

Strategy Research Project

A U.S. Strategy to Counter China's Airpower Modernization

by

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Abstract

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After years in the Middle East and Afghanistan, America formally asserted its renewed attention and commitment to Asia with the announcement of the U.S. Pacific rebalance in 2012. With this policy shift, the U.S. turned its focus squarely toward China whose rise challenges U.S. influence. After more than 200 years of contact, China stands today as neither enemy nor close ally of the United States. While China has long maintained a large Army, its recent economic boom has allowed it to significantly upgrade its airpower capabilities enabling power projection well beyond its borders. These improvements have stirred regional alarm and threaten the existing international order where the U.S. has long stood as the hegemonic leader. Historically, the phenomenon of rising powers challenging or surpassing the existing leading power has rarely ended peacefully. Thus, America must develop a strategy to counterbalance China's rising air arm in order to secure U.S. interests, reassure allies, and maintain regional stability.

A U.S. Strategy to Counter China's Airpower Modernization

The rise of China as a new power is another great challenge...Our failure to properly handle Germany and Japan earlier in the 20th century cost us and the world dearly. We must not make this same mistake with China.

—Steve Forbes¹

After years of focus on the Middle East and Afghanistan, America formally asserted a renewed attention and commitment to the Asian region with the announcement of the U.S. rebalance to the Pacific in 2012. With this policy shift, the United States endeavors to reaffirm its long-standing leadership in the Asian region and has turned its focus squarely towards China whose meteoric rise challenges U.S. regional influence. While the Pacific rebalance appears on the surface as a major strategic adjustment, the United States has actually long been a Pacific power, and its relationship with China even predates the signing of the U.S. Constitution. At the direction of the U.S. Congress, the first American representatives set sail for China on a ship named the *Empress of China* in 1784 to gain access to the lucrative tea, silk and porcelain trade.² With England reluctant to deal with the U.S. on the heels of the American Revolutionary War, America turned to Asia where it found a willing trading partner in China. Considering the U.S. had yet to expand its border westward to the Pacific and the Panama Canal had yet to be constructed, the emergence of a U.S.-China economic union seems highly improbable and becomes even more impressive.

Since the inception of this peaceful, economic relationship built on cooperation and mutual benefit, U.S.-China relations have oscillated continuously throughout history with varying degrees of interaction including cooperation, distrust, opposition, competition and even conflict. After more than 200 years of contact, the two countries have struggled to find common ground on which to build a lasting strategic partnership,

and China currently stands as neither enemy nor close ally of the United States. Due to the development of today's interdependent economies, the U.S. relationship with China would be best described as a competitive but necessary business arrangement, and China has benefitted tremendously from the relationship thus far. In terms of prestige, the U.S. successfully advocated for China's inclusion as a charter member on the United Nations' Security Council after World War II (WWII), despite opposition from the allied powers.³ As a result, China gained a seat equal in stature to the major powers even though China was not considered an equal at the time.⁴ Since becoming an open market economy, China has benefitted tremendously from the Asian economic system established by the U.S. after WWII, and the U.S. also played a key role in negotiating Chinese market reforms that ultimately enabled the country to join the World Trade Organization.⁵ Enabled by these U.S. actions, China has enjoyed unprecedented economic growth over the last thirty years, ascending to the second-largest economy in the world today.

While China has long maintained a large standing Army, its recent economic boom has allowed the country to significantly upgrade its military in terms of operational reach and technical capability in the air domain. China's investments in improved airpower capabilities, including advanced aircraft, air defense, aircraft carriers and ballistic missiles, enable power projection well beyond its borders. Consequently, these airpower improvements have stirred regional alarm and threaten the existing international order where the U.S. has long stood as the regional hegemonic leader. Further, China's airpower modernization has already begun to challenge the accustomed U.S. air and maritime dominance in the region with the capability gap

between the U.S. and China rapidly shrinking. Throughout history, the phenomenon of rising powers challenging or surpassing the existing leading power has rarely ended peacefully. In fact, a recent Harvard University study led by Graham Allison determined, “In 11 of 15 cases since 1500 in which a rising power rivaled a ruling power, the outcome was war.”⁶ Predating the Harvard study, the Peloponnesian War provides an iconic example of a conflict caused by a rising power where Thucydides chronicled, “The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Sparta, made war inevitable.”⁷ Thus, China’s rise intensifies the risk of potential conflict in Asia, and America must develop a whole-of-government approach to counterbalance China’s rising air arm in order to secure U.S. interests, reassure allies, and maintain regional hegemony and international order.

In order to develop a strategy to counter China’s airpower modernization, this paper examines some of the historical events that ultimately spurred China’s modernization efforts and identifies some of the significant advanced airpower capabilities being developed. Next, the analysis proposes a strategic approach and national objective designed to guide the development of a national strategy to counter China’s rising airpower. After determining the strategic approach, this paper analyzes the applicable U.S. interests in the region and explores three potential policy options the U.S. could pursue. After evaluating these options, this paper concludes with a recommended U.S. strategy to counter China’s airpower modernization and details the elements required to execute this strategy.

Framing the Strategic Environment

Due to Asia’s tremendous economic growth, the region has catapulted to the forefront of U.S. politics and interests. With the forecast projecting continued prosperity,

the region's importance will only continue to grow. The economic boom has also generated a second order effect where nations have been afforded the luxury of increasing their allotment towards defense spending. Consequently, China has transformed its airpower capabilities from a rudimentary, antiquated force into a formidable regional competitor that is challenging Asia's international order. In order to develop a strategy to counter Asia's evolving security dynamics, the U.S. must attempt to discern the inertia and motivation behind China's increased investment in airpower capabilities.

Background

In the 1990s, two significant events provided the driving force behind China's airpower modernization strategy. First, China was shaken by the destructive impact of the West's high-tech air arsenal and weaponry demonstrated in the 1991 Gulf War.⁸ Despite having a force significantly more modern than China, Iraq was quickly dismantled by the synchronized air operation conducted by the U.S. led coalition. Second, America's deployment of two aircraft carrier groups to the Taiwan Strait in reaction to Chinese ballistic-missile tests near Taiwanese ports in 1996 left China in a position where it was unable to respond to the superiority of American military power.⁹ Consequently, China realized its military equipment and force structure had grown woefully obsolete and embarked on a modernization strategy still in effect today.

After initially focusing on developing sufficient capability for its own defense, China has now progressed toward fielding an array of offensive components that can seriously place the security of its regional neighbors at risk.¹⁰ Equally disconcerting to the U.S., "China has already integrated within its force structure diverse weapon systems that are aimed at—and capable of—undermining the U.S. ability both to defend

its threatened allies in Asia” and to operate freely along the littorals in support of their security.¹¹ These destabilizing transformations forecast ominous signs the customary American air dominance has weakened and threaten to erode the American hegemonic order in Asia—an order the region and the U.S. have enjoyed since the end of WWII.

