

**EDELMAN:** Thanks for joining us today for this important conversation from the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. I'm Ambassador Eric Edelman, senior advisor here at FDD, and a member of the board of advisors for FDD's Center on Military and Political Power. FDD is a research institute exclusively focused on national security and foreign policy. We are nonpartisan and accept no funds from foreign governments. We are honored to have with us today Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs R. Clarke Cooper, for a discussion on the role of security assistance and arm sales and great power competition in the Indo-Pacific.

As the National Defense Strategy of 2018 acknowledged, we have entered a period of great power competition with both Russia and China. Due to China's growing economy and predatory economic statecraft the PRC is the pacing threat for this long-term strategic challenge. In recent months we have all watched China ignore international norms, bully other countries, and conduct dangerous military provocations. This behavior threatens U.S. interests, undermines regional stability and imperils the rule-based international order on which global security and prosperity depends. Thankfully, America already enjoys an impressive network of allies and partners in the region.

As my colleagues on the bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission that I co-chaired two years ago noted these alliances have: served as force- multipliers for U.S. influence, by promoting institutionalized cooperation between America and like-minded nations. They have allowed America to call on the aid of its friends in every major conflict it has waged since World War II. They have buttressed the concept of international order that the United States seeks to preserve, by enlisting other nations in the promotion of a world favorable to American interests. They have provided intelligence support, regional expertise, and other critical assistance. In short, alliances and partnerships rooted in shared interests and mutual respect have reduced the price America pays for global leadership and enhanced the advantages America enjoys over any geopolitical rival. But to get the most out of these alliances we need allies and partners who are as capable as possible in order to stand shoulder to shoulder with the United States to deter aggression from Beijing. That puts a premium on an increasingly robust strategy of U.S. security assistance in the Indo-Pacific that includes a comprehensive program of U.S. arms sales.

As a former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy who supervised the Defense Cooperation Security Agency which executes the Foreign Military Sales program I am keenly aware of the vital role that arms sales play in building the defense capabilities of partners and allies, facilitating persistent defense and security relationships and supporting the U.S. defense industrial base.

Today's discussion will feature a policy speech by Assistant Secretary Cooper, who will then join my friend and colleague Bradley Bowman for what promises to be a substantive and timely conversation. Brad serves as Senior Director of FDD's Center on Military and Political Power, where he focuses on U.S. defense policy and strategy. He has tremendous experience as a former long-time Senate staffer, Army officer and assistant professor at West Point.

Now it is my honor to introduce Assistant Secretary R. Clarke Cooper, who has served as Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs since May 2019. He brings to the position more than two decades of experience in both diplomatic and military roles, most recently serving as the Director of Intelligence Planning for the Joint Special Operations Command's Inter-Agency Task Force – National Capital Region.

Thank you again for joining us today. I am pleased to welcome Assistant Secretary Cooper to the virtual stage.

**COOPER:** Thank you for the kind introduction, Brad. You, Eric Edelman, and all the thought leaders at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies make invaluable contributions to America's foreign policy discourse, which

of course we will be doing further today. It is an honor to speak with you all, especially on the most pressing security challenges we face around the world: how we work with allies and partners to realize our shared vision of a free and open and independent Indo-Pacific region.

Nearly a decade ago, the previous Administration described an intended ‘pivot’ to Asia, but as we know, the ability for this nation to stay focused on the Indo-Pacific region does tend to ebb and flow depending on the conditions elsewhere in the world. Today, an increasingly assertive People’s Republic of China is flaunting international norms and bullying countries throughout the region, it requires consistency in our focus and our efforts. We cannot expect our partners to stand up, by themselves, to the PRC. It requires not only our attention, it requires our resources. Hence, the necessity to build an interoperable network of allies and partners – and enhancing our partners’ security capabilities through the arms sales and security assistance processes.

U.S. policy regarding the Indo-Pacific is bolstered by a set of core objectives: to promote freedom, openness, and cooperation. It is a rules-based international order – not of coercion, not of corruption, and not of crime. The United States seeks a pluralistic Indo-Pacific, where each and every state is sovereign and independent.

Pursuing these core objectives requires a whole-of-government effort by the United States, in which trade, scientific, educational, and cultural exchange play a role alongside diplomatic and military relationships. As the Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, it is the latter which I will be focusing on today, but I can and I want to be clear from the outset that security cooperation it does not – it cannot – exist in a vacuum, and everything my colleagues do within the PM Bureau, we do as part of a much broader strategy, in close cooperation with our partners over at the Department of Defense, as well as the intelligence community, USAID, the private sector, and of course beyond. With that clearly acknowledged, however, arms transfers and defense capacity building through security assistance are significant tools wielded by my Bureau and the entire interagency to promote foreign partner’s sovereignty and a free and open Indo-Pacific region, and are subject of our discussion here today.

Let me set the stage for that discussion by stepping back from the very specific geography as well as the challenges of the Indo-Pacific, and describing the broader context into which The United States’ security cooperation occurs in this era of Great Power Competition. The key, really, is that last word – competition.

America’s adversaries are not content to let us expand and deepen our global network of security partners uncontested. In particular, the People’s Republic of China and Russia increasingly turn to arms sales as a strategy to exert influence abroad and attempt to erode U.S. security partnerships, some of which we will talk about today.

