# COVID-19's National Security and Defence Lessons: Key Takeaways for Australia and India

John Coyne

## Abstract

*Since February 2020 hardly a day has gone by where a national security academic or policymaker has not used the word 'unprecedented' to describe global affairs in the age of COVID-19. The pandemic has created tectonic shifts in the globe's economic, social, political and international plates. With a vaccine yet to be found, there is increasing evidence that COVID-19's second-order impacts have assured one thing: further uncertainty in international affairs. The crisis after the crisis of COVID-19 is yet to take shape, but it is coming. To prepare for what could well be a decade or more of strategic uncertainty, countries like Australia and India need to consider COVID-19s national security lessons and how these might impact on assumptions regarding preparation for what comes next. This paper explores some of COVID-19s initial national security lessons for Australia and India.*

Dr. **John Coyne** is head of the North and Australia's Security Program at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute Canberra, Australia. Peter Jennings and Dr. John Coyne were editors and chapter authors for the institute's book *After Covid-19: Australia and the world rebuild* (Volume 1).

## Introduction

Despite the warnings of health experts, many policymakers across the globe had in the first two months of 2020 optimistically hoped that the rapidly evolving COVID-19 crisis would play out like the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).[1] They likely hoped there would be lots of hype with broad media coverage, followed by a rapid policy response that would quickly constrain further transmission.[2] While COVID-19 has not been an apocalyptic pandemic, as of 28 September 2020, it has killed almost a million people globally.[3] At the time of writing, 32 million people had been infected across the globe: with figures likely to be significantly higher given the varying quality of testing regimes. The pandemic is far from over and looks set to remain a global issue well into 2021.

Since February 2020, hardly a day has gone by where a national security academic or policymaker has not used the word 'unprecedented' to describe global affairs in the age of COVID-19. The pandemic has created tectonic shifts in the globe's economic, social, political and international plates. In April 2020, Richard Hass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations, argued that these changes are accelerating history rather than changing it.[4] Of course, the impact of these shifts varies between countries and regions. There are however, some worrying trends already emerging—especially, where accelerating change is putting pressure on existing international fault lines and vulnerabilities. These developments could well lead to systemic failures in the rules-based order.

Globalisation's promise of rapidly integrated, just in time, supply chains have now been tested in adversity and been found wanting just when they were needed the most.[5]

The pandemic has sent the world into an economic recession, of the kind not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s.[6] In many countries, COVID-19 measures have resulted into a swift decline in the demand for a range of products: which has had an impact on the

global economy. This demand reduction has also led to a rapid decline in employment. The final economic hit has been that global foreign direct investment has slowed to a trickle.[7]

Great power competition was increasing in intensity well before COVID-19, but it is here where the pandemic's accelerative impacts can be seen first-hand. The Indo-Pacific had become the main stage on which competition between the United States (US) and the Chinese government was playing out. This trend has significantly intensified over the last eight months, with little to suggest any improvements any time soon.

There is more than enough evidence to suggest that the Chinese government has sought to leverage COVID-19 to its advantage.[8] It has, without a doubt, sought to increase its influence across the region all the while undermining the rules-based order. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, there has been evidence of the Chinese government flexing its economic influence in countries like Australia.[9] From military skirmishes between Indian and Chinese troops in the Himalayas[10] to unplanned Chinese military aircraft encroaching dangerously close to Taiwan airspace,[11] international relations in 2020 are looking more and more like that of the last Cold War.

With a vaccine yet to be found, there is increasing evidence that COVID-19's second-order impacts have assured one thing: further uncertainty in international affairs. The crisis after the crisis of COVID-19 is yet to take shape, but it is coming. To prepare for what could well be a decade or more of strategic uncertainty, countries like Australia and India need to consider COVID-19s national security lessons and how these might impact on assumptions regarding preparation for what comes next.

## National Security and Defence Policy

Even before COVID-19 entered our daily vernacular, Australian and Indian strategists were increasingly concerned with the Chinese government's

efforts to undermine the global rules-based order. Moreover, there was a growing awareness that the Chinese government was building its soft and coercive power influence across the Indo-Pacific.[12]

In 2019, Australia focused on its pacific step-up,[13] while India watched the Chinese government's economic and security activities in Pakistan and the Himalayas.[14] Both understood the old Cold War was long gone, and the new one brewing was closer to home. Policymakers in both Canberra and New Delhi believed that while Beijing's ambitions did not represent an existential threat, it was not something to be ignored.

