

Singapore Navy RSS *Supreme* leads USS *Chung-Hoon* and Singapore Navy RSS *Vigour* during Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training Singapore maneuvers in South China Sea



U.S. Navy (Andrew Smith)

Enhancing the U.S. Rebalance Toward Asia

ELEVATING ALLIES

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After China responded with belligerence to the Obama administration's initial offers of partnership in 2009, by 2010 the United States had embarked on a new strategy of a "pivot" toward Asia, later rebranded as a "rebalancing." This strategy contains two interrelated elements: a desire to pursue deeper "engagement" with China while at the same time preparing for a new level of American and military capabilities to continue to deter China, a primary (though not exclusive) goal of the Air-Sea Battle (ASB) concept. It appears that China's growing antiaccess/area-denial (A2/AD) and accumulating power projection capabilities, tied to an increasing penchant to use its economic and military power to secure its interests,

will require a continuation of the rebalancing strategy in some form.

However, especially in the Pacific, the success of this U.S. response to China requires greater allied and friendly nation contributions from a region that abjures North Atlantic Treaty Organization-style alliances and wishes to retain growing mutually beneficial commercial relationships with China, as does the United States. Yet this article suggests that these goals are not exclusive and can be achieved while strengthening U.S. leadership by pursuing two broad paths: defining acceptable behavior for China while strengthening deterrence.

As has happened in Southeast Asia's response to China's belligerence in the South China Sea, Washington should lead a pursuit

of multiple codes of conduct that define minimum expected behavior from China in further realms such as other territorial disputes, cyberspace, proliferation, outer space, and military transparency, a process that should include but not be dependent on Beijing's participation. Setting goals that could result in substantial political and economic benefits would then help U.S. partners justify a higher level of hedging with Washington to strengthen deterrent capabilities on two broad levels:

- creating a regional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) system that provides constant situational awareness of Chinese military activities
- developing and selling a new class of missiles that allows U.S. and allied forces to respond with far greater speed to Chinese aggression—and ideally deter that aggression in the first place.

The Obama Administration's Pivot: Response to China's Regional Challenge

In a November 2011 *Foreign Policy* article, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton first officially articulated the policy basis for a U.S. pivot to Asia.¹ She emphasized that ensuring that the Asia-Pacific region remains stable and prosperous is key to advancing U.S. interests. Also in November 2011, the Pentagon announced formation of its Air-Sea Battle Office.² Though in itself a military-diplomatic statement, the Obama administration has gone to some length to deny that the new office's main mission was "anti-China,"³ but was instead to focus on the "generic" antiaccess challenge that could come from other states such as Iran. At that time, it was also revealed that the United States would station 2,500 Marines in Darwin, Australia, station littoral combat ships in Singapore, and seek greater military

cooperation with the Philippines. That was followed in early 2012 by an update to the Department of Defense (DOD) strategic guidance and defense strategy that called for a rebalance of U.S. forces to the Asia-Pacific region in order to "emphasize current alliances" and to "expand networks of collaboration" with other nations.⁴ Finally in June 2012, then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced more detailed plans concerning the forces the United States plans to shift to the Asia-Pacific region in the coming decade.⁵ Together, these statements, actions, and documents outline an emerging security policy toward Asia, in particular examining how China's rise could affect the region.

This followed the Obama administration's 2009 effort to craft what Secretary Clinton called a "comprehensive partnership" with China, downplaying differences over human rights and Taiwan in favor of seeking to elevate China's leadership status



U.S. Ambassador to China addresses reception for delegation aboard USS Carl Vinson in Hong Kong

U.S. Navy (James R. Evans)

in hopes of gaining its positive contributions to solving an expanded list of global concerns such as arms control, climate change, and financial stability—in addition to regional concerns such as North Korea.⁶ But by 2010, it became clear that Beijing was far more interested in advancing its own ambitions than in sharing burdens with Washington, be it climate change, arms control, its vigorous support for Pyongyang following North Korea's sinking of a South Korean corvette on March 26, or its rejection of U.S. offers for mediation of conflicting claims in the South China Sea at the July 2010 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum.

