

## Strategies of Japan and Australia toward China

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### ABSTRACT

*The post-Cold War era, marked by US dominance and famously dubbed the “unipolar moment,” has given way to a new age of global power competition, driven largely by the rise of China, whose rapid ascendance to superpower status is shaking up the established international order. According to the realist logic of balance of power theory, if China continues its rise as a superpower and builds a formidable military using its economic power, neighboring countries will ultimately seek to counter China by bolstering their own defense capabilities and forming alliances. The latest developments in the Asia-Pacific region reveal that Japan and Australia—two pivotal players in the region—have been proactively pursuing a strategy of balancing against China’s ascent, acknowledging the imperative to reinforce their own military capabilities and bolster security alliances led by the United States to counter China’s growing dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. These developments highlight the enduring relevance of the realist balance of power theory, offering valuable perspectives into the dynamics of contemporary international relations.*

**Keywords:** *China, Japan, Australia, United States, Indo-Pacific strategy*

### INTRODUCTION

China’s ascendance to superpower status presents a momentous challenge to the established global order. This study examines the strategic approaches pursued by Japan and Australia vis-à-vis China from a historical perspective, with a focused emphasis on the economic and security considerations that have molded their strategies over time. As vital allies of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region, Japan and Australia have nurtured robust economic ties with China while relying on the United States for their security needs. However, with the rivalry between the United States and China intensifying, both nations face mounting pressure to align themselves with one side or the other. This comprehensive study aims to furnish a profound understanding of the intricate dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region and the arduous choices these nations have been compelled to make in response to the swiftly evolving geopolitical landscape. The research underscores not only the momentous role played by economic considerations in shaping foreign policy decisions but also the paramount significance of upholding a balance of power to ensure regional stability. As the US–China rivalry escalates and other global events—such as Russia’s encroachment into Ukraine and the escalating prospect of China’s incursion into

Taiwan—continue to unfold, the strategic choices made by Japan and Australia regarding their relationship with China will carry substantial implications for the equilibrium of power in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. The consequences of these decisions could reverberate throughout the broader global order, potentially precipitating significant shifts in the balance of power, regional stability, and global security.

The study is divided into five chapters, beginning with a theoretical discussion on the balance of power theory. It then offers a detailed analysis of the distinct strategies adopted by Japan and Australia toward China. The conclusion summarizes the key findings and their broader implications for international relations theory.

### THEORETICAL DISCUSSIONS ON BALANCE OF POWER THEORY

The balance of power theory is a crucial concept in the field of international relations. It contends that states will pursue strategies to maintain stability and prevent any one state from becoming too powerful, as this could threaten the security and survival of other states in the anarchic international system. Essentially, the balance of power refers to the distribution of power among states. According to its theory,

when one state becomes too dominant, others will band together in alliances or coalitions to counterbalance this power, thereby restoring equilibrium.

The balance of power theory lies at the heart of both classical and neorealist thinking, providing a crucial framework to understand the formation of alliances. At its core, neorealist theory contends that the anarchic nature of the international system drives states to prioritize their own survival by accumulating power. With no central governing authority to rely on, states are left to fend for themselves and must marshal their own resources and capabilities to protect against potential aggressors and threats. Waltz (1979: 121), the founder of neorealism (also known as structural realism), posits that balance-of-power politics can only exist in an anarchic international system where individual states are driven by the need to survive. In essence, interactions between states are shaped by the constraints and limitations imposed by the structure of the international system, which lacks authority to enforce rules or prevent conflicts. In the absence of such authority, states must engage in a perpetual balancing act to ensure their own survival. As a result, their survival is contingent upon their ability to maintain a balance of power in the international system. In order to achieve this, states must continuously adapt to shifting power dynamics, forming alliances and coalitions to offset the influence of more powerful adversaries. Ultimately, the balance of power theory highlights the critical importance of power dynamics in shaping international relations and underscores the perpetual struggle of states to ensure their survival. In essence, this theory encapsulates the perpetual tug-of-war between states seeking to assert their influence and defend their interests, while simultaneously preventing any one state from gaining too much power and disrupting the delicate equilibrium of the international system.

Within the field of international relations, scholars have traditionally categorized the strategies that states adopt to ensure their survival in an anarchic international system into three distinct types: balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging. Balancing involves a state taking measures to counter the power of another state, or group of states, and prevent the rise of a dominant power that could destabilize the international system. In the realm of international relations, balancing has traditionally been defined as a state's efforts to

convert its latent power—encompassing economic, technological, social, and natural resources—into military capabilities (Kang, 2009: 6). According to Walt (1985; 1987), balancing is a natural response to the concentration of power, and states will balance against any state that they perceive as a potential threat to their own security. The two main types of balancing are “internal balancing” and “external balancing.” The first type involves using internal efforts to increase economic capability, develop clever strategies, and enhance military strength. This approach relies on a state's own resources and capabilities to increase its power and deter potential aggressors. The second type, on the other hand, involves taking external measures to increase security by forming alliances with other states, whose power and resources can be leveraged to counterbalance potential rivals and ensure a state's own security. Bandwagoning refers to the opposite strategy, in which a state aligns itself with a powerful or threatening state to gain security benefits or share the spoils of victory (Waltz, 1979: 21-29, 126). This approach is often chosen when a state believes that the costs of balancing are too high or when it perceives a potential hegemon as offering more benefits than risks. This can be a risky strategy, however, as it can lead to a loss of autonomy, which may ultimately undermine the balance of power. This strategy is typically pursued by weaker states seeking protection or benefits from aligning with a more powerful state.

