

**STRATEGY
RESEARCH
PROJECT**

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THE CASE FOR INCREASED NAVAL PRESENCE IN ASIA

BY

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United States Navy**

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The Case for Increased Naval Presence in Asia

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ABSTRACT

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With the end of the Cold War, the United States' naval services, the Navy and Marine Corps, turned away from blue ocean operations and reoriented their energies and doctrine to expeditionary warfare--using naval forces to decisively impact events on shore, especially in the littorals. All recent service documents, most notably the Navy's white paper "Forward...From the Sea," espouse this new commitment to the littoral mission. Yet deployment patterns by Navy Carrier Battle Groups (CVBG's) and Marine Amphibious Ready Groups (ARG's) remain rooted in the past and centered on a European--that is a Mediterranean-- focus. If the U.S. naval service is to contribute most effectively to future national security, it must shift its attention to the most important region in America's future--Asia. While the huge economic growth of the Asia-Pacific region make it a critical area economically for the U.S. in the 21st Century, the equally large potential for instability in that region makes it imperative that the U.S. military is optimally positioned to help shape the security environment in the Asia of the 21st Century. As a nation we can ill afford to neglect our national security interests in Asia by denying it the constant naval presence that will undoubtedly prove critical in helping to shape the future stability of this vital area of the world. Although the U.S. military will fight jointly and often as part of a coalition, neither the Army, nor the Air Force, nor our allies can provide the continuity of forward presence, nor act with the impunity and on-station duration inherent in forward-deployed naval forces operating from highly mobile "sea bases."

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INTRODUCTION

"Asia's volatility amid affluence will doubtless cast deep shadows over the 21st Century now struggling to be born."

-- Kent E. Calder, Pacific Defense, 1996

With the end of the Cold War, the United States' naval services, the Navy and Marine Corps, turned away from blue ocean operations and reoriented their energies and doctrine to expeditionary warfare--using naval forces to decisively impact events on shore, especially in the littorals. All recent service documents, most notably the Navy's white paper "Forward...From the Sea," espouse this new commitment to the littoral mission. Yet deployment patterns by Navy Carrier Battle Groups (CVBG's) and Marine Amphibious Ready Groups (ARG's) remain rooted in the past and centered on a European--that is a Mediterranean-- focus. If the U.S. naval service is to contribute most effectively to future national security, it must shift its attention to the most important region in America's future--Asia. While the huge economic growth of the Asia-Pacific region make it a critical area economically for the U.S. in the 21st Century, the equally large potential for instability in that region makes it imperative that the U.S. military is optimally positioned to help shape the security environment in the Asia of the 21st Century.

This is not an altogether new concept for some in the naval service. Some in the USMC perceive the challenge we face in Asia and understand the value of forward-deployed naval presence:

"The epicenter of instability will likely be in the world's littorals, where over half the world's population lives and over three-quarters of the world's cities thrive....The challenge the U.S. will face in the littorals, particularly the Asian-Pacific-Indian Ocean littorals, will be diverse and less prone to solution by overwhelming force. These situations will require innovative approaches that are truly effective across a wide range of military options....Seldom has the relevance and rationale for naval forces...been so compelling."¹

A NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

The 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review advocated a national security strategy of engagement, using all dimensions of U.S. national power to shape the international security environment in order to ensure peace and stability in regions where the United States has vital or important interests.² There is no region more important to U.S. interests than Asia and its significance will only increase in the next century. Although Europe will remain vital, U.S.-Pacific trade already exceeds U.S.-European trade. While Asia certainly will not be the only region of vital national interest, maintaining stability there will become increasingly important to our economic and foreign policies and national security.

Former Secretary of State Warren Christopher captured our current dilemma exactly when he said, "Our health is in Asia, but our heart is in Europe." As a result of our early history and heritage, two World Wars and the Cold War, the U.S. has had, for most of this century, a predominantly Euro-centric foreign policy

and security strategy. Even former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, barely touched on Asia in his book, *Diplomacy*, but instead viewed the world through "nineteenth-century European spectacles."³ But with the end of the Cold War, the consequent diminution of the threat from the Soviet Union, and the globalization of the world's economy, we recognize that the economic health of the U.S. is inexorably linked to that of the rest of the world. Any threat to the global economy has direct implications for the U.S. economy, and subsequently, to our national security. Much of the future of this global economy rests on the prospects of nations in the Asian-Pacific rim.