Foreign Minister Yang Jeichi's famous emotion-laden retort to the ASEAN summit—"China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that's just a fact"⁷—underscores the attitude of "might makes right" that has characterized China's increasing use of military pressure in Asia. China's desire for control of the South China Sea is linked to its future power ambitions. Yalong Bay on Hainan Island, for instance, may potentially house a major new base for nuclear ballistic missile submarines and aircraft carriers that could be crucial for strategic defense and power projection into the Indian Ocean and could propel China's desire to push back Washington's influence, particularly in the Philippines. With a relatively less-dominant navy at the time, Beijing took advantage of a low point in U.S.-Philippines defense relations in early 1995 to occupy Mischief Reef, about 230 kilometers (km) from Palawan. In April–May 2012, after building a more powerful navy and coast guard fleet, Beijing felt bold enough to effectively bar Philippine ships from Scarborough Shoal, about 240 km from Luzon, thus building what some in the region interpreted as a zone of denial up the Palawan-Manila Trench, a vital sea lane for Asian commerce. China did this despite a half-decade of revived U.S.-Philippine defense cooperation including more frequent U.S. exercises and the beginning of U.S. conventional force reequipment. Meanwhile, China has diminished, although not rejected outright, an ASEAN-led effort to create a code of conduct that would restrain China's actions, refusing to make a code "binding" and using Cambodia to rupture "ASEAN solidarity" by its preventing criticism of China's

actions in the South China Sea during the July 2012 ASEAN Ministerial Meeting.⁸

China's apparent unwillingness to accept restraint highlights a divided U.S. perspective on China's rise. Some American viewpoints tend to favor the possibility

by the Chinese Communist Party's political requirement to prevent an independent "Chinese" democracy on Taiwan that would undermine the party's legitimacy, by the mid to later part of this decade, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) could be fielding a

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China sees itself reclaiming its
rightful place in the world power structure*

that China's resurgence will be peaceful given its deep two-way economic links with the United States, European Union, and Japan.⁹ Affirming this view would be China's contributions to antipiracy patrols off Somalia since December 2008. However, rising nationalism and increasingly outward projection have given some U.S. policy experts cause for concern that China's aim is to be a revisionist power that seeks to eject the United States from any role in the region and possibly displace its status as sole superpower.¹⁰

One Chinese view of history is that the United States is a "new" power of only a century or so, whereas China has a history of regional power dating back thousands of years. Where the United States sees a "rising" China, China sees itself reclaiming its rightful place in the world power structure. This might explain China's unwillingness to accept restraints on actions viewed as threatening by others, be it the curtailment of foreign access to its rare-earth minerals,¹¹ pervasive economic and cyber espionage activity,¹² rejection of U.S. appeals to begin "stability" dialogues regarding its nuclear weapons plans, continued proliferation to dangerous regimes such as its mid-2011 sale of transporter-erector launcher vehicles to carry North Korea's new intercontinental ballistic missile¹³ despite United Nations Security Council resolutions forbidding such sales,¹⁴ and use of intimidating coast guard ships in its September 2012 dispute with Japan over the Senkaku/Daiyou islands.¹⁵

China's Military Challenge in Asia and Beyond

Absent significant U.S. and allied investments, deterring China will soon become far more difficult due to its galloping military modernization and buildup. Spurred

force decisively superior to that of Taiwan's and capable of performing an early A2/AD strategy within the First Island Chain.¹⁶ This would also create the beginning of a broad regional and then global projection capability. The Chinese "heartland" is becoming a platform for large-scale joint force projection to advance Chinese goals of preserving the dictatorship in Pyongyang, containing Japan, suppressing democracy on Taiwan, extending control over the South China Sea, containing India, and gaining growing power over Central Asia.