Where America’s systems appear maybe too costly or slow to deliver, the PRC and Russia offer very deceptively aggressive pricing and accessibility. Their cut-rate prices often mask predatory financial mechanisms, corrupt and coercive political demands, and the long-term costs of maintaining undependable and, frankly, sub-par systems. And their ability to deliver these systems quickly and often depends on providing “off-the-shelf” solutions, which may not even fulfill partners’ basic requirements, let alone partners’ bespoke requirements. Nonetheless, their offer of speedy delivery and cost-savings holds a powerful allure for many of our security partners.

Russia and the PRC also like to tout their purported respect for partners’ sovereignty and policies of noninterference in other nations’ internal affairs, drawing this, of course, in contrast to the United States’ perennial concerns over the responsible end-use of U.S.-origin military equipment and partners’ respect for human rights. Where

the United States offers consistent engagement and long-term commitment, our adversaries offer a transactional approach to security cooperation taking advantage of potential partners in need, or in extremis.

But make no mistake: our adversaries are not merely economic opportunists; they are strategic in their targeted marketing of systems like the S-400 to U.S. partners, as well as allies. Through major arms sales, Russia and the PRC seek to disrupt our ability to share advanced U.S. technologies and maintain interoperability with our partners. No surprise, our adversaries are using arms sales to drive a wedge between the U.S. and our partners.

When they do manage to place their equipment and personnel along U.S. systems, our adversaries create opportunities to divert, to steal, to exploit, and otherwise misuse U.S. advanced technologies. Both the PRC and Russia are adept at using arms transfers as a point of entrée to gain access and collect intelligence.

To put these challenges in perspective, it is important to remember the United States remains far and away the world's greatest provider of security, through both our presence as a global force and the deterrence of our alliances; the single greatest provider of grant security assistance, we do this to the tune of about –\$15, well over \$15, billion a year between the Departments of State and Defense; and by far the most significant source of defense equipment for countries around the world, with U.S. defense exports being almost double of Russia's, and almost an order of magnitude greater than China's.

But at the same time, we must be clear-eyed as to how cooperation is increasingly contested in this age of Great Power Competition, and the associated risks of our rivals gaining any ground.

It is as important as ever for the United States not only to lift the veil of our strategic competitors, but also help our partners really understand the true risks of procuring systems from the PRC or Russia, but also make the case for why partnering with America is the wiser option; why partnering with America is the preferred option.

U.S. defense equipment remains the most capable in warfighting domain, from the top-flight F-35s we provide our closest allies to the life-saving armored vehicles we deliver to peacekeeping partners – to protect personnel against IED or other threats, which is, frankly, more than what can be said for the armored personnel carriers Kenya procured from China just a few years back, and which proved to be deeply vulnerable to IED attacks.

Second, the United States is committed to providing full-spectrum capabilities, not just the equipment. Through the Foreign Military Sales process, the United States offers a “Total Package Approach” this is for security cooperation, and it ensures foreign partners receive all the necessary training, education, and the institutional capacity to effectively employ and sustain U.S. systems and materiel.

Third, our policies and processes are marked by transparency, accountability, and predictability. Yes, our processes are slower, and we would like them to be a little faster, and I've worked toward that, and despite the many strides we have made to gain efficiencies, we've also done this to do this for cost savings. But all arms transfers are vetted against the same factors, which anyone can find for themselves and read in President Trump's Conventional Arms Transfer Policy, or the CAT policy. And almost all of our decisions are made public – this, of course, is unlike the star chamber determinations of processes in Russia and in the PRC.

Lastly, the United States views arms sales as significant, tangible instruments of foreign policy and the start, or the continuation of, a long-term security relationship. Whether a country commits to purchasing a military system from

the United States through our Foreign Military Sales, or FMS processes, or directly through industry through our Direct Commercial Sales processes, it is also entering into years of close security collaboration with the United States.

Within this context, and to counter the malign influences of our adversaries, we are applying a set of strategies and tactics on a global and a regional scale. First, and perhaps foremost, after ensuring the dominance of our own military forces, we seek to modernize and strengthen our alliances in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. The Department's regional bureaus lead these broad diplomatic efforts, but my Bureau, the Political-Military Affairs Bureau, plays an important role in shaping the security components. At the recent Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultation, for example, both sides signed a classified Statement of Principles where an Alliance Defense and that Cooperation and our Force Posture Priorities would be aligned in the Indo-Pacific.

To ensure we are fully synchronized, PM leads a series of political-military dialogues with key partners, we do this by encouraging more equitable burden-sharing, strengthening the effectiveness of our investments, and identify precisely how we can help increase a partners' resilience as well as increase their capacity for self-defense. The pandemic impacted some of our plans this year, but we have adapted, and we have been able to overcome and we are still conducting virtual dialogues like the one I recently co-chaired with Vietnam and the Vice-Minister of their Foreign Affairs department just a few weeks ago.

PM also leads and oversees bilateral security negotiations with allies and partners from around the world facilitating the movement, rotational presence, and the logistical support of U.S. forces and materiel abroad and also provide the protection to U.S. service members, members of our civilian component, the dependents, and of course our contractors overseas. Some of these agreements are also host nation support related and help defray the costs of stationing forces, in particular, Korea and Japan are prime examples of that.