The problem here was not just a result of Chinese government policy. From Canberra to New Delhi, there was a concern about the impact of US President Donald Trump's erratic decision making on alliances and policy red lines. Many in Australia was comfortable that its alliance with the US was safe: in fact, closer than ever. Nevertheless, Trump seemed to be more interested in making friends with despots in North Korea and Russia than maintaining its long-held alliances. By mid-2019, Trump had managed to create unseen levels of strategic unpredictability.

In Australia's case, its then pre-eminent national security strategy document, the 2016 Defence White Paper, was deeply rooted in the 1980s thinking that assumed 10 or more years of strategic warning before any future conflict.[15] There was a reason for change. The security context described in the 2016 Defence White Paper had declined far quicker than anticipated. India was perhaps in a much better position to deal with the declining strategic context given its ongoing land border tensions with Pakistan and China.

By late 2019 Australia's Defence Minister had directed a strategic update of the Defence White Paper 2016. The outbreak of COVID-19 delayed the release of the review. The review's authors appear to have leveraged the delay as an opportunity to ensure that the update factored the early lessons of COVID-19, especially to resilience.

In August 2020, the Australian Defence Organisation released its 2020 Defence Strategic Update.[16] The update argued that the global security situation had deteriorated much faster than was anticipated in the 2016 Defence White Paper. Furthermore, for the first time since the 1980s, its authors argued that the warning time for major conflict was now under 10 years. It convincingly argued that:

"Australia now faces an environment of increasing strategic competition; the introduction of more capable military systems enabled by technological change; and the increasingly aggressive use of diverse grey-zone tactics to coerce states under the threshold for a conventional military response."[17]

The 2020 Defence Strategic Update contended that unlike previous global conflicts and during the Cold War, a future conflict, and it precursors would occur closer to home. This changing context has meant that Australia was no longer a strategic backwater in great power competition but key terrain in the struggle between the Chinese and the US governments over the Indo-Pacific. As such, it also reorientated the defence organisation to concentrate on its immediate region: ranging from the north-eastern Indian Ocean, through maritime and mainland South East Asia to Papua New Guinea and the South-West Pacific. It contained all-new strategic objectives to deploy military power to shape Australia's strategic environment, deter actions against its interests and, when required, respond with credible military force.

The headline story here is not one of a change in strategy, but of declining strategic context that is now gathering speed. COVID-19 has shown policymakers that many of the assumptions that underpin national security and defence policy no longer hold true in the new strategic context. Once lauded Chinese government initiatives like Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), are now being seen more widely for what they are:

influence building activities and planting the seeds for economic coercion and soft power influence.

Moreover, COVID-19 has illustrated that our national security strategies, established on long-term thinking, may require a level of agility not seen for several decades: if at all.

## Supply Chains and National Resilience

One of the first national security and defence lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic has been that globalisation's promises about the security of vertically integrated global supply chains appeared to crumble from the start of this global crisis.[18] After decades of allowing market forces to dictate the shape of just in time global supply chains, many a country was left with severely depleted national industrial capacity: especially, for manufacturing. In many cases, market forces had worked against the maintenance of a scalable industry base. To which, countries like Australia were far less resilient in the face of this crisis than they had assumed.

The early stages of the pandemic provided Australian policymakers with some timely lessons. Initially, its industry base could not surge and scale to manufacture personal protective equipment, including masks, ventilators and hand sanitiser. The rapid rise in global demand for these goods, and the slowing down of global supply chains was a hard policy lesson. It is also now a reminder of the importance of maintaining sovereign industry capabilities.

The pandemic has resulted in broad questions around strategic reserves and manufacturing capability. COVID-19 has been a stark reminder for Australian defence planners and strategists to review national resilience assumptions. For example, in Australia, a lack of strategic fuel reserves became a painfully evident policy priority during COVID-19.[19] Furthermore, the pandemic has also led more than a few Australian policymakers to reconsider their assumptions that future major conflict will be heartbreakingly destructive, but mercifully quick.[20] If these

assumptions are incorrect, is Australia's industrial base agile and scalable enough to sustain the nation during a period of protracted conflict? In the case of precision munitions, Australia finds itself with limited strategic reserves all the while sitting at the end of exceptionally long and vulnerable supply chains. COVID-19 has illustrated how a global crisis can result into a greater competition between allies for access to finite supplies.

