Staring Away from the Sun: How Non-Military Considerations Can Reduce Tensions Between the United States and China

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About the Author

Ron Sargent retired from the U.S. Army in 2018 following a 32-year active-duty career characterized by a diversity of experiences. He began his military career as an enlisted soldier in 1983. Ron then attended Xavier University on an Army ROTC scholarship and graduated in 1992 with a B.A. in Political Science. Following service as both an infantry and logistics officer, he was selected as a Southeast Asia Foreign Area Officer in 2000. Upon completion of training in the Malaysian and Indonesian languages, Ron attended the Malaysian Armed Forces Staff College in 2002 and graduated with a post-graduate diploma in Strategic and Defence Studies from the University of Malaya. He then completed the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in 2004. In 2006, following his graduation from Ohio University, where he earned a M.A. in International Affairs (with a concentration in Southeast Asian Studies), Ron served as the Defense Cooperation chief at the U.S. Embassy in Timor-Leste until 2009. His next assignment was as a military professor at the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu. In 2012, Ron moved on to serve as the deputy director of the Security Assistance Office in Kabul, Afghanistan. In 2013, he returned to Hawaii to serve as the chief of the U.S. Pacific Command Joint Intelligence Operations Center's Southeast Asia and Oceania Division. Ron was then selected to attend the U.S. National War College, from which he graduated with a M.S. in National Security Strategy in 2015. He concluded his military career after serving as the U.S. Army Attaché to Malaysia.

Dedication

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Lacey Hartigan, to whom I owe a tremendous dept of gratitude. Lacey kept me on track despite a host of administrative challenges that threatened to derail this project. As I came to learn, such challenges are simply part of the doctoral gauntlet.

Then there are my other Peabody College professors and my classmates. What a truly exceptional group of difference-makers. You all made my experience truly rewarding.

To Shahriman Lockman of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Without your help in tracking down my University of Malaya transcript, this show might have never gotten on the road.

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Abstract

This project explores how data provided by faculty members of the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies can contribute to the reduction of tensions between the US and China. The project asks three questions: 1) *How can non-military options from DKI-APCSS faculty **inform American policymakers** in their efforts to reduce tensions between the United States and China*? 2) *How can opinions provided by DKI-APCSS faculty on US-China tensions **influence narratives** regarding US-China security dynamics?* And lastly, 3) *In what ways can such opinions be **operationalized** within a strictly US context?* The project's key findings include the need for greater coherence and consistency in American foreign policy and an improved application of the instruments of national power; challenges with the application of American soft power; how American narratives are falling behind those of the Chinese; and how collaboration between the US and China must be improved. Recommendations center on several ways DKI-APCSS can leverage activities it hosts to influence policymakers, to improve its curricula, and to create space for dialogue that can lead to optimal outcomes.

Executive Summary:
Staring Away from the Sun: How Non-Military Considerations Can Reduce Tensions Between the United States and China

Organizational Background:
My Capstone Project partner organization is the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (DKI-APCSS) in Honolulu, Hawaii. The Center is an educational institution within the United States (US) Department of Defense (DoD) that addresses regional and global security issues. DKI-APCSS's mission centers around the participation of military and civilian fellows from the US and Indo-Pacific nations in its comprehensive program of executive education and workshops, both in Hawaii and throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Through its curricula, it "builds resilient capacity, shared understanding, and networked relationships among civilian and military practitioners and institutions to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific."

Problem of Practice:
The prevailing narratives surrounding current tensions between the United States and China focus on the inevitability of military conflict. DKI-APCSS is ideally postured to contribute to the mitigation of such narratives. Its courses and workshops create dialogue opportunities between principal and ancillary regional players. Such activities provide political and military leaders with insights into options that promote peaceful outcomes that can lead to the potential reduction of military tensions throughout the Indo-Pacific region. The intent of my partnership with DKI-APCSS is to contribute to both its curricula and its ability to influence US policymakers for the purpose of using non-military means to reduce tensions between the US and China.

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Project Questions:
1) *How can non-military options from DKI-APCSS faculty **inform American policymakers** in their efforts to reduce tensions between the United States and China?*
2) *How can opinions provided by DKI-APCSS faculty on US-China tensions **influence narratives** regarding US-China security dynamics?*
3) *In what ways can such opinions be **operationalized** within a strictly US context?*

Findings:
The project's key findings include:
- The need for greater coherence and consistency in American foreign policy and an improved application of the instruments of national power
- Challenges with the application of American soft power
- How American narratives are falling behind those of the Chinese
- How collaboration between the US and China must be improved

Proposed Recommendations:
Recommendations center on several ways DKI-APCSS can leverage activities it hosts to influence policymakers, to improve its curricula, and to create space for dialogue that can lead to optimal outcomes.

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The Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies

Organizational Mission

All projects start somewhere, and one that focuses on the reduction of tensions between the United States (US) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) is no exception. In considering a partner, I wanted to work with an organization that had the capability and wherewithal to both inform and operationalize substantive recommendations. Although it took me a little longer than I had first envisioned, I eventually settled on the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (DKI-APCSS) in Honolulu, Hawaii. Having worked for DKI-APCSS as a military professor from 2009 to 2012, I realized that this would be an ideal fit. Since the Center is an educational institution within the United States (US) Department of Defense (DoD) that addresses regional and global security issues, I already knew that its orientation was ideally suited to this project.

DKI-APCSS's mission centers around the participation of military and civilian fellows from the US and Indo-Pacific nations[1] in its comprehensive program of executive education and workshops, both in Hawaii and throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Through its curricula, it "builds resilient capacity, shared understanding, and networked relationships among civilian and military practitioners and institutions to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific" (Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies/About/Mission, n.d., para 2). Of note, the term "free and open" refers to the free and open transaction of commercial activities and ideas (The White House, February

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[1] The term "Indo-Pacific" primarily refers to the vast span of countries, territories, and regions that include continental Asia, maritime South and Southeast Asia, Oceania, and all contiguous bodies of water.

2022, para 3). This also implies the free passage of military forces through the region in ways that enhance and protect a peaceful status quo.

DKI-APCSS's faculty consists mainly of civilian academics who possess relevant practical experience in the policymaking and national security fields. Additional faculty consists of senior Department of State (DoS) diplomats and active-duty US military officers who are regionally focused on security issues throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

Since its inception in 1995, DKI-APCSS has hosted thousands of participants in its courses and workshops and boasts an alumni network that consists of over 15,000 practitioners and policymakers, to include defense force chiefs and heads of state (see Appendix 4). Approximately 90% of the total alumni population are non-American. While the organization's priorities have subtly evolved over the years, its focus has always been on how the US can work with its partners and allies to seek improved security solutions to the most vexing regional challenges, and to determine how regional tensions can be effectively mitigated. For example, DKI-APCSS has hosted well over 200 courses and workshops[2] and has contributed to the strengthening of alliances and partnerships throughout the Indo-Pacific. It has also been involved in the creation of national security policies and hosted high-level multilateral dialogues. While it is difficult to measure how successful DKI-APCSS programs have been in stabilizing security

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[2] Current DKI-APCSS courses include the one-week Theater Security Cooperation Course (participants are senior officials that include generals and admirals, as well as government ministers), the five-week Comprehensive Security Cooperation Course (participants are mid-level military and civilian officials), and the one-week Indo-Pacific Orientation Course (participants are primarily junior and mid-level US military officers).

within the Indo-Pacific region, my Capstone Project seeks to contribute to an improved understanding of such matters.

DKI-APCSS is interested in applying my project's findings and recommendations for two purposes:

1. To shape and/or modify its own curricula as applicable.

2. To potentially make policy recommendations to both military leaders at the US Indo-Pacific Command and to DoD leadership at the US Department of Defense.

Problem of Practice

The prevailing narratives surrounding current tensions between the United States and China focus on the inevitability of military conflict. Conversations are largely dominated by hawks on both sides of the Pacific Ocean, and this relegates those with other, potentially constructive views with little space in which to maneuver and be heard.

Hawks are important to fully understanding this issue as it is often those who beat the war drums that get heard. In the US, there are ample researchers and analysts who operate in this space and who spend more time focused on dialogue that centers on the inevitability of conflict rather on how it can be mitigated. Then, there are the hawkish politicians who can turn fear into votes for themselves, military leaders who can influence policy, and commercial interests that benefit from the military-industrial complex. And lastly, there is the supporting infrastructure that keeps hawkish voices buoyed. This can be manifested by media personalities and prevailing media narratives, such as insinuations that the recent Chinese spy balloon downing will somehow lead the two countries to war. While American hawks are not particularly opaque, reading

their Chinese counterparts is a different task altogether. The way Chinese leaders and influencers play their respective roles is far less clear, but in recent years, it has become more common for political and military leaders to voice things in more bellicose terms. Further, Chinese media is state-controlled and nothing more than another voice of the country's political masters.

In DKI-APCSS's curricula, there is a significant focus on security challenges that bedevil the US, to include those that are prioritized highly by other Indo-Pacific countries. An example is with challenges associated with the various territorial claims across the vast arc of East Asia, extending from the Yellow Sea in the northeast to the South China Sea. The People's Republic of China (PRC) is central to most of these claims. Since this directly impacts the sovereignty of US treaty allies such as Japan, South Korea, and The Philippines, as well as partners like Taiwan and several Southeast Asian nations, this is now seen as America's foremost security challenge. Additionally, the PRC has grown significantly in recent decades as both a military and economic power, and prominent US policy influencers have contributed significantly to narratives that have led to the growth of significant tensions between the two nations. Notably, the highest ranked military officer in the US and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark A. Milley, recently cautioned:

> "I think there's a lot of rhetoric in China, and a lot of rhetoric elsewhere, to include the United States, that could create the perception that war is right around the corner or we're on the brink of war with China. And that could happen. I mean, it is possible that you could have an incident or some other trigger event that could lead to uncontrolled escalation. So, it's not impossible…And I think the rhetoric itself can overheat the environment." (Baron, 2023, para 2)

A recent tweet exchange between Admiral James G. Stavridis (US Navy, Retired), the former Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, and prominent author and historian, Max Boot, underscore Milley's assertion that the situation is becoming dangerous:

Admiral James Stavridis, USN, Ret. ✔
@stavridisj

All the more reason we have to find a way to deescalate tensions between the United States and China.

🧑 **Max Boot** 🇺🇦🇺🇸 ✔ @MaxBoot · 5h
.@stavridisj told me: "If the U.S. and China manage to sleepwalk into a conventional war, the chances of it escalating into a nuclear exchange are significant.... Think 1914 with nuclear weapons at the ready."wapo.st/3UIV4R3

Figure 1 (Stavridis, 2023).

A principal *war-is-imminent* narrative centers on the notion of the "Thucydides Trap," where the growth of an emerging power (PRC) becomes a threat to a status-quo power (US), leading to an inevitable military showdown (Allison, 2013, para 3) (Brzezinski. 2014, p. 31), similar to what occurred between Sparta and Athens in the 5th Century BCE.

DKI-APCSS is ideally postured to contribute to the mitigation of such narratives. Its courses and workshops create dialogue opportunities between principal and ancillary regional players. Such activities provide political and military leaders with insights into options that promote peaceful outcomes that can lead to the potential reduction of military tensions throughout the Indo-Pacific region. However, since DKI-APCSS reports

to civilian and military leaders within both the DoD and the Indo-Pacific Command[3] who may possess more of a hawkish, warfighter mentality, this creates a natural tension between the organization and to those it reports. Fortunately, and by the DoD's design, DKI-APCSS does have a degree of autonomy from its masters and is able to consider possibilities that may otherwise be overlooked. This enables the organization to frame its curricula in ways that can contribute to both peaceful and status quo outcomes throughout the Indo-Pacific.

As alluded to previously, most course and workshop participants hail from Indo-Pacific partner and allied countries and are mid- to senior-level officials from both the uniformed services and non-military security-related agencies. Attendees are encouraged to share their own perspectives on security challenges during courses and workshops, and to actively network with one another to build on gains made during DKI-APCSS activities. Because of the nature of DKI-APCSS's engagements, some outcomes can impact national security policies throughout the Indo-Pacific, to include US policies that deal with the PRC.

In years past, Chinese officials attended programs at DKI-APCSS. The decision to invite them hinged on the hopes of creating opportunities to engage their officials in peaceful dialogue. However, People's Liberation Army (PLA)[4] officials stopped attending DKI-APCSS activities when the Center began hosting officials from Taiwan – a decision Beijing considered an affront (US government official, personal

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[3] Indo-Pacific Command is responsible for all US military operations and interests throughout the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions, and in all adjacent countries. It is based in Honolulu, Hawaii. The commander of the Indo-Pacific Command is a four-star US Navy admiral who reports directly to the Secretary of Defense (civilian leadership) and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (uniformed leadership).
[4] The PLA is the Chinese military.

communication, April 23, 2023). Presently, Chinese civilian officials can still attend events at DKI-APCSS, but only if the PRC funds their attendance.[5] But none have attended DKI-APCSS since 2016 (US government official, personal communication, April 23, 2023).

Because of the dangers that exist when two military powers face down one another, navigating possible solutions can be fraught with significant risk. And the risk associated with a conflict between the US and the PRC has global implications, particularly because of the economic reach of both countries. For example, while current US military activities in the Indo-Pacific are done in coordination with allies and partners and are in keeping with international law, they can stoke tensions with the PRC. Additionally, US sanctions against the PRC's various interests, particularly on both the economic and human rights fronts, have also contributed to an increase of tensions between the two countries. If such tensions are not reduced, they can lead towards military conflict that can easily spillover throughout the region or even globally, especially as China's military reach expands. Because of DKI-APCSS's mission and who it engages, the organization is centered in all relevant considerations and is postured to contribute to the reduction of tensions between the two countries.

For my project, I intend to conduct a confidential survey with members of the DKI-APCSS faculty that seek to explore their views on non-military ways and means that can lead to a reduction of tensions between the US and the PRC. Data derived from the project may provide unique perspectives that have not been considered by US

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[5] The attendance of most foreign participants at DKI-APCSS events is fully funded by the US government. Exceptions are made for those who come from wealthier countries such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, and China.

policymakers. My intent is to collate all findings into a host of recommendations that can be constructively employed by DKI-APCSS and, in turn, US policymakers.

Stakeholders

There are several principal stakeholders for this project. The first is DKI-APCSS itself. Because of its ability to influence US policymakers, it is ideally postured within the context of this project to shape outcomes constructively. US policymakers constitute another set of principal stakeholders. The project's findings and recommendations could enable them to create policies that effectively reduce tensions between the US and the PRC. And of course, such policymakers could also benefit politically. Another stakeholder is the Indo-Pacific Command. As the US government entity responsible for warfighting within the Indo-Pacific region, it too can influence the decisions made by policymakers.