Particularly unsettling to the U.S., China’s modernization has fixated on the pursuit of “anti-access/area-denial” (A2/AD) or “asymmetric capabilities” designed to blunt America’s historically overwhelming power projection in the region. Similarly, these capabilities appear principally aimed at deterring American intervention in either an intraregional conflict or a crisis over Taiwan.¹² Consequently, several Chinese airpower programs offer justifiable cause for concern such as advanced cruise missiles, short and medium range conventional ballistic missiles, counterspace weapons, and military cyberspace capabilities, all of which appear designed to enable A2/AD. Additionally, China has continued to demonstrate improved capabilities in advanced fighter aircraft, as evidenced by the inaugural flight testing of the J-20 stealth fighter; the development of a second stealth fighter, the J-31; limited power projection, with the launch of China’s first aircraft carrier for sea trials; integrated air defenses; nuclear deterrence and strategic strike; improved command and control; and more sophisticated training and exercises within China’s air force.¹³

In the China Military Power Report for 2011, the Department of Defense (DoD) declared China’s air force as 25 percent “modern” which represents a significant increase from the year 2000 where they were then assessed at less than 2 percent modern.¹⁴ The report defines “modern” as “4th generation platforms (Su-27, Su-30, F-10) and platforms with 4th generation-like capabilities (FB-7).”¹⁵ Meaning out of a total of

1,680 fighters identified in the DoD report, approximately 420 are regarded as 4th generation aircraft comparable in sophistication to Taiwan's air force of only 388 fighters with the disparity continuing to grow in China's favor.¹⁶ While Chinese fighter aircraft production rates are not entirely transparent, analysts estimate the percentage of "modern" combat aircraft could exceed 50 percent or be closer to 1,000 in number by the year 2020.¹⁷ Furthermore, the 2013 China Military Power Report also estimated China's indigenously produced 5th generation J-20 fighter could enter service as early as 2018.¹⁸ Lastly, sources have suggested that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) may purchase as many as 300 J-20s, while the U.S. 5th generation F-22 program ceased production at only 187 aircraft.¹⁹

In addition to modernizing its fighter aircraft, China has taken a truly comprehensive approach toward upgrading its fleet by addressing critical support aircraft for their combat air forces. Beyond modern fighter components, the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) has "also invested heavily in the development of critical electronic support aircraft for command and control, and to a lesser degree, new tanker and cargo aircraft."²⁰ Equally of consequence, the PLAAF has committed to developing and "fielding an array of unmanned aircraft to perform surveillance and even combat missions to complement its new fighter aircraft."²¹

In the fiscal analysis, China's air modernization has been fueled by more than two decades of steadily increasing military budgets and spending. According to the DoD, China's officially disclosed military budget increased an average of 9.7% annually in inflation-adjusted terms from 2003 to 2012.²² At \$114 billion, China's officially announced budget for 2013 represented an increase of 10.7% over 2012.²³ Due to lack

of transparency in China’s budgeting process, defense analysts believe China’s actual military spending markedly exceeded the officially disclosed figures, estimating China’s military spending for 2012 ranged from \$135 billion to \$215 billion.²⁴ For 2014, China recently announced a military budget that totals nearly \$132 billion—an increase of 12.2% over 2013.²⁵ Alarming, the increased spending in 2014 marks the largest growth in Chinese military expenditures in recent years.²⁶ Even with its rising defense budget, it is worth noting China’s escalation in military spending merely “reflects the growth of the Chinese economy, rather than an expanding share of national income.”²⁷ In fact, China has historically “spent the same proportion of GDP on defense (a bit over 2%, whereas America spends about 4.7%)” (see Figure 1).²⁸ Although today China’s defense budget stands meagerly at roughly one sixth the size of America’s, projections for continued Chinese economic growth plot the PLA on a course to become the world’s largest military spender in as little as 20 years.

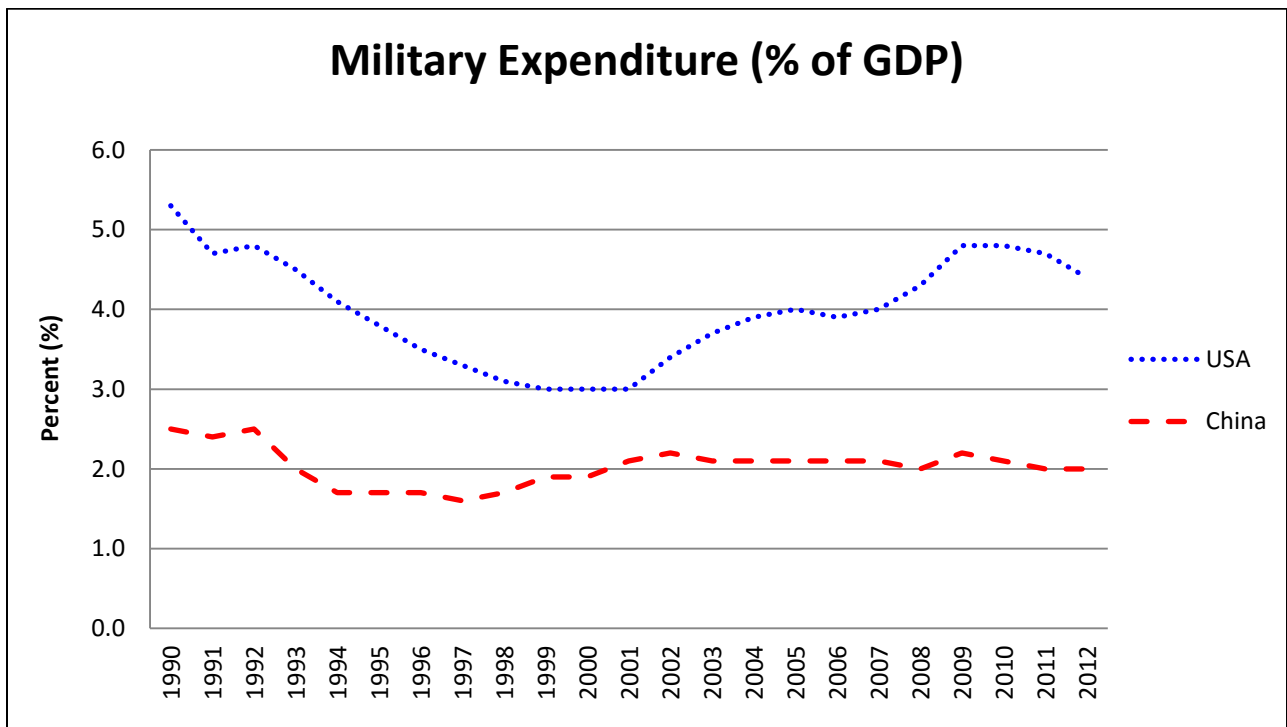


Figure 1. U.S.-China Defense Budgets GDP percentage Comparison²⁹

Unlike the Cold War, China's rebirth as a world leader has generated several elements of codependency, both regionally and globally. In contrast to the former Soviet Union, China's ascendancy has spawned an interconnected major power that is deeply integrated into both global and regional politics, economics and security. This intertwined relationship presents a far different and, quite possibly, far greater challenge to the United States because its allies and partners in Asia are becoming increasingly reliant on "China for capital, markets, goods, and in many cases even technology."³⁰ China's geographic location, immense size, vast resources and "huge economy have made it the center of a highly integrated Asian economic system, where the growth of every country on its periphery" hinges on Chinese trade relations.³¹ Further, the U.S. has sought an increased reliance on China to address critical regional security issues, such as North Korea's nuclear weapons program. To complicate matters even further, China has matured into an "ever-larger magnet for trade and foreign direct investment with the U.S.," and China's ascension has become "a major enabler of U.S. deficit spending through its large-scale purchases of U.S. Treasury notes."³²

From a strategic perspective, the United States has long been concerned and confused about the intentions behind China's military modernization efforts. In the January 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance that outlined the military component of the U.S. rebalancing toward the Asia Pacific, the DoD stated, "the growth of China's military power must be accompanied by greater clarity of its strategic intentions in order to avoid causing friction in the region."³³ In multiple forums, China has repeatedly offered assurances it remains committed to peace and to working within existing international systems and norms, not challenging them. Similarly, Chinese leadership has also

routinely reiterated that China has neither the desire nor the capability to challenge the U.S. position in Asia. In comments following his summit meeting with President Obama in June 2013, President Xi Jinping pledged that, “China will be firmly committed to the path of peaceful development.”³⁴ However, the U.S. would prefer China move beyond merely broad assurances and take tangible steps aimed at providing greater transparency about its decisions related to its military modernization program.