In this context, it can be rightly argued that both Australia and India will need now to consider the size and scale of their respective strategic reserves of crucial commodities, and this will not be inexpensive. There is also additional pressure to develop national policies that assure a scalable industry base to support a range of contingencies.

These hard lessons on capacity have given rise to several echoing public discussions on the need to decouple somewhat from China's economy to ensure resilience economically. An attractive option, but to do so nations like Australia and India will need to decide on what has become a sovereign capability, and where and how they will recouple their economy to create much-needed resilience and supply chain security. There will undoubtedly be winners and losers in this recoupling process.

## Governments Capacity to Surge

As the COVID-19 virus took hold, large tracts of government's bureaucracy worldwide reluctantly adopted work from home strategies Australia and India were no exception to this. For the most part, the bureaucracy was able to maintain services. However, the more considerable challenge was the sudden increase in resource demands from some specific areas of the bureaucracy. From contact tracing clusters of infections, to assuring national supply chains, the priority given to functions of government have changed. Previously low priority functions of government now require all new resources with no luxury of time to recruit and train new staff. COVID-19 required an all-new approach from senior public servants. It required the development of an all-new capability. The capability to surge

appropriately trained, security cleared and experienced public servants to all-new jobs, while still maintaining COVID-19 prevention protocols. At the same time, the bureaucracy had to come to terms with the reality that it could not maintain the same level of service delivery as that which occurred before lockdowns and staff reallocations.

In broad terms, the lesson here was that nations facing national crises need a more agile public service. Moreover, this agile public service is as critical to national security as it is to emergency and crisis management. Exercising this kind of agility in government is no easy task. At the very least, COVID-19 has revealed that policymakers must consider promoting greater public service agility. The pandemic highlights the need for a more formal process for assessing and communicating the impacts of government decisions to surge its public service capability in response to a national crisis. For countries like India, with a large, layered and complex bureaucracy, promoting greater public service agility is a byzantine affair. This observation serves to highlight the urgency behind getting the machinery of government arrangements right before any future challenges arise.

## Military Support to Emergencies

In both Australia and India, the respective militaries have a long history of supporting government responses to national emergencies. From floods to fire and cyclones to tsunamis, the military in both countries has figured prominently in emergency responses. These responses have ranged from the provision of specialist military capability, including areas such as command and control, logistics, medical and transport, as well as physical labour for searching and immediate response for recovery and reconstruction.

In Australia, 2020 began with a significant bush fire emergency which required the deployment of a range of specialist military capabilities. Moreover, just as the risk abated, COVID-19 made its appearance. Again, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) deployed a range of capabilities to support state and federal governments with their ongoing responses to

the COVID-19 threat. In many cases, ADF personal are still providing the staff to support the quarantine process for Australians and permanent residents returning home. As the crisis lingers on, these arrangements are having a more significant impact on the ADF's ability to conduct individual and collective training.

While many continue to disagree on global warming, it seems self-evident that the frequency and intensity of natural disasters appears to be increasing in the Indo-Pacific. Already, the Australian Defence Organisation has acknowledged, in its 2020 Force Structure Update, that there will be increasing demands on the ADF to assist in emergencies.[21] On its own this increasing demand for defence resources would place a strain on the ADFs ability to raise, train and sustain its forces. However, this increasing demand is occurring at a time when the Indo-Pacific region is facing mounting strategic uncertainty. The situation for India is far worse with the increased security challenges and threats. Amidst the pandemic, India was hit by two cyclones—*Amphan* and *Nisagra* and has been constantly engaged militarily with China and Pakistan at the border.

So, while acknowledging that military support to COVID-19 measures has been admirable, many senior defence officials are likely concerned that this success may result in further tasking in the future. Moreover, that such a development could degrade their respective war-fighting capabilities. It seems that defence leaders will face a choice here, accept the praise and accolades and prepare to provide future support. Alternatively, these leaders could champion other policy approaches to support emergency responses. Such an approach could take many forms. One approach could be to continue to leverage existing defence capabilities. However, the allocation of additional resources and policy on the creation of new and more cost-effective military capabilities for responding to emergencies must underpin this approach. Alternatively, it could champion the creation of a more qualified and professionalised civil defence capability. Governments cannot expect to have their cake and eat

it too: an increasing demand for military assistance requires additional funding, or it will mean degrading capabilities.

## Re-engaging with Risk

In 2018, Dr. Johnathan Quick was not the first to raise concerns over both the increased likelihood and deadly consequence of a global pandemic.[22] Quick, using a range of sources, did however write the script for COVID-19: including its health social and economic impacts. His work argued that denial, complacency, and hubris were preventing governments from being ready for the next global pandemic: and as bad luck would have it, they did.