Walt (1985; 1987) modified the balance of power theory, proposing the “balance-of-threat theory,” which underscores the critical role played by perceptions of threat in the formation of alliances. According to this theory, a state's behavior regarding forming alliances is largely determined by the threat it perceives from other states. According to Walt (1985: 4; 1987: 17), states tend to balance the threat by forming alliances with other states to counter the perceived danger, although weak states are more likely to bandwagon with rising threat.

Finally, hedging is a strategic concept that falls somewhere between balancing and bandwagoning. It was originally used in the context of finance and asset management to refer to the practice of diversifying investments in a way that minimizes potential losses due to market volatility. The concept of hedging when applied to international politics refers to a state's strategy to minimize potential risks and uncertainties in a constantly changing global

environment by establishing diverse diplomatic and economic relations, investing in military capabilities, and employing other measures to mitigate the impact of potential threats. If applied to the strategy of states caught in the middle of the escalating US–China competition, hedging would mean maintaining a neutral position and positive relations with both superpowers while steering clear of dependence on either, in order to manage potential risks and avoid potential dangers that may arise from unequivocally supporting one superpower over the other.

### JAPAN'S STRATEGY TOWARD CHINA

Despite their tumultuous history of regional power struggles during the Sino-Japanese War and World War II, Japan and China managed to forge a cooperative relationship since the normalization of diplomatic ties in 1972. The 1974 Japan–China Trade Agreement was pivotal in not only improving economic ties but also normalizing relations between the two countries. Following the agreement, subsequent diplomatic pacts, including the Japan–China Aviation Pact, Maritime Agreement, Fisheries Agreement, and Trade Mark Protection Agreement, further strengthened their economic partnership, setting the stage for the 1978 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between China and Japan, which deepened political, social, and cultural exchanges between the two countries. China's policy of reform and opening up its economy, coupled with its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, significantly broadened economic cooperation between the two countries into diverse areas. Until 2006, the United States had traditionally been Japan's primary trading partner. However, since 2007, China has emerged as Japan's largest export market, playing a substantial role in its economic activities (Kim & Park, 2022: 138). In 2020, the percentage of Japan's exports and imports with China reached 22% and 25.8%, respectively (Jo, 2021: 97). Despite some tensions between the two nations during the early 2000s over issues such as visits to the Yasukuni Shrine and Japan's leadership in UN reform, the two countries largely maintained a cordial relationship until around 2010.

However, Sino–Japanese relations experienced a significant deterioration in 2010, when a territorial dispute concerning the Senkaku Islands escalated into a pressing military and security concern. Historically, the Senkaku Islands, situated in the East China Sea, have

been subject to territorial claims by Japan, the People's Republic of China, and the Republic of China. These islands hold significant strategic value for all parties involved, being situated amidst abundant fishing grounds and potentially large deposits of underwater oil and gas reserves. In the early morning hours of September 7, 2010, a Chinese trawler collided with Japanese coast guard patrol boats in the vicinity of the disputed Senkaku Islands, triggering a diplomatic crisis between China and Japan. Following the incident, the Japanese authorities detained a Chinese captain for allegedly obstructing official duties, leading to a strong demand from the Chinese government for his immediate release. However, Japan refused and extended his detention by 19 days. In response, China retaliated by canceling all official ministerial-level meetings, banning its tourists from travelling to Japan, and reportedly suspending exports of rare earth minerals to Japan. The fallout from this dispute had significant economic consequences, particularly for Japan's exports to China and eventually led to the Japanese government releasing Chinese fishermen unconditionally, a move that was viewed as humiliating. The circumstance represented a significant shift in Sino–Japanese relations, which progressively became more competitive and uneasy. During this period, China became the world's second-largest economy, surpassing Japan in terms of gross domestic product (GDP), raising significant concerns among many Japanese citizens regarding their country's security and regional stability. The rapid growth of China's economy, combined with its aggressive military expansion and territorial aspirations, caused widespread anxiety and fear among the Japanese population. In 2012, under the leadership of Prime Minister Noda, the Japanese government nationalized three of the disputed Senkaku Islands, triggering the largest anti-Japanese protests in China since the two nations established diplomatic ties in 1972. These protests quickly escalated into violent attacks on Japanese businesses and cultural centers across China, leading to significant economic consequences for Japan. The Japanese auto industry, in particular, was hit hard, with sales of Toyota, Honda, and Nissan cars in China nearly halved and local production plans being canceled. China's growing hostility toward Japan has been accompanied by a more belligerent military approach, as evidenced by the Chinese government's increasingly aggressive tactics and strategies. In 2013, a Chinese warship locked its targeting radar onto

a Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force escort ship in the East China Sea, heightening tensions between the two countries (Kim & Park, 2022: 140). Matters only worsened when China declared the Senkaku Islands as one of its “core interests” on April 26, 2013, further inflaming the situation (SBS News, 2013). China also unilaterally declared an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over more than two-thirds of the East China Sea on November 23, 2013, covering the contested areas around the Senkaku Islands, without consulting its neighbors. The Chinese Ministry of National Defense announced new rules that require aircraft to report a flight plan, maintain radio communication, exhibit clear markings, and respond to identification inquiries or face potential defensive emergency measures by China’s armed forces (Osawa, 2013).