There is also a key ancillary stakeholder – the PRC itself, assuming it is interested in reducing tensions and benefit from a mutual peace dividend that consists of normalized ties with the US and its allies and partners. While it is currently uncertain whether China's paramount leader, Xi Jinping, sees such an outcome as desirable, it would seem clear that the reduction of tensions with the US enables China to prosper in a world characterized by fewer mortal risks.

Literature Review

In the literature review that follows, I explore what has historically been done to mitigate tensions between major military powers such as the US and China. To frame this, the criterion in Figure 2 was developed by the International Institute for Security

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Studies (IIS) to create a framework of understanding for how military powers are defined so we can better understand the relative military strength one country has over another. Using the IIS example, both the US and China qualify as military powers, with the former as the world's only global military power and the latter an expeditionary military power, together with France, Russia, and the United Kingdom (Giegerich, Childs & Hackett, 2018). This is relevant because it can create a basis for the efficacy of other instruments of national power (e.g., diplomatic, informational, and economic).

Table 1: Assessing military status			
Criterion	Global military power	Expeditionary military power	Regional military power
Nuclear-delivery capability	Intercontinental, triad	Intercontinental	Maybe
Strategic mobility (air and sea)	Comprehensive inflight and afloat support, capable independently of routine continental reach	Major inflight and/or afloat support assets capable of surge continental reach	Limited inflight and/or afloat support assets
Strategic intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (inc. military satellites)	Yes; independent constellation	Yes; limited constellation, or reliable access arrangements	Maybe; some capability including contracted/ agreed bandwidth
Cyber capability	Comprehensive offensive and defensive capability	Significant offensive and defensive capability	Limited capability
Expeditionary combat-air capability	Full-spectrum capability at strategic range, including headquarters and command-and-control assets	Integrated deployable offensive and defensive capabilities, capable of deploying for extended periods in coalition environment	Small-scale detachment capability
Aircraft carrier	Full multiple carrier-strike-group capability	Optional	No
Attack submarines	Nuclear-powered with land-attack capability	Nuclear-powered, with optional land-attack capability	Modern conventionally-powered, with optional land-attack capability
Amphibious combat	Yes; independently sustained, globally deployable	Yes; globally deployable for limited periods	Maybe; not globally deployable
Armoured warfare	Comprehensive, independently deployable combined-arms capability	Medium-scale and deployable combined-arms capability	Territorial defence and offensive capability at limited range
Intervention capability	Multiple divisions, all arms	Up to Division strength	Brigade strength
Recent high-intensity combat experience	Yes	Maybe	Maybe

11 criteria for assessing military power. ©IISS

Figure 2 (Giegerich, Childs & Hackett, 2018, Table 1)

Traditionally, military deterrence and/or de-escalation usually takes the form of one side tabling a military capability that overmatches that of the other side, or something akin to the Cold War doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction, where the extreme capability of both sides leads to a reciprocal standdown. However, such

courses of action can bear significant existential risk to both protagonists. As a result, I will consider the scope of other options in the following two subsections.

How policy ambiguity can lead to meaningful options

Through my review of the 2021 National Security Strategy (NSS), I found that the United States creates space for such contemplations through its use of ambiguity. In a national security context, language that is steeped in non-specifics and generalities can give policymakers the room they require to develop creative options. For example, the NSS speaks only to the employment of partnerships that contribute to an end state of mutually beneficial cooperation (The White House, October 2022). This implies that partnerships can come in a number of forms, to include the U.S. and China's historic people-to-people engagement with one another. This is manifested through educational exchanges that have resulted in thousands of Chinese students attending universities in the U.S., and vice versa (Institute of International Education, 2008). Then, there are extensive commercial exchanges and the two countries economic dependence upon one another (Hass, 2021). The NSS also states that the United States needs "to produce dramatically greater levels of cooperation" (The White House, October 2022, p. 16). Although efforts are currently underway to make the American economy less dependent on China, such an approach, which will certainly introduce new risks, could result in novel opportunities. For example, when considering China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)[6], the US generally views it as a threat to its own global interests.

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[6] The Belt and Road Initiative is a massive undertaking that connects China with Asia, Oceania, Africa, and Europe via infrastructure projects that promote increased trade and associated exchanges. China's focus is on countries and regions it deems as strategically important to its own interests.

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However, there is also the understanding that with such threats, there could also be significant opportunities (Ruta, 2018).

The NSS also alludes to "responsible technology development (p. 33)," "law enforcement cooperation (p. 34)," and "prioritizing peaceful engagements in the Arctic" (p. 44). On this latter point, the DoD has announced that it will soon open an academic regional center that focuses on the Arctic (U.S. Department of Defense, 2021). The DoD already has regional centers aligned with other geographic regions around the world, and they can be valuable tools to promote substantive multilateral dialogue through conferences, workshops, and courses.[7]

Adding to the potential menu of engagement options, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan added in 2022 that America's "strategy must also take on the equally serious 'transnational challenges' of climate change, energy, health and food insecurity as well as terrorism and arms control in this decisive decade" (Grady, 2022, para 20).

China's 2019 Defense White Paper speaks to similar ambiguous aspirations as the US. It addresses a commitment "to developing friendly cooperation with all countries" (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2019, p. 7), a desire to "strengthen international cooperation in arms control and non-proliferation" (p. 9), and participation "in international space cooperation" (p. 12). China adds that it wishes to prioritize "practical cooperation in HADR (humanitarian assistance

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[7] My partner organization, the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, is an example of a DoD regional center. Its principal focus is on security issues in the Indo-Pacific region. I was on its faculty as a military professor from 2009 to 2012.

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and disaster response), counter-piracy, and exchanges between academic institutions" (p. 31).

While China's and the U.S.'s respective ambiguity do create opportunities to reduce mutual tensions against one another, it should be said that such language in their respective strategic defense documents may be targeted more towards domestic audiences and close partners than potential adversaries. However, it would be a mistake to consider either document as exclusive of the latter possibility. Cordesman, in his analysis of the 2019 Chinese Defense White Paper, emphasizes that the U.S. should "find every possible opportunity for cooperation with China and to limit the military and civil competition between the two countries to peaceful forms where the end result can benefit both powers to at least some extent" (Cordesman, 2019, para 26). This would seem to underscore diplomatic maxims to never limit one's own options, and that all should be done to expand the available space created by policy ambiguity.

Historical examples of antagonists moving towards peace

The Cold War rivalry between the U.S. and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) is a good place to start. Throughout the Cold War, the two nations managed to keep ties at or below a simmer, despite the proxy wars and other intrigue in which both were involved. Doran, writing just before the dissolution of the USSR, stated that "the two superpowers understood each other well and shared a deep respect for each other's position and capability (Doran, 1991, p. 154)." Doran added that even during Stalin's rule, "there was a reluctance to take steps that would lead to high-risk diplomacy and the possibility of direct confrontation with the United States" (p. 154). Much of this was facilitated via routine diplomatic engagement with one another, as well

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as confidence building measures designed to keep tensions manageable. A few examples include participation in international sporting events such as the Olympics, strategic talks aimed at the reduction of each other's nuclear arsenals, and academic exchanges.

In the post-Cold War years and prior to Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, it is also worthwhile to consider measures taken between the European Union and Russia to reduce tensions and to increase interdependence. A relevant manifestation was in the construction and operationalization of the Nordstream II pipeline. Sulick characterized the relationship as one in which "Russia is just as dependent on Europe's energy market as Europe is on Russian energy supplies" (Sulick, 2016, as cited in Cottey, 2022, p. 216). Obviously, the geostrategic dynamics between the European Union and Russia have since changed following Moscow's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, but the Nordstream II example still demonstrates how great power rivalries can manifest themselves in forms of cooperation.

A final example is between Japan and China. Despite tensions between the two, particularly as it relates to the former's role in World War II and ongoing territorial disputes in the East China Sea, the two countries share close commercial ties and engage in ample people-to-people exchanges. Additionally, China offered to send a team of specialists to assist Japan following its cataclysmic 2011 earthquake (Osnos, 2011). Beijing's response can be seen as reciprocation for Japan's humanitarian response to the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan Province (Bergman, 2011). While such reciprocation does not necessarily equate to a sustained peace, national-level humility and a humanitarian spirit can contribute meaningfully to such an end state.

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Most of the above examples can serve as non-military templates to the reduction of tensions between the US and China. However, before the leaders of the two countries seek out such opportunities, they may first have to craft a peaceful coexistence where civility can override native tendencies.

The role contextual biases play in US-China relations

"We are never deceived; we deceive ourselves."

- Goethe (Jervis, 2006, p. 28)

While this project is ostensibly about the current state of US-China relations, it is important to analyze literature that weighs the role contextual biases can play in the realm of international relations. Kahneman and Renshon (2007) assert that hawkish politicians and policymakers tend to favor the application of military force, whereas doves are prone towards non-coercive steps. They go on to provocatively suggest that humans are hardwired for hawkish behaviors and that "hawkish advisors" to political leaders "are likely to be more persuasive than they deserve to be" (p. 36). Often, it is senior military officers who serve in such roles. While it is commonly assumed, particularly by commentators on military affairs, that such individuals are more prone towards hawkishness than civilian advisors, the literature does not conclusively support this. However, hawkish biases can be impacted by preexisting attitudes of officers prior to joining the military, whether they have served in combat, and a host of other factors (Jost, et al., 2022). Most research on hawkish tendencies has been with Western militaries. Because of the opaqueness of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA), little is known outside of the occasional bellicose rhetoric of senior PLA officials in public forums. Since the turn of the century, there has been a growing belief by US leaders that China is becoming increasingly hawkish. And this has seemingly been confirmed

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through pronouncements of PLA officials in recent years (Scobell, 2020), to include

threats to use nuclear weapons against US cities (Kahn, 2005). A common Chinese

narrative is that this is in response to nuclear threats America has made against it,

particularly during the Korean war and the 1954-55 Taiwan Straits Crisis (U.S.

Department of State, n.d.) (Kulacki, 2023). And of course, there is the fact that the US is

the only nation to ever use nuclear weapons. More recently, American leaders have

been generally cautious in how it portrays its military activities in Asia. In its most recent

National Defense Strategy (NDS), while it repeatedly refers to the "pacing challenge"

presented by Beijing (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022, p. 4), it stops short of

language conveyed by those who tend to exhibit a more hawkish bias towards the

Chinese.

     Contextual biases alone can be the framing drivers used by political leaders as

they decide whether to go to war. This accurately characterizes the Vietnam War in that

American leaders erroneously viewed Indochina as the communist's linchpin for taking

over Southeast Asia (Ngoei, 2017). Another example was when Indonesia, through a

distinct anti-communist bias, inaccurately viewed the left-leaning government in East

Timor as a Cuba on its doorstep and used this narrative to justify its 1975 invasion (Burr

& Evans, 2001). And finally, throughout the 1990s, Serb nationalists believed they were

central to the continued existence of Yugoslavia and launched military campaigns

against minority ethnic regions of their country. This led to what is now referred to as

their nation's *Balkanization* (Pesic, 1996). Such biases, misperceptions, and

misunderstandings have contributed to countless wars and will likely continue to do so

unless their influence is reined in by cooler heads who understand the value of

challenging such notions. Additionally, the role of biases as a conflict driver must be clearly weighed if this project's research questions are to be answered objectively.

Notably, there are no overt references to biases as a driver of conflict in the US NDS or the recently concluded 20th Chinese Communist Party Congress (International Crisis Group, 2022). The same can be said of China's 2019 Defense White Paper (Cordesman, 2019). Neither the U.S. nor China have publicly acknowledged the role their own respective biases can play in creating or maintaining tension. This can be highly problematic in tense international relations debates.

Historically, misperceptions have already led to conflict between the US and China. During the Korean War, the US was sure that its advance up the Korean Peninsula would not be perceived as hostile by the Chinese north of the international border along the Yalu River. However, shaped by nearly two and a half decades of nonstop war, Mao Zedong believed otherwise. In what can be described as a bias born out of paranoia, Mao sent his armies south of the Yalu where they met the Americans on the field of battle (Kahneman & Renshon, 2007).

Biases cannot be ignored or unrecognized. For example, in the world of strategic intelligence, analytical projects are akin to graduate-level research. When biases get in the way of objectivity, as was famously the case with the intelligence on weapons of mass destruction (WMD) before the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003, the aftereffects can be catastrophic. In this instance, confirmation bias amongst both US political leadership and intelligence agencies contributed significantly to the lethal operational missteps that followed. Complicating this picture was the fact that Iraq had a much larger WMD program than originally assessed following the 1991 Gulf War, and

that literally all non-American intelligence agencies, to include senior Iraqi officials, also believed that Iraq still possessed WMDs in 2003 (Jervis, 2006). This underscores the essentiality of intelligence that is arrived at via a rigorous analysis that leaves no stone unturned and an explicit recognition of any potential bias in play.

Another, more germane example for where contextual biases (in this case, a bias towards Western liberal political and economic philosophies) led to what now appears to be bad policy was the West's collective decision to integrate China into the global economy, somehow in the hope that this would lead it to become a liberal democracy (Mearshimer, 2019). While such integration has contributed to bringing hundreds of millions of Chinese out of poverty, contemporary China is proving to be anything but a cooperative partner of the West. Since the West's experiment with a cloistered China began in earnest with President Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972, there have been many hopes and dreams centered on the democratization of a country that then had roughly 700 million people.[8] While China certainly has transformed, it has done so in accordance with the rules of its leaders, not because of the influence of outsiders. Yet, a few prominent Westerners are still of the belief that China can somehow be changed so that it complies with global, liberal democratic norms. One prominent economist recently wrote about how China could yet be transformed to meet Western ideals (Dollar, 2020). And the European Union's (EU) High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell,[9] recently stated that the PRC's behaviors would determine the type of relationship the EU would have with it (Pamuk & Murakami, 2023). Such patronizing beliefs underscore a fundamental misread of the PRC. As

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[8] China's population is now at 1.426 billion (Li & Qi, 2023).
[9] Borrell also serves as the European Commission's Vice-President.

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Mitter and Johnson write, the West, looking through an ideological bias shaded by liberal democracy, fails to understand that China adheres to a Marxist economic system that centers on the "equal distribution of wealth" and political Leninism, where the state literally controls everything (Mitter & Johnson, 2021). In response to the West's fixation on China's human rights record, prominent American Sinologist, Orville Schell, adds:

> "Disagreement over human rights grows out of a more divisive problem that sits unacknowledged like the proverbial elephant in the room. Because nobody quite knows what to do, we are hardly inclined to recognize, much less discuss it: the United States and China have fundamentally irreconcilable political systems and antagonistic value systems. If we want to get anything done, we must pretend that the elephant isn't there."