The National Security Strategy (NSS) identifies the preservation of our economic well-being as a vital national interest--one that we would commit military power to protect. At the same time, the NSS also asserts, "Our economic strength depends on our ability to seize opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region. This region is the world's fastest-growing economic area with half the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)...fully 60% of U.S. merchandise exports went to Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) economies in 1996--30% to Asian countries."⁴ These numbers will continue to grow over the next several decades. It is clear that we cannot ignore, nor fail to try and shape, the future of the Asia-Pacific region with all instruments of national power.

ASIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

By 2020, eight out of ten of the world's largest economies will be found along the Pacific and Indian Ocean littorals--the global economic center of gravity will have shifted from the West to the East.⁵ Yet economic growth and prosperity alone will not be enough to ensure Asia's stability in the 21st Century. The increasing pressures of population growth, competition for resources and regional rivalries will continue to make the Asia-Pacific rim an unstable area for the foreseeable future.

Already today, if we could shrink the world's population to 100 people, 57 of them would be Asian.⁶ By 2025, the world's population is expected to grow by 3.4 billion people. Half of that growth, 1.7 billion, is projected to occur in Asia. By 2035, India will surpass China as the world's most populous nation.⁷ Unfortunately, the national infrastructure necessary to support this type of population expansion is lacking, especially in those developing Asian nations that are experiencing the most growth. Most of this growth will occur in urban areas, creating megacities (those with populations over 10 million) whose infrastructures will be even more precarious and unstable. These cities are becoming choked with traffic, pollution and slums as millions have migrated from rural regions to find employment and to participate in the so-called economic miracle.

THE FRAGILITY OF THE "ASIAN MIRACLE"

Even the ongoing economic boom of the Asian "tigers" itself is somewhat precarious. In the fall of 1997, the previously unstoppable Asian economy faltered as systemic shortfalls and apparent widespread corruption caught up with the booming economies of the Pacific rim countries. Stock markets around the world fell precipitously as the Asian economic crash threatened to take the rest of the world's economy down with it. By December, stock markets in Asia lost huge percentages of their value: South Korea--49%; Indonesia--48%; Thailand--41%, Philippines--33%; Hong Kong--30% and Japan--23%.⁸ Underscoring the linkages between the U.S. and Asian markets, multitudes of American companies heavily invested in Asian markets are now predicting disastrous fiscal years, much to the detriment of the U.S. stock market.

Six structural weaknesses in the Asian economic boom have been identified that could impact negatively on the continuation of the remarkable growth of the Pacific rim: the narrow product range of exports; heavy dependence on the North American market; weak infrastructure (as stated before); failure of the education system to generate original research; failure to develop service exports; and dependence on imported raw materials including energy.⁹

Dependence on external energy supplies, primarily Persian Gulf oil, makes these APEC economies extremely reliant on

uninterrupted access to the Persian Gulf and open sea lanes of communication (SLOC's) from the Strait of Hormuz and the Malacca Strait, through the South China Sea to Japan.¹⁰ Today, 25% of the world's merchandise and 56% of Northern Arabian Gulf oil flow through the SLOC's in Southeast Asia. By 2010, 74% of Asia's need for oil will come from the Persian Gulf. China is already a net importer of petroleum.¹¹ Securing SLOC's from the Middle East and throughout the Pacific will be key for continued economic dynamism in Asia. Without the free flow of goods and resources through these critical waterways, the economic health of our Asian allies as well as our own, would falter.

SOURCES OF INSTABILITY

In addition to the pressures of population growth and the fragility of economic boom, there are other sources of regional unrest and political instability in Asia. Ethnic and religious rivalry is a serious problem in Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. Human rights violations and political repression occur regularly in China, North Korea, and Indonesia. Child labor is widespread in South Asia and infanticide is common in India and China. Illegal drug trafficking from Central and Southeast Asia is a transnational problem that continues to defy international efforts to address it. Piracy at sea in the Malacca Strait is still an ongoing problem. The AIDS epidemic threatens both India and Thailand. Education of women lags in

most nations. The economic boom has generated pollution on a huge scale. By 2010, if current practices continue, East Asia will account for more than half of the world's carbon dioxide and sulfur dioxide emissions.¹² The combination of these cultural, societal and political problems suggests a region whose prosperity is never very far from potential disaster.