In terms of regional stability, China’s airpower modernization efforts and its corresponding increase in military capability have begun to spawn a classic regional security dilemma. In competitive international politics, a security dilemma “generally ensures that any improvements in military capacity, even if unaccompanied by questionable intentions, invariably create anxiety and suspicion in neighboring states because of the increased possibility of harm.”³⁵ With China, its military modernization efforts coupled with its renewed interests in disputed territories have exacerbated the security dilemma in Asia for a number of reasons. First, China’s massive military end strength along with its hefty financial allocations for defense capabilities intensifies “regional concerns because most of its neighbors, with a few exceptions like Russia, Japan, and India, have defense budgets that are dwarfed by China’s.”³⁶ Accordingly, the region’s smaller countries are economically incapable of directly competing with China, and as a result, these countries may be left with no other strategic options except aligning with China even though they may wish to proceed otherwise. Perhaps more significantly, China’s growing annual defense budget raises notable concern with many regional leaders because the PLA budget already more than doubles their own defense budgets with the gap projected to continue to widen (see Figure 2).³⁷ Additionally,

China's massive landmass and geostrategic location places it at the heartland of East Asia with several key regional states located along either its continental or maritime periphery (see Figure 3).³⁸ Thus, any Chinese increase in military investment coupled with the resultant enhancement of its airpower capabilities directly affects virtually every Asian state.

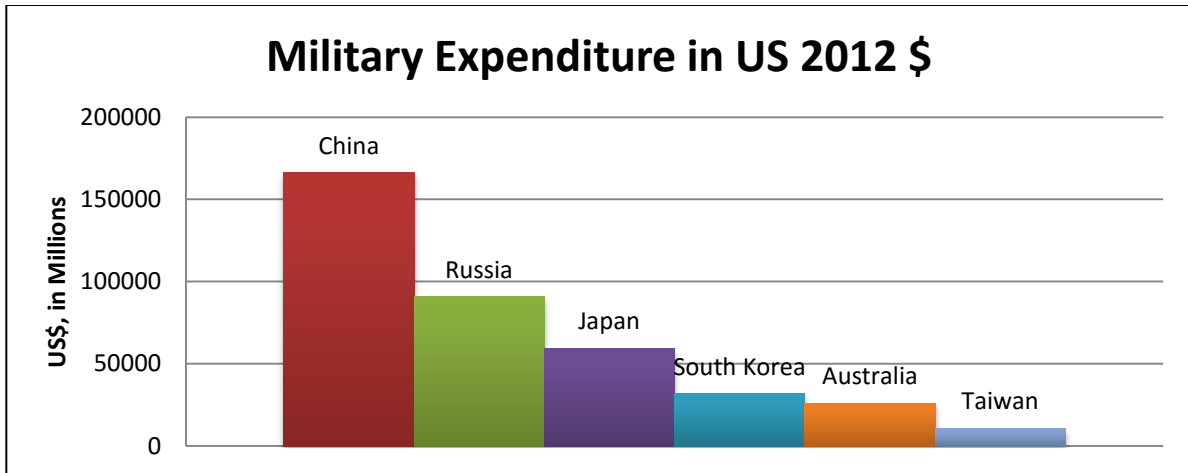


Figure 2. Asia Major Regional Powers 2012 Defense Budgets³⁹



Figure 3. China as Heartland of East Asia⁴⁰

Disputed Territories

Over the last few years, China has grown more assertive in its actions regarding the disputed territories in the East and South China Seas (see Figure 4). As China continues to increase its airpower capabilities, the nation's ability to influence or even drive the outcome of these territorial disputes will increase dramatically. Today, the significantly improved operational reach of China's airpower has matured to the point where its capability overlaps every area in which it is involved in a territorial dispute (see Figure 5). These disputed territories offer China much closer access to resources, and the significance of these rocks, islands and reefs, as well as the friction over them, will continue to grow as regional economic development and the corresponding demand for resources continue to escalate. Lastly, China prefers to settle these territorial disputes bilaterally, and as China's airpower capabilities further develop, the countries in dispute with China may be coerced to settle the dispute on terms that favor China due to a significant power imbalance.



Figure 4. Territorial Disputes in East and South China Seas⁴¹

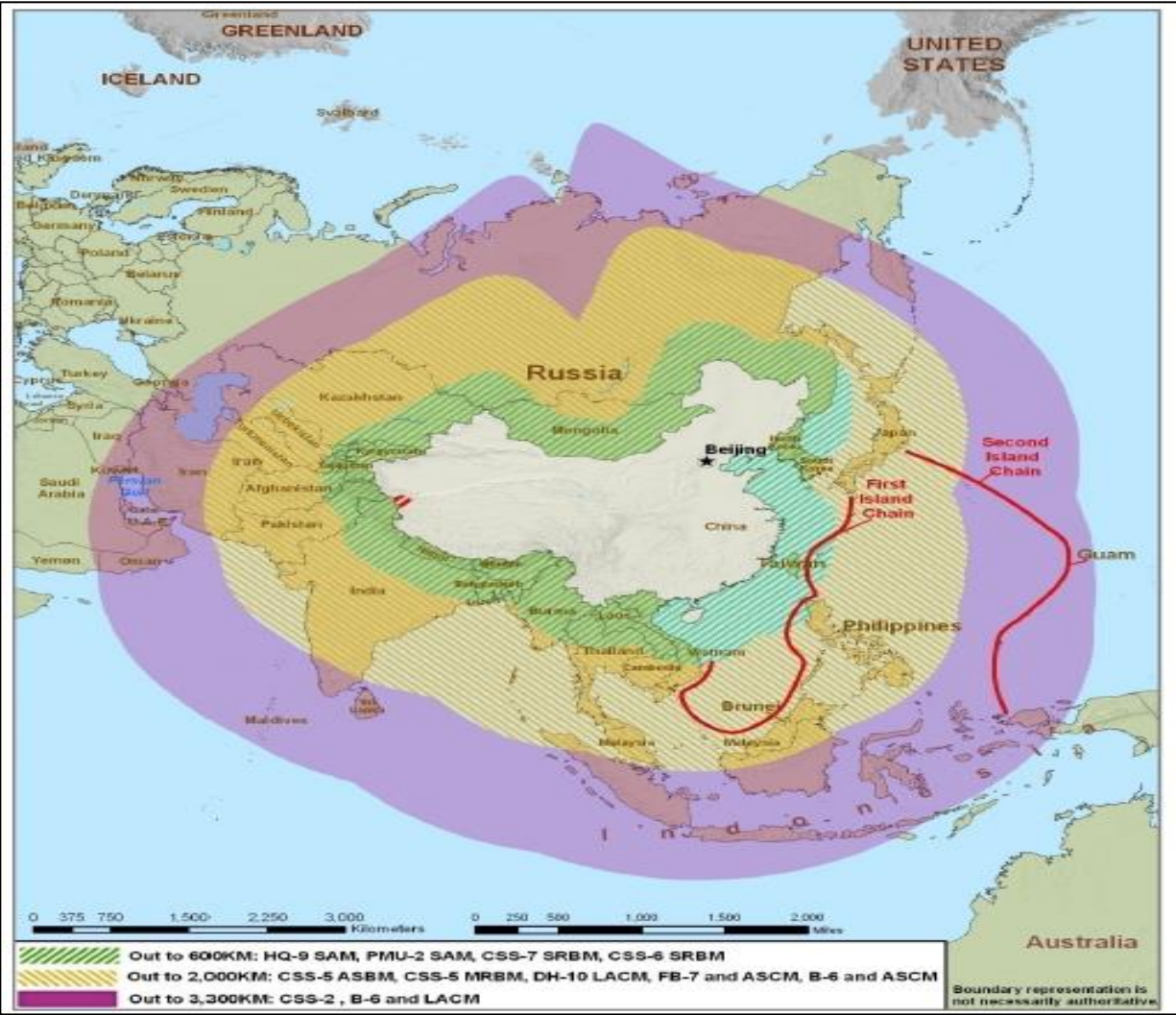


Figure 5. Depiction of China's Power Projection⁴²

In November 2013, China intensified its disputed territory claim with Japan by establishing a new Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) that extends over the Senkaku Islands (known as Diaoyu in China) (see Figure 6). While the new ADIZ does not in any way legitimize sovereignty claims, China's procedural protocol now requires Japanese aircraft to announce their intentions prior to entry into the new ADIZ. However, Japan refuses to honor China's declaration because Japan must enter this ADIZ to reach what it views as its undisputed sovereign territory.⁴³ After signing the 1972 Okinawa Reversion Treaty, the U.S. returned control of the Ryukyu prefecture to