(Schell, 2015, para 24)

For now, Borrell, the EU, and others do not appear willing or able to look past the elephant.

In *The World According to China*, the author states that "Xi and the Chinese leadership seek to reorder the world order by challenging the values, norms, and institutions that underpin the US-led liberal global order" (Frazier, 2022, p. 574-5). Herein lies one of the most profound dilemmas when considering how to objectively analyze US-China relations. In other words, China plays by a different set of rules, despite gaining its place in the contemporary world by taking full advantage of the so-called US-led global order. To those who seek to change China, their biases should be checked at the door. When one operates within a system that is permeated with a divergent worldview, the dangers posed by confirmation biases can overwhelm objectivity. And the sooner this gets incorporated into all forms of analytical outputs, the clearer the picture of China becomes.

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Measures used to mitigate the likelihood of major wars

"For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill."

- Sun Tzu (Griffith, 1971, p. 77)

Defining how an enemy is subdued without fighting can take many forms. On one hand, it can involve the posturing of military force in ways that make it apparent to an adversary that the costs of direct conflict are simply too high. In 1969, China and the USSR engaged in a series of clashes along their shared border that resulted in hundreds of casualties. It was only when the Soviets amassed over a million troops along the border and threatened to use nuclear weapons that violence was abated (Elleman, 2001). In 2017, China came to blows with India in a region of Bhutan claimed by Beijing. Prior to this, India, which has historic and cultural ties with Bhutan, had opted for a strategy that involved "greater diplomatic and economic linkages with the region (in) an effort to improve Sino-Indian relations through a mix of engagement and deterrence" (Hall, 2021, p. 1). After weeks of tension and skirmishes that resulted in dozens of casualties on both sides, the two armies pulled back. While neither country has been fully transparent on what led to the standdown, a clear contributor was the situation's overall strategic complexity as well as the risk of escalation between the nuclear weapons-armed neighbors.

Iran avoided direct conflict with the US during the latter's occupation of Iraq from 2003-2011 by employing proxy forces. States will frequently resort to proxies so they may hide behind the veil of plausible deniability (Heinkelmann-Wild & Mehrl, 2022) to minimize the chances of the spread of conflict. Although the fighting in Iraq was

oftentimes horrific, it was generally contained within its borders and did not devolve into a wider regional conflict.[10]

Incidentally, the use of proxies dates at least to the beginning of the era of large-scale conflict. Proxy forces, also known as surrogates, were extensively used by the Romans during their various campaigns in antiquity (Moghadam & Wyss, 2020). Thucydides even wrote of their use during the Peloponnesian War (Maurer, 2016). And in the Cold War, both the US and the Soviet Union used them actively throughout Latin America, Asia, and Africa (Wither, 2020).

Contemporary treaties and alliances have also been effective tools at mitigating conflict in other ways. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has perhaps been the best example of this. Founded in 1949 as a tool of Soviet containment, it has effectively helped to maintain the peace in most of Europe – the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the former Soviet republics (e.g., Ukraine) notwithstanding. Despite its historic, cultural, and linguistic disparateness, NATO member states became and remain united by common interests, and this has led to a shared peace and prosperity through "closer cultural and economic ties" (Sayle, 2020, p. 324) in parts of the world where interstate violence was commonplace for centuries. In East Asia and Oceania, the US presently enjoys alliances with Australia, Japan, New Zealand, The Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand, as well as close partnerships with many other nations (The White House, February 2022). While large-scale wars in that part of the world have occurred post-1945, they have largely been couched either within the context of the Cold War, China's punitive aggression against Vietnam from 1979 to 1991 (Radchenko,

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[10] While some may argue that the conflict did spread into Syria, the roots of the Syrian conflict are complex and did not involve the direct intervention of the US.

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2016), or post-colonial conflicts that centered primarily on border demarcations and sovereign insecurities (McGarr, 2020) (Ganguly, et al., 2016).

Diplomatic, informational, and economic means have also been used extensively by countries who seek to advance their interests short of conflict. Following Japan's defeat at the conclusion of the Second World War, tensions persisted between it and its former subaltern, South Korea, due to atrocities committed by the Imperial Japanese Army on the Korean people. Japan's use of Korean "comfort women" was one of the more brutal examples (Saito, 2016, p. 451). During its colonization of much of East and Southeast Asia before and during the war, comfort women were justified by Japanese leaders to prevent soldiers from engaging in mass rape and contracting sexually transmitted diseases (Saito, 2016). At least tens of thousands of women, not just from Korea, either voluntarily worked or were enslaved to serve in over 400 "comfort stations" throughout Asia (p. 452). This has contributed to significant tensions between the two nations in the post-war era, and distinct vestiges of this apprehension remain today, manifested by the lack of an unambiguous Japanese apology for its wartime conduct (Chen, 2020). However, both countries became anti-communist treaty allies of the US during the Cold War and remain so to this day. This likely moderated the tensions and kept the relationship between the two from descending into open hostility. Today, while the current interests of both Japan and South Korea enjoy a significant degree of alignment on the diplomatic, informational, and economic fronts, the two continue to live with this complex legacy.

Non-military options

While the previous illustrations all involve either hot or cold wars, there is ample literature on the constructive role non-military measures can play in shaping US foreign policy. In fact, the routine nature of such efforts renders them nearly invisible to the casual observer. For instance, American embassies are tasked with a host of diplomatic, informational, and economic engagement to build partnerships with the countries in which they serve. A few examples, under a variety of initiatives, highlight US efforts with China:

1. Public diplomacy: US embassies employ a host of tools to build partnerships. One is the granting of visas to foreign students so they may attend colleges and universities in the US. In 2019, over 370,000 Chinese students were granted visas to study in the US (U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

2. Public diplomacy: The State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (BECA) conducts the International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP). The IVLP typically involves up to five week-long, fully funded visits to the US by foreign officials who are exposed to unique experiences and relationship-building opportunities with American counterparts. Visits are centered around international visitors' professions and are designed in conjunction with US foreign policy interests (United States Department of State, n.d.). According to the BECA, approximately 5,000 international visitors travel to the US annually under the IVLP, and since the program's inception in

1940, more than 200,000 foreign officials, to include more than 500 current or former heads of state and/or government (United States Department of State, Exchange Programs, n.d.). Each year over 100 "Chinese emerging leaders in government, politics, media, education, business, the environment, and other fields" are invited to participate in the IVLP (U.S. Embassy & Consulates in China, n.d., para 6).

3. Foreign direct investment (FDI): The US invested $123.9 billion in China in 2020. This funding was primarily in the manufacturing, wholesale trade, and finance and insurance sectors (Office of the United States Trade Representative, n.d.).

4. Development aid: The US Agency for International Development (USAID) invested over $32 million in 2020, over $14 million in 2021, and approximately $1.7 million in China in 2022 (ForeignAssistance.gov, 2023).

5. Public affairs: In 2015 and 2016, Freedom House ranked China last in press freedom out of 65 assessed countries. Also in 2016, Reporters Without Borders ranked China 176 out of 180 countries in its global index of press freedom. Social media giants such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are also blocked there (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017). The challenges for a free media to operate in China are extraordinary, and this makes it difficult to align Chinese values with American ones.

Lastly, a key component of any country's embassy is the ability to meet with host nation counterparts to discuss matters of convergence and divergence. Historically, Zhou Enlai, Mao Zedong's brilliant and urbane premier, has often been considered the archetype of Chinese diplomats. He was a great listener, a talented negotiator, and a foreign affairs expert (Suyin, 1998). In recent years the behavior of Chinese diplomats has assumed a more undiplomatic tack. Chang-Liao asks, "Why have Chinese diplomats become so aggressive?" He offers three possible explanations: 1) They want foreign audiences to accept Chinese narratives; 2) They are appealing to nationalistic fervor; and 3) They have been directed to do so by Xi Jinping himself (Chang-Liao, 2022, p. 179). Such recalcitrance contributes to increased intractability when attempting to resolve thorny issues, and this has certainly led to significant challenges for their American counterparts.

However, there are now indications that China may be dialing back what had become known as "wolf warrior" diplomacy due to concerns that it could be alienating key economic partners in the West (Feng, 2023, para 19). While it may be too early to know whether an actual change in Chinese tack is underway, the US will undoubtedly watch closely to see if any new, constructive opportunities present themselves.

Through this literature review, I have attempted to explore a wide range of non-military options that can lead to the reduction of tensions between antagonistic countries like the US and China, while exploring constructive roles that military force can contribute. As Pope Francis said last year in describing his own engagement of China, "Diplomacy is the art of the possible…" (Reuters Staff, 2023, para 34). As long as the

door remains open to bilateral dialogue and engagement between the US and China, opportunities to maintain an elusive peace must be pursued.

Conceptual Framework

The window to mitigate tensions between the US and China may be decreasing as the risk of conflict increases due to the possibility of tactical, operational, and strategic miscalculations. This is largely because US and Chinese military assets now operate more closely to one another, especially in maritime East and Southeast Asia. Therefore, I selected a conceptual framework that underscores the centrality of dyadic collaboration to the reduction of tensions and considers both *Social Constructivist Theory* and *Democratic Peace Theory* as principal tenets.

Social Constructivist Theory "treats cognitive activity as a developmental process and incorporates the influences of the individual experiences, sociocultural conditions, and interpersonal relations" (Sivan, 1986, p. 216). In an international relations context, it provides a mechanism where earnest engagement can contribute to the persuasion of others (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). "Like law and philosophy, affect and empathy have been swept under the carpet in recent decades" (p. 916). This description may help explain the increase in tensions between the US and China. Human passions have come to dominate the discourse between the two countries, and this can be both "dangerous and undesirable" (p. 916). This would seem to underscore the necessity for robust dialogue and engagement between the US and China, both of which are in acute shortage presently.

Democratic Peace Theory centers on the notion that democratic societies seldom if ever go to war with one another because of shared liberal norms that minimize hostile interactions (Bakker, 2021). It complements Social Constructivist Theory in that it also contributes to a roadmap for optimal international relations outcomes through broad social and political engagement. Evidence indicates that "The relationship between democracy and peace is at least five times as robust as that between smoking and lung cancer" (Imai & Lo, 2021, p. 901). The same cannot be said for autocratic countries (Bakker, 2021).

Incidentally, while China's leadership has tried to brand itself a "democracy with Chinese characteristics" (Wong, 2021), it is obviously not a democracy in the Western liberal tradition. However, this does not mean the PRC must become a Jeffersonian democracy for there to be peace between the two countries. The prominent Chinese academic, Yu Keping, cites Karl Marx himself in stating that, "There is no socialism without democracy" (Yu, 2009, p. 5). Yu adds that a democratic China aspires to "realize harmonious coexistence between nations as well as between nature and human beings (p. 169). Regardless of how China might want to brand itself, it does appear that a Chinese-styled democracy can coexist within the context of a world dominated by Western liberal democracies. While Beijing is certainly guilty of moments of harsh rhetoric towards the US and heavy-handedness against neighboring countries and its own people, a thoughtful appraisal of all its behaviors makes China seem less like a country bent on perpetual intractability *vis à vis* its relationship with the US. There clearly is room for dialogue.
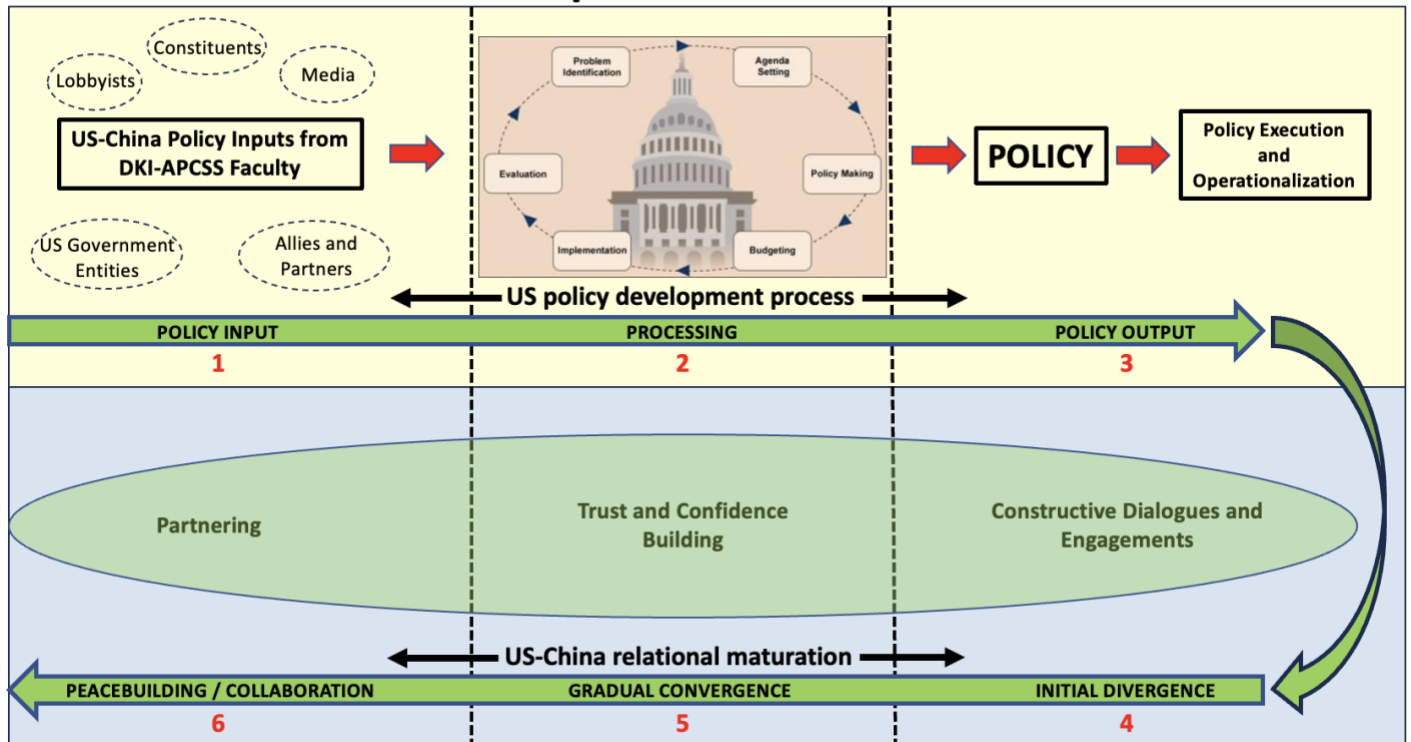
Figure 3

Theoretical conceptualization

My conceptual framework is centered on desired actions and behaviors within the context of a six-phased approach. In developing this framework, I borrowed from concepts I encountered while involved with peacekeeping operations in both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Timor-Leste, and a counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. In the *Policy Input* phase, I consider where such inputs generally emerge. With US politicians, they will always take into consideration their own myriad of interests, to include their constituents, lobbyists, and other significant influencers. While they may engage well-informed academicians to help them determine the best way forward, this is typically not a formalized step within policy input. What my project introduces is the potential formalization of input from US government academic institutions, such as DKI-APCSS,

that are not traditionally engaged in US-China policymaking in an in-depth manner. Why is this important? When considering how US-China policy plays out in the Indo-Pacific, we must also remember there are also other countries in these regions, most of which the US does not have security alliances with. Tapping into a pool of experts on US-China relations, such as with the DKI-APCSS faculty, could lead to the formulation of more effective and creative American policies.