It is also within our national security interest to promote, actively promote, America's prosperity, and we actively enable our embassies to strenuously advocate for U.S. defense trade, not only in a general sense, but also through specific cases that we've identified through our Defense Advocacy Working Group, and this allows a mission to be able to enhance interagency support for defense exports as well as help really level the playing field for America's defense industry.

Now returning to today's event, and the focus on the Indo-Pacific region, and how arms sales and security assistance fit into the approach, that aligns within our strategy. Simply summarized its capability and its capacity. So, we'll be talking about those capabilities, and capacities that support our partners in the region. Given the geography, one set of the challenges can be found is in, the maritime domain.

Here, we're cooperating with partners across the Indo-Pacific region, to make sure that they maintain freedom of navigation, and other unlawful uses of the sea, so that those are mitigated. And so that all nations, all nations, can access and benefit from the common maritime space.

This includes nearly a billion dollars in FFMF, and this is Foreign Military Financing, from fiscal year 16 through fiscal year 20; both in bilateral allocations, in support of the department's regional programs, but also particular programs like the Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative or SAMSI, and the Bay of Bengal Initiative, as well as plusing-up, back in 2018, in fiscal year 18, support for the Indo-Pacific strategy. These programs provide training as well as equipment enabling our South and Southeast Asian countries to better detect threats, to share information, and also respond collectively to natural as well as man-made crises.

Congress has also authorized a new State Department authority in fiscal year 2020 – This is one that I am particularly interested in. This is the CCIF, or the Countering Chinese Influence Fund. And, it is a global account. It is not limited to the region, but it includes about \$50 million in foreign military financing. And, \$25 million for non-proliferation activities, terrorism, demining and related programs or NADR. While it's not limited, as I said, to the Indo-Pac region, we are currently reviewing proposals. Many of them, very creative, on projects to counter Chinese malign influence and behavior.

Over the same period, the Department of Defense, their Maritime Security Initiative, or MSI, and section 333 funds, provided nearly a little over \$858 million in maritime security, counter-narcotics, and counter-terrorism capacity building, in the Indo-Pacific region. And, this was done to enhance of course, information sharing; which is well past on the defense spaces and into the law enforcement spaces, interoperability in multinational maritime cooperation. We're also providing new advisors to enhance maritime security and defense reforms in the Pacific. And, this is particularly in the islands in Oceania, and also to develop cyber policy in government frameworks in Mongolia. We're also working to continue the efforts with our ASEAN partners and allies to build maritime domain awareness. This goes back to the information sharing aspect. And this is also so we can combat maritime transnational crime and do this through the Southeast Asian Maritime Law Enforcement Initiative.

So, over the past two years, we've welcomed historic firsts in our maritime cooperation. Just in May of 2019, it seems like yesterday, the U.S. Navy alongside Japan, as well as India and the Philippines, all participated in a first group sale through the South China Sea. And in September in '19 we co-hosted with Thailand, the first U.S. ASEAN Maritime Exercise, and this was to strengthen the relationships, and again, that information sharing that is very necessary on maritime domain awareness. We did this between the navies amongst the ASEAN states, as well as the U.S.

So, beyond this, each partner in Indo-Pacific faces a very discreet set of challenges and deserving a tailored or bespoke set of solutions that reflect not only the challenges, but also reflect the current capabilities of that particular partner.

The U.S. has about, if we go into arms sales, we have about \$20 billion in active government to government sales cases with Japan, more than \$30 billion in active government-to-government cases with South Korea, and then about \$26 billion in cases with Australia. Each of these set of cases are driven entirely by host nation generated requirements.

Japan, for example, has recently requested an additional 105 of the F-35 Joint Strike fighters. And this is valued at a little over \$23 billion, which by the way, was the second, or is the second, largest single FMS case ever authorized by the Department of State in the history of the Department. And Japan's other major procurements reflect the self-defense needs of course, of the Island chain, in a very challenging neighborhood. And this includes some other assets like the E-2D Airborne Early Warning Aircraft, the MV-222 Osprey Tilt Rotor Aircraft and the SM-3 Block Ballistic Missile Defense Interceptor Missiles.

So, for Seoul, going over to their Korean peninsula, whose very much pressing need is to deter the DPRK and North Korea's aggression, major recent purchases include the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, the P-8 Patrol Aircraft, the Patriot Advanced Capability Three Missile Systems, and Global Hawk UAS, and then the KF-16 Airlift Upgrades and Aegis Combat Harpoon Missiles. And then the Apache, which is one that is quite popular to region, the AH-64D Attack Helicopters. And then for Australia, major sales there included also the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, and then the C-17 Globemaster, which of course is one that is quite desirable for long haul. And then the long-range anti-ship missiles, and then the Aegis Combat System Components. And of course, we are continuing ongoing support for Australia's fleet of their FA-18 Hornets.

Now, looking at other neighbors specific to Taiwan. Our partner there faces an increasing aggressive posture as well as pressures from the PRC. And our efforts there are consistent with the Taiwan Relations Act, and we want to make sure that what is available to Taiwan are defense articles and services necessary for Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense.