Despite the presence of longitudinal evidence of disease outbreaks occurring at increasing frequency, and risk assessments that indicated that a pandemic was possible, the insurance policy of preparation was deemed too expensive for such an unlikely event by many a government. Despite medical evidence and near misses with SARS and Ebola, experience did not encourage governments to engage with the disastrous consequences and likelihood of a Spanish Flu-like pandemic.

Most countries failed to take the pandemic risk sufficiently seriously. In many cases, they failed to engage with the possible scale and scope of a future pandemic because of an inability to reconcile humanity's progress with a threat type last seen in 1918 with the Spanish Flu.

Quick was right, in Australia's case, despite the conduct of a range of national-level desktop exercises with it world-class health system, during COVID-19 it quickly found itself with medical equipment shortages and no way to meet them.[23] Arguably policymakers had become all too comfortable with their ability to mitigate risk. Understandably, complacency about the risk was likely a key factor.

Finally, and probably linked somewhat to policymakers denial of the problem, hubris led to an overconfidence in the national and global capacities to deal with a pandemic problem.

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have varied dramatically between countries. Those countries with strong testing regimes and first-world medical capabilities are, despite high infections in the US, doing relatively well. Many developing nations are yet to fully understand the scale and impacts of the pandemic on their communities. Nevertheless, in those countries, often accustomed to dealing with epidemics of infections nearly eradicated in the first world, are appearing to be better equipped socially to deal with and recover from COVID-19.

Of course, hindsight is a beautiful gift, but rarely of use after the fact. However, the longer governments in Canberra and New Delhi struggle to deal with the pandemic, the more it will indelibly affect current and future leaders. It is more likely too that COVID-19 will bring a nagging discomfort with their understanding of national risk. It seems likely that governments will exit from the COVID-19 crisis more risk-averse and willing to invest in mitigation, response and recovery.

Defence and national security could well find themselves in the front and centre of this readjustment process. At the very least, for the time being, governments will think differently about the risks associated with the growing strategic uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific and the Chinese government's interference in the region. This changing dynamic will require much thought, more than likely over a noticeably short time frame. Senior military advisors and national security policymakers will need to be mindful to ensure that the immediacy of COVID-19 does not leave them ill-prepared to meet other contingencies driven by its consequences.

## Strategic Miscalculation and Operational Misadventure

The previous and current US Presidents, Barrack Obama and Donald Trump respectively, have done little during their terms to stem the growing tensions between their nation and the Chinese government. Obama's consistent failure to act when his government's official 'red lines' had been

crossed—like when the Syrian regime used chemical weapons against their people—has served to illustrate a systemic weakness in the resolve of the US to support a rules-based order and international norms.[24]

Trump's America first policy, disdain for long-term allies and engagement with some of the globe's worst despots, has shown that he cares little for rules-based order. While his government has made efforts to respond to Beijing's increasingly assertive policies, this has more to do with domestic politics. Trump's unpredictable behaviour serves only to project doubt over his commitment to the Indo-Pacific.

Over the last several years, there has been an acceleration in concern over the Chinese governments behaviour and intentions amongst governments in New Delhi, Canberra and Tokyo. This awareness has resulted in a reassessment of defence and national security strategies. There had been a reluctance amongst these governments to develop and implement comprehensive strategies to mitigate economic and national security vulnerable to Chinese government exploitation. Many a policymaker wanted to believe that the miracle of globalisation was good enough a reason to delay the resource costs of acting.

The lack of action was also likely a nagging concern over the economic impacts of unnecessarily standing in the way of Beijing's ambitions. And for a good reason. In 2010, the Chinese government used its domination of the rare earth element supply against Japan during a territorial dispute.[25] While unsuccessful in their efforts on that occasion, Beijing has become far more agile at using such methods in the decade since.

The Chinese government's assertive maritime strategy in the South China Sea, and grey zone tactics, continue to test Australia's resolve. There is an expanding body of evidence of the Chinese government's attempts at exerting influence in Australian affairs. Despite the severe impacts the Chinese government has continued to use of economic coercion against the Australian government: more recently seemingly as punishment for its leadership on an independent inquiry into COVID-19.