The second and third phases consist of *Processing* and *Policy Output.* Both are logical outgrowths of the initial Policy Input phase and simply refer to the internal machinations involved in taking a policy proposal from its initial formulative steps to actual implementation. DKI-APCSS can also play a role here through its congressional engagement efforts. Such efforts can serve to inform Members of Congress, particularly those serving on committees that control defense and foreign policy purse strings.

In the fourth phase, *Initial Divergence*, antagonistic parties may have interests that hinder steps that can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes. However, as long as there is space for *Constructive Dialogues and Engagements*, then there is at least the potential for progress. Additionally, I considered mechanisms that can influence policy execution within a divergent context. Essentially, these are the small steps that enable antagonists to move away from conflict.

During Phases 5, *Gradual Convergence*, the dialogues and engagements that occurred in the previous phase have led the antagonists down a path where common interests become apparent. Measures taken during this phase center on *Trust and Confidence Building* and create the conditions where peaceful outcomes gradually become realized. Also, greater process formalization becomes evident, and activities

that reinforce trust and confidence building take place[11]. Here, while there still may be many divergent and disparate interests at play, commonalities are given greater emphasis, thus contributing to the creation of positive shared outcomes that are sustainable.

During the sixth and last phase, *Peacebuilding/Collaboration*, antagonistic positions have largely been set aside as parties embrace the fruits of *Partnering*. Decisions are wholly based on mutual respect and inclusivity. While not necessarily devoid of various manifestations of antipathy, parties who routinely partner with one another see value in such relationships and emphasize diplomatic solutions over prolonged divisiveness. Both sides fully envisage their shared interests and work to achieve and maintain mutually beneficial end states.

DKI-APCSS can also play key roles in Phases 4 through 6. They are occasionally called upon by DoD leadership to host workshops on relevant topics designed to mitigate tensions and further partnerships throughout the Indo-Pacific region (DKI-APCSS: Workshops, n.d.). Such workshops usually involve defense leaders and diplomats from countries that find themselves in the vortex of potential crises. Additionally, DKI-APCSS can also recommend such activities to DoD leadership. Many of its faculty members maintain professional ties with regional counterparts and as a result, gain unique insights into security dynamics that Washington DC-based policymakers may not be privy to.

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[11] This could involve activities of minimal complexity such as military student exchange programs, or highly complex endeavors such as joint exercises and operations that focus on non-antagonistic themes, such as humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

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In conclusion, this framework creates the basis for not just how this project was conducted, it also creates a roadmap for how DKI-APCSS can make the most of the project's findings and recommendations. And through the application of key principals from both Social Constructivist Theory and Democratic Peace Theory, this framework also envisages a maximized space where dyadic collaboration between the US and China can lead to positive mutual outcomes.

Project Questions

For my project I selected three questions to frame my inquiry. First, I asked, "*How can non-military options from DKI-APCSS faculty **inform American policymakers** in their efforts to reduce tensions between the United States and China*?" While the question focuses on non-military options, I should add that this does not preclude the use of military force in their entirety. The military instrument of national power, together with the other principal instruments – diplomatic, informational, and economic – is seldom, if ever, used singularly. And often times, it is employed as a posturing tool since the threat of conflict can frequently achieve better results than actual warfare itself. Ideally, US political leadership will use all instruments in a coordinated manner so that one augments the other. During the Cold War, the US and its NATO allies did this in near perpetuity against the European Eastern Bloc countries led by the Soviet Union. The West's diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments of power were carefully orchestrated to maintain leverage over the East, and these were augmented by a significant military force, led by the US, all along NATO's eastern frontier. While tensions were palpable over the decades, direct conflict

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was avoided due to fears on both sides that war would only lead to catastrophic outcomes (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022).

My second question was, "*How can opinions provided by DKI-APCSS faculty on US-China tensions **influence narratives** regarding US-China security dynamics?*" As for why the DKI-APCSS faculty is important to this project, they consist of approximately 30 civilian academics, all of whom specialize in some facet of Indo-Pacific security, and 10 mid-level to senior military officers, nearly all of whom possess significant operational experience in the Indo-Pacific region[12] (DKI-APCSS: Faculty, n.d.). The DoD benefits from such a faculty through the courses and workshops they lead at DKI-APCSS, as well as their publications. However, while military leaders at INDOPACOM regularly engage with the faculty on matters relevant to the Indo-Pacific, I hypothesize that US policymakers may not be taking full advantage of the level of expertise the Center possesses. Part of this may be geographic since DKI-APCSS is based in Hawaii and national-level policy generally comes together in Washington DC. Also, there are several think tanks and governmental agencies in the DC area that engage policymakers regularly, and this can marginalize DKI-APCSS faculty from having a significant degree of policy influence. Nonetheless, my project design can contribute to outcomes where findings and recommendations can gain the attention of policymakers and others who influence them. This can lead to the centering of DKI-APCSS into the

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[12] Such military personnel are referred to as foreign area officers (FAO). Each of the military services have small populations of them, and they represent the DoD's interests by serving in US embassies where they work closely with State Department diplomats, or in US military headquarters where they serve as advisors to senior military leaders and as operational planners and analysts. Typically, they will have had immersive experiences in their assigned regions, intensive language training, and opportunities to attend regionally oriented graduate programs.

policymaking conversation, particularly when considering the makeup of the Center's faculty and senior leadership.

My final question, "*In what ways can such opinions be **operationalized** within a strictly US context?*", is designed to capture potential courses of action that can lead to improved relational outcomes between the US and China. While DKI-APCSS has limits to what it can itself enact, it is still in a position to influence the formulation of measures that lead to optimal policy outcomes. In essence, it is an "idea factory" (Haass, 2002, para 7) that can apply the ample talent of its faculty towards vexing security challenges. It is also ideally postured to bring high-level professionals together in a world-class facility to drive constructive change (Haass, 2002).

Data Collection Tools and Methodology

To answer my proposed project questions, I conducted a three-part survey with both closed- and open-ended questions that captured a limited demographic profile of each participant and their perspectives on US and China tensions (see Appendix 5). The first section of the survey began with questions regarding the age, academic qualifications, nationality, professional backgrounds, religion, and ethnicity of each participant. I also asked questions regarding their academic specialty, and whether they had spent six consecutive months or more in either a personal or professional capacity in China. These questions were accompanied by possible responses in a dropdown menu. The question on academic specialties was the exception as participants were asked to type in their responses. In the second section of the survey, I asked several questions designed to assess each participants' attitudes regarding possible causes of

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US-China tensions. Participants were asked to provide responses using a Likert Scale with values ranging from opposite ends of applicable spectrums. For example, with Question 11, possible responses were: 1) counterproductive, 2) between counterproductive to neutral, 3) neutral, 4) between neutral and ideal, and 5) ideal. Then, they were asked to explain their responses. The purpose of the first two sections of the survey was to elicit data, based on demographic and experiential variables, that could help determine if participants had a particular bias that could impact their survey responses. The third section of the survey consisted of an open-ended question based on a fictional scenario where each participant was asked to roleplay the position of the US National Security Council's lead China analyst. In the question they were told to respond to a presidential request for creative, non-military options that could lead to a more refined engagement strategy and a reduction of tensions with China.

My point of contact at DKI-APCSS, who is a senior member of its faculty, emailed all faculty colleagues to provide them a few details on me, the project, and that this endeavor had the support of the Center's leadership (see Appendix 6). Approximately 48 hours later, I emailed the faculty the weblink to the survey and included a few additional clarifying points (see Appendix 6).

I used Vanderbilt University's REDCap survey platform for the survey. This enabled me to build the survey, disseminate it, and to track survey completion status – both partial and complete. Initially, I gave faculty members 10 days to complete the survey. I extended this later to 14 days so I could have the best chance to achieve a meaningful sample size. In the end there were eight respondents, five of whom fully

completed the survey, and three who completed everything except for the final open-ended question.

Data storage and security

Another reason I used REDCap is because of its security protocols. REDCap was originally created by Vanderbilt University as a secure data collection tool in compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). It has since evolved into a web-based platform that enables researchers to manage their projects with a heightened degree of security and flexibility (REDCap, n.d.). Additionally, I stored data on Vanderbilt's Amazon Web Services' (AWS) cloud server. This enabled me to conduct the project's data analysis on my personal computer, but in a secure environment. Lastly, whenever accessing REDCap and AWS, I used Vanderbilt's Pulse VPN to spoof my location. At no time was any of the survey data saved on my personal computer.

Data analysis

I analyzed my data by first creating a spreadsheet to collate all survey raw data under the questions asked of participants (an excerpt of this can be found in Appendix 7). This provided me an initial opportunity to determine if there were themes that immediately emerged from the data. Following this I calculated descriptive statistics of the Section 1 survey questions by recording all closed-ended responses on bar graphs (see Appendix 8) to determine if any indications of biases might surface and thus impact my findings and recommendations. Then, I moved on to the Section 2 responses and conducted an analysis of the data since responses were both closed- and open-ended (see Appendix 9). While the closed-ended responses called for a quantitative analysis, I

applied a qualitative analysis to the open-ended responses. Here, I also created coding

matrices that enabled me to see the number of times a particular code would appear.

Each topical theme came about following a line-by-line, inductive analysis of the data

that allowed me to place data into chunks (see Figure 4).

Topic	n
Capitalize on US strengths	16
Potential for collaboration with China	12
Potential for collaboration with partners	3
Engage acitively in irregular competition	3
Nothing can be done	3
Messaging	2
Economic leveraging	2
Treat China as a rational actor	1

Figure 4

For example, Participant 4's descriptive response in Appendix 7 speaks to the

US not doing enough economically in the Indo-Pacific. This creates space where the US

can potentially do more on the economic front, and this can lead to opportunities where

"Economic leveraging" (see Figure 4) can be a useful tool. In Participant 2's Appendix 7

descriptive response, it speaks to opportunities for collaboration without mentioning

whether the intent is to collaborate with China or the US's regional partners. In such

instances, I coded the response into both the "Potential for collaboration with China"

and "Potential for collaboration with partners" (see Figure 4) chunks. Participant 4's

other qualitative responses were consistent with such a measure.

For the open-ended responses to Section 3, I also used qualitative analysis to

best understand the data. However, I did this in two steps. First, I created a coding table

similar to what I had done in Section 2 (see Appendix 10). This enabled clear data

trends to emerge. Then, I applied this data to a more comprehensive table (see

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Appendix 11) that could allow me to further categorize the data by the major categories of *Diplomatic, Informational/Intelligence, Military, and Economic*. Then I took another step by sub-categorizing the data further based on how the US could best apply it. Those categories consisted of *Unilaterally, Bilaterally without China, Bilaterally with China, Multilaterally without China*, and *Multilaterally with China*. Coding the data in this manner provided me an opportunity to more clearly visualize how the data from Section 3 could be transformed into findings and recommendations.

Project Findings and Recommendations

I have organized the passages that follow in accordance with my three project questions. Of note, I did not arrive at any significant findings that could support my project questions through quantitative analysis; instead, I used this data to examine potential biases that could impact my qualitative findings and recommendations. Based on the closed-ended questions I asked (see Appendix 5), while I did find evidence of possible bias, I dismissed the possibility of significant bias due to the participants' open-ended responses. For instance, demographic responses to Section 1, Question 3 (nationality) demonstrated that all participants were American citizens (one was a dual American/other citizen). Although this could be an indicator of pro-US, anti-China bias, the qualitative responses did not bear this out. The same applies to Section 1, Question 10 (professional and personal experience in China). Participants' responses indicated that only one had more than six months of professional or personal experience in China. Again, while I could have concluded that this may indicate an anti-China bias, participants' qualitative responses to the questions in Sections 2 and 3 did not support

this. As a result, all subsequent findings and recommendations are based on my qualitative analysis.

Findings Related to Project Question 1: How can non-military options from DKI-APCSS faculty inform American policymakers in their efforts to reduce tensions between the United States and China?

Finding 1a:

Much of the data clearly supported greater coordination and balance between the US's instruments of national power. Examples of participant comments included, "The US's application of [the instruments of national power] is largely ineffective," and "We are...relying too much on the military." In the latter case, the participant added that too much application of the military is "increasing the risks of military conflict." At the same time, there was equal support to the US not backing off on the military pressure it places on China. One participant said that US military "Presence in the region is needed and should be a constant." However, one challenge for the US is how it maintains policy coherence over time. With political cycles playing out every two, four, and six years, and with America's foreign policy subject to greater politicization, this may be a difficult hurdle to overcome.

Additionally, the US seems at a loss for how to engage its instruments of national power in a coordinated manner to influence China to change its behavior. One participant conveyed that as long as Xi Jinping remained in charge of China, there was likely nothing America could do. However, it could very well be that America needs to think more three-dimensionally and to better appreciate how it can also play the long-

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term game. Because the Chinese Communist Party is the only political option in Beijing, this makes it far easier for it to sit back until it is time to exploit foreign policy fissures that appear whenever a political transition or earthquake occurs in America.

American policy dysfunction can be easily seen outside of the country. When US military commanders spend more time in Asia behind microphones and in front of cameras than US diplomats and political leaders, it reinforces the perception that American foreign policy is excessively militarized. This results in feelings of unease, particularly in South and Southeast Asia, where memories of the US involvement in Indochina and its support of Pakistan over India during the Cold War are still profound. An example is with India's continued distrust of the US, despite the latter's courting efforts. Unfortunately, such efforts are too often countered by assorted American missteps and failures to exploit opportunities served up by New Delhi (Grossman, 2021).