the Japanese government, and the treaty included control over the Senkaku Islands, which had been administered by the U.S. since the end of WWII.⁴⁴ Due to U.S. control over the islands, the U.S. and Japan included the Senkakus as part of the U.S.-Japan mutual defense agreement, so if the dispute between China and Japan evolved into conflict, the bilateral defense treaty obligates the U.S. to come to Japan's aid. This situation presents a far different scenario than China's dispute with the Philippines over the Scarborough Shoals because the Philippine claim to the Scarborough Shoals occurred after the U.S.-Filipino bilateral security agreement. Hence, a Sino-Filipino conflict over the Scarborough Shoals does not legally bind the U.S. by treaty to defend the Philippines.⁴⁵ In terms of regional stability, peacefully resolving the Senkaku dispute remains of critical importance for the U.S. in order to avoid an unwanted conflict in Asia, and every country involved in a territorial dispute with China will closely monitor the approach taken to try to resolve the Senkakus, as well as the degree of U.S. involvement in determining the outcome.

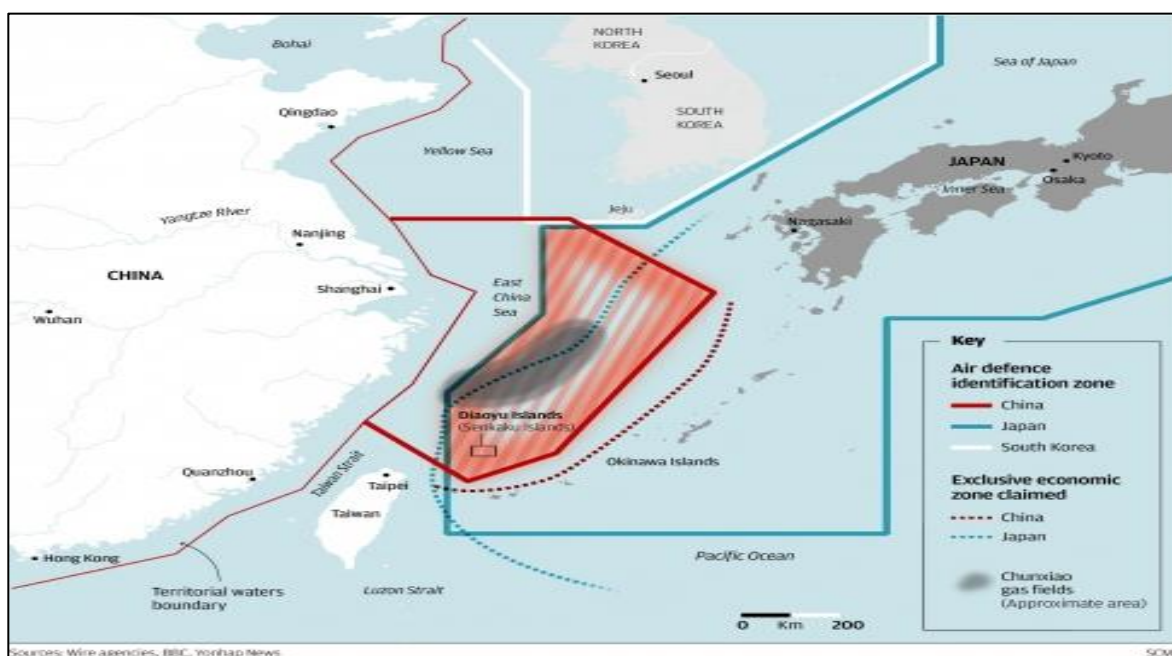


Figure 6. China's New ADIZ⁴⁶

Since the U.S. retains a technological airpower advantage over China, some analysts refute the possibility China would resort to violence over these disputed territories. However, a cursory look at Chinese historical interaction in the region paints a starkly different picture. While the U.S. has stood as the regional leader since WWII, this U.S. position has failed to deter China from exercising aggressive behavior over territorial disputes in the past. In fact, China has undertaken several provocative actions against its neighbors in clear view of the United States.

In 1950, China allied with North Korea and entered the Korean War after United Nations forces began advancing north of the 38th parallel. China's intervention helped generate a stalemate in the conflict, which ultimately returned the peninsula back to the status quo (divided). In 1962, China attacked India over a "territorial dispute and tensions over Tibet," and although China swiftly won the conflict, "the war still casts a long shadow over Sino-Indian relations."⁴⁷ Rather than pursuing a negotiated settlement for the Paracel Islands, China forcefully seized the archipelago from Vietnam in 1974 where 70 Vietnamese soldiers lost their lives, and China's ongoing control of the islands continues to cause friction with Vietnam today.⁴⁸ In 1979, China invaded Vietnam with over 600,000 troops over a border dispute, and although the conflict ended only 17 days later, "it was followed by border tensions between the two countries throughout the following decade."⁴⁹ Additionally, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has regularly escalated tensions over Taiwan despite the long-standing U.S. support for the Republic of China. With the U.S. political will and general population still war weary from Iraq and Afghanistan, China may perceive the newfound U.S. aversion to conflict as a prime

opportunity to resort to violence in pursuit of its interests in the East and South China Seas.

A Strategic Approach and Objectives

In order to develop a national policy to counter China, the U.S. must formulate sound objectives and develop a clear vision detailing what the strategy intends to accomplish. The development of succinct strategic ends (or objectives) will provide unambiguous guidance to government agencies so they can, in turn, develop their own supporting strategies. To ensure unity of effort through a whole-of-government approach, the strategic ends necessitate development through interagency coordination and discussion rather than in isolation by a single department of government. The U.S. National Security Council offers the ideal interagency setting to formulate the political aim.

For example, the U.S. developed National Security Council Report 68 (NSC 68) in 1950 to counter the Soviet Union, and the document served to guide the U.S. Cold War Strategy for nearly a quarter of a century. While the Department of State initially produced NSC 68, the President, advisors, the National Security Council statutory members, the Vice President, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of Central Intelligence all reviewed and concurred with the document.⁵⁰ Although NSC 68 had its flaws, the document presented a whole-of-government approach that included a “rapid build-up (sic) of political, economic, and military strength” as the means to achieving the strategy’s objectives.⁵¹ The NSC 68 strategy also required engagement abroad and shunned the possibility of a U.S. transition to isolationism. A U.S. isolation strategy would have failed to counter

Soviet aggression and influence because allies and partners would have been left to confront the Soviet Union on their own.⁵²

Although the U.S. developed a strategy for the Cold War, the question for the U.S. and its allies today centers on whether the rise of China warrants a similar approach. From a theoretical standpoint, China's ascension clearly challenges the international order in Asia where the U.S. has long been the regional leader. However, the PRC threat to the U.S. pales in comparison to the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The Soviet Union presented an existential military threat to the United States and its allies; however, communism and the free world lacked interdependent economic ties. Although China's airpower is growing rapidly, the PRC still remains far less capable than the U.S. in the near term and has yet to attain the potency required to endanger U.S. national survival on the same scale as the Soviet Union. Due to China's sheer size and potential, China's airpower modernization does possibly pose a threat of national survival or, at a minimum, regional autonomy for U.S. allies and international partners in Asia, which threatens the unfettered pursuit of their own national interests. If China's economy continues to grow as expected, China's airpower has the potential to achieve parity with the U.S. within a generation, and the increasing elements of economic interdependency also place the U.S. economy at far greater risk than it was when compared to the Cold War.

