S. mainland. This remains a serious concern for the United States. However, to effectively address this growing threat, the U.S. must engage with China, recognizing its role in influencing North Korea's actions. Cooperation with China will be essential in curbing North Korea's destabilizing activities in the region and mitigating the direct security risks posed to the U.S. itself.

The report clearly indicates a shift in the preferences of some of the United States' traditional allies. This shift can be attributed, in part, to the U.S.'s increasingly partisan approach to foreign policy, which has made it difficult for the country to handle diplomacy in a balanced and consistent manner. As a result, a trust deficit has emerged between the United States and several countries in the Asian region, posing challenges for the U.S. as it seeks to maintain its influence in this geopolitically significant area.

Additionally, the United States is expected to maintain a strong presence in key Middle Eastern countries, such as Kuwait and Bahrain, where it holds strategic naval and air bases. The importance of the U.S. 5th Fleet will likely grow significantly as China's influence in the region expands, prompting the United States to intensify its efforts to counterbalance this growing presence.

In essence, the United States' interests in Asia are increasingly challenged by China's rapid growth and rising influence. As a result, U.S. foreign policy in the region will be largely shaped by efforts to counteract China's expanding power. This will include ensuring that countries like Kuwait and Bahrain remain outside China's sphere of influence. To navigate these complexities, the United States will need to reassess its alliances, strengthen existing partnerships, and adopt a more strategic and adaptive approach to maintain its position and safeguard its interests in the evolving Asian landscape.

4. Discussion

The United States' interests in the Asian region are multifaceted, and its foreign policy strategies have often been complex, utilizing tactics such as "divide and rule" to manage relationships with different countries. This approach has sometimes involved pitting nations against each other based on ideological, political, or religious differences. One of the most prominent examples of such a strategy is the ongoing conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, where the U.S. has historically played a role in influencing the regional balance of power. However, the United States' handling of such delicate issues requires serious reconsideration, especially given the shifting geopolitical landscape in Asia and the Middle East.

A case in point is President Biden's diplomatic approach to Saudi Arabia. During his presidential campaign, Biden had promised to take a tough stance on Saudi Arabia, particularly in response to the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. He had even declared his intent to make the Kingdom a "pariah" state in the wake of the brutal murder. However, when Biden visited Saudi Arabia in June of the following year, the trip was widely seen as a diplomatic failure. Despite his previous rhetoric, Biden was forced to engage with Saudi leaders due to strategic and economic interests, particularly related to oil production. At the same time, this visit provided an opportunity for Saudi Arabia to explore deeper relations with China, further signalling a shift in their foreign policy dynamics. The warming relations between Saudi Arabia and China have become more evident, especially in light of the United States' requests to OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum

Exporting Countries) to increase oil production due to rising energy prices. Saudi Arabia, however, chose to ignore this request, opting instead to announce production cuts, citing financial losses incurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This decision was made at a particularly sensitive time—just ahead of the U.S. mid-term elections, when the Biden administration was already facing significant domestic criticism and was considered highly unpopular. This move by Saudi Arabia, perceived as defiant, underscored the growing divide between the U.S. and its once-close ally and demonstrated how countries in the region are increasingly seeking to diversify their alliances and reduce dependence on the United States. The diplomatic fallout from this episode has forced the U.S. to rethink its approach to relations in the Middle East, particularly with influential countries like Saudi Arabia, where strategic interests, energy policies, and regional security dynamics are intertwined (Sutter, 2019).

The United States must reconsider its approach in the region, balancing its long-standing alliances with emerging challenges. As China grows its influence in the Middle East, the U.S. faces the prospect of losing strategic leverage unless it adapts its policies to foster stronger, more stable partnerships with countries like Saudi Arabia while addressing the evolving political, economic, and security landscape. This situation highlights the importance of nuanced diplomacy and the need for the U.S. to cultivate more flexible, forward-looking relationships that are less reliant on traditional power structures and instead focused on mutual benefit and long-term stability (Sutter, 2019).

The United States reacted strongly to Saudi Arabia's decision to reduce oil production, framing the move as a significant victory for the Russian Federation, implying that it would primarily benefit Russia at the expense of the West, particularly the United States. However, despite the United States' vocal protests and attempts to rally global opposition to this shift, the Saudi decision was not reversed. This situation underscored a broader geopolitical shift in the Middle East, signalling Saudi Arabia's growing desire to assert its independence and recalibrate its alliances, particularly as its relationship with China deepened. The Biden administration's

diplomatic efforts were rendered ineffective, as Saudi Arabia's move highlighted a more profound change in the kingdom's foreign policy direction, one that was no longer firmly aligned with U.S. interests.