Finding 1b:

Participants emphasized the importance of the US strengthening its ties with its existing allies and partners, and that it should seek opportunities to build additional close relationships. Examples provided include doing more with "multinational info-sharing," doing more in the realm of humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR), while underscoring that the US "needs to be more collaborative." To a significant extent, the US and China are engaged in a competition for the hearts and minds (Meltzer, 2023) of fence-sitting nations such as Malaysia – a Southeast Asian nation that sits astride some of the most strategically important waterways in the world. Concurrently, the Philippines, another country that China has sought to win-over, has a

legal claim over all islands, maritime features to include shoals, and sub-surface resources within 200 nautical miles of its land boundaries. However, China also has staked a claim over nearly all of the South China Sea, something that has put it at odds with the Philippines, as well several other regional countries. In 2016, an international arbitral tribunal ruled irrefutably in favor of Manila's claims of Chinese encroachment within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ)[13] and labeled Beijing's claims as unlawful. China's response was to call the ruling "null and void" (Campbell & Salidjanova, 2016, p.1). While the US routinely asserts that it is about the rule of law and upholding international norms, Chinese intransigence would seem to play into American hands in its efforts to isolate Beijing. However, because of China's historical ties to the region, several nations, to include Malaysia, want to avoid getting in the middle of a great power tussles and prefer to engage in hedging behaviors where one great power is routinely played off the other (Abuza, 2020). This creates challenges for the US in strategically important parts of the world, such as Southeast Asia, if it is to gain influence.

At the same time, one participant emphasized that the US should "continue to strengthen relationships with partners and allies in the region and the world." In East Asia and Oceania alone, the US has treaty alliances with Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand, and Manila has recently granted the US permission to use four military bases on its homeland (Wingfield-Hayes, 2023). These points are not lost on Beijing (Liff, 2017).

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[13] Exclusive economic zones, or EEZ, are defined "as generally extending 200 nautical miles from shore, within which the coastal state has the right to explore and exploit, and the responsibility to conserve and manage, both living and non-living resources" (World Trade Organization, n.d.).

Finding 1c:

There were several data points that highlighted the underwhelming nature of American soft power.[14] A near consensus of project participants indicated that the US is missing the mark with its soft power application and results are nowhere near as impactful as they could be. One participant highlighted that the Trump Administration "knee-capped" itself by pulling out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). While the TPP was a trade agreement and a reflection of the economic instrument of power, it did not endear the US to many of the same countries that China is trying to win over (Thunderbird School of Global Management, 2018). This is closely related to both the lack of balance associated with the application of the instruments of national power, and general coherence with US foreign policy.

Recommendation 1a:

In response to Finding 1a, and in coordination with relevant US policymakers, DKI-APCSS should host a Track 1.5[15] event that considers strategies for engaging China constructively within the backdrop of Indo-Pacific security. Key questions that could frame such a workshop are: 1) With Chinese foreign policy playing itself out coherently over the course of multiple US presidential administrations, what mechanisms can be introduced to make US foreign policy more coherent and consistent over a timeframe that runs in parallel with Beijing's long-term approach? 2) While there are certain benefits to the chaotic nature of US foreign policy, what aspects of it should

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[14] Soft power is when "countries project their values, ideals, and culture across borders to foster goodwill and strengthen partnerships," and is typically manifested by governments who use diplomacy, the media, and civil society organizations as primary conveyances (World 101, n.d.).

[15] Track 1.5 events are dialogues that can lead to major policy initiatives. They are typically attended by senior government officials (but not principals) in an "unofficial" capacity, together with nongovernmental experts. In turn, Track 1 events involve principals, and Track 2 events bring together unofficial representatives of governments (Staats, 2019).

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be locked in when facing down a potentially generational adversary? And are there mechanisms available to lock it in? Such a workshop should also Include foreign participants to offer an outsider's view on how American national power dysfunction is viewed abroad so that their suggestions can be tabled. US-China tensions do not only impact the US and China – it is important to give all interested and potentially impacted parties a voice.

DKI-APCSS could also consider hosting a series of workshops whose collective objective is to identify policy options that can lead to the diffusing of tensions between the US and China. The initial session could consist of attendees from both the US and its closest Indo-Pacific allies. A second session could consist of those partner countries within the Indo-Pacific region with whom the US does not have an alliance. And lastly, a final session could take place that involves participants from the first two sessions and where the best practices drawn from each can be synthesized and developed into policy recommendations that are then shared with US policymakers.

Recommendation 1b:

In response to Finding 1b, DKI-APCSS should publish a series of think pieces that address how key fence-sitting nations like Malaysia can be leveraged constructively. Such an effort should be aimed at achieving strategic-level outcomes that are consistent with US national priorities and consider the challenges the US must overcome with regards to policy coherence and consistency. Such think pieces might be helpful in informing US policymakers.

Recommendation 1c:

Perhaps one of the greatest tools of American soft power in the Indo-Pacific region is the USNS Mercy hospital ship. Every two years it sails around the region and provides an unmatched capability that immediately changes thousands of lives through its provision of routine and advanced healthcare, particularly in countries that lack such capabilities. However, it is a US Navy asset and nearly all its personnel are from the Navy. This might reinforce regional perceptions regarding the militarization of American foreign policy. Therefore, and in response to Finding 1c, DKI-APCSS recommends to policymakers that the Mercy be civilianized and allowed to become a platform that raises the profile of other vestiges of American soft power. Such steps could also contribute to the demilitarization of American foreign policy.

Findings Related to Project Question 2: How can opinions provided by DKI-APCSS faculty on US-China tensions influence narratives regarding US-China security dynamics?

Finding 2a:

The US faces significant challenges in its efforts to gain influence in strategically important sub-regions within the Indo-Pacific; this again relates largely to the lack of coherence and consistency in America's foreign policy. It also ties in with the US's inability to capture key audiences with its messaging and to counter Chinese narratives. Regarding the latter, one participant exclaimed that the US must do a better job of listening to those who live in the Indo-Pacific, particularly those from countries the US would absolutely like to have on its side. Frequently, Beijing's talking points, whether

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uttered by their leaders or their proxies, go unchallenged by the US. This results in a vacuum where both China's voice and American silence are clearly heard.

Another significant point made by one participant is that the US does not do a good job of messaging what it does well, to include how the world has benefitted from its security guarantees and efforts to uphold the rule of law. In 2013, an article appeared in the New York Times Magazine entitled, *A Game of Shark and Minnow*. It told the story of how China took over maritime features within the Philippines EEZ and threatened to take over another (Himmelman, 2013). The article masterfully tells the tale of China's aggressive behavior throughout the South China Sea. Such stories, appearing routinely in the media, can grow legs and create a narrative on their own, and are valuable in how they can counter specious narratives being drummed up by Beijing.

Recommendation 2a:

DKI-APCSS makes a policy recommendation to push for more investment in public relations and other mechanisms designed to promote American narratives. Here, there should be two principal objectives: 1) To create counternarratives for everything China utters that can adversely impact US interests, as well as those of its allies and partners, and to resource the modes that can disseminate such counternarratives. In the case of foreign media, this could involve the leveraging of US national power to influence key partner nations to foster the growth of free and professional media organizations that can report on such matters, and to even reprint useful stories like A Game of Shark and Minnow. 2) To determine how the US can capitalize on Chinese missteps and to seize and retain the initiative so that its own narrative(s) becomes dominant.

Additionally, the Center could convene a workshop that explores ways the power of China's narratives can be mitigated. The participants of such a workshop would have to be carefully selected and should be either senior policymakers or, at a minimum, significant policy influencers. Such high-level participation would be essential if the outcome was intended to lead to US policy calibrations. It could be useful to view such an event through the guise of another Track 1.5 activity. Also, besides US participants, foreign participants should be considered integral to the workshop's success and should come from countries where a healthy US-China relationship is a vital national interest, to include countries in South and Southeast Asia. Lastly, in lieu of a workshop, the Center could consider hosting an all-hands faculty event designed to achieve similar outcomes that can lead to a direct recommendation to policymakers.

Findings Related to Project Question 3: In what ways can such opinions be operationalized within a strictly US context?

Finding 3a:

This finding centers on the need to explore opportunities for collaboration between the US and China. While most participants conveyed a strong desire to see the US continue to play to its military strengths, significantly, there were also several calls for finding more opportunities to involve China bilaterally and multilaterally – a key point of emphasis with my conceptual framework. As an illustration, one participant highlighted the benefit of collaborating with China on "climate disruption," particularly since it speaks to the national interests of all countries. Such collaboration could be shaped to address the disruption and destabilization that climate change can result in,

and the imperative of having the world's most powerful countries providing global leadership on the topic. Other participant responses emphasized the need for collaboration on HADR around the world; reciprocal people-to-people exchanges between the US and China; optimizing advancements in battery technologies that are essential to the proliferation of both day-to-day commodities and industrial applications; and technological innovations that can mitigate environmental degradation. And because of the rise of lesser developed countries crippled by debt burdens, the US and China could work together in providing assistance. One participant added that the US and China should "find ways to work together to lead global responses to crises." However, such collaboration will not happen overnight, considering other high stakes issues that are far from resolved, to include disagreements over Taiwan's status and territorial disputes in the seas adjacent to China. Beijing has stated that its position on all such issues is non-negotiable. That said, negotiations, like politics, is the art of the possible. And when considering DKI-APCSS's mission, it may be well-postured to further embed negotiation components into its curricula to contribute to efforts to manage the US-China relationship's seeming intractability.

Recommendation 3a:

The Center could consider building an exercise that can be conducted at several DKI-APCSS courses and workshops and explores opportunities for collaboration between the US and China. Since approximately 90% of DKI-APCSS fellows come from the Indo-Pacific region and other parts of the world, it seems this could be a great opportunity to elicit novel approaches that could have usefulness in a US foreign policy

context. Following each course/workshop, the Center would then report the results of the exercise to policymakers.

Regarding the inability of the US to gain traction in being able to constructively influence key countries within Indo-Pacific sub-regions, DKI-APCSS could host a separate exercise based on a fictional account (or not) for conduct at its flagship Theater Security Cooperation Course, where fellows are all senior security sector, foreign policy, and other governmental agency officials from the region. Such an exercise could be based on a scenario where "Superpower A" desires to engage "Superpower B" for the purpose of heading off a seemingly imminent conflict. This could lead to collaborative opportunities between the US and China.

Lastly, DKI-APCSS should engage policymakers to underscore the importance of bringing China back to its courses and workshops. It is far more important to have the Chinese present at DKI-APCSS than to not have them. Ideas are exchanged, partnerships are built, and friendships are created. Doing so fits precisely within DKI-APCSS's mission statement. As I often heard during my three years at the Center, when you're 300 meters from Waikiki Beach, useful engagements are able to flow more easily and become low-hanging fruit that have the potential for high payoff. Without Chinese participation, there cannot be the dyadic collaboration that I highlighted in my conceptual framework.

Conclusion

As I concluded this project, I realized a few additional questions may have been useful to pose to participants. For example, I could have asked how long they have

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been employed by DKI-APCSS; how long they had studied US-China relations; and additional questions that focused on the depth and breadth of their knowledge of US-China relations. In light of the relatively small sample size I attained of the DKI-APCSS faculty, answers derived from such questions might have contributed to a greater overall appreciation for data that originated with project participants. Also, while I specifically opted to not ask a question about participants' gender, doing so could also have introduced another useful variable into my data analysis, particularly with a larger sample size.

Additionally, my project was subject to several lengthy delays and administrative barriers, and as a result, data collection and analysis was not able to begin in earnest until after several Vanderbilt University requirements were met. Had the delays not occurred, I may have had time to follow-up directly with faculty members in order to request clarifications and/or amplifications, conduct focus groups, and carry out other inquiries that could have led to the enrichment of the data.

Originally, the project design was to invite Asian think tank analysts and researchers to serve as my project participants. In the end this was not possible due to an administrative hurdle that could not be overcome. However, it would have been fascinating to see if data provided by non-Americans would have offered additional insights and contributed to richer findings and recommendations. Of course, they too might have exhibited biases, maybe of a more anti-US nature, particularly as recent polling in Southeast Asia shows that most regional countries now favor China over the US (Iwamoto, 2020). Perhaps a follow-up to this project could be based on a design where DKI-APCSS faculty members are placed into a control group and their non-

American counterparts into an experimental group, and to then compare the data from the two.

Limitations and imperfections aside, my project succeeded in that it collected data that led to findings and recommendations linked directly to the three project questions. Additionally, I identified themes that were somewhat novel, such as the need to civilianize/demilitarize aspects of US foreign policy. And others reinforced existing priorities, such as discovering ways to improve dialogue and collaboration with China. Therefore, project recommendations, if enacted, could lead to improvements over current US policies, narratives, and operations, and could eventually contribute to a reduction of tensions with China.

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Appendix 1: DKI-APCSS Vision, Mission, Guiding Principles (DKI-APCSS, 2019)

VISION, MISSION, GUIDING PRINCIPLES

With remarkable prescience, the late Senator Daniel K. Inouye, saw precisely such a role for DKI APCSS more than a quarter of a century ago. Despite the passage of time, his words continue to be relevant, and the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies accepts the challenge to help secure the future of the Indo-Pacific region.

VISION
A free and prosperous Indo-Pacific promoting collaborative, inclusive security.

MISSION
DKI APCSS builds *resilient capacity*, *shared understanding*, and *networked relationships* among civilian and military practitioners and institutions to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

DKI APCSS recognizes that the "how" of doing things can sometimes assume equal significance to the "why" and "what" is accomplished. Building enduring relationships based on trust, developing shared understandings, catalyzing networks of security professionals into collaborative action, all are the result of a unique environment carefully nurtured through the practice of three cardinal principles at the Center: Transparency, Mutual Respect, and Inclusion. These principles inspire everything we do at the Center. We instill these in anyone interacting with our Programs – shaping wider values and principles practiced in the Indo-Pacific – to provide fertile ground for enhanced understanding and collaborative approaches to shared challenges.

Transparency: Foster an environment that encourages open and honest communication and processes.
Mutual Respect: Value perspectives that are different from our own.
Inclusion: Seek to involve the broadest range of stakeholders and ideas.

Two Chinese People's Liberation Army officers participating in a DKI-APCSS activity

Appendix 2: DKI-APCSS Lines of Effort (DKI-APCSS, 2019)

LINES OF EFFORT

In pursuing the above Vision and Mission, DKI APCSS will focus on three principal Lines of Effort (LOE) that Educate, Connect, and Empower security practitioners. These LOEs frame what the Center "does" for its stakeholders.

LOE 1: Educate

Foster a learning environment both internally for our employees, as well as externally for everyone who interacts with DKI APCSS through our programs, to create an improved shared understanding of the Indo-Pacific.