In recent years, China has become more assertive in claiming its sovereignty and territorial rights in the waters and airspace around the Senkaku Islands. In June 2020, a Chinese advanced nuclear submarine conducted a provocative maneuver in the vicinity of the Senkaku Islands, and in July of the same year, Chinese coast guard ships approached the waters around the islands for 100 consecutive days (KIDA, 2020: 5). On February 1, 2021, China passed a new law granting the Chinese coast guard the authority to use deadly force in response to violations of China’s “national sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction” within its ADIZ (Brimelow, 2021). In December 2022, two Chinese coast guard ships carried out a prolonged incursion into the waters near the Senkaku Islands, remaining in the area for more than 72 hours—the longest duration during which a Chinese ship remained within Japanese waters since Japan’s declaration in 2012 that the islands were part of its national territory (Hankyoreh, 2022). In January 2023, Chinese coast guard ships expelled five Japanese ships from the waters surrounding the islands (NEWSIS, 2023). In short, the simmering tensions between Japan and China have been steadily escalating since 2010, fueled by China’s increasing military activity in and around the disputed Senkaku Islands. As China intensifies its law enforcement operations in the area, the prospect of potential military clashes between the two nations looms larger than ever.

Japan’s rapid economic growth in the latter half of the 20th century made it a dominant force in East Asia, with significant economic influence in the region. China, on the other hand, was still

considered a developing country in comparison. However, Japan’s economy hit a rough patch in the 1990s, while China continued to experience explosive growth. In 1990, Japan’s GDP (PPP: purchasing power parity) was twice the size of China’s, but today China’s GDP (PPP) is about five times larger than Japan’s. The growing economic relationship between the two countries initially helped stabilize their bilateral ties, but China’s increasing economic dominance over Japan has led to tensions in areas such as sovereignty, diplomacy, and security. China’s growing economic strength vis-à-vis Japan has emboldened Beijing to leverage economic interdependence as a tool to advance its strategic objectives. This approach was particularly apparent in the aftermath of the 2010 Senkaku Islands territorial dispute, when China responded with retaliatory economic measures. Since 2007, China has also surpassed Japan in defense spending, becoming the world’s second-largest military spender, trailing only the United States (McCurry, 2012). This growth in economic and military might has given China significant quantitative superiority over most navies in the Asia-Pacific area, including the East China Sea. Although Japan still maintains a qualitative advantage in naval power, China’s efforts to narrow the gap are rapidly progressing (Kwon, 2020: 159).

Despite substantial economic ties between China and Japan, the former’s aggressive military expansion and hostile actions in the Senkaku Islands have left the latter feeling vulnerable to potential attacks. This unease is further amplified by China’s rapid growth and Japan’s relative economic decline. The extent of Japan’s anxiety is evident in a series of surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center, which predicted a significant rise in negative perceptions of China among the Japanese population. In 2013 and 2014, a staggering 93% and 91% of Japanese held negative views toward China, respectively. This became 87% in the latest spring 2022 survey (Silver et al., 2022: 4). This trend represents a significant escalation from the 42% negative perception of China recorded in 2002 (Silver et al., 2022: 4).

A heightened sense of apprehension about and perceived threat of China’s expanding economic and military power and aggressive actions in the Asia-Pacific is reflected in Japan’s government documents. China Security Report 2011, released in February 2012 by the National Institute for Defense Studies, the core policy research arm of the Japanese Ministry of

Defense, suggests that China's rapid and aggressive naval buildup and expansion have had a negative impact on the maritime security environment in the Asia-Pacific, posing a significant challenge to Japan's security. The report further warns that China's increasing assertiveness, as exemplified by its intrusion into the waters near the Senkaku Islands, is inconsistent with the current order and can lead to further instability in the region. Japan's 2015 Defense White Paper accuses China of engaging in activities that violate international law in the East and South China Seas, including the Senkaku Islands (Austin, 2015). Japan's 2018 Defense White Paper further criticizes China for its unilateral actions in the East and South China Seas that disregard international norms and specifically highlights its swift military expansion, particularly in the areas of nuclear capabilities, missiles, naval forces, and air power (Yoon, 2021: 7). Meantime, Japan's National Security Strategy (NSS) 2022 identifies China as a country attempting to change the status quo through the use of force. All of this underscores Japan's growing anxiety about China's actions and intentions in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan now views China as a dangerous country with formidable power that seeks to change the existing order through the use of force, similar to Japan's imperialist regime during the 1930s (Yoon, 2021: 6).

Perceiving China's expanding power and aggressive actions as a growing threat, Japan has taken counterbalance measures, such as restructuring its defense and implementing the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)" strategy, which emphasizes the importance of the US–Japan alliance and aims to address China's military buildup and territorial ambitions in the region. Shinzo Abe, Japan's former prime minister, was a key architect of its Indo-Pacific strategy. He was keenly aware of the shifting balance of power between the United States and China and the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region. As early as 2007, during a visit to India, Abe proposed the idea of connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans, anticipating the changes to the regional order that would emerge from China's rise. With the formation of his second cabinet in 2012, Abe proposed the creation of "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond" to establish a security cooperation mechanism between the United States, Japan, Australia, and India—four countries located across the maritime space from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean—to uphold a free and open

maritime order. This concept laid the groundwork for the FOIP strategy, which became the official strategy of the Japanese government in 2017. The current Kishida administration has continued to prioritize the implementation of the FOIP as its top diplomatic goal.