Furthermore, the diplomatic consequences of this shift became even more pronounced when China, in an unexpected turn of events, facilitated an agreement between two long-time regional adversaries, Saudi Arabia and Iran. For years, the United States had attempted to mediate the Iranian-Saudi rivalry, often unsuccessfully. The idea that these two nations could reconcile, particularly with China's involvement as a mediator, had been deemed improbable by American diplomats. Yet, China's successful intervention in brokering a détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran marked a major diplomatic triumph for Beijing. This development not only reshaped the dynamics of Middle Eastern diplomacy but also signalled a diminishing role for the United States in its traditional role as the principal power broker in the region. For the U.S., this shift was particularly significant as it undermined its influence over one of its closest allies, Saudi Arabia, and highlighted the waning effectiveness of its traditional strategies in the Middle East. Furthermore, this agreement, which China facilitated, dealt a blow to America's longstanding influence in the region and placed additional strain on its relationship with Israel, one of its most steadfast allies in the Middle East (Bass, 2004).

This shift in Saudi policy and China's growing influence in brokering peace agreements between traditionally hostile states reflects a broader realignment in global power dynamics. For the United States, it is a stark reminder that its traditional alliances and influence in the Middle East are no longer as unassailable as they once seemed. As countries like Saudi Arabia seek to diversify their foreign relations and reduce dependence on the U.S., the global power structure is becoming increasingly multipolar, with China playing a more central role in shaping regional outcomes. This evolution necessitates a re-evaluation of U.S. foreign policy strategies, as the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East continues to change rapidly. In this new era, the United States may find itself needing to adapt to a world where its influence is increasingly contested

by other powers, particularly China, whose diplomatic initiatives continue to reshape longstanding geopolitical rivalries (Bass, 2004). Since shifting its foreign policy focus to the Asia-Pacific region, the United States has increasingly viewed Israel as a beacon of democracy in a region often characterized by political instability and conflict. In a world where many nations struggle with issues of governance and human rights, Israel stands as a unique exception, often touted by the U.S. as an exemplary "democratic" state amidst its less stable neighbours. As a result, the U.S. has steadfastly supported Israel through significant arms sales, foreign aid, and political backing. This strategic relationship serves as a cornerstone of U.S. policy in the Middle East, with Washington incentivizing American companies to invest in Israel as part of its broader goal of strengthening ties with the Jewish state. Israel's innovation-driven economy, particularly in sectors like technology and defence, has further solidified its importance to the United States.

However, the U.S.'s unwavering support for Israel has not come without its challenges, particularly in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While the United States continues to advocate for a peaceful resolution to this longstanding dispute, it has simultaneously championed the idea of a two-state solution, which envisions the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. The Biden administration, in particular, has voiced opposition to any further Israeli annexations of Palestinian territories, reflecting its commitment to achieving a peaceful and equitable resolution. Despite these diplomatic pressures, Israel has continued to annex Palestinian land, particularly in contested areas such as the West Bank, undermining U.S. efforts to mediate a lasting peace. This ongoing annexation has strained relations between the U.S. and some of its allies in the region, who view such actions as a barrier to peace and stability.

The United States' support for Israel, however, is not solely driven by ideological alignment or democratic values. There is also a strategic rationale behind this enduring partnership. By empowering Israel as a regional power, the U.S. seeks to maintain a counterbalance to the influence of hostile regimes and to deter potential threats from countries such as Iran. Israel has long been viewed as a stabilizing force in the Middle

East, and the United States has relied on this relationship to ensure that Israel remains strong enough to deter aggression from its neighbors. This approach, though controversial at times, has been the cornerstone of U.S. policy in the Middle East for decades. The desire to maintain a powerful ally in the region to serve as a bulwark against instability has often taken precedence over other concerns, including the challenges posed by the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Tan, 2020).

Ultimately, the United States' policy toward Israel is a complex balancing act. While advocating for peace and a two-state solution, the U.S. continues to prioritize its strategic alliance with Israel as a means to exert influence in the region and counter potential adversaries. This approach has made Israel a key partner in U.S. efforts to shape the Middle East's political and security dynamics, even as the region faces evolving challenges and the growing influence of other powers, such as China. As tensions persist between Israel and Palestine, the U.S. will need to navigate these competing interests carefully, ensuring that its support for Israel does not come at the expense of broader regional stability (Tan, 2020).