Therefore, this paper argues the U.S. should approach the rebalance to the Pacific through a detailed national strategy similar to the NSC 68 document issued during the Cold War. This national strategy should be founded on enduring U.S. national interests, and the recommended policy aim should seek to counter-balance

China's airpower modernization in order to facilitate a peaceful Chinese ascension, preserve regional stability and ensure the survival of key allies. A National Security Council directive detailing this strategy would provide government agencies with the necessary strategic guidance to formulate their subordinate, supporting strategies.

U.S. National Interests

In Asia, the United States stands at a historical strategic crossroads, faced with both the tasks of reducing military spending in order to alleviate its massive deficits and concurrently addressing the evolving international political dynamics in Asia, which includes a rising power. Due to the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, America has neglected the Asian region for several years, responding inadequately to China's extensive airpower modernization efforts. Based on its actions, China's approach appears to possess the ambition and increasingly the power to become a regional hegemon.⁵³ Further, China appears determined to lock America out of a region that has been declared a vital U.S. security interest by every administration since Teddy Roosevelt's, and it is pulling South-East Asian countries "into its orbit of influence 'by default'."⁵⁴

The 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy identified four enduring national interests: 1) "The security of the United States, its citizens, and U.S. allies and partners;" 2) "A strong, innovative, and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity;" 3) "Respect for universal values at home and around the world; and" 4) "An international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges."⁵⁵

The United States maintains a complex relationship with China, which encompasses “an exceptionally broad range of issues, from security, trade, and broader economic issues, to the environment and human rights.”⁵⁶ Thus, implementing a strategy to effectively manage China’s airpower modernization and the associated impacts to the region would address each of these enduring interests at some level. In terms of security, the United States has a deeply rooted investment in Asian stability. The U.S. currently maintains seven collective defense arrangements with international partners around the globe and five of those alliances reside in Asia.⁵⁷ China’s military modernization program over the last two decades has forced dramatic shifts in the Asian balance of power and potentially threatens to disrupt regional stability through conflict over Taiwan or other regional territorial disputes. For prosperity, Asia represents a lucrative trading region for the U.S. First, the volume of U.S. trade in the region is second only to the North American Free Trade Agreement, and “after more than 30 years of fast-paced economic growth, China’s economy is now the second largest in the world.”⁵⁸ Further, five (China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and India) of the top twelve U.S. trading partners reside in Asia.⁵⁹ In regards to universal values, China’s history on human rights has been less than stellar, so any engagement with China provides an opportunity for the U.S. and its allies to promote universal values.

Policy Options

Due to the significant U.S. national interests in Asia, it is imperative America formulates an effective strategy to counter the rising Chinese air component in order to protect its allies and maintain regional stability. In an effort to determine the best policy option, this paper examines three different approaches; these options include a “Proxy Engagement Strategy,” “Multilateral Engagement Strategy,” and a “Hedging Strategy.”

While these approaches are fundamentally unique, all three options emphasize the integration of every instrument of national power (Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic) in order to synchronize and unify effort among U.S. government agencies. While the purpose of each option focuses on China's rising air arm, they each provide a separate and distinct way of providing a balancing approach, and each option requires vastly different levels of U.S. commitment and engagement requirements.

Proxy Engagement Strategy

This strategic option proposes the U.S. implement a proxy engagement strategy focused on strengthening regional partners' airpower capabilities, ultimately allowing the U.S. to reduce its footprint and presence in Asia. The conceptual framework of this strategy relies on enhancing allied and international partner capacity to provide for both their own security and security of the region through upgraded airpower competencies. Hence, this means helping allies develop their own anti-access capabilities designed to successfully confront China's A2/AD improvements, if necessary, and to deny Chinese access into allied territorial waters and airspace while minimizing dependence on U.S. security guarantees. Accordingly, this also means helping build forces that can act as proxies, thus allowing the U.S. to reduce its security investment in the region. The long-term goal in the region would be to encourage allies to work together to design and field the next generation weapons platforms capable of maintaining regional stability while allowing China to peacefully expand its aerial strength.

The proxy option consists of the following elements: 1) Increase diplomacy within the region to strengthen ties with both allies and existing partners to provide a means to entice new international partners; 2) Encourage increased allied and partner investment in airpower capabilities in proportion to their respective GDPs; 3) Expand offers of

advanced U.S. airpower technologies (fighter aircraft, command and control technologies, air defense capabilities, etc.) through Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programs; 4) Enhance allied security capabilities through international training exercises and through military advisors; 5) Encourage Trans-Pacific Partnership finalization in order to bolster regional economics to ultimately support military modernization programs; 6) Reduce U.S. military footprint in the Pacific as a function of allied airpower improvement.

Strategy Analysis and Risk Assessment

In order to determine the viability of a strategy, the proposed options must be assessed through the feasibility, acceptability and suitability tests of strategy along with an objective risk assessment. In terms of feasibility, a proxy approach presents an opportunity to allow the U.S. to reduce its regional investment in military infrastructure and may provide a catalyst for U.S. defense budget reductions. Since the end of WWII, U.S. power and security guarantees have enabled its Pacific allies to become “free riders” by allowing them to concentrate their national priorities on economic pursuits rather than expending excessive amounts of resources on their own defense.⁶⁰ As a result, the U.S. approach laid the foundation for the rapid recovery and reconstruction of its Pacific allies following WWII, which correspondingly stimulated the reinvigoration of their economies. After decades of thriving under U.S. security guarantees, allies such as Japan and South Korea have enjoyed tremendous economic growth and prosperity. With the rise of China, these allies are in a position to commit a greater financial investment on defense commensurate with their position as economic powers, as a means to burden-share this regional security challenge.

For acceptability, a proxy approach provides a method to curtail U.S. military investment in the region, and with the looming budget cuts stemming from sequestration, it presents an opportunity to reduce the U.S. defense budget requirements and infrastructure in Asia. Facilitating a reduction of the U.S. footprint in Asia, all three regional powers (Japan, Taiwan and South Korea) near China have already initiated major counter-modernization programs for their own air forces, and the U.S. could further their modernization efforts through enhanced FMS programs that include technologies designed to counter China's A2/AD capabilities. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's Arms Transfer program, the top five weapons importers from 2008-2012 consisted of all Asian countries, and the volume of weapon deliveries to South East Asian states over the same period increased by 169 percent when compared to the preceding five-year period.⁶¹ Thus, with growing economies, Asian nations' ability and willingness to invest in defense capabilities has also grown in nearly equal proportion. For smaller, less prosperous allies and partners, the U.S. would need to pursue military development through the Foreign Military Financing or the Global Security Contingency Fund programs.

From a suitability standpoint, a proxy approach would require a major paradigm shift in historical U.S. interaction in the Asian region. While this approach does not advocate abolishing existing security agreements, the traditionally used methodology for guaranteeing these treaties would require significant alteration. Heretofore, the U.S. has traditionally assured allies through a substantial, enduring presence of U.S. airpower, so a sudden reduction of these capabilities may not align with allied expectations. Notwithstanding, this strategy presents a viable option to preserve regional stability by

strengthening multiple states to balance the rise of China, provided U.S. allies and partners are willing to commit increased investment in their own airpower capabilities. While some may argue Asian countries will be unable to deter China with a reduced American presence, the tiny, city-state country of Singapore provides an example of a small nation that has long preserved its existence through a significant investment in airpower. Singapore's establishment of a "Poison Shrimp" defense strategy, "which is intended to warn any larger country that trying to swallow the island state would be painful" has enabled it to prosper without an American security guarantee.⁶²

For risk, the estimated strategic risk of a proxy strategy ranges from moderate to high. At this juncture, China's airpower strength may not be nearly as daunting as many alarmists have portrayed it to appear. China's military technology has suffered from the Western arms embargo imposed after the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989.⁶³ As a result, many western defense firms believe that is why they are often on the receiving end of cyber-attacks that appear to come from China.⁶⁴ Thus, strengthening allies and partners may provide an effective balance to China's airpower modernization.