We also want to work in conjunction, and do, with DOD, to continuously assess Taiwan's defense requirements. And we do this consistently with Taipei as well. And it's in that strategic interest of the United States to provide these capabilities that we assess, make sense for Taiwan, and make sense also in the context of its asymmetric capability, as well as the innovative security approaches that are required in that space.

And based on our assessment of the increased PRC threat, as well as the aggressive postures that have been recently displayed, over the past three years, the Trump administration has implemented over \$15 billion in arms sales to Taiwan. And in addition to that, direct commercial sales authorizations during this same period, totaled a little over \$1 billion.

So then along the South China Sea, going over to the Philippines, they've received approximately about \$276 million in foreign military financing or FMF. And this averages about \$45 million annually, going back to 2016. The Philippines face an interesting dual challenge of not only maritime incursions by the PRC, but they're also dealing with illicit traffickers, terrorists, and then also the decades-long CT campaign in the South that we have been directly invested in. As such, our FMF supports the Philippines' Maritime Security capabilities, including these fleet upgrades they require, support for aerial reconnaissance capabilities, and development of a C4 intel surveillance targeting acquisition and reconnaissance network, as well as helping provide assistance for Philippine disaster response, natural disaster response, and again, building that CT capacity.

Moreover, under the EDA, or the wildly popular Excess Defense Articles Program, the United States has transferred three secretary-class, high-endurance cutters. We've also done one C-130 and 20 UH-1 aircraft, as well as about 114 armored tanks. We've also used the EDA program to provide several trucks. And then about 30,000 M16 rifles and some patrol boats. A whole host, a range of support to their ground, air, and sea. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the assistance to the Philippines. And we do this through the FMF funded. We've also provided high-endurance cutters, and these cutters regularly patrol the South China Sea in support of the Philippines and the Philippines' Maritime claims.

In Vietnam, going over there, we find security relationship with the United States is rapidly growing. This is a maturing relationship in recent years, as we built a common vision for a future, for a free and an open Indo-Pacific region, again, for all of the states.

If we look in the last few years, so going from FY-2016, up until FY-19, Vietnam has received a little over \$150 million in state-funded security assistance, again through FMF. Over about 58 million in bilateral FMF has supported not only the transfer, but it's also supported the refurbishment of two U.S. Coast Guard cutters to Vietnam. And again, this is through that very popular EDA or Excess Defense Articles Program. These vessels, these cutters represent the most significant major defense transfer between the United States and Vietnam. And they actually are currently the largest vessels in Vietnam's military.

FMS has also funded the acquisition of 24, these are the 45-foot Metal Shark fast patrol boats. We've also applied FMF in getting those last six over the finish line, and they were delivered in just May of this year. So that's something that is quite on the forefront for us.

Our efforts, not only in sales, but also grants has certainly enhanced Vietnam's Maritime domain awareness. It has also increased their capability to patrol their own territorial waters, and it's helped them to maintain the rights and the freedoms specified under the International Law of the Sea.

So of course, moving a little further west, we cannot forget the Indo in Indo-Pacific. And on the sub-continent, we're working to deepen our partnership with India and to strengthen India's defense capabilities in making sure that we can do this as we are accounting for China's provocation. And particularly, more recently on the line of actual control, since May. And then we also can look at the deadly encounter in Galwan in mid-June that left about 20 Indian soldiers dead. India knows all too well the neighbor to the north has little regard for respecting the status quo along the border. And that certainly has amplified the necessity for India's leadership in the region.

The U.S.-India defense cooperation relationship has undergone a rapid transformation during the Trump administration. If one looks at, from the last decade to now, that rise, that evolution, that vision identifies India as a key security partner, not just in Indo-Pacific region, but again, it's also commiserate with our bilateral relationship, and well-aligns with India as a major defense partner.

So, at the last 2+2 ministerial, and this was the dialogue between India and the United States, we committed to further expand military to military cooperation. This was also included, and this is a very timely reference this week, the quadrilateral mechanism with Japan and Australia. When President Trump was in India back in February of this year, it was where, in addition to announcing \$3 billion in new defense trade sales, both sides actually committed to continue to strengthen security cooperation. And this is between not just our two countries, but it's also looking at it from a regional context.

We also, in addition to arms sales, the PM Bureau in this space overseas peacekeeping cooperation. Well, this goes into, again, the broader context with our relationship with India. And we're very, very proud of the growing peacekeeping partnership that we have with India, including joint capacity building initiatives that we are doing with third country partners.

The United States has authorized India more than about \$18 billion in FMS since 2008, and at least \$3 billion on the direct commercial side since 2015. India today operates the second largest fleet of the C-17s, the Globemasters, and the Neptune P-81 Aircraft behind the United States. Those are significant statistics. And during President Trump's visit back in February, India agreed to purchase the Seahawk or the Mh6R Helos, as well as the Apache. So, if we just look at the Seahawk, that's a \$2.8 billion commitment. And then when we look at the Apaches, that's about a near \$800 million commitment the Indians have made, as well as large, infrared countermeasures for package on aircraft.

So if one's looking at the defense relationship, it's not without challenges, however. We talked a little bit about sales here, but there is definitely a positive trajectory as we work with India, as they reform their procurement processes, as we work together as partner in that space. And there's certainly strong bipartisan support here in Washington. And there's certainly across the aisle support amongst the different parties in New Delhi as well. Room to grow, but definitely wind in our sails to make progress.