In addition to its long-standing engagement in the Middle East, the United States is increasingly focused on countering China's growing influence in Asia through a combination of diplomatic, economic, and military strategies. Central to this effort is the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative, which aims to secure a stable, rules-based order in the region while curbing China's ambitions, particularly in maritime domains. One of the key components of this strategy is the United States' Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs), which are designed to challenge China's extensive territorial claims in the South China Sea. These operations serve as a demonstration of the U.S.'s commitment to upholding international law and ensuring the free flow of trade in these strategically important waters. At the same time, the United States is working to form alliances and partnerships with countries across Asia to isolate China and weaken its geopolitical influence.

A significant part of the U.S. strategy to counter China's rising influence involves warning other countries in the region about the potential risks of engaging with China, particularly regarding its

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The U.S. has repeatedly raised concerns about the so-called "debt-trap diplomacy" that China allegedly practices, claiming that Beijing provides enormous loans to developing countries with terms that are difficult or impossible to repay. According to the United States, this practice leaves these countries vulnerable to Chinese political and economic leverage. A key advocate of this narrative has been Alice Wells, former U.S. State Department official, who highlighted in press briefings how China, unlike other major lenders, is not a part of the Paris Club—a group of creditor nations that offer debt relief—and does not disclose the full terms of its loans. The United States has accused China of manipulating this lack of transparency to further its geopolitical ambitions, particularly in strategically important regions. However, China has consistently denied these accusations, asserting that its lending practices are conducted transparently and with the intent to support the development of infrastructure in emerging economies. Additionally, the developing world, particularly in Asia, has largely rejected the U.S. narrative, with many countries continuing to view China's investments as opportunities for economic growth and infrastructure development.

Pakistan, a key ally in the region, exemplifies this divergence in perception. Despite repeated U.S. efforts to discourage Pakistan from participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistan remains steadfast in its support for the project. The United States has portrayed CPEC as a major risk to Pakistan's sovereignty and economic stability, warning that the infrastructure projects could lead to unsustainable debt burdens. However, Pakistan continues to embrace the "happy version" of the BRI that China presents, focusing on the potential for economic development, job creation, and improved infrastructure. This highlights the challenges the United States faces in its attempts to sway countries in the region away from China's growing economic influence.

Moreover, the U.S. strategy in Asia is also heavily focused on exploiting existing geopolitical tensions to limit China's expansion. One of the most critical aspects of this strategy is the attempt to deepen relations with India, particularly given

the long-standing rivalry between India and China. The United States sees an opportunity to leverage the trust deficit between India and China to its advantage, particularly in the Indian Ocean region. By strengthening India's naval capabilities, especially through the provision of advanced military equipment and technology, the U.S. aims to ensure that the Indian Navy can effectively secure vital maritime trade routes, such as those leading to the Strait of Malacca. This strait is a critical chokepoint for global trade, particularly for China, which relies heavily on these routes for its trade flows to and from the South China Sea. By bolstering India's maritime security, the United States seeks to counter China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean and to ensure that India can serve as a key strategic partner in maintaining a balance of power in the region. As China continues to exert its influence over countries through economic means, the United States' efforts to counter this by strengthening strategic alliances, particularly with India, are central to its broader goal of maintaining dominance in the Asia-Pacific region (Yuan, 2024).

Ultimately, the United States' policy in Asia is shaped by a complex array of factors, ranging from military concerns to economic competition. The U.S. is working tirelessly to contain China's economic and political rise by fostering alliances, warning against China's growing debt leverage, and enhancing India's military capabilities to ensure security in the region. These efforts reflect the larger context of a new geopolitical rivalry between the U.S. and China, akin to a modern "Cold War" where influence over global trade routes, strategic partnerships, and economic dominance are key points of contention. As these dynamics evolve, the United States must continue to adapt its strategy to effectively counter China's increasing presence in Asia, while balancing the interests of its regional partners (Yuan, 2024).

The growing Chinese influence in the South China Sea has prompted the United States to employ strategies such as Freedom of Air and Sea (FAS) operations and support for Taiwan as tools to challenge China's territorial ambitions. China has aggressively pursued its ideological "nine-dash line," which claims a vast expanse of the South China Sea, disregarding the internationally recognized maritime boundaries of neighbouring

island nations. This expansionist stance has been a source of significant tension, as China continues to assert control over disputed waters, undermining the rights of other countries in the region (Liu, 2021). In response, the United States has increasingly used military and diplomatic measures to counteract China's actions, including bolstering Taiwan's defence capabilities and conducting FAS operations to uphold freedom of navigation and challenge China's excessive claims in these critical international waters.