Conversely, a proxy strategy may be perceived as the U.S. backing down or pulling away from the region, creating a strategic leadership vacuum in Asia and ultimately providing China with a major strategic victory. With the U.S. abdication as the regional leader, the resultant international order may evolve detrimentally for the U.S. because this strategy will depend on close security cooperation with regional partners in order to form an effective counter-balance. Yet, multilateral security cooperation without substantial U.S. involvement poses a significant challenge due to historical animosities and a lack of prior intraregional military alliances. Therefore, there is a significant risk in

placing U.S. interests in the hands of others. Consequently, U.S. allies or partners may decide—or be coerced—to align with China when faced with a decreased presence or absence of U.S. airpower. The question is whether the U.S. can remain the world's leading power while delegating to others the task of protecting its regional influence and national interests.

Multilateral Alliance Strategy

The intent of this option would be to pursue a balancing strategy through a regional multilateral alliance. Similar to the proxy strategy, this approach also represents a significant departure from the historical U.S. geopolitical interaction in the Pacific region. In contrast to other regions of the globe, the U.S. engagement strategy in Asia has historically been constrained to bilateral agreements and state-to-state interaction. For example, the U.S. has separate bilateral security agreements with Japan, Philippines, Thailand and South Korea along with a trilateral agreement with Australia and New Zealand. Outside of Asia, the U.S. maintains collective security agreements with multiple states in Europe (NATO) and the Americas (Rio Treaty) both of which provide institutions for multilateral interaction. Similar to NATO and the Rio Treaty, the purpose of this option is to develop a multilateral alliance in Asia, as a means to balance China's rising airpower.

The multilateral alliance option has six elements: 1) U.S. diplomatically engages Asian allies within existing security arrangements and proposes a multilateral alliance backed by the new U.S. Pacific rebalance strategy; 2) Design multilateral military training exercises involving all members and potential members of the alliance; 3) Openly communicate U.S. Pacific rebalancing strategy, but make it clear the aim does not intend to contain or encircle China; 4) Encourage Trans-Pacific Partnership

finalization in order to bolster regional economics to ultimately support military modernization programs; 5) Support existing regional institutions such as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and East Asian Summit; 6) Encourage a reconciliation between Japan and its regional neighbors over past aggression and atrocities in an attempt to build and strengthen the alliance.

Strategy Analysis and Risk Assessment

In terms of feasibility, this option will not require any greater U.S. economic or military investment than already pledged under the existing security agreements within the region. For the foreseeable future, the combined airpower capabilities of the allies in the region are sufficient to collectively counter-balance the PLAAF, especially with the U.S. as an alliance member. Perhaps more significantly, a multilateral alliance may actually enhance U.S. access to Asia while improving interoperability between the U.S. and its partners. However, this approach would require a significant diplomatic effort in order to garner multilateral support for forming an Asian alliance. Presumably, many countries may remain hesitant to join an alliance due to their existing economic ties with China.

From an acceptability standpoint, forming alliances is well within the provisions of international law and norms. Throughout history, there have been numerous examples of multinational alliances successfully maintaining regional stability, yet forming an Asian multilateral alliance could be challenging due to the historic resentment that still exists between nations (primarily against Japan). However, the increased threat posed by new Chinese offensive capabilities and China's aggressive approach regarding disputed territories have had an encouraging effect of dampening these frictions, particularly between Japan and South Korea. Further, China's rise has increased many

Asian countries' reliance on the United States and may provide a regional environment that is ripe for a multilateral alliance.

For suitability, this option provides a means to ensure the collective security of U.S. allies and partners while providing a regional institution that fosters multinational cooperation. Due to the cooperative approach, this multilateral alliance will relieve individual security and defense burdens for each member state. Rather than individual nations attempting to keep pace with China independently, an alliance can encourage technology and financial burden sharing among the alliance partners. Similar to NATO, the organization could also implement military standardization across the alliance to ensure the interoperability of equipment, and the alliance can also mandate certain percentages of GDP be allocated towards defense spending in support of the alliance.

The overall risk of pursuing a multilateral alliance in Asia is high. While multilateral alliances have been successful elsewhere, attempting to create a regional alliance that could be misconstrued as anti-Chinese presents a potentially dangerous proposition. First, most of the potential members of such an alliance already maintain some intertwining ties (mainly economic) with China, and they may prefer to protect and nurture their Chinese relationships instead of risking the perception they are challenging them. Second, this option presents the risk of driving China to seek powerful allies of its own, such as Russia or Iran, which could potentially increase the likelihood of conflict. Third, Taiwan may publicly petition to join the alliance, which may destructively affect China's relationships with the U.S. and its alliance partners. Further, a multilateral alliance could be perceived by China as a ploy to deny them access to resources (such as oil) that it needs for its economic development causing regional instability rather than

preventing it. Unlike the Soviet Union, a strategy to multilaterally balance China could backfire because the U.S., regional and global economies are all heavily dependent on China. Moreover, the United States has become increasingly reliant on foreign funding—specifically from China—to finance its large annual budget deficits.

Due to the number of parties in Asia involved in claims over disputed territories in the East and South China Seas, a multilateral alliance may generate too many flashpoints for both the U.S. and the organization itself. The risk inherent in any alliance stems from the increased probability of being dragged into an unwanted conflict by an ally that was only emboldened because of the concept of the alliance itself. In other words, a smaller state backed by an alliance may act more aggressively or assertively towards an opposing state than it otherwise would have if it were simply acting on its own. In Asia, this competitive political behavior may drive China to respond aggressively. Assuming an Asian alliance would contain a clause similar to NATO's Article 5, irresponsible allies may actually provoke conflict rather than prevent it. Using the Peloponnesian War as an example, the conflict between Sparta and Athens initially arose because of a skirmish between Corinth (allied with Sparta) and Corcyra (allied with Athens) as opposed to a direct confrontation between the two major powers.⁶⁵ Furthermore, another major drawback to a multilateral alliance stems from the difficulty inherent in multinational decision-making. Pragmatically, alliances frequently require consensus-oriented solutions in order to satisfy all members of the organization. In an Asian alliance, this may prove to be particularly troublesome because of the extraordinary amount of cultural diversity in the region.

Hedging Strategy

The final strategic option proposed in this paper includes a hedging strategy that incorporates direct engagement with China while simultaneously pursuing/strengthening bilateral relationships with regional allies and partners. Thus, a hedging strategy requires the execution of a two-pronged approach that utilizes both direct and indirect means. On one hand, the focus is to pursue direct bilateral engagement with China, and on the other, this approach emphasizes developing regional balancing through security cooperation and military modernization programs with willing partners. Accordingly, the U.S. should openly stress and promote a cooperative, constructive, and candid relationship with China, while working to uncover the real, underlying Chinese strategic intentions. Further, this strategy provides a versatile and comprehensive approach to counter China's airpower modernization while demonstrating a strong U.S. commitment to the region in order to assure its allies. Therefore, an effective implementation of this hedging strategy will ensure continued U.S. leadership in the region while bolstering existing security arrangements. Finally, this strategy aligns well with the U.S. Pacific rebalancing philosophy.