With such support, it is certainly no exaggeration to declare India will prove to be a greater partner in achieving security. They'll be a greater partner in governance. And they will certainly be a greater partner in economic objectives for the Indo-Pacific region.

The United States certainly desires a free and open region. And as I said, this is for all countries to prosper side by side, as sovereign states, as independent states. And this is based on values underpinning peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific for generations. It is free, fair, and reciprocal trade, open investment environments, good governance, and the freedom of seas are goals. These are all goals, and we want to share these with all countries in the region. We want them to be able to prosper in a free and open space.

In this context, arms transfers and defense capacity building, those efforts for the region, they're carefully tailored to match the requirements. And as I mentioned earlier, the requirements are identified initially by our partners. And we want to be able to serve to enhance a partner's sovereignty. We want to advance American national security interests. And we particularly are doing this in the context of great power competition. We do this to ensure a free, open and rules-based region. So, thank you, look forward to the discourse on the Indo-Pacific and any other issues that may arise beyond the region.

**BOWMAN:** Assistant Secretary Cooper, thank you so much for those substantive and timely remarks. It's a pleasure to see you again.

**COOPER:** Good to see you, Brad. Glad to join you. Would prefer it in person, but we'll do it this way.

**BOWMAN:** Exactly. No, it's a real honor to talk with you and sincerely, thank you for covering so much ground in your remarks. I wish we had three hours to discuss all this. Unfortunately, we don't, but with your permission, let me just jump right in. I'm so pleased that you started with Great Power Competition and you ended with it, because to me, that is the context really for all of this. I think you made a persuasive case why America really should be the partner of choice, preferred partner, for a lot of our allies and partners in terms of their military capabilities. But for the average American who doesn't follow these issues quite as closely as you do, I would love to hear you just chat for a little bit if you're willing, why a robust system of security assistance, specifically arm sales, helps Americans. Why should the average American care about all these different programs that you've talked about?

**COOPER:** Right. Great question, and one that actually could be put in the context of, "Why should Americans care about foreign policy and national security at all?" And this actually strikes to some curriculum development we're doing at the department. I will give a little pitch for what our Foreign Service Institute is doing on to strengthen our diplomats to be able to, not only do their work in foreign form, but to better explain to fellow Americans as to why we seek to do what we do in the frame of the National Security Strategy, how we apply those ways and means to reach strategic ends, and why it matters at home. So, to your question on arm sales, anything that we can do that puts in a space a broader, what I can say, the concentric rings of security for not only the United States, but U.S. interests help keep us from limiting – It helps us limit the amount of boots on the ground that we would have, meaning U.S. boots on the ground.

It also goes right to the aspect of burden sharing and calling upon our partners to not only address shared challenges together and seek shared opportunities together, but actually keeping Americans off the battlefield. There's also not only a security imperative here or national security imperative, there's also an economic one. Arm sales do contribute to the economy and they are certainly in many respects tied to a mix, or I would say a diverse aspect of aerospace. So, it's not just the defense industrial base. And then, one can even look at how research and development applied toward arm sales actually does contribute to day-to-day life and products.

And we don't have time to discuss that today, but much of what we do including the platform you and I are communicating on today had its roots in defense research and development, much tied to how to shoot, move, and

communicate with defense articles and materiel. So, for yes, for folks who are not in the national security enterprise, why should they care? Well, we want to make sure that again, our homeland is safe. So, we're talking about a secure homeland. We want our interests abroad protected, and we also want to make sure that our partners and allies are doing their share to shoulder the burden. So, it's burden sharing, but it's also protecting our interests. And as I said, there's an economic imperative as well.

**BOWMAN:** That's great. What a great overview. Perhaps that explains why all these benefits that Americans accrue when we sell arms to partners and allies and make them more capable to stand shoulder with shoulder to us to secure common interests and counter common threats. Perhaps that's why Moscow and Beijing are acting so aggressively to try to convince those partners to instead buy from them. And you talked a little bit about this in your remarks, but we're seeing corruption, we're seeing lack of transparency, which is a real contrast as to when they work with Americans. Is it not?

**COOPER:** Absolutely is a contrast. I mentioned earlier that some of our partners are frustrated by our processes, but our transparency, our accountability, and our predictability, those are actually features of our arms transfers. Those are features of our security cooperation. Now bilaterally, I will sometimes have a ministerial counterpart from another country privately say to me that they are very grateful that that is in place, and so they may publicly grouse for political reasons. But they're privately very happy, because it provides them another layer of accountability. And also, particularly partners that are doing reform to advance openness and rule of law and partners that are fighting historic corruption issues, they do desire an open, accountable, and predictable system.

Some of our partners' big transactions require a parliamentary or legislative approval. For that to occur, our system actually, there's no guarantee, but I would put it this way, is that the fact that we have an accountable, transparent, and predictable system, it helps ensure that when there is a check to be written by a partner that that procurement comes through because we're able to show them exactly what it is that they're getting. And that there is no, as I said earlier, star chamber process in place and we're not coercive about it. That said, we have some partners that do have buyer's remorse and can't call that out here today. But I mean, there are numbers of partners that would much rather work with us, but have been in some cases, unfortunately coerced into some political schemes or some too-good-to-be-true easy credit rip-off schemes.