The United States is increasingly concerned about China's growing influence in the technology sector, particularly in the areas of 5G infrastructure and cybersecurity. The U.S. government has raised significant national security concerns regarding China's involvement in critical telecommunications networks, especially with the rise of Chinese telecom giant Huawei. The U.S. has actively urged its allies and partners in the region, including Japan, Australia, and South Korea, to exclude Huawei from their 5G networks, citing potential risks of Chinese government espionage and control. Recognizing the strategic importance of technological dominance, the U.S. views this as a key battleground in the global technological race. In response to China's advancements in areas such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing, the United States has ramped up its own efforts, heavily investing in research and development, and fostering innovation within its tech industry to preserve its competitive edge (Ken, 2022).

The United States recognizes the strategic importance of the Asia-Pacific region in driving global economic growth and trade. To strengthen its economic presence, the U.S. has actively pursued regional trade agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), seeking to establish favourable trading terms with key countries in the region. Through these efforts, the United States aims to remain a dominant force in shaping the rules of international trade and investment. In addition, the U.S. government has shown keen interest in deepening economic ties with Southeast Asian nations through initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Economic Vision. This initiative focuses on promoting sustainable economic development, enhancing connectivity, and encouraging market-driven investment in the

region. By strengthening these economic partnerships, the United States seeks to maintain its influence and competitiveness in Asia, ensuring its long-term economic leadership (Chaisse & Hsieh, 2023).

Another significant aspect of the United States' interests in the region is Central Asia, which is rich in natural resources, particularly gas. The U.S. has actively sought to counter Russian influence in this resource-rich area by investing in the region's economies to strengthen their stability and independence. The ongoing Ukraine-Russia conflict has highlighted the global dependence on energy resources such as liquefied natural gas (LNG), leading to a sharp increase in commodity and housing prices in the West. This surge has caused widespread protests in several Western countries, contributing to growing dissatisfaction with current governments. In this context, Central Asia's abundant natural resources present a promising alternative for the United States and its Western allies, providing an opportunity to reduce reliance on Russian energy supplies and secure more stable and diversified sources of energy for the future (Pradhan, 2020).

6. Recommendations

Here are key recommendations for the United States in relation to Asia:

- **Economic Engagement:**

- Strengthen economic ties with major Asian economies like China, Japan, and South Korea.
- Explore trade liberalization, improved market access, and investment opportunities in emerging sectors such as technology, renewable energy, and healthcare.

- **Regional Security:**

- Maintain a robust security presence in the Asia-Pacific region to safeguard U.S. interests and support allies.
- Strengthen defense partnerships and cooperation with key regional allies, including Japan, South Korea, and Australia, to promote stability and deter potential threats.

- **North Korea:**

- Continue diplomatic efforts to address North Korea's nuclear weapons program.
- Collaborate closely with regional partners, particularly China and South Korea, to

pursue denuclearization and ensure peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

- **Indo-Pacific Strategy:**

- Prioritize the Indo-Pacific region as a focal point of U.S. foreign policy.

- Strengthen engagement with Southeast Asia, India, and Pacific Island nations, recognizing their strategic significance and economic potential.

- Support initiatives such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other regional mechanisms that promote a rules-based order.

- **Cybersecurity:**

- Enhance cooperation with Asian countries to address cybersecurity threats.

- Promote information sharing, capacity building, and the development of international norms and standards to ensure a secure digital environment.

- **Climate Change and Sustainability:**

- Collaborate with Asian nations to address climate change and promote sustainable development.

- Support clean energy initiatives, encourage technology transfer, and engage in multilateral efforts, such as the Paris Agreement, to mitigate climate change impacts.

- **Human Rights and Democracy:**

- Advocate for human rights, democratic values, and the rule of law across Asia.

- Engage with governments to promote respect for human rights, religious freedom, freedom of speech, and democratic institutions.

- **Health Cooperation:**

- Strengthen partnerships for public health cooperation, particularly in addressing global health challenges like pandemics.

- Collaborate on disease surveillance, research, and response mechanisms to ensure timely and effective action against emerging infectious diseases.

These recommendations offer a comprehensive approach to the United States' engagement with Asia, emphasizing economic, security, and diplomatic priorities. Regular evaluation and adaptation of policies will be essential in responding to the region's evolving dynamics and maintaining strong partnerships.