If current trends continue, by the latter part of this decade, U.S. forces in Asia will be confronting a larger PLA A2/AD capability that will have multiple layers of ISR to include 15 to 20 surveillance satellites, long-range unmanned aerial vehicles, long-range phased array radar, over-the-horizon (OTH) radar, and electronic intelligence systems. The PLA can also be expected to deploy multiple low- and high-Earth orbit antisatellite systems.¹⁷ PLA ISR will be used to target layers of long-range missile systems, from a new 4,000-km intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) expected after 2015,¹⁸ to the novel 1,500+km-range DF-21D antiship ballistic missile,¹⁹ and the new *X'ian* H-6K bomber modified to carry six or more 1,500-km-range CJ-10K cruise missiles. The estimated 1,600 short-range ballistic missiles aimed at Taiwan²⁰ include multiple versions of the 600-km-range DF-15 and 500-km-range DF-11 and are now being supplemented by the 800- to 1,000-km-range DF-16.²¹ To this could be added nearly 1,000 fourth-, four+, and initial fifth-generation fighters, most of which will be multirole platforms armed with families of precision-guided munitions and long-range antiship missiles, and assisted by surveillance and refueling platforms. At sea, the PLA Navy

could offer a force of 50 to 60 conventional submarines, over half of which would be modern *Kilo*-, *Song*-, and *Yuan*-classes. These could be joined by modern surface forces of at least ten 7,000- to 8,000-ton *Luyang II* and *III Aegis*-class destroyers, at least 16 Type 054 frigates, and littoral forces of about 80 SSM-armed *Hubei* stealthy fast-attack craft and 30 or more new 1,300-ton Type 056 corvettes.

Growing PLA air and missile forces will be further integrated with much modernized ground forces that, over the last decade, have benefited from intensive investments in new tracked and wheeled armor, artillery, mobility, and information systems. Army units in the Shenyang and Beijing Military Regions (MR) facing the Korean Peninsula are nearly as modern as the Nanjing and Guangzhou MR units facing Taiwan, while upgrading forces facing India has been a key priority more recently. The PLA can draw on an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 troops with some degree of amphibious training for Taiwan scenarios. Formal PLA amphibious lift, which could transport about one division to Taiwan, could be expanded to five or six divisions by mobilizing new civilian large- and medium-size ferries, according to a 2006 Taiwan estimate. The extensive development of rail and road networks, especially in the west, plus the incorporation of over 1,000 modern jet transports for “reserve” mobility, means that the PLA can far more rapidly shift its forces for operations on multiple axes. PLA investments in special operations and “irregular” capabilities also give it options to strike decisively in “low-intensity” conflicts with high strategic impact, such as in the East China Sea and South China Sea. The mobilization of hundreds of fishing ships near the Senkaku Islands in September 2012 illustrates one irregular capability that could quickly overwhelm Japan’s defenses.²²

Three other growing Chinese strategic capabilities further complicate U.S. and Asian deterrence calculations. By the late 2020s, China could have an initial maritime/air projection force of 3 to 5 aircraft carrier battlegroups and up to 12 large amphibious projection landing dock platforms or landing dock helicopter ships, plus growing numbers of the X’ian Y-20, a C-17 class airlifter, giving it the option to “pivot” against U.S. interests globally. This formal projection capability is complemented by China’s decades-long investment in advancing the nuclear missile

capabilities of its radical clients such as North Korea and Iran, which, if uncontrolled by Beijing, could undertake direct and indirect action against U.S. interests, diverting U.S. forces and attention to China’s advantage. Third, toward the end of this decade, China’s improving nuclear forces may be expanding to hundreds of warheads, many on new multiple independently reentry targetable vehicle-capable DF-41 or new DF-5 ICBMs.²³ The PLA may also have a substantial arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons,²⁴ and as it demonstrated in January 2010, is also actively developing missile defenses. Such a large and defended PLA nuclear arsenal would undermine the credibility of an extended U.S. nuclear deterrent for Asian allies, especially as the United States considers nuclear weapon reductions below the 1,550 deployed warheads in the latest Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty agreement with Russia.

