

The US THINK TWICE Act and the Future of Indo-Pacific Partnerships

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Introduction

“Peace through strength... means we want our allies and our partners to rest easy while our adversaries think twice,” as stressed by the Migton Huston, Deputy Spokesperson, the US Department of State, which clearly demonstrates the US’s commitment to the Indo-Pacific region in securing the allied interests and taking proactive measures while working with the allies.² The proactive policies to secure allied interests are in the form of strengthening the Indo-Pacific

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² FPC Briefing, “U.S. Efforts to Promote a Free, Fair, and Open Indo-Pacific with Deputy Spokesperson Mignon Houston.”

partnerships and controlling Chinese military advancement. These two are complementary in the sense that they necessitate maintaining strategic influence in the region while refraining the swing states from hedging their bets against the allied interests. The priority is to prevent them from acquiring Chinese military instruments and to reduce dependency. This possesses complex dichotomy to the small states and the middle powers, whether to adopt Chinese military instruments and a conscious assessment of the consequences of the US economic repercussions.

Senator Pete Ricketts' introduction of the *Tracking Hostile Industry Networks and Kit while Thwarting Weapons Imports from Chinese Entities (THINK TWICE) Act of 2025* demonstrates the US interest in the proactive assessment against the Chinese military advancement.³ This is a conscious evaluation of the Chinese military industrial complex that needs to be countered through refraining countries from being dependent on Chinese military instruments. This is under the Trump administration's broader tariff umbrella to deter countries from acquiring Chinese weaponry.⁴ This requires interdepartmental coordination to assess the efficacy of the high-potential Chinese military instruments that poses threat to the US military industrial complex, and its overseas interests. That means through conscious assessment and evaluation of the threat from the Chinese defense industry, the US might take proactive measures through leveraging its control over the world economy and facilitating the exchange of high-tech military instruments among the partners in the region. This is a groundbreaking phenomenon in assessing the Trump administration's national security strategy, as this act's implementation would require proactive allied engagement in the Indo-Pacific to secure common interests. That means the effectiveness of Trump's broader tariff umbrella is tied up with its active engagement in the Indo-Pacific affairs if the US is concerned about Chinese military advancement.

Therefore, this article intends to analyze how the probable implementation of the US THINK TWICE Act of 2025 would reorient the future of the existing partnerships in the Indo-Pacific and the adaptive measures of the countries in achieving strategic autonomy.

³ Ricketts, "Senator Ricketts Introduces the THINK TWICE Act to Combat Chinese Arms Sales."

⁴ Harding, *The National Security Strategy*.

Strategic Rationale of the Act

The adaptation of the THINK TWICE Act would address the growing Chinese defense industrial reputation and the enhancement of its offensive military capability.

China is the fourth largest arms exporter after the US, Russia, and France, and its R&D subsidies are a prime contributor to the advancement of its defense industry and its offensive capacity. This is not limited to weapon exporting, as there are concerns for the US regarding the Chinese influence in the strategic locations, which are being enhanced as part of its A2/AD strategy.⁵ This also hinders the offensive capacity of the US from the Sea to the critical littorals, as countries using both the US modern military instruments and the Chinese low-cost advanced weaponry cause the mapping of electronic signatures of the US high-tech military instruments. This is not limited to breaking Intel only, but also gathering functional footprints of the US's military instruments, like the 5th-generation fighter jets. The C4ISR Chinese radar and HQ interceptor series are purchased, for example, by Malaysia, while the Malacca Strait is the core strategic location for the US to deter China from achieving offensive capacity to block it when tension escalates. And the use of Chinese radars in the crucial strategic littorals functions as a surveillance mechanism for the effectiveness of its A2/AD strategy.

Further, comparatively lower cost and efficacy of the Chinese modern fighter jets and the 5th generation fighter jets like JF17, J-16, J20, J10c, and J7 maintain their appeal, thereby competing with the 5th generation F-35.⁶ The effectiveness of the Chinese fighter jets proved their effectiveness in the Indo-Pak war, while the world witnessed a drastic price reduction of the giant Rafale. That's a major concern, as the bill was proposed, as the Chinese low-cost weaponry's consistent performance would drop the appeal of the West's high military tech grandeur. On a broader scale, the Chinese footprint is not limited to its focus on achieving high-tech superiority in the military industry, but rather it is maintaining the third world's consistent dependency on other kinds of weaponry as well. This is leveraging countries maintaining military hedging while reducing dependency on a particular side. So the application of the act would deter the smaller and growing middle powers from being dependent on China. The core of the US strategy would focus on deterring Chinese pattern in port and base control through creating soft economic and military

⁵ Spellman, "Opinion | How China's Military-Industrial Complex Is Reshaping Geopolitics."