**BOWMAN:** No, it's a great point. You mentioned in your remarks that there was one example, specific example of an inferior product coming from one of our competitors. And I would suspect there are many other examples you might be able to cite where people have been bamboozled or via corruption have purchased something that in the end they regretted.

**COOPER:** Yeah. And also, you mentioned it as well. There's a risk. There's not only a risk to their capability and their ability to operate. I mean, one of the risks, and this is something that is a strategic drive coming from Moscow and Beijing is to disrupt interoperability not only with the United States, but with other partner states. So, if you look at multi-lateral interoperability, the NATO Alliance, for example. I mentioned ASEAN earlier in the context of the Indo-Pacific. It is key to be able to be interoperable with partners who are like-minded so that you can work together, have that information that you can share with each other and be able to have a common operating picture. And in some cases, with more advanced relationships, we want to have a common intelligence picture. And so how do you disrupt that? Action of significant platforms from Russia or the PRC would certainly be disruptive in that space.

**BOWMAN:** You mentioned The Quad. I know that Secretary Pompeo, along with the foreign ministers from Australia, Japan, and India are in Tokyo this week discussing the growing threat from China, and what more those four countries, known as The Quad, can do to secure a free and open Indo-Pacific. If you wouldn't mind, can you discuss The Quad, the key objectives for this week in Tokyo, and what the next steps are?

**COOPER:** Yeah. So, I mean, some of this space ties to bilateral lines not only between us, but Japan's bilateral relationship with India and Australia. Again, we've already talked about interoperability today. That definitely, The Quad strikes into that space of how we can get these States more interoperable, more integrated so that we can do things like freedom of navigation exercises. Then when it comes to a common operating picture or common intelligence picture, we don't want to do more information sharing. Again, that's going to require some bilateral efforts between the states, but The Quad does provide a platform to identify shared requirements, shared challenges, and also helps us get to a shared understanding. So, what could one predict out of this Quad?

Well, it's not just going to be a matter of fulfilling materiel requirements. It is going to take some homework on the part of each member of The Quad to address those gaps, so that we can become more interoperable and that we can be able to share information as well as work with each other in that space. If you open up this beyond security cooperation and in defense cooperation, and you look at things like trade, then this is where the discussion about the telecommunications ecosystem comes into play and the necessity to have clean networks or 5G clean network pass so that we don't put at risk some of the technologies and information we're sharing with each other.

**BOWMAN:** That's great. For me, The Quad is a wonderful symbol of the fact that what China, what Beijing is doing is not – It's not just U.S. v. China. It's not just the two great powers wrestling. It's really China versus the world, in terms of challenging norms and mores and laws and ultimately challenging peace and security of the region. And if that weren't true, I don't think we'd see our allies and partners stepping forward the way they are. So, it really is these four great powers, which frankly, must be a real nightmare for military planners in Beijing looking to bully their neighbors and implement a policy of might makes right, to see United States, Australia, Japan, and India operating together in a more unified and increasingly integrated and effective defense capabilities, it really is quite a positive thing, it seems to me.

**COOPER:** And a natural evolution.

**BOWMAN:** Exactly, exactly.

**COOPER:** That occurred because in part of Beijing's coercive posture.

**BOWMAN:** Exactly. In looking at the growing capabilities of the People's Liberation Army undertaking what I would call the most significant military modernization in the history of the PRC, they're increasingly able to target our large, main operating bases throughout the region, especially in the – what's called the First Island Chain. It occurs to me, and this is consistent with what the Pentagon's been working on as you know well, and the National Defense Strategy, that we have to make sure that our forces can survive and operate, so as to deter additional aggression or provocation from China. I'd be interested in what you could tell the audience, me and the audience, on what the Department of State may be doing in terms of negotiating new basing or access agreements, both now before a potential conflict, and also potential smaller bases where U.S. forces could displace to survive and be able to operate in the horrible eventuality of conflict with the PRC?

**COOPER:** Sure. So, basing isn't just limited to personnel. I mean, basing is very important for communications. It's also important for the ability to collect in certain places, and it's also important for logistical support when we're looking at not just air frames, but also naval capabilities. That said, from the Political Military Affairs perspective, it's a much broader look or aperture when we talk about defense negotiations. I mentioned earlier today about the security cooperation negotiations or defense cooperation agreements that we cover. Now that sometimes does include basing, often times, we're talking about the space of a status of forces agreements or visiting forces agreements that are usually done in a bilateral state-to-state process. We have one that we just started negotiating this week. This is the Host Nation Support Agreement with Japan. That happens to reach its expiry in March of 2021.

I identify that one, that's I would say a front runner for us right now, and one that is a mutual desire between Washington and Tokyo to work on, at a quick speed and make sure that we're not bumping up against that expiry date, but it's not the only one. We are still working on our SMA, our Special Measures Agreement with South Korea that is still en train. And then we've got some other agreements in the entire region that may be a little bit more finite as to what we would like to be able to achieve, but if you look at the patchwork quilt, so to speak, of the different bilateral agreements that we have in the region, they all do feed into a broader view of where we have the ability strategically to reach and access. And some of that could evolve and change in part because of partners' will and desire to take on a certain element, in some cases, a great amount of burden sharing. And then of course, we've already discussed several times today the particular nature and aggressive posture that is emanating from Beijing.