Since Prime Minister Abe took office, Japan has been focused on implementing institutional reforms to bolster its military capabilities and exercise collective self-defense. It has sought to amend Article 9 of its Constitution to establish legal frameworks for exercising these rights, despite facing strong opposition. In September 2015, the Abe administration passed a controversial law that removed post-World War II restrictions on Japanese troops fighting overseas, marking a significant departure from the country's previous interpretation of the Constitution, which had limited the use of military force to self-defense purposes only. The new law allows Japan's armed forces to come to the aid of allies based on the concept of collective self-defense, which was previously ruled unconstitutional. Under these new institutional reforms, Japan can intercept a missile flying over its territory even if it is bound for another country and not aimed directly at Japan. It also allows Japanese forces to intervene in the defense of a foreign warship under attack. These changes represent a significant shift in Japan's military posture, enabling it to exercise its collective self-defense rights more broadly. On December 18, 2018, the Japanese government approved the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) and a five-year (2019–2023) Medium-Term Defense Program aimed at bolstering its military capabilities. The NDPG prioritized improving Japan's air defense capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region, with plans to develop a fighter aircraft system that includes short-range takeoff and vertical landing aircraft. To support these efforts, the Japanese government allocated approximately \$245.3 billion toward the Medium-Term Defense Program, which included initiatives to upgrade and modernize the nation's defense capabilities over the next five years (Jo, 2021: 99). An important aspect of this program is the conversion of the Izumo-class destroyer into a multipurpose ship, in accordance with Japan's overall military modernization strategy. These developments led to a large-scale military exercise in September 2021, with 120 fighter jets, over 20,000 military vehicles, and 100,000 troops deployed

nationwide to prepare for potential conflicts with China in the South China Sea, including Taiwan (Jo, 2021: 100). More recently, on December 16, 2022, the Kishida administration approved revisions to three key security and defense documents: the NSS, the National Defense Strategy (previously the NDPG), and the Defense Capability Enhancement Plan (previously the Medium-Term Defense Program). The revisions represent a major shift in Japan's defense posture, with the approval of "counterattack capabilities" for defensive purposes enabling Japan to strike bases in enemy territory—a significant departure from its pacifist outlook on defense since World War II (Smith 2022). The revisions also include a commitment to double defense spending to 2% of the GDP by 2027—which is a major policy shift in the country's history. These measures exemplify Japan's internal balancing strategy, aimed at enhancing its national defense capabilities to effectively counter the growing influence of China in the Asia-Pacific region.

Japan has also been actively participating in the US-led Indo-Pacific strategy and in security cooperation with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) member countries. As mentioned earlier, former prime minister Abe proposed the Asia's Democratic Security Diamond initiative in 2012, which aimed at strengthening the collective security of four Indo-Pacific countries that share democratic values against China's increasing provocations in the East and South China Seas. Since then, Japan has intensified its efforts to enhance bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral cooperation with the United States, India, and Australia. Starting in 2014, Japan has been strengthening its strategic partnerships with Australia and India, signing several agreements to deepen their military cooperation. Prime Minister Abe's visit to India in 2015 further accelerated this trend, resulting in the "Japan and India Vision 2025" joint statement (Kwon, 2020: 170). Japan, the United States, and India have been engaging in trilateral talks since 2011, culminating in their first joint foreign minister meeting in 2015 (Jo, 2021: 103). In the same year, Japan joined the Malabar joint naval exercise with the United States and India for the first time, which has since been held in various locations, including the South China Sea, Guam in the Pacific, Philippine waters, and the waters off Japan. On January 6, 2022, Japan signed a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) with Australia that will enhance already growing defense and

security cooperation between the two countries by facilitating cooperative activities between their military forces. Japan's new NSS, published in December 2022, named Australia as its top partner among "like-minded countries" (Satake, 2023). In the recent US–Japan Security Consultative Committee held in Washington, DC, in January 2023, the two countries designated China's current activities as the "greatest strategic challenge" in the Indo-Pacific region and the international community. Under the vision of the FOIP and a peaceful and prosperous world, they pledged to closely cooperate on various issues related to China in the region, including the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue. At the subsequent US–Japan summit, President Biden expressed full support for Prime Minister Kishida's proposal to strengthen Japan's defense capabilities and expand its defense budget, while reaffirming the US defense commitment to Japan, including the Senkaku Islands, which demonstrated a strengthening of the security alliance between the two countries in preparation for China's expansion of influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

In addition to its efforts to strengthen its ties with the United States and the Quad countries, Japan has also been expanding its security cooperation networks with Western European countries, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the European Union. Prime Minister Kishida has played a leading role in this effort, making a series of important diplomatic moves during his recent visit to Europe in January 2023. Kishida met with UK prime minister Rishi Sunak in London to sign an RAA, which outlines protocols for joint activities between the Japanese Self-Defense Forces and the UK military during visits to each other's countries. Kishida also met with French president Emmanuel Macron in Paris, where the two leaders agreed to conduct joint military training and troop exchanges between the Japanese Self-Defense Forces and the French military. Kishida's visit to Rome was equally significant, as he met with Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni to raise bilateral relations to a "strategic partnership" and begin discussions between diplomatic and defense authorities. These diplomatic efforts illustrate Japan's unwavering commitment to broaden its security cooperation networks beyond the United States and collaborate with other countries that share its concerns about China's

## Strategies of Japan and Australia toward China

military expansion and its aggressive actions in the East and South China Seas.

Meanwhile, the Kishida administration is seeking opportunities to enhance cooperation with the United States in the fields of economic and advanced technology, as a means to counter China's ascent as a technological powerhouse. To this end, it is actively seeking to participate in the Biden administration's "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework," while exploring collaboration in the "Chip 4" alliance that includes four of the world's top producers of semiconductors—the United States, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. By joining forces with the United States in these key advanced technology areas, Japan hopes to put pressure on China's rapid technological advancement and maintain its own competitive edge in the global market. These recent diplomatic moves reflect Japan's deliberate strategy of external balancing, aimed at countering China's expanding influence. By forging security partnerships and collaborating with like-minded nations, Japan has actively pursued the establishment of a resilient regional security network capable of countering China's increasing power and influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

In summary, Japan has moved away from its previous neutral stance between the United States and China, opting instead for a strategy aimed at countering China's growing influence. Although it is not preparing for direct military confrontation, it is actively strengthening its defense capabilities and cultivating stronger military alliances with its partners to effectively address China's expanding military threat in the Indo-Pacific region. This shift in Japan's approach reflects its determination to ensure its own security and stability in the face of rising China, and underscores the broader trend of regional powers seeking to balance against China's expanding power and influence in the region.