THE ASIAN MILITARY BUILDUP

Regional stability in Asia is also at least influenced, if not directly threatened, by an unprecedented and ongoing military modernization. Eight of the world's nine largest armed forces are located in or operate in this region. Excluding the US and Russia, these forces include: China (2.9 million troops); India (1.3 million); North Korea (1.2 million); Vietnam (0.9 million); South Korea (.75 million); and Pakistan (.5 million).¹³ Most of these militaries have embarked on significant programs of arms purchases and modernization. Between 1984 and 1994, overall defense spending in this region of the world grew 21% (adjusted for inflation) while defense spending in the U.S. and Western Europe declined. Asia's share of the world arms imports stood at 22% in 1994.¹⁴

While most of these defense acquisitions appear to be intended to modernize existing forces, the types of equipment and platforms being acquired can be seen as destabilizing when viewed from a maritime perspective. Asian arms purchases are generally

focused on acquiring command, control and communications (C3) systems, multi-role fighter aircraft, modern surface combatants, submarines, anti-ship missiles, electronic warfare systems and rapid deployment forces.¹⁵ Fashioned into a coherent force and in the right combination and numbers, these types of weapons and platforms can give a country either a robust area denial or force projection capability that should be of concern, not only to other nations in the region but to the U.S. as well. Additionally, India's ongoing pursuit of a "blue water" naval capability in the Indian Ocean could be a direct threat to U.S. naval operations in South Asia.

DESTABILIZING REGIONAL PRESSURES

With the Western powers decreasing their military force structures and spending, what is driving Asian militaries to modernize or build up their own militaries? Clearly, many Asian militaries are sorely in need of modern platforms and weapon systems to replace aging or obsolete equipment. And certainly, we must remember that the economic boom of the past decade has made available increased resources for defense spending. There is also some uncertainty regarding U.S. defense commitments in the region which is driving some nations--including those nations friendly to the U.S.--to enhance their own self-defense capabilities. There is also a large supply of surplus military equipment available on the world market as a result of Western

forces downsizing.¹⁶ All these factors contribute to increased Asian defense expenditures.

But more troubling are the regional political factors that are contributing to this perceived need for Asian nations to acquire perhaps destabilizing levels of new military systems. There is a potential for the rise of competing regional powers, and increased likelihood of conflicts over territorial disputes, sovereignty claims, historical animosities, surveillance and protection of exclusive economic zones, protection of sea lanes, maritime resources and fishing areas, as well as environmental issues.¹⁷ As is clear, many of these potential disputes have a maritime or naval component to them.

THE ROLE OF THE U.S. MILITARY

If we can agree that Asia's continued stability and economic viability are vital strategic interests for the United States--and the President has indeed defined "a strong and stable Asia Pacific community" as a strategic priority in his 1997 State of the Union address--then the question to be answered is what can the U.S. and its military forces do to help preserve today's security and guarantee tomorrow's prosperity. We must recognize that military forces send the most unambiguous signal of U.S. commitment to a region. American credibility in Asia is inexorably linked to a visible military capability in the Pacific. Admiral Richard Macke, former USCINCPAC, discussing

American military forces, asserted that "no diplomatic note, no political mission, no economic commission conveys the same clear message of enduring commitment."¹⁸

Stability overseas clearly cannot be assured by military forces garrisoned in CONUS; therefore, regional security issues are best addressed by those forces that are forward-stationed or forward-deployed. This is especially true for the Pacific given the vast distances CONUS-based forces would have to traverse in order to respond to crises. In fact, according to the Institute for National Strategic Studies, "The most critical aspect of U.S. engagement strategy is forward deployment."¹⁹ In 1989, approximately 510,000 U.S. military personnel, about 15% of the total active force, were stationed overseas. By 1995, that total had fallen by 50% to about 255,000, with roughly 100,000 of those stationed in East Asia.²⁰ Additionally, perhaps exemplifying our deficit of Asian focus, of the 212 CJCS exercises conducted in 1995, only 21 were in the PACOM AOR.²¹

THE FUTURE OF FORWARD-DEPLOYED U.S. FORCES

In an era of declining budgets and abandonment of forward bases, it is unlikely that any additional U.S. troops will be stationed overseas to address our increased security requirements in Asia. As we have seen, in fact, according to the National Defense University, just the opposite is happening:

"Although the U.S. government remains committed to current force deployments in Japan and South Korea for the foreseeable future, future events and evolving political debates may encourage Washington to focus more on capabilities and quantitiesespecially if there is a diminution of the threat from North Korea, subsequent U.S. security planners may find it prudent to focus less on the number (of personnel) and more on essential missions and types of leading edge forces, especially naval and air, which adequately convey the seriousness of America's commitment to the region."²²