⁶ 刘明, "All Types of Fifth-Generation Combat Planes Displayed at V-Day Parade."

dependency. Therefore, the implementation of the Act is expected to act as a proactive deterrent to the Chinese offensive military industrial advancement.

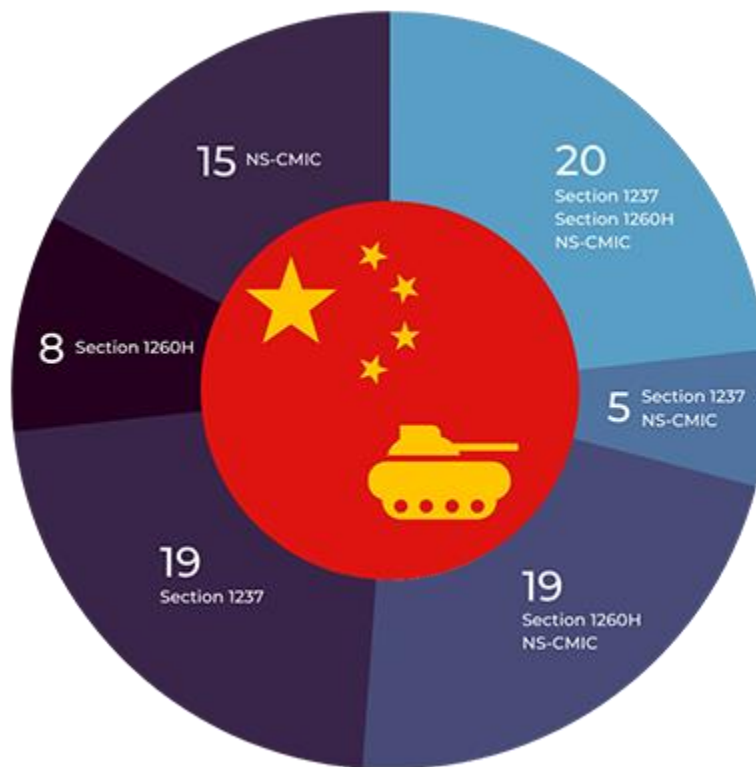


Figure 1: The U.S. to Restrict Trade and Investment that Support the Chinese Military.⁷

The Future of Indo-Pacific Partnerships

Why do the Indo-Pacific partnerships matter for the successful implementation of the Act? The answer is quite complex and depends on the effective implications of the THINK TWICE Act's objectives. There are two concerns: Does flexibility in swing states' hedging benefit the US's broader objective? If not, how can the impact of the successful application of the Act minimize the likelihood of further escalation and intensified tensions in the Indo-Pacific?

The Partnership Conundrum

⁷ The Wisconsin Project

The greater umbrella of the West-led Indo-Pacific partnerships sustains with the US's commitment not to be a threat to the allies' sovereignty while ensuring the US's involvement during the crisis with China. For example, Japan's only objective in the QUAD is to ensure the US's commitment and reduce the risk of the US abandoning it when the tension escalates with China. But India is the most complex member of the QUAD.⁸ The country is maintaining regional autonomy by neutralizing the US in the Indian Ocean region, while at the same time making military-industrial and economic contributions to the US's adversaries. These are the two cases that present references before thinking about the successful implementation of the Act and the future of existing partners. Again, the case of the AUKUS countries cannot be considered the primary tool to implement the US's security objectives without building confidence with non-Western allies.⁹ If QUAD fails, the US would need to pursue more coercive measures in maintaining a common security umbrella with its non-Western allies. But how long would the coerciveness be effective in the future to sustain the US-led Indo-Pacific partnerships remains a question.

Limited Space with Obscurity

The successful application of the Act is going to make the Indo-Pacific security apparatus divided into blocs, in effect. And there would be a limited opportunity for grey zone warfare, a greater likelihood of active engagement in conflict. The blurry space between peace and war would be substituted by a high level of tension and conflict. The effectiveness of the Chinese anti-access/area denial strategy might retaliate with a coercive stance that might harm the autonomy of the small states in its zone of influence. So the success of the THINK TWICE Act depends on the implementation of the US's commitment to not harming the autonomy of the littorals.¹⁰ This assurance would require the US's intense focus on the region that necessitates military deployments and acquiring more bases in strategic locations. The effectiveness of the proposed policy requires a stalemate situation that would balance with the security dilemma and would not threaten Chinese autonomy within its zone, while gradually building trust and confidence with the nations in the Indo-Pacific. A sudden lurch would necessitate the US's intense concentration in the Indo-Pacific, which would reduce its commitment in the Western hemisphere.