**BOWMAN:** Based on Russia's longtime cheating, as you know, the INF treaty is no longer relevant for the United States or Russia. And so that presents some opportunities as you know, to increase the lethality of US forces in the region. Can you speak generally to any initial discussions regarding the placement of intermediate range missiles in the region?

**COOPER:** I cannot talk in specificity about localities or ranges, but I mean, you did mention... We talked about posture, right? So, a post-INF world is certainly a planning factor, not only for the United States, but for a number of our allies and partners. It's a global conversation, right? So, it's not limited to the Indo-Pacific region. So, I would just say that there are, from a global view, an assessment is a combination of U.S. interests as far as what would be best, best serve our protection and our defense, but we also have partners that have actually come forth in bilateral channels to offer where they want to take on a greater role in that space.

**BOWMAN:** No, that's great. The South China Sea has obviously received a lot of attention. My sense is that what Beijing is trying to do there is push the U.S. further and further back, so that Beijing can more effectively bully its neighbors. And so, you talked quite a bit about Vietnam in your remarks, which I think is excellent, all that we're doing with them. Can you talk, if you will, and give us an update about options in the South China Sea, what change there's been on U.S. policy on maritime claims.

**COOPER:** Yeah. Well, so let's start with the PRC. So, they don't have a legal basis, and there's no legal foundation for the PRC to make the claims that they've had in the South China Sea. And that's a challenge, because it's an imposition on the entire region. So, what the United States has done is to make sure that areas or states that had the need to be able to move to that space, that it is open and free for all. And that it's not predicated on the PRC's definition of those claims. That has certainly has rankled Beijing, but we also wanted to make sure that we provided the confidence to our allies and partners that we stand with them, that we stand with them, and that their ability to be able to move through that space and not to be coerced or driven out of the South China Sea.

**BOWMAN:** Do you think we're working toward a more effective multilateral response in the South China Sea to what Beijing is doing? I mean, you mentioned the group sail through the South China Sea. What an important diplomatic and military symbol that was. Do you think we're going to see more of a multilateral unified response in the South China Sea based on the great work you're doing?

**COOPER:** The short answer is yes, but it does require a little bit more effort in multilateral fora. And I'm not just saying ASEAN, I mean, this requires some action on the United Nations part as well. Because if we're talking about not just our partners in that space. If we're talking about not just our partners in that space who are impacted, but there's, of course, international trade and navigation, that would and should benefit from freedom of movement in the South China Sea. So yes, it's incumbent upon states to ensure that there's responsible behaviors, not coercive behaviors happening in that space.

**BOWMAN:** In your remarks, you also discussed Taiwan. My sense with Taiwan is that you have a free prosperous democratic people that are thriving, and that's not a good thing for authoritarian Beijing, and so accordingly we've seen increasing provocation in the Taiwan Strait, as you know, and the seas and sky surrounding Taiwan. Ronald Reagan issued a memo to his secretary of defense, his secretary of state, back in the early 1980s saying that U.S. arm cells should be based on, it was rather logical, from the threat from Beijing. And for too long, I think, the U.S. has been a little, before this administration, was a little bit reluctant in providing Taiwan what they need. And as a result, there's been a shift in the balance of power, arguably, in Taiwan Strait that I fear encourages more aggression from Beijing.

So, can you talk about – Actually, I have a question from, as we try to replicate a live studio audience here, I have a question from Jennifer Hansler at CNN who is interested in anything you can say about, “What additional specific support is the US prepared to offer Taiwan and can you confirm the administration is readying the sale of up to seven large packages to Taiwan?”

**COOPER:** Yeah, so I'll start with, I'll go back to the relationship and how that is deeply rooted, not only in the Taiwan Relations Act going back 40 plus years, but you already mentioned what was at one point a classified memo from President Reagan as to how we would identify and shape our support there. It's not just bilateral. We share a common vision for a free and open region, so this is something where we want to make sure that Taiwan's defense capabilities are met and they've certainly been a very dependable, reliable partner in that region.

Now, as far as specific sales, no. I can't, and good on Jennifer for trying to ask, preview sales before we notify them to Congress. But it's worth mentioning, when we do notify a case for Taiwan of course it is certainly met with an expedient reply and action by our Congress. I would say if there is a partner out there that is a unifying force in Washington at a time where there is a healthy discourse on many issues, Taiwan and our relationship with Taipei crosses the aisle, transcends political party parochialness in a way that is not often seen with a number of our partners. So, I'm not going to be able to preview, but I would say that what we're doing in that space is to, of course, meet their defense needs. And as I've said, we are acutely aware and sensitive to the posture that is emanating from Beijing, particularly now with a Taiwan that has been more assertive. And with Taiwan with a second term presidency with President Tsai and her meeting her incumbency and requirements for Taiwan's self-defense.

**BOWMAN:** That's great. In your remarks, you also talked about the State Department's efforts to counter Beijing's malign activities, which I was so pleased to hear. FDD has stood up a China program, we have three full-time scholars looking full-time at all things China, including in detail into Chinese military civil fusion. Here's a question that might

sound a little simplistic, but I think has far reaching consequences. Do you think we should essentially banish the concept of a private Chinese company?