U.S. bases in the Philippines (Subic Bay and Clark) have already been abandoned. While the Naval base at Yokosuka is likely to remain, the same cannot be said for the USMC stronghold on Okinawa in the wake of the political storm over the rape of a Japanese girl by U.S. service members. The U.S. must realistically consider that U.S. military in Okinawa could be expelled by the turn of the century--and Okinawa houses 62% of all U.S. troops in Japan.²³ Should North Korea implode by the turn of the century as many experts seem to think, or peacefully re-unite with the south, then the largest contingent of forward stationed Army forces in the Pacific, the 2nd Infantry Division in South Korea, or a large portion thereof, will quite likely be reduced or removed. We should not forget that the reason for the majority of forces currently in Japan is to support a Korean conflict and these levels would also likely be cut back.

Additionally, the burden-sharing agreements the U.S. has with South Korea and Japan which offset U.S. costs to maintain forward-stationed forces in those nations may need to be reviewed. Japan alone pays about 70% of the cost of maintaining

U.S. forces in that country--to the tune of approximately \$5 billion a year. With the recent precipitous drop in the value of the currencies of both countries against the U.S. dollar, it should be expected that our two strongest allies will want to re-negotiate their share of the costs that had been agreed to during much rosier economic times.

ASIAN PERCEPTIONS OF U.S. COMMITMENT

The 100,000 troop total in Asia is significant if for no other reason than it is roughly equivalent to the number of U.S. troops stationed in Europe and symbolic of our continued commitment to this region of the world. With our predominantly Euro-centric view of national interests, it is key to our allies in the Pacific that the U.S. demonstrate continued resolve to remain engaged in Asia. Asian military professionals already perceive that, much like our "Win in Europe, hold in the Pacific" strategy during World War II, the U.S. still places its primary emphasis on European and Middle Eastern interests.²⁴ Therefore the 100,000 total is a crucial demonstration to our Asian allies, and would-be transgressors, of the depth of our resolve in Asia.

The reductions in U.S. force levels already achieved have not been lost on our Asian-Pacific allies. There is a widespread perception that the U.S. is withdrawing from Asia. The U.S. Pacific strategy of "places not bases" (securing access rights in case of a crisis with no otherwise permanent presence at a given

location) has been interpreted by many in Asia as a unilateral departure from the region because the cost and difficulty of maintaining these forward bases in the absence of a Soviet Pacific threat was not worthwhile. This perception has led to an erosion of confidence in our commitment to security guarantees to nations in the region and, as mentioned earlier, caused some countries to spend more in their own defense.²⁵

The two Major Theater War (MTW) argument for force structure that currently supports U.S. military manpower levels will begin to unravel rapidly once the issue of North Korea is resolved--either peacefully or with force. Once that inevitable event occurs--as early as the next 2-3 years, according to some experts--then the rationale for keeping existing force levels as they are, much less keeping 100,000 troops in Asia (in the absence of a Northeast Asia threat) will be difficult to maintain. Taken together, all these developments strongly suggest a continued reduction in U.S. overseas forward-stationed forces, especially in Asia, just when the security situation appears ripe for increased U.S. military influence to help shape the future of the region.

FUTURE CONFLICT SCENARIOS

Should the Korean problem be resolved, and with the loss of the Soviet Union as a potential Pacific foe, what other potential conflicts in the 21st century would U.S. forces stationed in Asia

be deterring? Is it possible that there would really be no further need for forward-deployed U.S. troops in Asia of the 21st century? What role will they play in the early 21st century?

The U.S. has bilateral security treaties in the Asian-Pacific rim that include not only South Korea, but Japan, Australia, Thailand and the Philippines. Our responsibilities to these other nations will not disappear with a resolution of the Korean situation. There remain numerous regional hot spots in the Asian-Pacific region that could potentially erupt into crisis or war, threatening not only these allies, but regional and even global economic stability.