LOE 2: Connect

Create, preserve, and expand extensive networked relationships of security practitioners so security challenges can be addressed through collaborative and complementary actions.

LOE 3: Empower

Provide our employees with the appropriate professional development opportunities and create a work environment that values their contributions and allows for professional growth. DKI APCSS will provide participants and Alumni the essential tools for critical thinking in today's highly complex security environment and to become change agents for their nations and organizations to build resilient capacity.

Appendix 3: DKI-APCSS Goals (DKI-APCSS, 2019)

GOALS

Four goals will be key to accomplishing the vision
and mission of DKI APCSS. These are:

GOAL 1: People

It is people who are affected by the security environment and it is people who will improve it. People are the most vital element to this Center and to the region. We aim to **empower and inspire a community committed to positively transforming the regional security environment.** We want people to be exemplars of innovative and critical thought who will take ownership in improving their security environments.

GOAL 2: Programs

Our programs provide participants with transformative education opportunities and enables them to return to their organizations to make positive changes. Programs are also designed to be interactive and collaborative, enabling the acquisition of crucial collaborative skills and laying the foundations for security networks to be nurtured. We aim to **innovate and champion relevant, integrated, and responsive programs that enhance regional security.** Our programs will provide value to stakeholders while remaining responsive, comprehensive, and efficient.

GOAL 3: Processes

Processes are key enablers of success in any organization and, at DKI APCSS, contribute significantly to its reputation as a premier institution. We aim to **synchronize and integrate adaptive processes that empower all stakeholders to optimize value and efficiency.** Our processes will be deliberately implemented and continually assessed.

GOAL 4: Infrastructure

From logistics and sustainment, to our buildings and IT architecture, infrastructure is what underpins the Center's professional learning environment. We aim to **optimize an infrastructure that fosters a safe, collaborative, inspirational, and transformative environment.** From the moment participants arrive, our infrastructure will provide all who interact with DKI APCSS an inviting educational experience that enhances their understanding of the region and inspires them to greater achievements.

THE DANIEL K. INOUYE ASIA-PACIFIC CENTER FOR SECURITY STUDIES

Established Sept. 4, 1995

Builds resilient capacity, shared understanding, and networked relationships among civilian and military practitioners and institutions to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific.
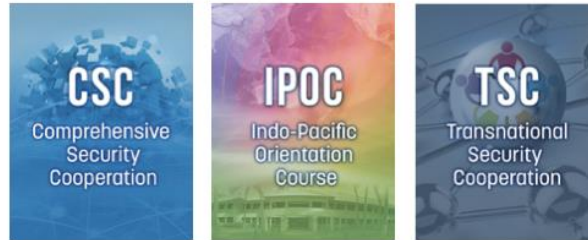
FACTS

204 COURSES HELD

139 COUNTRIES ATTENDING

15,402* GRADUATES

14,602 ALUMNI

111 VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENTS

6,839 VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENTS PARTICIPANTS
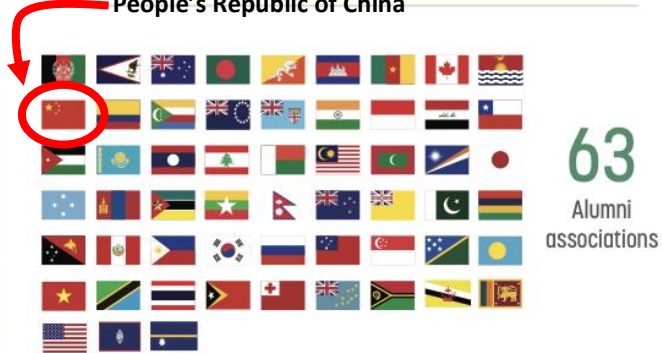
28 YEARS IN SERVICE

Connect

- DKIAPCSS.edu
- APCSSLink.org
- @APCSS
- @DKIAPCSS
- #dkiapcss
- DKIAPCSS.edu/youtube
- DKIAPCSS.edu/linkedin

* Total throughput including alumni who attended multiple courses.
January 1, 2023

Courses Offered

CSC Comprehensive Security Cooperation

IPOC Indo-Pacific Orientation Course

TSC Transnational Security Cooperation

People's Republic of China

63 Alumni associations

2,073 Alumni in senior positions

Position	Count
President/PM	7
Vice President/Deputy PM	11
Minister/Deputy Minister	100
Ambassador/High Commissioner	220
Chief or Deputy Chief of Defense	50
Chief or Deputy Chief of Service	69
Cabinet or Parliament appointment	200
General/Flag Officer	1416

229 WORKSHOPS

10,495 Participants

National Security Policy Development in the Pacific Islands: Shared Experiences, Lessons Learned and Best Practices
March 20-26, 2018 | Honolulu, Hawaii

Advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific
October 24-26, 2018 | Honolulu, Hawaii

Gray Zone Activities and Great Power Competition

Vanderbilt Capstone Project

My name is xxx xxxxxx and I am a third-year student in Vanderbilt University's online Doctorate of Education in Leadership and Learning in Organizations program.

As Dr. xxx xxxxxx has already informed you in a previous email, please complete the questions that follow. Also, all data derived from this will be kept confidential, and strict anonymity will be maintained to protect the identities of all project participants.

The questionnaires and survey require no advanced preparation and should take you roughly 30-60 minutes to complete. However, there is no time limit, so take as much time as you need. Also, if you prefer to write a draft of your response(s) in Word/Pages/etc, and then copy and paste into the response box, feel free. Additionally, at the bottom of each page is an option that enables you to save your work so you can return to it later.

Please ensure your responses are at the UNCLASSIFIED level. I respectfully request that you submit your responses by no later than June 22, 2023.

Thank you very much, and feel free to contact me at xxxxxx@vanderbilt.edu if you have questions about the project.

1)	What is your age?	○ 21–25 ○ 26–30 ○ 31–35 ○ 36–40 ○ 41–45 ○ 46–50 ○ 51–55 ○ 56–60 ○ 60 or older ○ Prefer not to state
2)	What is your highest academic degree?	○ Doctorate ○ Masters ○ Bachelors ○ Other
3)	What is your nationality?	○ United States ○ Other ○ Dual United States/Other
4)	If you selected either "Other" or "Dual United States/Other," please specify what your other nationality is.	_____
5)	What is your academic specialty?	_____

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Appendix 5, Survey Instrument (page 2 of 5)

6) What is your professional background? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

☐ Academic
☐ Current diplomat
☐ Former diplomat
☐ Current military
☐ Former/retired military
☐ Other

7) What is your religion?

○ Protestant
○ Catholic
○ Sunni Muslim
○ Shi'a Muslim
○ Hindu
○ Buddhist
○ Shinto
○ Taoist
○ Animist
○ Agnostic
○ Atheist
○ Other
○ Prefer not to state

8) What is your principal ethnicity?

○ East Asian
○ Northeast Asian
○ Southeast Asian
○ South Asian
○ Middle Eastern or North African
○ Pacific Islander
○ Black or African American
○ Hispanic or Latino
○ Native American or Alaskan Native
○ White or Caucasian
○ Multiracial or Biracial
○ An ethnicity not listed here
○ Prefer not to state

9) How would you describe your political views?

○ Very liberal
○ Slightly liberal
○ In the middle
○ Slightly conservative
○ Very conservative
○ Prefer not to state

10) Have you spent six consecutive months or more in some professional or personal capacity in China?

○ Yes
○ No

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Appendix 5, Survey Instrument (page 3 of 5)

End of Section 1; Begin Section 2

	Counterproductive	Between counterproductive and neutral	Neutral	Between neutral and ideal	Ideal
11) The US's current application of military force in the Indo-Pacific is:	○	○	○	○	○

12) Please explain your previous response in one paragraph or less.

_____

	Irrational	Between irrational and neutral	Neutral	Between neutral and rational	Rational
13) The US's current approach towards its engagement with China is:	○	○	○	○	○

14) Please explain your previous response in one paragraph or less.

_____

	Increases the likelihood of conflict	Between "increases the likelihood of conflict" and neutral	Neutral	Between neutral and "decreases the likelihood of conflict"	Decreases the likelihood of conflict
15) The US's current application of its other manifestations of national power (e.g., diplomatic, informational, economic, etc.) towards China:	○	○	○	○	○

16) Please explain your previous response in one paragraph or less.

_____

	A principal driver	Between "a principal driver" and neutral	Neutral	Between neutral and "ancillary to China's contributions	Ancillary to China's contributions
17) The US's contributions to current tensions between it and China are:	○	○	○	○	○

18) Please explain your previous response in one paragraph or less.

_____

projectredcap.org **REDCap**

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Appendix 5, Survey Instrument (page 4 of 5)

	Ineffective	Between ineffective and neutral	Neutral	Between neutral and effective	Effective
19) The US's application of soft power in the Indo-Pacific region is:	○	○	○	○	○

20) Please explain your previous response in one paragraph or less.

_____

	I am a layperson	I am between a layperson and conversant	I am conversant	I am between conversant and an expert	I am an expert
21) I self-assess my knowledge of US-China relational dynamics as:	○	○	○	○	○

22) Please explain your previous response in one paragraph or less.

_____

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Appendix 5, Survey Instrument (page 5 of 5)

End of Section 2; Begin Section 3

23) You are the Senior Director for China Policy within the US National Security Council. You report directly to the National Security Advisor, who reports directly to the President. You attend all meetings with the President that involve China policy, and s/he knows you and respects your advice. Today, following a meeting in the Oval Office, the National Security Advisor directed you to provide the President with innovative, non-military policy options that can lead to the diffusing of tensions with China in the Indo-Pacific region. The driver for this request is threefold: 1) the President wants to further isolate Russia because of its nefarious activities in Ukraine and elsewhere in the world; 2) s/he believes there are far more strategic points of convergence between China and the US than points of friction; and 3) s/he sees calm in the Indo-Pacific region as beneficial to US economic and security interests globally. Additionally, the President seeks non-military policy options because s/he feels that defense hawks, within the Administration, on Capitol Hill, and in key lobby groups, have an outsized voice in shaping American policy towards China.

Please prepare policy recommendations for the President. Limit your response to three to four concise paragraphs in the text box to the right. Also, while the President wants non-military policy options, this does not preclude a synthesis with US military capabilities, as long as this results in a reduction in tensions.

_____

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Appendix 6, Email to DKI-APCSS Faculty

Subject: Request your support for ██████'s Ed.D research

Colleagues

In the next couple days, you will receive an invitation from an old friend of the Center - ████████ - asking you to participate in a questionnaire/survey for his Ed.D capstone project at Vanderbilt University. For those who don't know ██, he was a military professor here at DKI-APCSS from 2009 to 2012 and is now in his third year at VU. His project centers on non-military options to mitigate tensions between the US and China, and he has received authorization from DKI-APCSS leadership to collect data from our academic faculty.

I've been ██'s DKI-APCSS point of contact on his project, and it will be very helpful for him to have as many responses as possible. He estimates it may take you between 30-60 minutes to complete the questionnaire/survey.

One point of note: you may want to add ██'s email address (██████@vanderbilt.edu) to your address book to prevent his invitation from winding up in your spam folder. That happened to me when we did a test run a couple days ago.

Mahalo nui loa, and don't hesitate to let me know if you have any questions.
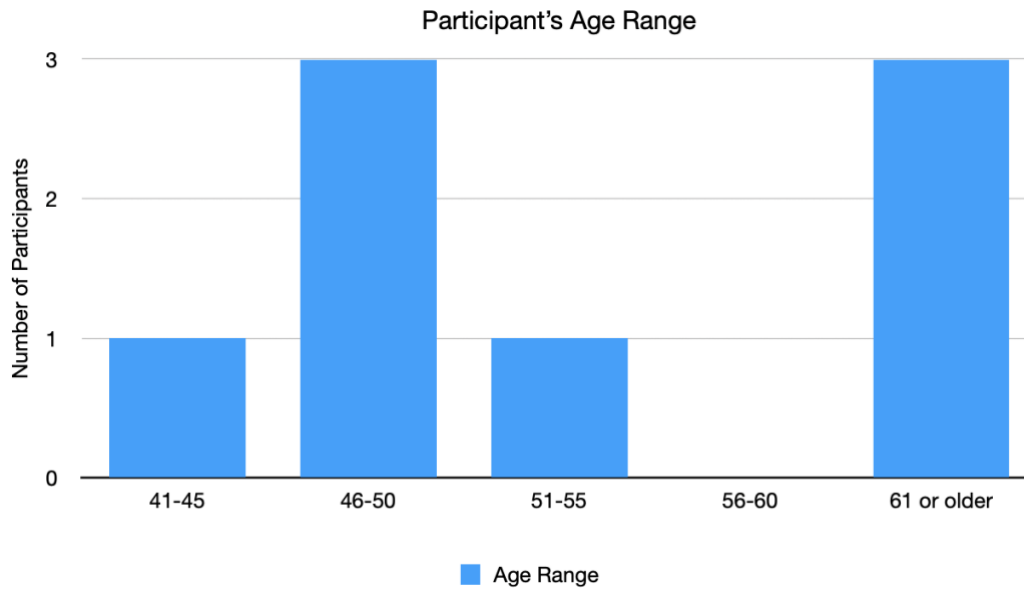
Aloha!