Developing ASB: A Concept to Augment the Pivot

To augment the rebalance and provide an option to ensure that needed capabilities exist in an increasingly contested future environment, the U.S. Air Force and Navy have developed a new concept of joint operations called Air-Sea Battle (ASB). Some tout it as a panacea to thwart China’s A2/AD capabilities,²⁵ yet detractors denounce the concept as a failure foolishly masquerading as strategy that will ultimately harm actual U.S. capacity to rebalance to the Pacific.²⁶ Officially, ASB stands as a platform to further integrate cross-domain operations and provide the

focus on joint operations also meshes with the goals of the 2012 Capstone Concept for Joint Operations, which names the need to handle globally integrated operations as a primary goal of the U.S. military.²⁹

ASB, at its core, has one clear aim: to utilize joint capabilities in dynamic ways to ensure that the United States retains freedom of choice, in terms of military action, in the Asia-Pacific region. If China is able to use its A2/AD capabilities to limit U.S. options in a future scenario, it will succeed in “winning without fighting,” a longstanding tenant of Chinese strategic thinking. ASB is a tool that would parry that A2/AD thrust, retaining the ability of U.S. commanders to “seize the initiative at a time and place of their choosing.”³⁰ ASB is a more acceptable future possibility for U.S. strategic planners, who believe that to allow China to restrict American freedom of action would be to cede too much control to China, disrupting the balances of power in the region and weakening U.S. ties with friends and allies.

However, ASB is not meant to be an advocate for certain weapons systems, though the Services do have their early preferences. In a time of increasing austerity when the Services have to accept cutbacks or cancellations of key programs, they also seek to sustain core capabilities. Having seen the curtailment of the Lockheed Martin F-22 to 187 in 2010, the Air Force seeks to preserve as much as possible of its planned purchase of 1,763 Lockheed-Martin F-35 strike fighters as well as develop a new bomber by 2020 and a sixth-generation combat aircraft by

PLA investments in special operations and “irregular” capabilities give it options to strike decisively in “low-intensity” conflicts with high strategic impact

full leverage of all the various capabilities of the Services in one coherent operational concept.²⁷ ASB was born of the Joint Operational Access Concept, a document issued by the Defense Department in early 2012 that identified three critical areas where the United States will need to be prepared in order to deal with in the near future: A2/AD issues, changing U.S. international defense posture, and growing space and cyberspace as contested domains.²⁸ ASB focuses mainly on the first objective, promoting joint use of air and naval assets to ensure access. This

2030. As its planned 32 stealthy advanced capability DDG-1000 destroyers was cut to just 3 in 2008, the Navy seeks to preserve its 10 to 11 aircraft carrier battle groups and sustain a nuclear attack submarine force of about 50 ships.

While ASB does not specifically call for specific weapons systems, preservation of the F-35 at current estimates would greatly enhance its joint integration capabilities both among forces and allies. The F-35’s command, control, communications, computers, and ISR capabilities—spread across

Air Force, Marine, and Navy platforms, as well as integrated into the South Korean, Japanese, Singaporean, and Australian militaries—present the United States with a chance to leverage unprecedented situational awareness into the ASB concept. Having interoperable platforms across these forces would enable ASB to utilize F-35s in a “honeycomb” strategy, allowing scalable deployment options to provide on-demand and widespread support, and expand the capabilities, of surrounding forces.

Beyond air and naval deployment plans, another chance to develop a new level of U.S. deterrent capability in Asia was signaled by the August 2012 revelation that the United States would put a second 1,000–2,000-km-range AN/TPY-2 or Forward-based X-Band Transportable (FBX-T) radar in Japan, as well as a yet-to-be identified long-range X-Band radar in the Philippines.³¹ The first FBX-T allows possible coverage of North Korea and well into China, while a second FBX-T for an island in southern Japan (approved by both governments in September 2012) might reach into Central China. Washington might consider placing a version of the Raytheon SBX radar in the Philippines. Its 6,000-km range³² would enable coverage from Siberia to the Tasman Sea.