Border disputes and territorial claims are probably the most common areas of disagreement in the region and there are many of these. China and India have disputed claims in three separate locations; the southern Kuril Islands are claimed by both Japan and Russia; the Paracel Islands are occupied by China and claimed by Vietnam; the Senkaku Islands are claimed by Japan, China and Taiwan. But perhaps the most contentious area of disputed claims is the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. These reefs and islands are spread over 340,000 nm but are comprised of only about 5 square kilometers of actual land. Rich in fishing banks and petroleum potential, these otherwise insignificant rocks are claimed by Brunei, China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines. All but Brunei keep a military presence in the contested area.²⁶ It should be noted that these territorial

issues have as their common denominator, a distinctly maritime flavor. Many sit astride key sea lines of communication which if interrupted by crises, would impact severely trade and commerce throughout and across the Pacific.

Another key area of potential concern is, of course, Taiwan. This longstanding dispute continues to be a major flashpoint in the region. Should Taiwan declare independence from China, then military force would likely be projected from the mainland to forestall such an event. This would surely draw the U.S. into conflict as it almost did in 1996.

Some experts have envisioned two distinctly different futures for Asia. One possible future, predicated on the U.S. remaining effectively engaged, forecasts an Asia with China moving toward a more open political system, a stable and prosperous Hong Kong, peaceful dialogue between China and Taiwan, a cohesive and cooperative ASEAN, Japan with strong military ties to the U.S., and Russia without significant military power. The second future, one where U.S. influence has been allowed to erode, forecasts a militaristic and nationalistic China, a regional arms race, weakened U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty, ASEAN divided by internal strife, and a worsened climate for trade and investment.²⁷ CINCPACFLT summarizes this alternative future should U.S. influence be allowed to wane:

"Without a visible, continuous commitment, there is no doubt our ability to influence events in the region will erode. Without the equalizing effect U.S. presence affords, age-old political, religious, and

territorial animosities will certainly rekindle. U.S. withdrawal would also transform military modernization into an arms race, as countries rush to fill the void left by the absence of America's protective umbrella. Adventurism would seek new perimeters without a deterrent check."²⁸

U.S. PACIFIC STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE

How then, in the face of these economic realities, increasing national interests, potential for conflict and U.S. force reductions--halted, at least temporarily at the 100,000 mark--is the U.S. addressing security concerns in Asia? In 1992, Secretary of Defense Cheney put forward six principles to guide U.S. policy in Asia and the Pacific: (1) assurance of U.S. engagement, (2) strong bilateral security arrangements, (3) maintenance of modest but capable forward-deployed forces, (4) base structure sufficient to support those forces, (5) a desire that Asian allies assume a greater role in their own defense, and (6) complementary defense cooperation.²⁹ These principles have not changed significantly in the intervening 5 years.

Pacific Command's strategy of relying on forward presence to ensure peace and stability in Asia was spelled out by USCINCPAC, ADM Joseph Prueher, in testimony to Congress in March, 1997:

"Our government's leaders as well as those throughout the region agree that security, brokered primarily by U.S. military engagement and presence, underwrites the stable conditions upon which economic security depends."³⁰

PACOM's strategic concept of the Asian-Pacific AOR is "Cooperative Engagement in Peace, Crisis and War," and is designed to (1) shape the regional environment in peace to render conflict and crisis less likely; (2) to resolve crisis situations on terms that advance U.S. long-term interests; and (3) to win wars quickly, decisively and with minimum casualties.³¹

This strategy, closely aligned with the National Security Strategy, relies heavily on the forward presence of credible U.S. military forces as a bedrock assumption for success. How then, would PACOM be able to implement such a strategy if a large number of forward-based land and air forces were returned to CONUS, or worse yet, downsized due to the loss of the two MTW rationale for force structure?

THE UTILITY OF CONUS-BASED LAND AND AIR POWER

The void in forward-based presence could arguably be filled by U.S. air power if one believed in the Air Force's touted concept of "virtual presence." This belief, held by many in the Air Force, claims that a CONUS-based aircraft--for instance a B-2 stationed at Barksdale AFB--can achieve a level of presence during a crisis situation by merely flying a mission into an area and quickly returning home. But long-range bombers can only do one of two things, drop bombs or not. In this they are much like a light switch--either on or off with no capability to incrementally change intensity like a rheostat. Moreover,

aircraft based at long distances have little staying power on-scene and even less ability to send the kind of subtle signals that can help shape the initial stages of a crisis.

The U.S. could also attempt to rapidly reintroduce Air Force wings to the region in a crisis, but these forces are dependent on foreign basing agreements and permission whose securing is not a foregone conclusion. Once these forces have left the region, like Clark Air Base in the Philippines, getting agreement to return will be problematical at best.