Appendix 7, Raw Data Excerpt

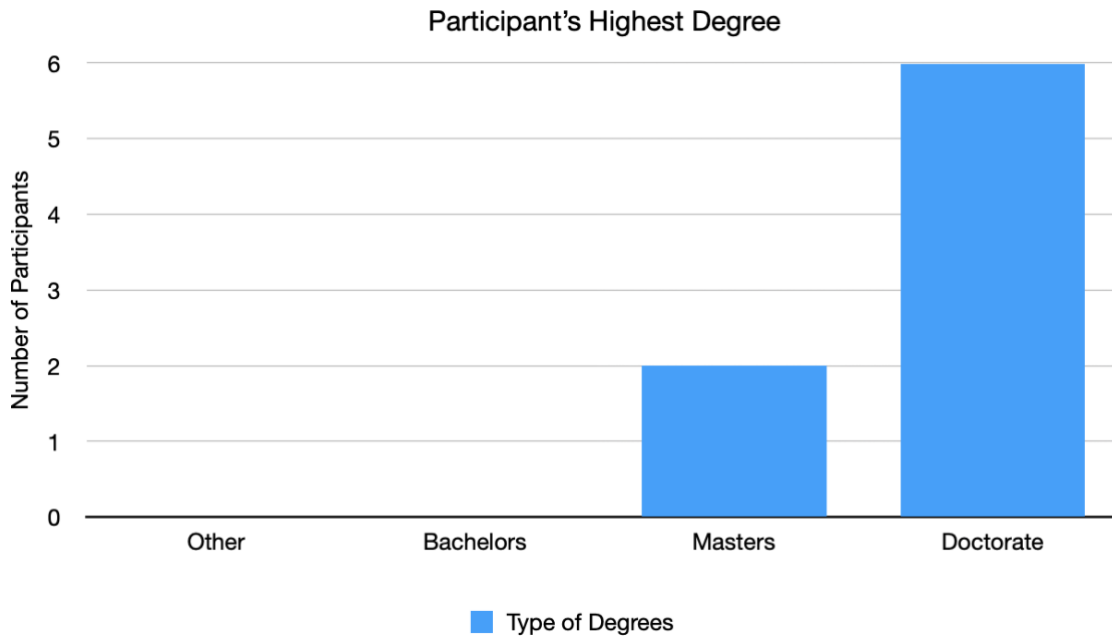| Participant	The US's current application of military force in the Indo-Pacific is:	Please explain your previous response in one paragraph or less.	The US's current approach towards its engagement with China is:
1	Between neutral and ideal	Presence in the region is needed, and should be a constant (which it's not always been in the past). But focus should be more on concrete helping of local populations, via CATs or other means - providing them with the sorts of assistance they want and need.	Between neutral and rational
2	Between neutral and ideal	The US plays an important role in Indo-Pacific security but needs to be more collaborative, which it is working on.	Rational
3	Between neutral and ideal	I don't think we have a thorough understanding, or maybe appreciation, for the way that our partners think about national/regional security matters.	Between neutral and rational
4	Between neutral and ideal	I believe our increased focus on building, strengthening, and improving alliances and partnerships is ideal and beneficial not only for competition with China, but for broader regional security. At the same time, I think we are overly reliant on the military lever of power and should invest effort and resources in diplomatic, economic, and information engagement.	Between neutral and rational

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This appendix also includes brief analysis on several of the data points drawn from my research.

1.

Participant's Age Range

2.

Participant's Highest Degree
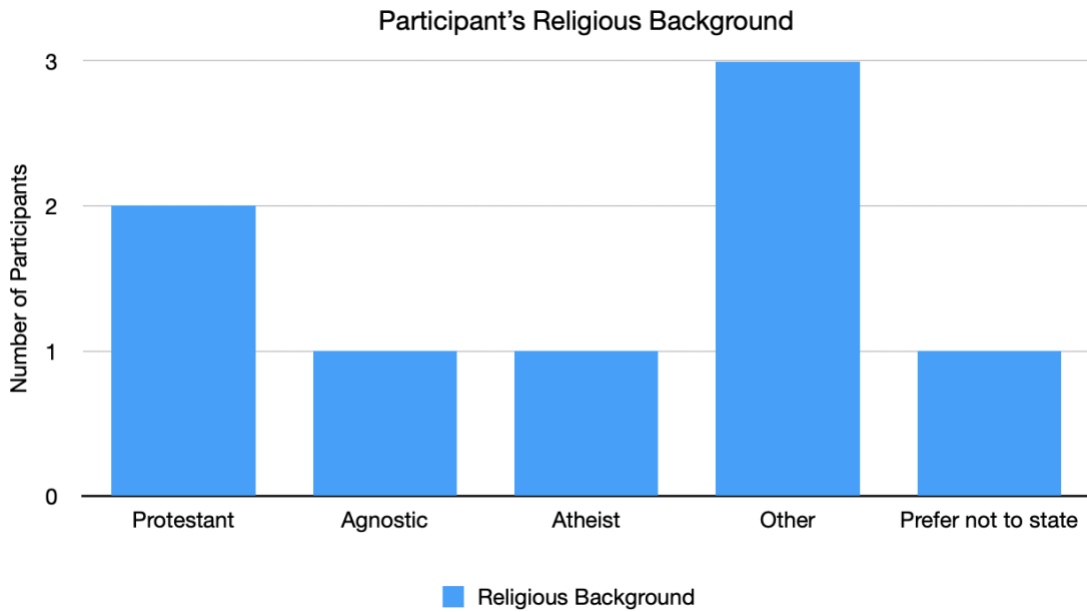
3.

Participants' Citizenship
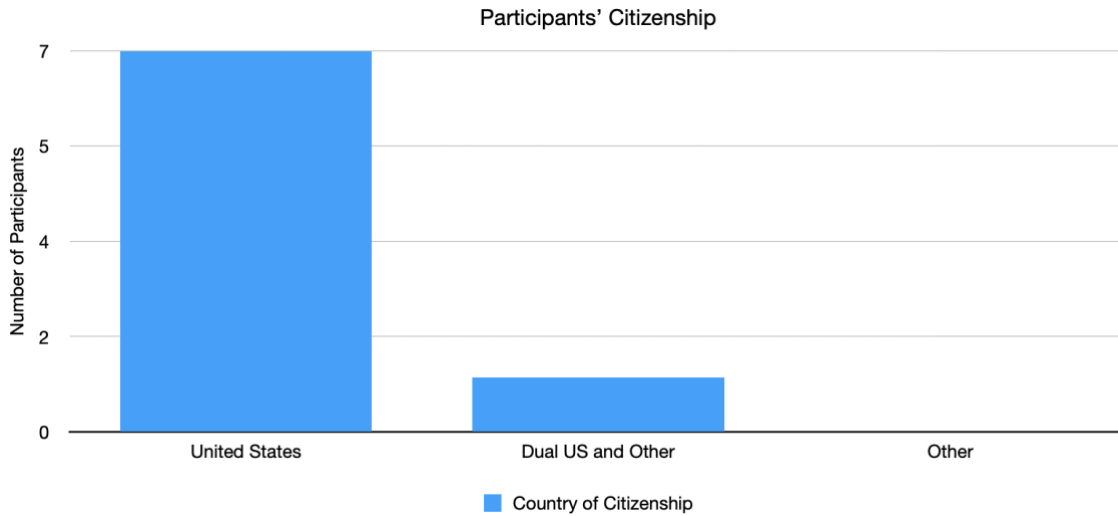
These results brought forth my first surprise. While the faculty of DKI-APCSS is mainly White-Caucasian, there are also several members who are citizens of other countries. Based on my data collection, none of those who participated were non-Americans, the lone exception being one faculty member who is a dual US/other country citizen. I viewed this as potentially significant since it could have signaled more of a pro US-bias on behalf of project participants. However, the responses to the other survey questions did not fully bear this out and as a result, it left me less concerned about this particular bias impacting the data. Specifically, while some of the more qualitative responses in Sections 2 and 3 did reflect some biases that could have impacted the data, these were balanced out by other, well-reasoned answers that supported my conceptual framework.

4.

Participant's Professional Background (participants can select all that apply)

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5.

Participant's Religious Background
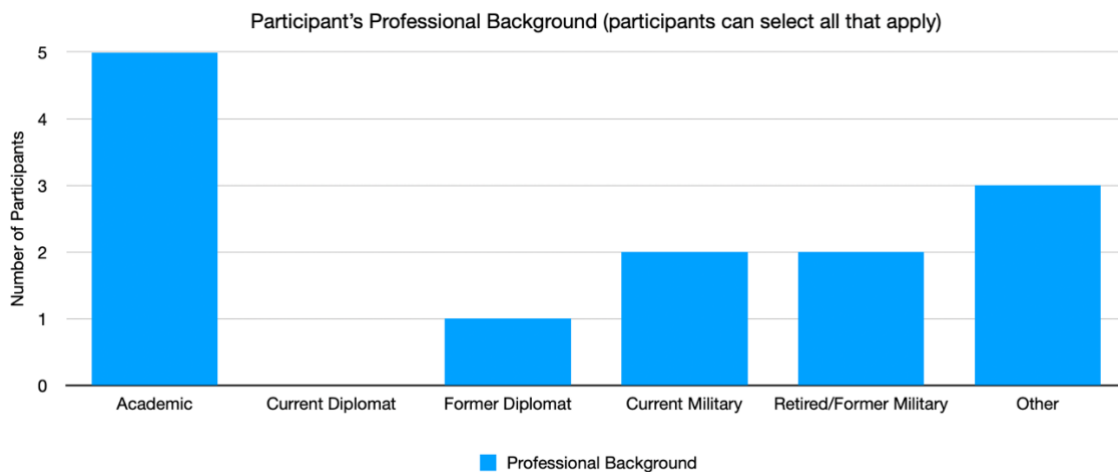
I was mildly surprised by these results, particularly when considering that nearly all participants self-identified as both US citizens and White/Caucasian elsewhere in Section 1. Such diversity would seem to indicate significant religious variance in the makeup of the faculty, and thus, perhaps a lesser propensity towards the lack of rigor attributed to more homogeneous groups (Apfelbaum, 2018). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that greater diversity in the workplace leads to debiasing (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2021). However, a larger sample size would have better supported such a conclusion.

6.

Participant's Political Preference
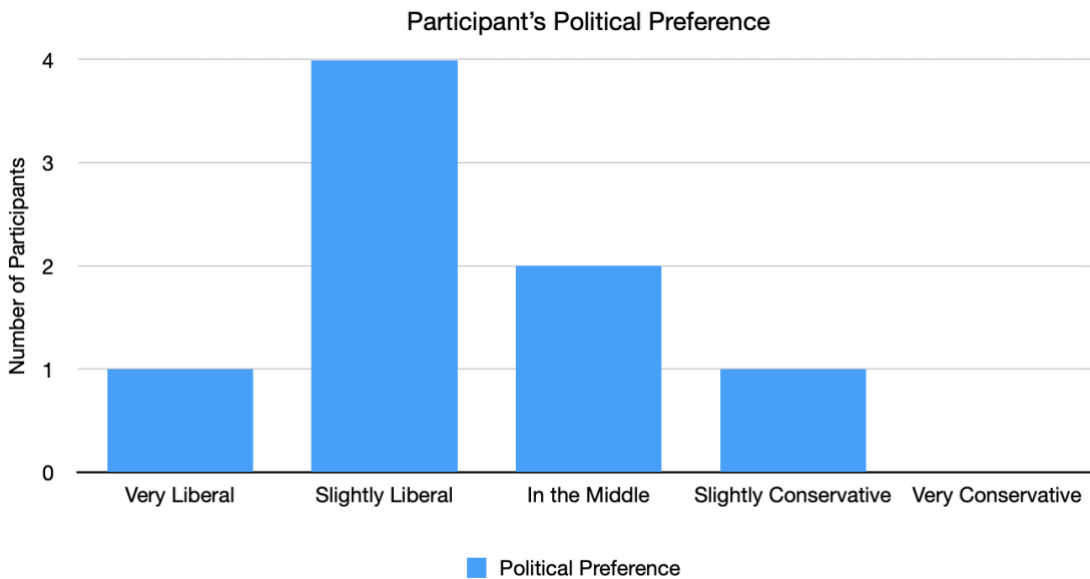
The fact that participants reflected a distinct center-left orientation was somewhat surprising, considering that DKI-APCSS is a DoD facility, its senior leaders are all former military, and it could be assumed that those who apply to work at the Center may lean more to the right. While the figure below

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supports the assertion that historically, active duty and former military personnel lean right (Newport, 2009), one could also conclude that academics who lean right might be more prone to seek employment at a DoD facility. However, and once again, perhaps a larger faculty sample size could tell a different story.

Party Identification, by Veteran Status

■ Republican   ■ Democrat   ■ Independent

Veteran/Active duty: 34% Republican, 29% Democrat, 33% Independent

Nonveteran: 26% Republican, 38% Democrat, 29% Independent

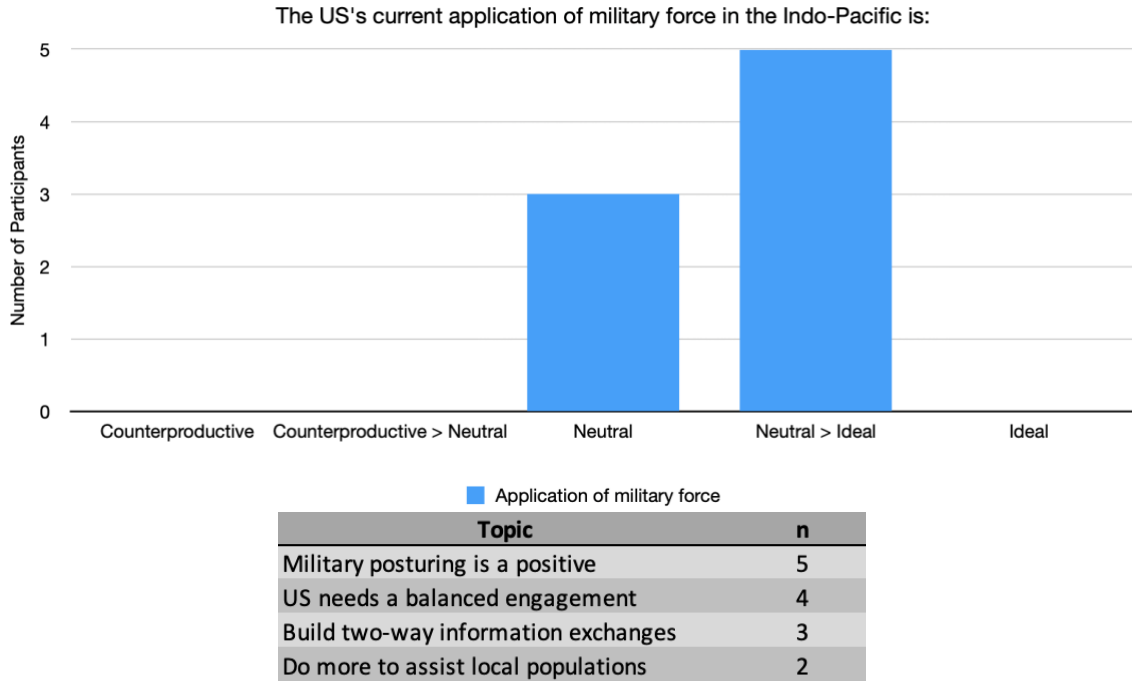Gallup Poll Daily tracking, Jan. 2-May 19, 2009
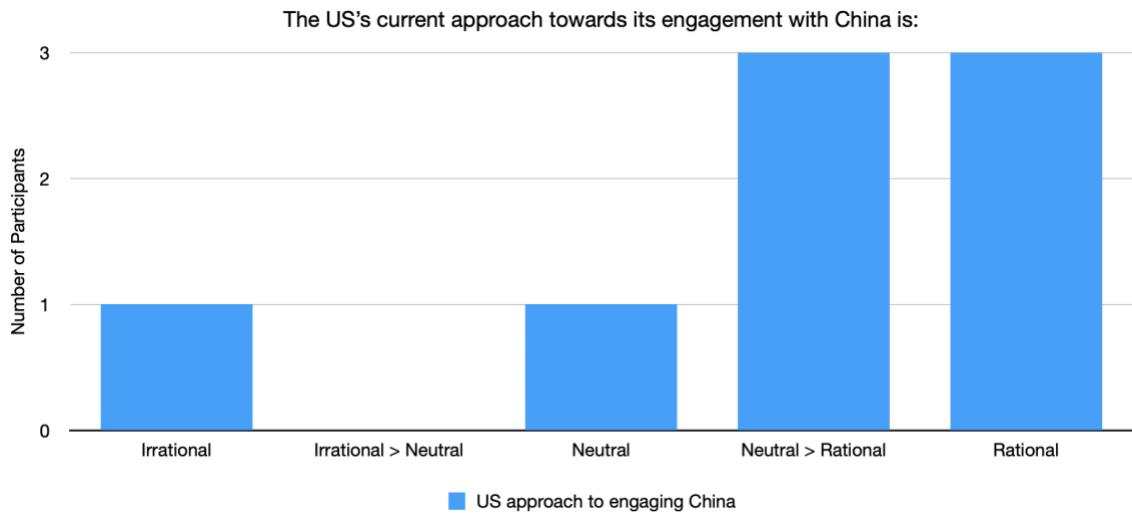
GALLUP POLL

(Newport, 2009)

7.