### AUSTRALIA'S STRATEGY TOWARD CHINA

Australia has maintained a longstanding and robust military alliance with the United States. However, it has also demonstrated astute recognition of the significant economic opportunities arising from its association with China, particularly since the latter's accession to the WTO in 2001. Despite perceiving China's ascent as a security challenge, Australia has navigated a delicate balance between its strategic interests and economic ties with China, employing deliberate measures to enhance and

consolidate these bonds. In a pivotal moment of this ongoing trajectory, Australian prime minister John Howard's meeting with China's newly appointed leader Hu Jintao in Beijing in August 2003 marked the genesis of a dynamic, multifaceted relationship between these two nations. At that time, China had already become Australia's third-largest trading partner, playing a significant role as a major buyer of Australian iron ore and coal. The meeting focused on strengthening economic and trade ties between the two nations, with both leaders keen on exploring opportunities for collaboration and mutual benefit. In October of the same year, Hu Jintao visited Australia at Howard's invitation, where they signed the Trade and Economic Framework between Australia and the People's Republic of China, which laid the foundation for cooperative efforts between the two countries in various sectors such as energy, education, quality inspection, and food safety. In 2005, Hu Jintao and John Howard agreed to commence negotiations on the China–Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA), a pivotal moment in Sino–Australian relations that highlighted their strong dedication to enhancing economic cooperation and strengthening bilateral ties. The resulting ChAFTA negotiations further increased reciprocal visits between Australian and Chinese leaders, cementing a close and mutually beneficial partnership. In 2007, the Australian government withdrew from the Quad due to concerns about potential political and diplomatic tensions with China. This decision was made in order to prioritize and promote further economic cooperation with China (Song & Kim, 2021: 168).

These concerted efforts led to significant advancements in Sino–Australian economic relations, driving its rapid and ongoing development. By 2009, China had surpassed Japan to become Australia's biggest export destination and, in 2012, had accounted for approximately one-fourth of Australia's total exports, underscoring the growing importance of the Chinese market for the Australian economy (Atkin & Connolly, 2013: 2). In 2014, an agreement was reached between China and Australia to establish a Chinese currency clearing bank in Sydney, while granting Australian banks a Renminbi Qualified Foreign Institutional Investor (RQFII) quota of 50 billion yuan (\$8.2 billion) (Reuters, 2014). This initiative allows Australian investors to participate in mainland China's capital market by investing up to 50 billion yuan through the

RQFII scheme, thereby facilitating their involvement in Chinese stocks, bonds, and money market instruments. In late 2014, Australia's relationship with China reached a high point when Chinese president Xi Jinping addressed a joint session of the Australian parliament, receiving widespread praise and applause from members of parliament. This was followed by a meeting between President Xi and Prime Minister Tony Abbott, during which they agreed to elevate their diplomatic relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership—a significant milestone in their bilateral ties (China Daily, 2014). The meeting also saw the successful conclusion of negotiations on the ChAFTA, which came into effect in December 2015 and further strengthened the already robust trade relations between Australia and China.

By 2017, Australia's exports to China surpassed \$116 billion, comprising over 25% of its global exports, while Chinese investment in Australia reached \$65 billion (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2018). In 2020, China remained a crucial market for Australian exports, totaling over \$102 billion, with Chinese investment surging to \$92 billion by 2021 (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022). Over the years, Australia's exports to China have demonstrated remarkable growth, increasing from around \$5.779 billion in 2003 (ranked 4th) to approximately \$102 billion in 2020 (ranked 1st) (Lee, 2022: 289). Similarly, Australia's imports from China have rapidly escalated from about \$9.683 billion in 2003 (ranked 3rd) to roughly \$61.054 billion in 2020 (ranked 1st) (Lee, 2022: 289). Despite China's economic retaliation against Australia in 2020, triggered by the Australian government's call for a global investigation into the origins of COVID-19, China continues to remain Australia's primary trade partner for both imports and exports, underscoring Australia's significant trade dependence on China. According to a 2020 study conducted by the Henry Jackson Society, a UK-based think tank, Australia has the highest reliance on China within the global supply chain among the Five Eyes countries (Jo, 2021: 79).

Building on their economic cooperation, Australia and China have strengthened their collaboration in multiple fields, including politics, finance, tourism, international cooperation, cultural exchange, education, research, science, climate change, and defense. Mutual visits between the heads of state and officials of both countries became increasingly

frequent. Australia's Labor Government, which came to power in 2007, sent numerous high-ranking officials to China, including former and current governor-generals, two prime ministers, and two treasurers, as well as ministers for foreign affairs, trade, infrastructure, transport, regional development and local government, innovation, industry, science and research, climate change and water, agriculture, fisheries and forestry, tourism, resources and energy, and the speaker of the House of Representatives (European Parliament, 2010). In April 2011, Prime Minister Julia Gillard paid a visit to China, and this was followed by a visit from the governor-general, HE Ms. Quentin Bryce AC, in June of the same year (Australian Embassy in China, 2012). China reciprocated with high-level visits to Australia, including those by Premier Wen Jiabao in 2006, President Hu Jintao in 2007, Vice Premier Li Keqiang in 2009, and Vice President Xi Jinping in 2010 (European Parliament, 2010). During Li Keqiang's visit in 2009, in particular, both countries issued a joint statement, reiterating their dedication to strengthening cooperation and fostering the growth of their bilateral relationship.