7. Conclusion

The United States' interests in the Asian region are vast and multifaceted, but they face a range of growing challenges, particularly from China's increasing influence. The findings of this report emphasize that the U.S. cannot afford to isolate itself from the region or scale down its involvement, as it has made significant economic, military, and strategic investments in Asia. However, these investments are now under threat due to China's rapid economic growth, expanding military capabilities, and increasing assertiveness in regional affairs. As China seeks to reshape the regional order, it poses a direct challenge to U.S. dominance and its ability to maintain its position as a central player in the region. The balance of power in Asia is shifting, and to preserve its interests, the United States must reassess its approach.

To remain a key influence in the region, the United States must consider a fundamental shift in its foreign policy. The traditional approach of unwavering support for Israel, while important in certain contexts, may need to be reevaluated, particularly in light of its increasingly contentious policies and actions that sometimes undermine broader U.S. interests in the Middle East and beyond. Additionally, the United States should broaden its focus to include other countries in the region, particularly those it has historically overlooked. By strengthening relationships with countries like India, Vietnam, and Indonesia—nations with growing influence and strategic importance—the United States can move away from the perception of being a "bully" state. Instead, it can position itself as a partner in fostering mutually beneficial solutions, which can help counterbalance China's growing influence and facilitate regional cooperation on shared challenges.

One of the central areas of U.S. strategic interest in Asia is the role of Taiwan and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) allies in countering China's influence. Taiwan, in particular, holds critical geopolitical significance, but it is essential for Taiwan to recognize the complex reality of its relationship with China. While it is important for Taiwan to maintain its democratic values and sovereignty, it must also engage in diplomatic channels that acknowledge the presence and

power of China in the region. This nuanced approach will help prevent unnecessary escalation and encourage dialogue with China, while also ensuring U.S. interests in the region are upheld. Moreover, the United States should continue to reinforce its alliances with key regional partners like Japan, South Korea, and Australia. These nations are central to ensuring stability and addressing shared security concerns, particularly as China's influence grows. A coordinated approach with these allies will be essential in maintaining a robust defense posture and addressing challenges such as maritime security, cyber threats, and regional conflicts.

The issue of North Korea and its nuclear ambitions remains a contentious and unresolved challenge for the United States. The last U.S. administration adopted a confrontational approach, which resulted in North Korea's continued missile testing, including missiles capable of reaching the United States. This situation requires a more nuanced strategy, one that involves working with China to manage the North Korean threat. China plays a critical role in influencing North Korea's behavior, and the U.S. must engage Beijing diplomatically to curb the nuclear threat. A cooperative approach with China, alongside sustained pressure on North Korea, is vital for ensuring regional stability and safeguarding U.S. national security. Without a concerted effort to address the North Korean issue, the U.S. risks further destabilization in the region, potentially allowing for a broader nuclear arms race and undermining global security.

Another significant challenge is the trust deficit that exists between the United States and several countries in Asia. The United States' approach to foreign policy in the region has often been criticized for being partisan and inconsistent, leading to a perception of the U.S. as a hegemonic power with its own interests at heart, rather than as a partner for mutual benefit. To rebuild trust, the U.S. must demonstrate a more balanced and bipartisan approach to foreign policy—one that transcends party lines and genuinely respects the sovereignty and interests of its Asian counterparts. By prioritizing diplomacy that is mutually beneficial, the U.S. can repair relationships and strengthen regional cooperation, ensuring that its leadership is viewed as legitimate and constructive.

Furthermore, the United States will likely continue to maintain a strong presence in the Middle East, where it holds key military bases in countries like Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar. This presence will become even more important as China expands its reach in the region, particularly in strategic areas such as the Gulf and the broader Middle Eastern infrastructure. The U.S. must navigate the complexities of both the Asian and Middle Eastern regions to safeguard its interests and protect the stability of its alliances. By carefully balancing its focus on these regions, the United States can counter China's increasing influence and preserve its strategic advantage.

Given China's growing influence, the United States faces significant challenges in maintaining its interests in the Asian region. To ensure that it remains a key player in Asia, the U.S. must consider a policy shift that includes reevaluating its stance on Israel, expanding its relationships with other important regional players, and adopting a more diplomatic and bipartisan approach to foreign policy. Addressing the North Korean threat, reinforcing key alliances, and navigating the complexities of both Asia and the Middle East are critical to safeguarding U.S. interests. By strategically adapting to the changing regional dynamics, the United States can effectively counter China's influence and maintain its leadership in this vital part of the world.

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