The hedging option includes the following elements: 1) Encourage Chinese involvement in and contributions to regional problem solving in Asia and elsewhere; 2) Seek to bind China further into the existing international system of norms, rules and institutions; 3) Encourage regional institutions, such as ASEAN Plus Three and East Asian Summit, to develop mutually agreed rules of the road that protect the rights of all nations to free and open access to the seas; 4) Openly communicate U.S. Pacific rebalancing strategy, but make it clear the purpose is not intended to contain or encircle China; 5) Continue investment in military infrastructure projects for South Korea, Japan,

Guam and any other potential host nations of U.S. forces; 6) Strengthen U.S. treaty alliances in the region with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand, and expand cooperation with “emerging partners” in order to ensure collective capability and capacity to counter-balance China; 7) Invest in a long-term strategic partnership with India; 8) Continue to invest in transformational airpower capabilities to provide a technological advantage to the U.S. and its allies and to improve collection analysis in regards to the Chinese military; 9) Expand military-to-military activities with China to encourage transparency and strengthen relationships. Encourage China’s participation in multilateral military exercises and seek opportunities for combined employment such as noncombatant evacuation, search-and-rescue, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) and counter-terrorism; 10) Increase the size and number of participants for military training exercises in the Pacific to improve regional air forces and ensure interoperability; 11) Promote growing quad-lateral security cooperation between the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and Australia; 12) Encourage a reconciliation between China and Japan over past aggression and atrocities in an attempt to relieve historic tension between the two countries; 13) Encourage pursuing resolution to territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas through international arbitration through existing institutions such as the World Trade Organization or the ASEAN Plus Three.

Strategy Analysis and Risk Assessment

From a feasibility analysis, this option demands a significant U.S. commitment of resources and utilizes all instruments of national power; however, all of the recommended elements of this option are feasible. The U.S. has had a long history of engagement in the Asian region, and this hedging strategy provides an approach designed to facilitate increased U.S. involvement while retaining the flexibility to adjust

to changes in the strategic environment. Further, the expanded military investments and increased diplomatic engagement align well with the new Pacific rebalancing concept. These measures will provide substantive evidence to the region and China that the new U.S. strategy encompasses more than empty political promises.

For acceptability, this option relies on leveraging the existing U.S. security agreements as the foundation to expand regional security cooperation. While the strengthening of U.S. allies will require a greater commitment, the approach will not significantly alter the long-standing U.S. interaction in the region. Unlike the proxy and multilateral approaches, a hedging strategy incorporates key elements that are focused on interaction with China whereas the other two strategies merely focus on countering China. Although a hedging strategy includes elements to counter China's rising airpower, a significant political aim includes encouraging greater Chinese engagement in world issues and international institutions.

From the standpoint of suitability, this option incorporates a combination of the diplomatic, information, economic and military instruments of national power to achieve the desired end. Further, it demonstrates a strong U.S. regional commitment to China and U.S. allies and international partners in Asia. While a hedging strategy entails a major shift in policy for Chinese engagement, this approach does not fundamentally alter the traditional U.S. interaction with regional allies and partners who have heretofore benefited immensely from the historical U.S. approach. Lastly, this strategy does not stimulate a political environment where nations must choose between the U.S. and China for strategic partnerships; instead, states can maintain interaction with both.

For risk, a hedging strategy ranges from low to moderate. Due to its two-pronged nature, this approach can be fraught with complications and dangers that could ultimately incite rivalry and produce regional instability. Thus, the execution of a hedging strategy requires a delicate balancing act that, to be effective and sustainable, necessitates careful management of accumulating stresses in U.S.-China relations and regional reactions to U.S.-China interaction. In Asia, the prospect of armed conflict over Taiwan or other disputed territories dramatically exacerbates these challenges. Since the end of WWII, a U.S.-centric, hub-and-spoke system consisting of bilateral alliances and international partnerships has delivered both “stability and security to the region and facilitated Asia’s impressive economic development.”⁶⁶ However, China’s improving air arsenal has begun threatening the long established regional order at a time when U.S.-China economic and technological interdependence is progressively accelerating.⁶⁷

In light of these competing dynamics, a U.S. hedging strategy must be carefully managed because a misstep could “undermine the historical U.S. centrality to the region, alienate U.S. allies and security partners and precipitate adversarial competition between the U.S. and China.”⁶⁸ Due to the ongoing territorial disputes, the prospect of building a U.S.-China strategic partnership may prove disturbing from the perspective of U.S. allies and partners. In their view, cooperation with China may appear as the U.S. abandoning—or at the very least, distancing itself from—long-standing security agreements while providing increased leverage to China. While the U.S. cannot afford to ignore China, America must balance the interests of allies while engaging China to preclude causing friction and unrest with allies. A U.S. miscalculation towards either

side could rapidly become disastrous. If the situation were to deteriorate into a conflict between the U.S. and China—who holds both the world's fastest growing and second largest economy—the economic and political costs on both sides could be catastrophic, and the aftershocks of the conflict could generate devastatingly adverse affects on the overall global economy.

Recommended Strategy

A proxy strategy offers the lowest material risk and the least amount of resources and commitment from the United States, but expecting allied airpower to counter-balance Chinese airpower with only limited U.S. support may put the region and potentially the global economy at an unacceptable risk. Further, this option could be perceived as the U.S. backing down from China thus diminishing the role of U.S. leadership in the region. A multilateral alliance strategy provides a method to build a strong counter-balance, but this approach may actually cause regional instability instead of preventing it. China already has suspicions about the U.S. Pacific rebalancing strategy, and it fears the purpose of the U.S. shift in policy is aimed at containing it. Thus, a multilateral alliance may only exacerbate those fears and could provoke an unacceptable, aggressive response by China. Alternatively, a hedging strategy provides the most versatile and comprehensive approach to counter China's airpower modernization without dramatically altering the political dynamics in the region. This option demonstrates a strong, multifaceted U.S. commitment and provides a method to ensure continued U.S. leadership in Asia while strengthening existing security arrangements. Lastly, the hedging strategy aligns well with the U.S. Pacific rebalancing strategy. In terms of execution, the overarching hedging strategy entails the following three major pillars:

Pillar #1:

Objective: Secure/Expand the Flow of Trade and Maintain Economic Order.

Concept: Diplomatically, the U.S. must encourage the development of mutually agreed upon rules of the commons that protect the rights of all nations to free and open access to the seas. This can most effectively be accomplished by engaging with regional institutions such as ASEAN Plus Three and Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation as well as during forums such as the East Asian Summit. These regional institutions and forums, which include China, need to address the confrontational activities in both the South and East China Seas. The U.S. must encourage the geopolitical institutions to devise solutions to the ongoing territorial disputes through international arbitration in order to diffuse the recent state-to-state confrontations between China and its regional neighbors. If the regional institutions are unable to resolve the disputes, the U.S. must encourage its allies to request binding arbitration from a neutral global institution such as the World Trade Organization. Using an impartial international institution for adjudication is the key to ensure the resulting decision will not be perceived as U.S. influenced. Lastly, to expand the flow of trade the U.S. must continue to advocate the adoption of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement which will further liberalize Asian economies while reducing trade barriers.

Pillar #2:

Objective: Strengthen/Expand Bilateral Security Alliances in the Region.

Concept: In order to preserve its role as a regional leader, the U.S. must continue to strengthen relations with existing security partners in Asia. After years of focus on Iraq and Afghanistan, the President or the Secretary of State must schedule a Pacific tour with the five key U.S. allies (South Korea, Japan, Philippines, Thailand and

Australia) and conduct personal, high-level meetings designed to reaffirm U.S. commitment to the region, both publicly and diplomatically. This tour must not be in conjunction with other Asian business or conferences. Rather, the U.S. should communicate the sole purpose of the trip is to promote and support the U.S. Pacific Rebalancing strategy. Further, the U.S. administration must place a higher priority on ensuring the President attends meaningful regional multilateral forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asian Summit. After the U.S. announced its Pacific rebalance in 2012, the subsequent absence of the U.S. President at the East Asia Summit in 2013 sent the wrong signal to the region and portrayed an insincere U.S. commitment.