⁸ Bajpae, "Has India Defanged the Quad?"

⁹ AIIA, "Built on 'Hopes and Dreams' – AUKUS and the Future of Australian Foreign Policy."

¹⁰ Sen. Ricketts, "Text - S.2424 - 119th Congress (2025-2026)."

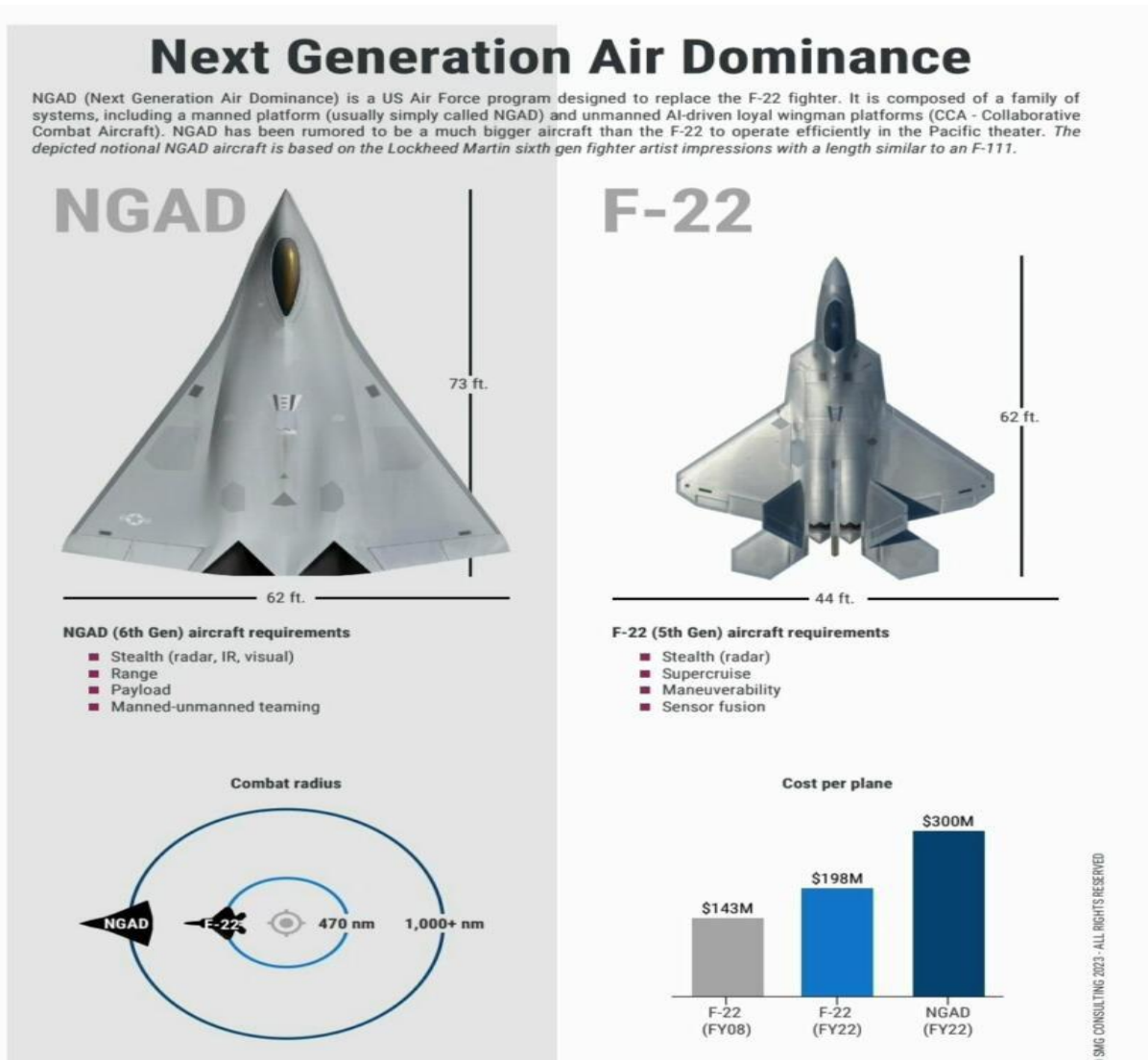


Figure 2: The US 6th Generation Fighter Projects.¹¹

Does Strategic Autonomy of the Littorals Benefit the US Broader Objective?