**COOPER:** Well, there is no such thing as a private Chinese company.

**BOWMAN:** There it is, exactly. Exactly, okay. That was simple.

**COOPER:** But I'm glad you mentioned this because this goes into another aspect I think that's lost on when we're working partners. Because the United States has a free and open economy, and we talked earlier about defense industry, well, that's it. It's private sector industry and so, it's market driven, it's requirements driven. And also, we're talking about profit does matter at the end of the day and we want to make sure that it's the best product. Well, supply and demand drive and create a better product. Innovation is certainly bolstered by an open market and open economy. No, I don't call armaments factory number five when we need to push out support or address a requirement for a partner. So yeah, it's a little farcical for there to be a claim of a private Chinese company when there really is no such thing.

**BOWMAN:** Right. It sounds rather obvious, I guess when I say it, but in an authoritarian regime, if the Chinese Communist Party calls, no Chinese company is going to be able to say no to that. So, when our German allies, or allies in the Indo-Pacific, are working with these "private companies," I think it's important to remember that they're not going to say no to the Chinese Communist Party.

**COOPER:** Well, I would also add to that, is that this is where we get into risk. And so, we talked a little bit about 5G and telecommunications, but any private entity in the West that's doing business with a so-called private Chinese company is incurring a significant amount of risk in many cases as to who are you exposing your technology to or your know how to? And so, you run the risk of, if not exploitation, you run the risk of just darn right outright theft of that intellectual property, as well as that unique technology.

**BOWMAN:** And we've seen arguably one of the greatest thefts of intellectual property in human history in what the Chinese party has done with respect to the United States and so we speak from scarring and experience when we say that, and we warn our allies and partners to watch out themselves.

If I may, in the remaining five or 10 minutes we have together, Assistant Secretary, I'd love to shift out of the region of the Indo-Pacific and ask you one or two quick questions on some news related to the Middle East. In my view, the administration has to be applauded for its role in the historic peace agreements between Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain, truly historic developments that I know took a lot of hard work behind the scenes. These and perhaps future agreements with Arab countries may increase their demand or their desire for American arm sales. Perhaps we're seeing that with the UAE and the reported interest in the F-35, I won't press you on that. But we have this policy of QME here in the United States, which in my view is both good policy and is codified in law. Can you discuss, if you wouldn't mind, QME and its relevance to decision-making going forward in terms of arms sales in the Middle East following these great historic agreements with UAE and Bahrain and potentially others?

**COOPER:** Right. So QME, so we talked about the qualitative military edge of Israel, as you noted, it's not just policy, it's actually statute and it's memorialized in the Arms Export Control Act. And so that requirement there for any partner in the region that is seeking to acquire particular capabilities or materiel has to be weighed against on how that may or may not impact Israel's capabilities. And of course, as an ally, Israel certainly has consideration in a form of primacy as to making sure that it is not eroded. And so that is a calculus that's applied on anything and everything in that region.

So, in the frame of the Abraham Accords, if you look at that, then you have this tremendous transformative situation where the Abraham Accords had provided a foundation for lasting and enduring peace, as well as tremendous economic opportunities. And so, we are still building out and realizing what those considerations are and what those very real linkages are. That said, it does not preclude the United States from keeping its commitment on QME. And so, I would just say that regardless of what materializes for a partner like, say, the United Arab Emirates or any other partner that seeks to meet their security and their defense requirements, QME still exists, it still matters, and we are very much committed to ensuring that Israel's QME is not impeded or degraded.

**BOWMAN:** Well, that's great. The central idea behind it is ensuring our closest and most reliable ally in the Middle East always has the best capability to defend itself. And as you said, that relates to both the quality or the capability of the weapons. To what degree does it, or should it, also include quantity or capacity?

**COOPER:** Yeah. So, not to get into the calculus or the alchemy of QME, but it is an inter-agency process, it certainly has some engineering factors and it certainly does factor in not just the bilateral. So, we've talked a little bit about that today, but yes, it does matter what requirement and material is maybe procured by a partner as to how does that impact or somehow change where Israel needs to pay particular attention to. So, all those things factor in, I would say. It's in a regional framework as well. It's not just a state to state framework, we have to look at it holistically from the region.

But again, the Trump administration's efforts on the securing of the Abraham Accords has really opened the door in a transformative space. And so, it has now taken this approach of where do we expect additional burden sharing? So, while there are new opportunities, we are also looking at where we're sharing, even closer, some of the challenges like the threat coming from Tehran, either in the form of Iran itself or through any one of the proxy groups, like Hezbollah or the Houthis. That said, again, it is still incumbent upon the United States to make sure that Israel's QME remains.

**BOWMAN:** Assistant Secretary Cooper, I want to thank you for spending some time with me. I've found this thoroughly enjoyable and informative. I hope you've enjoyed it as well. And I hope that we can do it again soon, like you said, in person.

**COOPER:** Yes. We can go onto the other parts of the globe on the GPC. There's more that we could cover there beyond the region, but look forward to it.

**BOWMAN:** Thank you, sir. To our viewers, this concludes our discussion. Thanks for watching. For more from FDD's Center on Military and Political Power, as well as our China Program, please visit [fdd.org](http://fdd.org). Thank you again.