Financially, the U.S. must continue long-term investment in military infrastructure projects in the region. In addition to improvements on the U.S. territory of Guam, infrastructure investment in South Korea, Japan, and any other potential host nations of U.S. forces should also be continued. These infrastructure improvements will serve two distinct purposes. First, they will increase the capabilities of the host nation governments and militaries. Second, they will provide access, reception, and/or dispersion capabilities for U.S. forces if a regional conflict arises. Furthermore, the U.S. must capitalize on the growing quad-lateral security cooperation between the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and Australia. Until the rise of China, a cooperative security relationship between these nations (especially South Korea and Japan) seemed highly unrealistic. However, China's rise has created a regional security environment that has increased Asian countries' reliance on the United States while fostering previously unimagined multilateral cooperation that is transcending historical animosities.

After initially focusing on strengthening existing alliances, the U.S. should seek to expand cooperation with “emerging partners” as a means to cultivate an informal collective capability and capacity to counter-balance China. For the more militarily developed nations such as India and Indonesia, the U.S. must invest in a long-term strategic partnership through increased diplomatic, economic and military ties. As the world’s largest democracy, India may prove to be a vital U.S. partner who can serve as a regional economic and security anchor while functioning as a net security provider for the broader Indian Ocean region.⁶⁹ For less modern military states (Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines), the U.S. should reallocate the Foreign Military Assistance funding to shift financial support towards these lesser-developed countries. In 2012, more than \$3 billion of the \$5.2 billion total Foreign Military Assistance budget went to Israel alone.⁷⁰ Without increasing the Foreign Assistance budget, reallocating funding will be challenging because the current U.S. international partners (funding recipients) will likely express displeasure over a reduction in their funding. However, in light of the current U.S. debt situation, political constraints and public scrutiny will likely preclude Congress from raising the foreign assistance budget, so a reallocation offers the only viable solution. Without a significant U.S. financial commitment, the rebalancing strategy will soon be perceived as merely American rhetoric.

Based on China’s sheer size and potential, the U.S. must continue to invest in the development of transformational airpower capabilities designed to provide a technological edge to the U.S. and its allies. Likewise, the U.S. must continue to seek methods and technologies aimed at improving intelligence collection and analysis capabilities in regards to the Chinese military. Additionally, the Departments of State

and Defense must also pursue military export approval from Congress to share more of this technology with foreign partners through the Foreign Military Sales program. While there is some security risk to sharing technology, the U.S. must exploit the increased sharing of technology as a means to strengthen existing relations while improving allied capabilities. Further, this technology sharing through foreign military sales will foster economic benefit for U.S. defense industry and the overall U.S. economy.

Lastly, the U.S. Pacific Command and Pacific Air Forces Command must increase the size of military training exercises in Asia as a means to improve regional air forces and ensure interoperability. While the Pacific theater engagement strategy includes a robust exercise schedule, most of the airpower exercises are conducted either bilaterally or trilaterally and are not conducive to the U.S. engaging Asian air forces in a large regional forum. Due to a shrinking budget, increasing the number of exercises remains doubtful, so both commands should instead focus on increasing the number of countries who participate in the existing exercises. Expanding multinational participation permits the U.S. to demonstrate its airpower superiority to a larger audience while fostering cooperation among regional air forces and its allies. Moreover, multilateral exercises offer a critical opportunity for the integration of international airpower systems and technologies, which is vital to verifying multilateral interoperability. Further, these exercises must not be limited exclusively to combat training scenarios. Instead, they must also include HADR coordination and training. If history is any indicator, the likelihood of the need for a real-world response with HADR far exceeds the probability of a major regional conflict. Thus, it is imperative the U.S. and its allies are prepared to respond appropriately.

Pillar #3:

Objective: Facilitate/Encourage Greater Chinese Transparency and International Responsibility.

Concept: The U.S. must continue to encourage Chinese involvement in and contributions to regional problem solving in Asia and elsewhere. Thus far, the two countries have cooperated, with mixed results, to address nuclear proliferation concerns with Iran and North Korea.⁷¹ To improve U.S.-China cooperation, the U.S. should seek to bind China further into the existing international system of norms, rules and institutions such as Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Trans Pacific Partnership. Cooperating with China through multilateral institutions should help moderate China's perceptions of unilateral U.S. meddling in the region while bringing China closer to internationally accepted standards.

The U.S.-China relationship remains strained by long-standing mutual mistrust, which stems in part from the two countries' very different political systems.⁷² Additionally, China's military is modernizing and expanding its presence in Asia at the same time the United States is implementing its new rebalancing strategy to the Asian Pacific. This combination of events threatens to bring the two militaries into even closer proximity thereby increasing the likelihood and frequency of military encounters. Thus, the U.S. and China need to take concrete steps to expand their burgeoning military-to-military relations and activities. The strengthening of military relationships should help bring some transparency to China's military modernization program while building trust between the military establishments. This trust and familiarity will be crucial in deescalating situations should a contentious military encounter occur. Combined training exercises or real-world operations also provide tangible options for deepening

mil-to-mil relationships. Therefore, the Department of Defense, along with the Department of State, must seek opportunities for China to participate in regional multilateral military exercises. China's planned participation in the Rim of the Pacific Exercise in the summer of 2014 represents the first step in accomplishing this goal, but the U.S. must continue to work with China to develop opportunities to conduct combined employment operations such as noncombatant evacuation, search-and-rescue, HADR and counter-terrorism activities.

Unfortunately, further development of these mil-to-mil relationships remains hindered on the U.S. side by restrictions imposed by Congress. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2000 bars exchanges or contacts with China's military that include "inappropriate exposure" to a range of subjects, including surveillance and reconnaissance operations, joint combat operations and arms sales.⁷³ These provisions adversely affect the bilateral relationship, and Chinese authorities argue these restrictions signal U.S. ill will.⁷⁴ From the other point of view, China remains wary of closer ties due to a lack of clarity on U.S. intentions and the fear deeper relations will expose vulnerabilities in its weaker force.⁷⁵ Thus, the President and Cabinet officials should seize the opportunity to communicate the U.S. Pacific Rebalancing strategy is not intended to contain China. Rather, the messaging should emphasize a major element of the strategy focuses on expanding mil-to-mil relations and engagement with China. This messaging should also help calm China's fears and reduce its suspicions of the recent U.S. change in strategy.

Conclusion

China's rise has considerably raised the stakes for the U.S. and its allies in Asia. In the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides contended state behavior stemmed from three

very powerful motives, “fear, honor and interests,” and the importance of these motives ultimately spurred the Athenians into war with Sparta.⁷⁶ Today, China’s imposing airpower improvements challenge all three of these motives for both the U.S. and its allies. After more than 20 years of modernization, the ensuing growth and technological improvement of Chinese airpower jeopardize U.S. honor and prestige because it threatens to diminish America’s influence and its long-standing position as the region’s hegemonic leader. Further, China’s enhanced power projection capabilities, particularly its A2/AD focus, instill fear because these advancements challenge the U.S. capacity to ensure regional stability and guarantee the security of its allies. Ultimately, the evolving political and security dynamics in the region endanger all four U.S. enduring national interests identified in the National Security Strategy to some degree.

When examining historical precedents of rising powers who mature to challenge the ruling power, the future outlook for Asia appears ominous because 11 of 15 such instances in the last 500 years resulted in conflict.⁷⁷ Due to the intricate elements of codependency between China and the U.S., the economic and political costs of a conflict would be enormous to both sides causing devastating effects to the global economy. To avoid falling into the proverbial “Thucydides Trap,” the U.S. must develop and implement a comprehensive and multifaceted hedging strategy that seeks to avoid conflict and accommodate a peaceful rise of China in order to secure U.S. interests, reassure allies and partners, and maintain international order.

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