In his lecture titled "Australia and China in the World" at the 70th Morrison Lecture held at the Australian National University on April 23, 2010, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd described the bilateral relationship between Australia and China as a genuine friendship built upon mutual trust, commitment, and open dialogue (You, 2021: 107-108). Inspired by Prime Minister Rudd's enlightening lecture, the Australian Centre on China in the World was subsequently established at the Australian National University in 2010, the primary objective of which is to promote effective diplomacy by fostering a deeper understanding of China and Asia. In 2012, Prime Minister Julia Gillard introduced the Australia in the Asian Century White Paper, a strategic roadmap for Australia to succeed in the era of Asia's growth (Henry, 2016: 132). The White Paper emphasizes the need for significant policy and attitudinal changes to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the Asian Century. In 2014, the conservative government led by Tony Abbott launched the New Colombo Plan to foster student exchange between Australia and China, resulting in an increase in the number of Chinese students studying in Australia. Scholars and scientists as well as cultural delegations from both countries also made reciprocal visits to discuss common interests (You, 2021: 108).

Tourism exchange also increased rapidly. Furthermore, the expansion of cooperation between the two countries extended to military and security cooperation. The two countries agreed to elevate the Bilateral Defense Dialogue to the highest level, attended by the defense ministers and chiefs of defense of both countries. In line with this, in 2009, the chief of the People's Liberation Army of China, Chen Bingde, visited Australia for bilateral security consultations, and the Australian chief of defense and naval leadership also visited China (You, 2021: 108). Following Gillard's visit to China in April 2013, where she agreed to commence annual strategic dialogues and cooperation at the ministerial level between their respective defense departments, the two countries pursued practical cooperation in areas such as exchange of personnel, humanitarian and disaster relief training, maritime activities, and peacekeeping (Lee, 2022: 289).

Overall, Sino–Australian relations experienced substantial growth over time, with both nations acknowledging the mutual economic advantages stemming from a robust partnership. Despite apprehensions regarding security risks associated with China's ascent, Australia did not actively pursue a policy of balancing against China. During the Rudd (2007–2010) and Gillard (2010–2013) administrations, in particular, Australia placed a strong emphasis on maintaining engagement with China and refraining from openly criticizing its human rights record. This approach was driven by Australia's significant dependence on China as its largest trading partner, and the concern that any deterioration in diplomatic relations could result in negative economic consequences. Despite the US government's introduction of the “pivot to Asia” policy in the early 2010s, the Australian government remained cautious not to provoke China intentionally and refrained from implementing policies that would directly challenge China's interests (Zongyou, 2015: 100). This approach was in line with Australia's commitment to promoting a peaceful and cooperative relationship with China.

Starting in the mid-2010s, however, the previously friendly relationship between Australia and China experienced a significant shift, with Australia adopting a more assertive stance toward what it viewed as China's aggressive actions. Tensions between the two nations began to escalate following revelations that China had continued to militarize its artificial islands in the South China Sea, which

had already been strongly opposed by the United States. China's outright rejection of the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling on the Philippines' dispute in the region further strained relations, leading to a rapid deterioration in their once-strong relationship. The PCA in The Hague ruled that China's claims to sovereignty over the South China Sea had no legal basis under international law and found China guilty of encroaching on the Philippines' sovereignty. Despite the PCA's ruling, China persistently asserted its ownership over 90% of the South China Sea, relying on the contentious Nine-Dash Line—an arbitrary maritime boundary unilaterally established in 1953 by Chairman Mao Zedong, resembling a U-shaped perimeter around the region. Despite President Duterte's ongoing efforts to ease tensions in the South China Sea through his pro-China approach since assuming office in 2016, the Chinese People's Liberation Army and Coast Guard have consistently posed significant threats to Philippine naval vessels and fishing boats operating in the disputed waters. China's aggressive actions were driven by the significant strategic value of the South China Sea, which serves as a crucial hub for East Asian maritime trade. Over half of China's shipping traffic and more than 60% of its foreign trade pass through the adjacent Malacca Strait. Additionally, the region is rich in natural resources such as oil and natural gas.

Furthermore, the Australian public was deeply alarmed by reports of Chinese interference in their country's political affairs, which was a major scandal in 2016. A leading senator from the Australian Labor Party was found to have accepted financial assistance from Chinese individuals and entities in exchange for supporting China's political positions. The conservative Australian government capitalized on the controversy, launching a full-scale attack on the opposition party and emphasizing broader fears about China's expanding influence in Australia. Investigative reporters in Australia extensively covered the extent of China's infiltration into the country's political and academic institutions, further fueling public anxiety. According to an analysis by the Melbourne Law School Dollars and Democracy Database, Chinese individuals and organizations donated nearly AUD 12.6 million to Australian political parties from 2000 to 2016, constituting almost 80% of all foreign political donations (Gomes, 2017). As media and political circles continued to voice their concerns, the previously

cooperative and mutually beneficial Sino–Australian relationship was replaced by one of growing tension and suspicion.

