As stated by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Force Design 2030 (FD2030) envisions expeditionary advance bases with stand-in forces capable of confronting opposing naval forces with “an array of low signature, affordable, and risk-worthy platforms and payloads.” The Center for Strategic and International Studies deduced from FD2030 that small Marine forces would deploy around the islands of the first island chain and the South China Sea, each element having the ability to contest the surrounding air and naval space using anti-air and anti-ship missiles. Based on these descriptions, what would be the role of the State Department and U.S. diplomacy in the implementation of FD2030? This article considers the questions that U.S. diplomats in the region would need to ask to accomplish the goals of FD2030.

First, U.S. diplomats must engage our close allies and partners like Japan, Australia, and India, which, together with the United States, make up the informal Quadrilateral Security Agreement, or “Quad,” grouping. The United States reaffirmed this diplomatic relationship following the 2017 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit in Manila. The State Department should begin by sending a message, coordinated with the DOD and the National Security Council, instructing Embassies Canberra, New Delhi, and Tokyo to approach the host government at the political leadership level and ask for three key things. First, FD2030 will need facilities throughout the region. How can our Quad partners assist in obtaining the facilities needed to support FD2030? Second, these facilities and the personnel engaged on those facilities will need logistical support. How can our Quad partners assist with logistical support? Third, FD2030 will need to partner with other nations in Southeast Asia. We will need the help of our Quad partners to identify those nations and to assist us in working with them in such a way that will benefit them but will also enable the requirements of FD2030.

Developing a diplomatic approach to enable FD2030 opens up new opportunities in the region. FD2030 provides an opportunity to deepen our partnership with Japan on infrastructure and engagement in the region. U.S. diplomats could ask their counterparts in Japan to advise and assist in building the infrastructure to deploy small Marine forces around the islands of the first island chain and the South China Sea. This will require delicate negotiation with nations in the region but will also open up economic opportunities for the development of this new infrastructure. In these ways, FD2030 would open up new avenues of engagement with our Quad partners.

Diplomatically, the United States would certainly want to consult with ASEAN regarding the concepts of FD2030. To respect the principle of ASEAN centrality, U.S. diplomats should begin by talking with the ASEAN chair. The 2020 chair, Vietnam, would likely be friendly and receptive while cautious not to alienate China. Although Vietnam has tried to work
jointly with China on coast guard patrolling and maritime policy, China’s continued harassment of Vietnamese fishermen and drilling interests opens up opportunities for agreements with more cooperative partners.\(^6\) \textit{FD2030} could provide the diplomatic catalyst for initiating conversations about new partnerships with Vietnam and other nations (e.g. Malaysia and the Philippines) that are growing impatient with China’s violations of territorial sovereignty.\(^7\) Given these circumstances, U.S. diplomats could propose expanded bilateral or multilateral partnerships with ASEAN countries in maritime domain awareness.

As recommended in the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) “Contested Spaces” report, the United States and Japan could invite teams of engineers and entrepreneurs from across Southeast Asia to participate in a contest to develop innovative and low-cost solutions to the region’s maritime domain awareness needs. Teams could compete to develop applications that would enable civilian fishing vessels to share information on a common platform that could pool data from commercial vessels and layer in cell phone pictures and text messages.\(^8\) Implementation of \textit{FD2030} provides a catalyst for initiating U.S. diplomatic discussions first with the ASEAN chair, Vietnam, but then with other willing partners in the region to establish increased maritime domain awareness.

As suggested by Patrick Cronin of the Hudson Institute, the distribution of forces around the region is a way to “maintain and expand access through low-footprint efforts designed to help address local problems, from humanitarian disasters to illegal fishing,” which, he said, should go along with modernizing early-warning systems in the region.\(^9\) Addressing these issues within the region could be used to build upon current military exercises, which would also support the implementation of \textit{FD2030}. The vision of \textit{FD2030} could be integrated into these exercises by employing small Marine forces with the ability to contest the surrounding air and naval space using anti-air and anti-ship missiles around the islands of the first island chain and the South China Sea. The employment of these forces could be exercised to increase maritime defense against counter-piracy, counter-terrorism, or other maritime concerns of ASEAN members—Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and all those with an interest in increasing the efficacy of maritime monitoring in the region.

Looking beyond maritime security to economic growth in the region, U.S. diplomats could ask their counterparts how the United States could collaborate in vocational and technical training to develop logistical support networks in the region. Logistics support will be a crucial element of \textit{FD2030}. Partnering in education would be an avenue of long-term diplomatic engagement in support of \textit{FD2030}. The CNAS “Contested Spaces” report remarked that countries in the region view human-capital development, especially vocational and technical training, as “fundamental to becoming innovation hubs in their own right.”\(^10\) Japan’s Kosen National Institute of Technology has partnered with Thailand’s universities to develop training for programmers.\(^11\) Similarly, partnering in vocational and technical education could develop regional partnerships to provide the training in logistics that will be needed for \textit{FD2030}.

\textit{FD2030} is an ambitious and innovative concept that could propel the Marine Corps into a new era of support to our nation’s security. Partnering with the diplomatic community will be an essential component of the success of this initiative. The questions proposed in this article provide a starting point for the diplomatic ask for our Quad partners as well as the ASEAN nations that are integrally connected to the vision of \textit{FD2030}.

**Notes**

6. Ibid.
10. “Contested Spaces.”

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**U.S. diplomats could propose expanded bilateral or multilateral partnerships with ASEAN...**

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