The Indian government faces not too dissimilar developments. India continues to stare down the Chinese government's assertive behaviour along its shared land borders. It has witnessed, first-hand, the increasingly destabilising impacts of China's BRI on regional security. The BRI projects in Pakistan have served to provide the Chinese government with new port access to the Indian Ocean and increased land connections with access to resources and markets. New Delhi now faces the spectre of China's increasing maritime activities across the Indian Ocean.

The emerging cold war between the US and Chinese governments is vastly different to the last. The rules for this cold war are far less precise than those between the US and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). While the USSR was intent on testing the US resolve, the existential threat of a nuclear war ensured cool heads and steady hands. Today, the Chinese government is unconstrained in its efforts to assert itself. In doing so, it increasingly tries to undermine the existing rules-based order through creating its own truth.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 is playing out at with this great power competition as a backdrop. It seems that Covid-19 is serving to accelerate the existing trend of increased strategic instability and uncertainty in the Indo-pacific.

The Chinese government's debt-trap diplomacy and dominance of strategic markets: like rare earth elements has afforded them a great deal of coercive economic power. COVID-19 has served to awaken some nations to the security vulnerabilities created by economic globalisation. Moreover, to the implications of China's status as the globes manufacturing house. Already, various discussions are being had about economic decoupling from the Chinese economy, building national resilience and supply chain security.[26] These responses have, without doubt, drawn the ire of the Chinese government. This COVID-19 driven development, has increased the strategic intensity in the Indo-Pacific region.

The last cold war's possible consequences included the existential threat of thermonuclear war. Thankfully, this kind of existential threat seems to be an unlikely consequence for the current strategic environment. The world is not out of the woods yet though. The possibility of a conflict in the Indo-Pacific, resulting from strategic miscalculation or operational misadventure, is more likely than ever.

Strategic uncertainty surrounding US diplomatic red lines and foreign policy, along with the accelerated policy development during COVID-19 have increased the possibility of the kind of strategic miscalculations that could well lead to unplanned and unwanted conflict. With the Chinese People's Liberation Army flexing its muscles across multiple domains, the possibility of an operational misadventure, such as has been seen in the Himalayan Mountains and the South China Sea, leading to a geographically broader conflict is also an all too real possibility for the Indo-Pacific.

Both Canberra and New Delhi need to adapt to deal with this new uncertain strategic reality rapidly. Central to this adaption will be responding consistently to Chinese government policy decisions in a way as to mitigate the possibility of future miscalculation in Beijing. At the same time Australia and India's junior commanders at sea, on the land and in the air will need to be thinking about their decisions and actions from a far more strategic perspective than ever before.

## Conclusion

The world is still battling COVID-19, and is yet to come to terms with the scale and scope of the crisis after this crisis. It is, however, clear that if Australia and India are to emerge from these dual crises successfully, then they both must quickly learn their lessons and adapt to meet what comes next. Both nations need a stable and secure Indo-Pacific if they are to enjoy a stable and secure future.

To successfully navigate the somewhat uncertain decade that will likely follow 2020, Australia and India will need to enhance their connectivity across the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, by deepening and reinvigorating ties with longstanding allies and friends.

On a positive note, the pandemic offers both Australia and India a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to critically review and reset policy and the assumptions that underpin them. For Australia and India, there is an opportunity to cooperate on economic and national security issues that will reduce strategic uncertainty. It also offers both a chance to mitigate some of the less desirable impacts of the last three decades of rapid globalisation.

The world that emerges after COVID-19 will need strong, like-minded countries like India and Australia to work closely together to set the foundation for continued global stability. Strategists will need to carefully consider the policy implications of each of COVID-19's lessons: of course remembering that the pandemic, and the crisis that will inevitably follow it, are far from over.

## Notes

1.  See World Health Organization (2020), "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)." Available online at https://www.who.int/health-topics/severe-acute-respiratory-syndrome#tab=tab_1, accessed on September 25, 2020.
2.  Talha Burki (2020), "The origins of SARS-CoV-2," *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, Vol. 20, Issue 9, pp. 1018-1019, September 1, 2020. Available online at https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(20)30641-1/fulltext, accessed on September 28, 2020.
3.  World Health Organization (2020), "WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboar." Available online at https://covid19.who.int/, accessed on October 6, 2020.
4.  Richard Hass (2020), "The Pandemic Will Accelerate History Rather Than Reshape It: Not Every Crisis Is a Turning Point," Foreign Affairs, April 7, 2020, at https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-04-07/pandemic-will-accelerate-history-rather-reshape-it, accessed on October 5, 2020.
5.  Deakin University (2020), "COVID-19 pandemic exposes weakness in Aussie supply chain," Media Release. Available online at https://www.deakin.edu.au/about-deakin/media-releases/articles/covid-19-pandemic-exposes-weakness-in-aussie-supply-chains, accessed on October 6, 2020.