Considering the hedging strategies taken by the states in the Indo-Pacific, the sudden lurch would destabilize the status quo that might hinder the US's confidence-building process in the Indo-Pacific region. In consequence, vulnerable states that are highly dependent on Chinese supply chains of resources might counter-pressurize to bandwagon with China. In addition, the alternative sources of military instruments and kits might not be suitable and beneficial for a particular country to adopt, while risking its economy. This is why the threat of economic measures would struggle

¹¹ TP Huang. TP's Substact

to provide a cost-benefit advantage in deciding to join the US security umbrella, and would be counter-productive.

That means, if the small littoral states and the thriving middle powers in the region are forced to abandon their strategic autonomy and pursue a bandwagon strategy vis-à-vis the US, it would require segregating military cooperation from the economic cooperation with China. But the threat of economic consequences for purchasing military instruments from China blurs the grey zone to come up with any fruitful strategies. The countries might pressure the US to share their geo-economic and security implications of bandwagoning. This might pose an extra burden to the US while the country was intending to share burdens with its allies.

Then, What's the Future?

The remaining option for the US is to continue the pressure to reduce Chinese military weaponry dependency through a gradual trust-building process with the Indo-Pacific littorals while facilitating existing partnerships and adding new partners on the horizon. The policy implications of the THINK TWICE Act are highly dependent on allied cooperation and mutual consensus. The implementation of the Act is AUKUS-oriented, as the cooperation among the partners concerns for protecting the Pillar II cutting-edge technologies, cooperating to overcome bureaucratic hindrances for shared military tech advancement.¹² The reform initiatives of the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) would reduce the production time and cost while maintaining efficiency through cooperation among the AUKUS partners.¹³ This would leverage the allies to compete with the Chinese thriving high-tech military industry.

At the strategic level, the US THINK TWICE Act might closely align Australia and Japan in its success while dealing with complex partners like India to reduce its military kit dependency on China and Russia gradually. The US might pursue a pressurizing tactic through which it can successfully reduce the rest of the Indo-Pacific nations' dependence on China. This would require ranking the countries as Tier I, II, and III based on highly China-dependent security systems,

¹² Ricketts, "Senator Ricketts Introduces the THINK TWICE Act to Combat Chinese Arms Sales"; Spellman, "Opinion | How China's Military-Industrial Complex Is Reshaping Geopolitics"; AIIA, "Built on 'Hopes and Dreams' – AUKUS and the Future of Australian Foreign Policy."

¹³ Defense Security Corporation Agency, "Foreign Military Sales (FMS) | Defense Security Cooperation Agency"; The US Department of Defense, *2025 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*.

moderate, and lower, respectively. The economic repercussions would be applied by considering the extent to which a country is signed up to the Chinese security umbrella. To mention, this initiative is focused on obstructing the way to not subscribe to any kind of Chinese military objectives, and at the same time, maintaining the competitive superiority of the West.

Tier I Countries	High Dependence
Tier II Countries	Moderate Dependence
Tier III Countries	Low-level Dependency

Table 1: Labelling the likelihood of repercussions under the THINK TWICE Act of 2025.

Final Remarks: *Burden Sharing Through Coercion*

Whether the THINK TWICE Act would be successful depends on the US's successful dealing with its allies' interests in the Indo-Pacific. The country would need its allies' commitment to preserve the existing partnerships as well. But growing Chinese influence on the economy of the allies poses constraints to this kind of proactive measures. Increased Chinese influence in Oceania and the Australian economy might perform as a hindrance. Likewise, India's commitment to preserving allied interests is in question as the country is preserving strategic autonomy while maintaining trade and defense collaboration with the US's adversaries. This necessitates pursuing coercive measures to sustain the US-led Indo-Pacific partnerships.

It must be kept in mind that hampering the existing partnerships while implementing the Act is going to hamper the US's broader objective in the Indo-Pacific. The 2025 national security strategy's emphasis on burden sharing among the partners would be in great crisis when the US is trying to focus on its backyard as well. The reduction of the budget and the fleets is a precondition to focus on both the Western hemisphere and Indo-Pacific. That means, burden sharing among the partners, along with securing the allied commitment, is necessary. That's why the US must avail all the confidence-building measures among its partners and the nations in the Indo-Pacific to align the US's broader interests in the Indo-Pacific and the objective of the THINK TWICE Act of 2025.