Later this May, the Biden administration is expected to unveil the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IEPF) – its signature economic and trade cooperation initiative for the Indo-Pacific region. The four-pillared framework will take the form of an “administrative arrangement” that “will not include new market access commitments” but will feature “high-standard outcomes” with a more “consultative” enforcement mechanism. The Framework clearly departs from the existing architecture of economic and trade liberalization in the Asia-Pacific, as represented by the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the Regional Economic Comprehensive Partnership (RCEP), and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA).

What is the Biden administration's thinking behind the launch of IPEF? Is the Framework the ‘real deal’ – a meaningful economic and trade liberalization initiative – or is it mostly about telegraphing good intentions of U.S. commitment to the region? How are East and Southeast Asian nations reacting to the Framework's launch and contents? Is IPEF fit for purpose as a meaningful regional rules-setting undertaking? Or is it primarily a means to de-emphasize – and decouple – the role of China within existing Asian and trans-Pacific supply chains?
Craig ALLEN is the current President of the United States-China Business Council in Washington, DC, a private, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization representing over 200 American companies doing business with China. Prior to joining USCBC, Craig had a long, distinguished career in US public service, beginning in 1985 at the Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration (ITA). He entered government as a Presidential Management Intern, rotating through the four branches of ITA. From 1986 to 1988, he was an international economist in ITA’s China Office. In 1988, Craig transferred to the American Institute in Taiwan, where he served as Director of the American Trade Center in Taipei. He held this position until 1992, when he returned to the Department of Commerce for a three-year posting at the US Embassy in Beijing as Commercial Attaché. In 1995, Craig was assigned to the US Embassy in Tokyo and in 1999 became a member of the Senior Foreign Service, serving tours in Seattle and working on the APEC Summits in Brunei, China, and Mexico. In 2002, it was back to Beijing, where Craig served as the Senior Commercial Officer and was later promoted to the Minister Counselor rank of the Senior Foreign Service. In 2006, he became Deputy Assistant Secretary for Asia at the US Department of Commerce International Trade Administration, later becoming Deputy Assistant Secretary for China. Craig was sworn in as the United States ambassador to Brunei Darussalam on December 19, 2014, where he served until July 2018, when he transitioned to President of the US-China Business Council.

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