6.  The World Bank (2020), "COVID-19 to plunge the global economy into the worst recession since World War II," Press Release, June 8, 2020. Available online at https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/08/covid-19-to-plunge-global-economy-into-worst-recession-since-world-war-ii, accessed on October 6, 2020.

7.  OECD (2020), COVID-19 and the global contraction in foreign direct investment," Development Matters, June 29, 2020. Available online at https://oecd-development-matters.org/2020/06/29/covid-19-and-the-global-contraction-in-foreign-direct-investment/, accessed on October 6, 2020.

8.  Elise Thomas, Albert Zhang and Jake Wallis (2020), "COVID-19 disinformation and social media manipulation," Australian Strategic Policy Institute, September 29, 2020. Available online at https://www.aspi.org.au/report/covid-19-disinformation, accessed on October 6, 2020.

9.  Michael Shoebridge (2020), "Wine-dumping 'investigation' shows Australian businesses must plan for Chinese coercion," The Strategist, August 21, 2020. Available online at https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/wine-dumping-investigation-shows-australian-businesses-must-plan-for-chinese-coercion/, accessed on October 5, 2020.

10. Jin Wu and Steven Lee Myers (2020), "Battle in the Himalayas," *The New York Times*, July 18, 2020. Available online at https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/18/world/asia/china-india-border-conflict.html, accessed on October 4, 2020.

11. Stephen Lee Myers (2020), "China sends warning to Taiwan and U.S. with big show of airpower", *The New York Times*, October 5, 2020. Available online at https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/18/world/asia/us-taiwan-china-jets.html, accessed on October 6, 2020.

12. Marc Purcell (2020), "We have to be hard-nosed about soft power in Asia," A*ustralian Financial Review*, March 13, 2020. Available online at https://www.afr.com/policy/foreign-affairs/we-have-to-be-hard-nosed-about-soft-power-in-asia-20200312-p549ci, accessed on October 3, 2020.

13. "Pacific Step-up," Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Available online at https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/Pages/the-pacific, accessed on October 3, 2020.

14. Shi Jiangtao (2020), "India's latest row with Pakistan adds to tensions in Himalayan region after China border clash," *South China Morning Post*, June 25, 2020. Available online at https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3090479/indias-latest-row-pakistan-adds-tensions-himalayan-region, accessed on October 3, 2020.

15. Department of Defence (2016), "2016 Defence White Paper." Available at https://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/docs/2016-defence-white-paper.pdf, accessed on October 3, 2020.

16. Department of Defence (2020), "2020 Defence Strategic Update." Available online at https://www.defence.gov.au/strategicupdate-2020/, accessed on October 3, 2020.

17. Ibid.

18. Deakin University (2020), "COVID-19 pandemic," n. 5.

19. John Coyne, Tony McCormack and Hal Crichton-Standish (2020), "In a crisis, Australians might be soon running on empty," The Strategist, May 13, 2020. Available online at

https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/in-a-crisis-australians-might-soon-be-running-on-empty-2/, accessed on October 6, 2020.

20. Ross Babbage (2020), "Ten questionable assumptions about future war in the Indo-Pacific," *Australian Journal of Defence and Strategic Studies*, 2(1), August 2020.

21. "Department of Defence (2020), "2020 Defence Strategic Update," n. 16.

22. Jonathan Quick (2018), *The end of epidemics: the looming threat to humanity and how to stop it,* Victoria: Scribe Publications.

23. Ibid.

24. Ben Rhodes (2018), "*Inside the White House during the Syrian 'Red Line' crisis,"* The Atlantic, June 3, 2018. Available online at https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/inside-the-white-house-during-the-syrian-red-line-crisis/561887/, accessed on October 5, 2020.

25. Julian Ryall (2020), "Japan moves to secure rare earths to reduce dependence on China," *South China Morning Post*, August 17, 2020. Available online athttps://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3097672/japan-moves-secure-rare-earths-reduce-dependence-china, accessed on October 2, 2020.

26. Valbona Zeneli and Joseph Vann (2020), "The real strategic end game in decoupling from China," The Diplomat, September 18, 2020. Available online at https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/the-real-strategic-end-game-in-decoupling-from-china/, accessed on October 5, 2020.