Land-based forces, primarily Army units, certainly have the staying power not found in long-range aircraft. But, as we have already seen, forward-based ground forces in the Asian-Pacific region will most likely diminish in the future and as such will be less able to convey continued American commitment in the Far East. Introduction of land combat forces to an area in crisis is also much like a light switch, and once there, assuming they are granted entrance by a host nation, they are difficult and costly to redeploy. This also assumes that enough land combat power could be introduced to a region in time to have the desired effect on a fast moving crisis, to shape unfolding events and deter undesirable future events.

THE IMPACT OF FORWARD-DEPLOYED NAVAL FORCES

If Army and Air Force combat power, both increasingly CONUS-based, are not the answer to promoting future long-term regional

stability in the Pacific rim, what then is the most appropriate force to do so? By process of elimination alone, Navy and Marine Corps units temporarily but routinely deployed forward are the only remaining choice. But what do these forces provide that the other services cannot? "Forward...From the Sea", the Department of the Navy's 1995 White Paper best explains the unique contributions of forward-deployed naval forces:

"Naval forces are particularly well-suited to the entire range of military operations in support of our national strategy. They continue the historical role of naval forces engaged in preventive diplomacy and otherwise supporting our policies overseas. Moreover, forward-deployed naval forces--manned, equipped, and trained for combat--play a significant role in demonstrating both the intention and the capability to join ...allies, as well as other friendly powers, in defending shared interests. Finally, if deterrence fails during a crisis and conflict erupts, naval forces provide the means for immediate sea-based reaction. This could include forcible entry and providing the protective cover essential to enabling the flow of follow-on forces which will be deployed, supported, and sustained from the continental United States."³²

How, in fact, does the nation shape an environment with afloat naval forces alone? Naval Doctrine Publication 1 (Naval Warfare) describes the naval service's role in influencing and shaping the security environment of the areas to which these forces are deployed. First, deployed naval forces deter aggression and promote stability by their very presence. Naval forces are the leading edge of the world's most capable military and their very movement to a crisis area is unequivocal evidence that a robust combat force is poised to protect our interests and

that additional joint forces, most from CONUS, are forthcoming if the situation dictates.³³

The Pacific Fleet's strategy for employing naval forces as enablers to "shape, respond and prepare" the theater is elaborated below:

"In this 'mother of all maritime theaters,' naval forces...are best suited to carry out national objectives and secure U.S. vital interests...It's no surprise that the U.S. Navy is the predominant component of Pacific Command forces in this vast maritime theater. The Army and Air Force are poised to deploy to a scene of action rapidly, but the inherent mobility and flexibility of naval forces allows us to be visibly present, to concentrate power where needed and to sustain our presence as long as necessary. The combined elements of strike, expeditionary Marines operating from the sea, and sea-based transport provide credible reassurance upon which regional countries rely."³⁴

Pacific Fleet naval forces are engaged in the theater on a daily basis, shaping the security environment of the region. The forward-deployed carrier, ships and Marines in Japan are the centerpiece of the Navy's forward presence but their presence is not sufficient in itself to fulfill the shaping mission. Navy CVBG's and ARG's from CONUS contribute to cooperative engagement in the region by conducting more than 800 port visits annually, and by participating in almost 200 exercises with maritime forces of regional navies. Additionally, naval commanders engage in bilateral staff talks and symposiums to open new

military-to-military conduits and confidence building measures with such nations as Russia and China.³⁵

PRIORITIZING NAVAL COMMITMENTS

At the same time that Naval presence is increasingly necessary in the Pacific, the requirement for the Navy to meet expanding commitments overseas with steadily decreasing force structure means some prioritization will be needed. The QDR mandates a future naval force of 11 active and 1 reserve carriers (down from 15 in the 1980's), 12 ARG's, 50 attack submarines (down from 73 in 1997) and 116 surface combatants (down from 128 in 1997).³⁶ Six of these carrier battle groups and amphibious ready groups are stationed in the Pacific. "Forward...From the Sea" recognizes this problem but does not prescribe areas of future emphasis: "Reductions in fiscal resources...dictate that we must refocus our more limited naval assets on the highest priorities and the most immediate challenges, even within those areas of historic and vital interest to the United States."³⁷

National Defense University also comments on this dilemma:

"The Navy finds it increasingly difficult to retain a significant presence in the Caribbean, Mediterranean, Atlantic, Pacific, Indian Ocean, and Persian Gulf with a fleet two-thirds the size of a decade ago. As Marine Expeditionary Units increasingly provide a mobile presence for crisis management, there do not seem to be enough forces to go around."³⁸