As tensions between Australia and China continue to mount, the Australian government has begun to implement a strategy of exerting pressure on China and enacting measures to curb its influence in Australia. This approach has included the introduction of several bills aimed at curtailing Chinese influence in key sectors of Australian society. The notion of “hitting China” has also gained momentum in official government documents and in discussions among top government officials, reflecting a marked shift in Australia's foreign policy toward China. Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper labeled China as a “revisionist power,” citing concerns over its assertive foreign policy, particularly in the South China Sea, and its handling of human rights issues in Xinjiang and Hong Kong (Lee, 2022: 290). Australia rejoined the Quad in 2017, shifting its foreign strategy focus from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific. In June 2018, Australia introduced the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act with the aim of promoting greater transparency in the country's government and politics by shedding light on the nature, extent, and level of foreign influence. The introduction of this legislation was a response to growing public concerns about China's alleged interference in Australia's domestic affairs. In August 2018, the Australian government announced its decision to prohibit Chinese telecom giants Huawei and ZTE from participating in the development of the country's 5G technology infrastructure due to concerns over national security. This was followed by the announcement in 2019 of a \$211.5 million investment by the US government to build a new navy base at Glyde Point, near the port of Darwin in Australia (Greene, 2019). This decision was significant in light of the fact that China's Landbridge Group Co. had secured a 99-year lease over the port of Darwin in 2015. These moves illustrate Australia's increased vigilance toward Chinese activities within its borders and its determination to counter China's expanding influence in the Asia-Pacific region, which suggests a shift in its perception from viewing China as an opportunity to a potential threat. Clive Hamilton's 2018 book *Silent Invasion: China's Influence in Australia* effectively portrays Australia's fears of China's expansion efforts, including the “One Belt One Road” strategy.

In 2019, Australia aligned itself with the Trump administration's policy of excluding Chinese technology supply chains and implementing tariffs, which resulted in a rapid deterioration in Sino-Australian relations. This decision laid the groundwork for retaliatory measures taken by China against Australia. The situation escalated further in April 2020 when the Australian government called for a global investigation into the origins of COVID-19, triggering a strong reaction from China. In the months that followed, the Chinese government enacted a sweeping array of the most punitive trade measures it had used against any country in recent history against Australia. In retaliatory fashion, China implemented import restrictions on Australian beef and steep tariffs on a wide range of goods, such as barley, wine, lobster, copper, timber, and cotton. It even went as far as to ban imports of Australian coal, dealing a significant blow to Australia's economy and further straining the already-tense relations between the two countries. China also issued a travel warning to its citizens against visiting Australia, citing concerns about racial discrimination, essentially barring Chinese students from studying in Australia. During this process, China's high-ranking officials resorted to using derogatory language and making threats to ridicule or intimidate Australia.

In the wake of China's economic retaliation against Australia, Australia's perception of China as a potential threat dramatically intensified, as evidenced by the Lowy Institute polling on Australian attitudes toward China. While the percentage of Australians who viewed China as an economic partner had steadily increased from 77% in 2015 to 82% in 2018, this trend was abruptly reversed with a sharp drop to 55% in 2020, followed by a significant decline to 34% in 2021 and 33% in 2022. Simultaneously, the percentage of Australians who saw China as a security threat initially declined from approximately 15% in 2015 to 12% in 2018. However, this trend also shifted dramatically, with the number surging to 63% in both 2021 and 2022. In short, as China continues to expand its global power and influence, the Australian public is increasingly viewing the country as a significant security threat.

This shift in perception has led to a swift and robust response from the Australian government in both economic and diplomatic spheres. The government's resolute approach demonstrates the seriousness with which Australia views

China's actions, including economic coercion, as a challenge to its sovereignty and national interests. In response to China's economic retaliation against Australia, the Australian government lodged complaints with the WTO to challenge China's trade practices (Han, 2020). It also introduced a sweeping overhaul of its foreign investment regulations in sensitive sectors such as telecommunications, energy, and technology to protect national security. This move was triggered by a spike in Chinese investment and acquisitions of key Australian companies. The related laws were amended in December 2020 to enhance the screening process for foreign investments. In June 2020, Australian authorities conducted covert raids on the residences of four journalists from three Chinese media organizations in Australia on the grounds of alleged violations of Australia's Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act, sparking fierce protest from China. In July 2020, the Australian government submitted a declaration to the United Nations, asserting that China's territorial and maritime claims in the South China Sea lacked legal foundation (Visontay, 2020). Around the same time, the Australian government issued a travel advisory to its citizens, urging them to avoid traveling to Hong Kong, and suspended the extradition treaty with the Hong Kong government. In October 2020, Australia joined almost 40 other countries in expressing deep concerns at the United Nations about the Chinese government's human rights violations in the Xinjiang region (Hurst, 2020). In September of the same year, two Chinese scholars had their visas revoked on national security grounds. In November of that year, the Chinese embassy in Canberra released a document enumerating 14 grievances against Australia on various issues, including Australia's call for an investigation into the origins of COVID-19, allegations of Australia's biased position on the South China Sea territorial dispute, implied accusations of Chinese cyber-attacks, and the decision to exclude Huawei from participating in the deployment of 5G technology due to security concerns. The Chinese embassy's action only served to further inflame anti-China sentiment in Australia, with Prime Minister Scott Morrison taking a hardline stance and firmly declaring that he would not compromise with China when it comes to the nation's interests (Needham, 2020). In December 2020, the Parliament of Australia passed the Australian Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Bill 2020, which grants the prime minister the

authority to invalidate any agreement made by the Australian federal or state governments, as well as universities, with foreign entities. In April 2021, the Australian government actually used this law to unilaterally terminate two Belt and Road Initiative agreements that the state government of Victoria had signed with China's National Development and Reform Commission in 2018 and 2019, citing the protection of national interest (Hurst, 2021).