Have you spent six consecutive months or more in professional or personal capacity in China?

Yes: 1 participant

No: 7 participants

■ Six or More Months in China

This appendix also includes brief analysis on several of the data points drawn from my research.

1.

The US's current application of military force in the Indo-Pacific is:

Number of Participants

Counterproductive · Counterproductive > Neutral · Neutral · Neutral > Ideal · Ideal

■ Application of military force

Topic	n
Military posturing is a positive	5
US needs a balanced engagement	4
Build two-way information exchanges	3
Do more to assist local populations	2

2.

The US's current approach towards its engagement with China is:

Number of Participants

Irrational · Irrational > Neutral · Neutral · Neutral > Rational · Rational

■ US approach to engaging China

These results indicated that the US approach is generally rational. *Rational*, within this context, applies to international relations theory and supposes that nations behave rationally when considering their interests, while simultaneously weighing the potential for benefits and risks (Yetiv, 2011). And while one faculty member did respond that the US approach towards its engagement with China is irrational, no explanations were provided that could help to justify such an opinion.
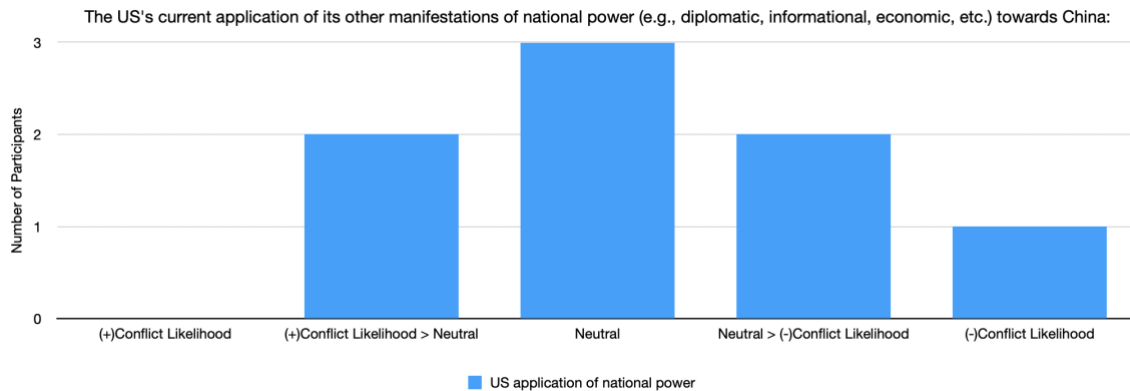
The figure below shows the coded responses I received for this question. The qualitative coding I used throughout this section and Section 3 was designed to highlight key points and trends as indicated

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by the participants, all centering on key interests of the US, China, and other interested parties. For this question, participants clearly leaned towards China as the key antagonist, and that the US should maintain its tough posture. At the same time, some participants also felt that more novel approaches towards engaging China would be welcome.

Topic	n
China against international norms	5
US needs to maintain its tough stance	3
US needs to consider different perspectives	3
US and China are inexorably linked	1
Climate and environmental issues	1
US response has been slow in the making	1

3.

The US's current application of its other manifestations of national power (e.g., diplomatic, informational, economic, etc.) towards China:

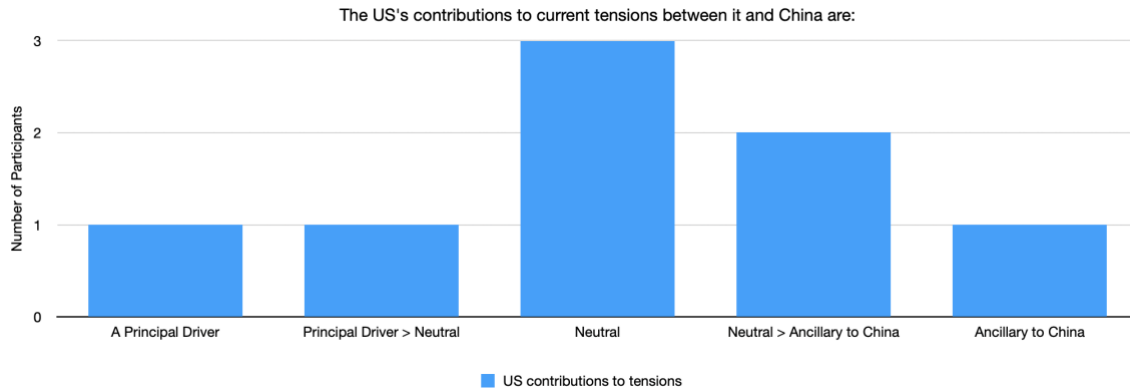US application of national power

These results clearly leaned towards US efforts as reducing the likelihood of conflict. While I somewhat expected this outcome, this could also be a manifestation of bias, perhaps of a pro-US or anti-China nature. Interestingly, the original project design was to invite Asian think tank analysts and researchers to serve as my project participants. In the end this was not possible due to an administrative hurdle that could not be overcome. However, it would have been fascinating to see if data provided by non-Americans would have offered different insights. Of course, they too might have exhibited biases, maybe of a more anti-US nature, particularly as recent polling in Southeast Asia shows that most regional countries now favor China over the US (Iwamoto, 2020). An ideal project design would have been to place the DKI-APCSS faculty members into a control group and their Asian counterparts into an experimental group, and to then compare the data from the two.

Qualitatively, several participants indicated that the US must do more with its tools of influence to shape Chinese behavior (see below figure). Such tools would comprise the various ways and means associated with the four conventional instruments of national power, all of which are featured prominently in this project. However, this is only applicable if such tools are able to motivate China to change its behavior. Thus far, it appears the application of the US's instruments of national power has been marginally effective at best.

Topic	n
US tools to influence China	4
US needs to maintain its tough stance	3
US and China are inexorably linked	2
Current US projection doesn't increase risk	2
US messaging on Chinese transgressions	2
US desire to maintain strong position	1

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4.

The US's contributions to current tensions between it and China are:

Y-axis: Number of Participants (0–3)	

Bar chart values:
- A Principal Driver: 1
- Principal Driver > Neutral: 1
- Neutral: 3
- Neutral > Ancillary to China: 2
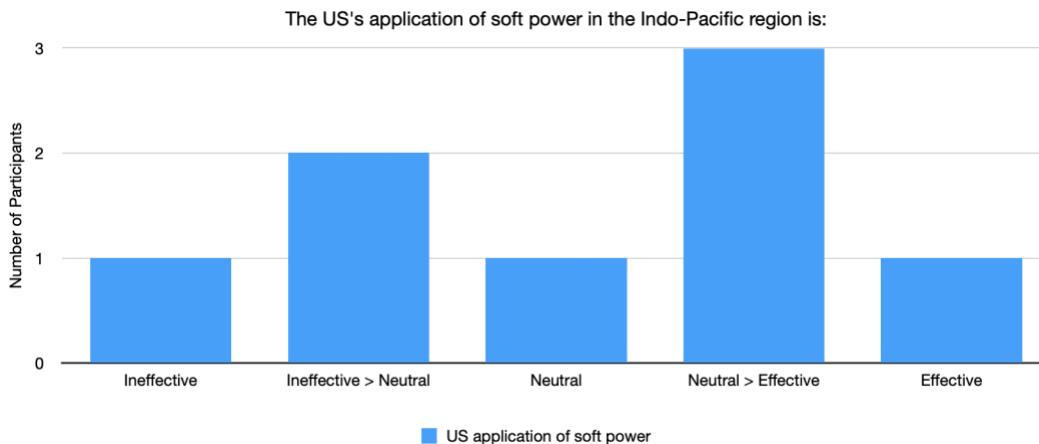- Ancillary to China: 1

■ US contributions to tensions

 While these results were generally balanced against both extremes, with a modest lean towards China as the more antagonistic, a larger sample size may have borne out a more conclusive outcome.
 A quantitative analysis of the data (see figure below) supports the perspective that China is indeed the bad actor. But once again, it is not possible to fully discount biases as a possible driver.

Topic	n
China's malign behavior	5
Influencing China to behave normally	2
Need more collaboration	1
Back away from competition	1
Inherent friction	1

5.

The US's application of soft power in the Indo-Pacific region is:

Y-axis: Number of Participants (0–3)

Bar chart values:
- Ineffective: 1
- Ineffective > Neutral: 2
- Neutral: 1
- Neutral > Effective: 3
- Effective: 1

■ US application of soft power

 Again, the data was inconclusive. But even with a diversity of responses, there is potentially a significant finding here within the lack of consensus. Obviously, the US desires its soft power application to be successful. When informed US academics are unable to arrive at such a conclusion, that is not a good sign for policymakers.
 A qualitative analysis of the data proves to be more conclusive. In Figure 15, responses from the participants were decisively in the corner of the US being deficient in its soft power application. By and large, no other country possesses the soft power resources as the US (The Soft Power 30, n.d.), but based on project data, American efforts do not seem to be hitting the mark. One of the participants noted that the US leads far too much with its military power and neglects its other instruments of national power.

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Perhaps acknowledging this would be a good first step towards making the application of US foreign policy, via its ample soft power, "more nuanced, more diverse, and ultimately more effective" (Seymour, 2020).

Topic	n
Deficient application of soft power	7
Do more to assist civilian populations	2

6.

I self-assess my knowledge of US-China relational dynamics as:
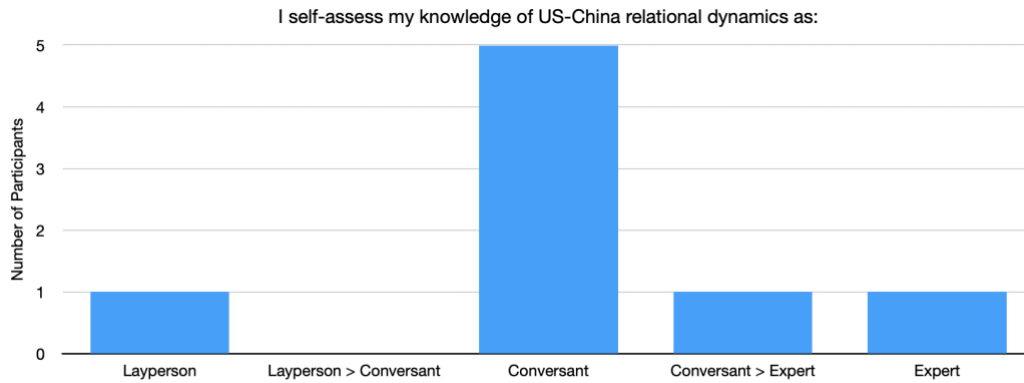
Topic	n
Experiential background	8
Complexity	1
China misunderstands the US	1

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Appendix 10, Section 3 Coding Matrix

Topic	n
Capitalize on US strengths	16
Potential for collaboration with China	12
Potential for collaboration with partners	3
Engage acitively in irregular competition	3
Nothing can be done	3
Messaging	2
Economic leveraging	2
Treat China as a rational actor	1

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Appendix 11, Section 3 Detailed Coding Matrix

Diplomatic				
Unilateral	Bilateral w/o PRC	Bilateral w/PRC	Multilateral w/o PRC	Multilateral w/PRC
C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9, C10, C11, C12, C18, C19, C20, D7, E1, E2, E4	E3	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, B1, B2, B3, B4, D3, D4, D5, D6	C13, C14, C15, C16, C17, C18, C19, D1, D2, D7, E5, E6	B4, D1, D2
19	1	13	12	3
			Total instances:	48

Informational/Intelligence				
Unilateral	Bilateral w/o PRC	Bilateral w/PRC	Multilateral w/o PRC	Multilateral w/PRC
C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9, C10, C11, C12, C18, C19, C20, D7, E1, E2, E4	E3	A3, B1, B2, B3, B4, D3, D4, D5, D6	C13, C14, C15, C16, C17, C18, C19, D1, D2, D7, E5, E6	B4, D1, D2
19	1	9	12	3
			Total instances:	44

Military				
Unilateral	Bilateral w/o PRC	Bilateral w/PRC	Multilateral w/o PRC	Multilateral w/PRC
C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9, C10, C11, C12, C18, C19, E1, E2, E4	E3	A5, D6	C13, C14, C15, C16, C17, C18, C19, C20, E5, E6	A1, A4, A5, B2, B3
17	1	2	10	5
			Total instances:	35

Economic				
Unilateral	Bilateral w/o PRC	Bilateral w/PRC	Multilateral w/o PRC	Multilateral w/PRC
C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9, C10, C11, C12, C18, C19, E1, E2, E4	E3	A1, A4, D6	C13, C14, C15, C16, C17, C18, C19, C20, D1, D2, E5, E6	D1, D2
17	1	3	12	2
			Total instances:	35

Coding Explanation

1. Respondent #1 is coded as "A." Their first response is matched with the appropriate category above and listed as "A1."
   a. Respondent #2's second response is "B2."
   b. Respondent #5's eighth response is "E8."

2. Coded responses to the questionnaire will be tallied on this spreadsheet under each appropriate column. Each coded response signifies an opportunity where a meaningful action can be taken.

3. Total number of instances exceeds the total number of responses since some responses can be applied to more than one category.

4. Instances are organized in the four conventional national power categories: Diplomatic, Informational/Intelligence, Military, and Economic.

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