To meet 100% coverage of existing CVBG commitments, the Navy believes it needs 14 carriers.³⁹ In order to attempt to meet continuing requirements for CVBG and ARG presence in the Mediterranean, Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, as well as the Pacific, the Navy has considered numerous alternatives. These include, shortening the deployment cycle and reducing crew training time; lengthening deployments from six to eight months; shuttling crews to carriers that remain on-station; establishing a homeport in the Mediterranean; and transferring two carriers from the Pacific to the Atlantic to reduce transit time to the Persian Gulf.⁴⁰ This last alternative is exactly 180 degrees out and further indicates our national lack of focus on Asia of the 21st century.

If the Navy must prioritize its deployment sites, then Asia needs to become one of those priorities in the future, if not the priority. Some Navy commanders already indicate they would prefer to have two carriers available at all times in the Pacific.⁴¹ The U.S. maintains one CVBG forward stationed in Japan, but that carrier cannot be deployed at all times nor be in all places of a huge area of responsibility. While five Pacific Fleet carriers from the U.S. west coast do spend part of their deployments in the Pacific region, they do so while en route to their primary deployment sites in the Arabian or Persian Gulfs. The Pacific is not their main area of focus and the majority of

ship-days spent in the Asian-Pacific are merely a by-product of their transits to the Persian Gulf.

During the Taiwan crisis in 1996, the CVBG from Japan deployed rapidly to the crisis area while a second began transiting from the Indian Ocean. Although the Navy touted the fact that two CVBG's responded, the second did not actually arrive on-station until the crisis was all but over. This type of "virtual presence" may suffice when no shooting war erupts but, had the Chinese actually fired ballistic missiles at Taiwanese port facilities, "virtual" tactical ballistic missile defense (TBMD) would not have been at all sufficient.

CONCLUSION

The U.S. will need to keep a CVBG and ARG on-station at all times in the increasingly important Asia-Pacific region in the 21st Century. This means deployed at sea and on station, not just in port and perhaps ready to get underway. But, as we have seen, the carrier force cannot support another full-time deployment cycle without giving up an existing one. As stability in Asia becomes more paramount to U.S. national interests, other regions where the Navy deploys now, namely the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf, will have to be satisfied with increasingly gapped naval presence. These are both relatively small bodies of water that are also relatively close to each other. Should a crisis arise in either location--and both locations are still of

strategic interest to the U.S.--a battle group or ARG could be flowed relatively quickly, in about a week. The Pacific, on the other hand is ruled by the "tyranny of distance." Naval forces from CONUS take approximately two weeks to arrive in that theater from the U.S. west coast. Future crises in the Pacific will not wait this long for a carrier battle group or amphibious ready group to arrive or augment the single Japan-based carrier.

As argued throughout this paper, Asia, not Europe or even the Persian Gulf, will become the most important region for the U.S., both economically and strategically, at the dawn of the next century. Our trade with Asia is today 50% more than with Europe. It is the most promising and lucrative region for American exports and jobs and is tied closely with the administration's focus on the nation's economy and our future prosperity.⁴² It is increasingly likely that forward-based force levels in this critical region will be reduced over the next decade despite our assertions that we are not retreating from Asia. As a nation then, we can ill afford to neglect our national security interests in Asia by denying that region the constant naval presence that will undoubtedly prove critical in helping to shape the future stability of this vital area of the world. Although the U.S. military will fight jointly and often as part of a coalition, neither the Army, nor the Air Force, nor our allies can provide the continuity of forward presence, nor

act with the impunity and on-station duration inherent in forward-deployed naval forces from highly mobile "sea bases."

5623 Word Count

ENDNOTES

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³ Richard Halloran, The Rising East, (Foreign Policy Number 102, Spring 1996. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), 6.

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⁶ John J. Sheehan, "Building the Right Military for the 21st Century," Strategic Review (Summer 1997): 7.

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³³ U.S. Department of the Navy, Naval Doctrine Publication 1-Naval Warfare (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Navy, 28 March 1994), 17.

³⁴ U.S. Pacific Fleet, "Command Brief."

³⁵ Ibid.

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³⁷ Forward...From the Sea, 2.

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³⁹ Bradley Peniston, "The Carriers," Navy Times, 27 October 1997, 14.

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⁴¹ Ibid, 14.

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