Amidst the growing tensions with China, Australia has taken significant steps to enhance its defense capabilities and forge stronger security partnerships with allied nations, particularly the United States. In July 2020, the Australian government introduced the Defense Strategic Update and Force Structure Plan to address the evolving security landscape and its far-reaching implications on Australia's defense requirements. The Defense Strategic Update for 2020 not only reflected these transformative changes but also delineated the imperative adjustments essential to Australia's defense strategy. In concert with this update, the Australian Department of Defense unveiled an extensive Force Structure Plan that meticulously outlined ambitious investment objectives aimed at bolstering military capabilities. Paramount among these goals was the government's unwavering commitment to providing a substantial total funding of AUD 575 billion over the next decade until 2029–2030, with AUD 270 billion specifically allocated for capability investment (Panda, 2020). Meanwhile, Australian defense minister Peter Craig Dutton and home affairs secretary Mike Pezzullo underscored the need for democratic nations to be prepared for war with China during their remarks on Australian Veterans' Day in April 2021. On September 15, 2021, Australia, together with the United States and the United Kingdom, formed the trilateral security partnership known as AUKUS, representing an upgraded military alliance with a stronger emphasis on physical military and technological aspects than the Five Eyes intelligence alliance. Australia's leading role in forming the AUKUS has allowed it to acquire advanced weapon technologies, such as nuclear-powered submarines, and enhance US and UK involvement in the Indo-Pacific region's security. Moreover, Australia has stepped up its participation in the Quad and, since November 2020, has joined the Malabar naval exercise, alongside the United States, India, and Japan (Greene, 2020).

In May 2022, the Australian Labor Party's Anthony Albanese took office as the new prime minister, signaling a potential shift toward reconciliation with China and pushing for a more active resumption of trade. At the G20 summit held in Bali in November of that same year, Albanese met with Xi Jinping, the Chinese president, effectively ending a protracted period of strained diplomatic relations between the two countries (Knott & Crowe, 2022). However, Albanese also attended the Quad summit and the 2022 NATO Madrid summit, where he discussed the growing security threats posed by China in the Indo-Pacific region. Additionally, he expressed support for the AUKUS alliance, demonstrating a firm commitment to building military alliances to counterbalance China. While seeking to restore economic ties with China, the Albanese government simultaneously took a firm stance against China's aggressive actions in the Indo-Pacific region, opposing any unilateral attempts by China to alter the status quo in the region, including its illegal maritime claims, militarization of artificial islands, and use of coercive tactics in the South China Sea. The defense strategic review, released by the Australian government on April 24, 2023, warned of China's military expansion and assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea (Hurst, 2023). The report highlights China's substantial and opaque military expansion in the South China Sea, warning that such actions endanger the global rules-based order in the region and have a detrimental impact on Australia's national interests.

In summary, although Australia had previously pursued a hedging strategy, maintaining a neutral stance between China and the United States, given its deep economic interdependence with China, China's aggressive diplomatic posturing and military expansion eroded Australia's confidence in this approach. To offset the perceived military threat posed by China and its relatively weak border defense capabilities, Australia has been increasingly focusing on enhancing its own national defense capabilities by aligning more closely with the United States and other allies, as evident by its active participation in security alliances such as the Quad and AUKUS. These moves demonstrate its strategy of balancing against China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Australia's efforts to counter China's influence have been criticized by notable figures, including former Australian prime ministers Malcolm Fraser and Paul Keating, as well as

prominent intellectual Professor Hugh White. They warn that Australia's strategy of countering China's ascent, which has been influenced by the United States' foreign policy of containment toward China, could actually harm Australia's national interests and security altogether (Asia Pacific Week, 2022; VOA, 2021; Global Times, 2022; White, 2013, 2019, 2022). They argue that engaging with China rather than simply trying to counter its growing influence would be a more effective strategy, given China's rapidly growing economic and military power. They have also expressed concerns that Australia's current approach to countering China would create further tension, potentially alienating the rising superpower, which could lead to the "worst war ever." Despite these warnings, the Australian government has remained committed to its strategy of balancing against China. As the Australian public increasingly perceives China as a potential threat, this approach is expected to play a central role in shaping Australia's foreign policy in the coming years.

## CONCLUSION

This study, thus far, has examined Japan and Australia's strategies toward China from a historical perspective. It reveals that both countries have been proactively taking steps to bolster their military capabilities and further their involvement in security alliances to balance against China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. While both countries have extensive economic ties with China, they have recognized the potential threat of China's growing economic prowess possibly translating into a formidable military force. This realization has prompted them to shift their focus toward augmenting their defense capabilities and reinforcing their security alliances led by the United States, prioritizing security concerns over economic interests. This paradigm shift underlines their recognition of the greater importance of military power and security alliances, as opposed to economic ties, in today's geopolitical climate. This development serves as a compelling testament to the continued relevance of the realist theory of balance of power in the contemporary world.

The world is currently facing a highly precarious and volatile period, with the ongoing Ukraine war showing no signs of abating and tensions escalating in the Taiwan Strait. In the midst of heightened instability and mounting uncertainties in contemporary international politics, the principles of balance of power

theory offer a critical framework for comprehending and efficaciously responding to the complex and fluid dynamics that shape our global landscape. As we navigate this shifting global geopolitical landscape, it is crucial to acknowledge that the pursuit of power and influence by nation-states is a natural, ever-present factor within the realm of international relations and that upholding a balance of power is imperative for preserving stability and security in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

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## Strategies of Japan and Australia toward China

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**Citation:** Yong Soo Park, Ph.D. "Strategies of Japan and Australia toward China", *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*. 2024; 11(1): 1-14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22259/2394-6296.1101001>

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