New U.S. radars are reportedly intended to provide much-needed early warning for missile defense interceptors. But their continuous coverage also provides U.S. allies and friends with an expanded real-time picture of Chinese military activities. They can also enable targeting for aircraft and new classes of missiles. Navy leaders are seeking a new balance between stealthy and expensive “platforms” and new and more capable “payloads” that better exploit the modularity of the vertical launch systems on ships and submarines.³³ When cued by new U.S. long-range radar, a new class of medium-range missiles—to include antiship ballistic missiles placed on ships and submarines—could greatly enhance deterrence by providing a new means for more rapidly countering PLA naval and amphibious aggression. Such a move would require renegotiation or withdrawal from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

Elevating the Allied Role

By using elements of ASB to deepen military ties with U.S. allies such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Australia,

U.S. Navy (Chad J. McNeelley)



People's Liberation Army soldiers prepare for demonstration

plus friends such as Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Vietnam, and Taiwan, ASB could affirm U.S. leadership by creating new means to deter China's growing military capabilities.³⁴ A new U.S.-led information-strike complex would establish a new level of nonnuclear deterrence in Asia that could increase the effectiveness of Asian missile programs. In October 2012, South Korea convinced Washington to allow it to develop missiles up to 800-km in range,³⁵ while in 2011–2012, there appears to have been a change in U.S. attitudes toward Taiwan's indigenous long-range missile program from opposition to acceptance.³⁶ While Japan has not developed offensive long-range missiles due to constitutional restrictions, it has developed solid-fueled space launch vehicles that could form the basis for an IRBM. For the United States and its Asian allies, a movement toward new classes of missiles would constitute a measured nonnuclear response to China's emerging ISR/strike A2/AD combine. Washington should also assist with allied missile programs, for example, by providing sensor-fused, munition-based warheads that could more effectively counter PLA naval swarming tactics and mass amphibious invasion operations—a growing requirement for Taiwan and the Philippines.

There would also be the option for U.S. friends and allies to calibrate their cooperation with Washington. Most value their growing commercial relationships with China and may require an added measure of flexibility. For example, while Australia agreed to host U.S. Marines at Darwin in 2011, in August 2012 it decided that it was necessary to make an awkward public judgment not to allow a U.S. carrier task group to station in Perth, likely in deference to China.³⁷

Contributing to a regional ISR network from which U.S. friends also gain an expanded and redundant view of the Asian theater would allow countries such as Australia and Taiwan to contribute and gain substantial strategic benefit without problematic stationing of U.S. forces. Australia, Japan, and Taiwan have powerful OTH or phased array radar that could contribute to a regional picture, while South Korea is developing its own long-range radar. For Taiwan, the United States could play the role of “server” that would receive and distribute Taipei's sensor inputs while providing Taiwan with a picture based on its own radar in Japan and the Philippines. Providing Taiwan with such redundant coverage would by itself enhance deterrence by ensuring no

degradation in defensive coverage if Taiwan's radar is attacked. For Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and India, sharing an expanded ISR picture would greatly improve warning time for Chinese military action; Beijing would be less able to conceal military preparations in distant regions.

To be sure, China will not be pleased with such a course. In October 2012, it reportedly was forming a new office in its Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the purpose of better coordinating economic pressures to achieve its diplomatic goals.³⁸ However, it is possible to bolster resolve in Washington and in allied capitals by addressing Beijing on two levels. First, it should be told that the creation of a broad ISR network wedded to new missile capabilities is merely a symmetrical response to what China has been building over the course of the last two decades; Beijing did not clear its ISR/strike combination with any other country.

But on a second level, it may be possible to short-circuit another Cold War by following the example set by ASEAN and for Washington to take a leading role in establishing a series of codes of conduct that would at least result in levels of minimum acceptable behavior, especially for Beijing. The goal would be to put in motion the construction of political regimes that not only define the essential Western interests but also offer the potential for the widest benefits should Beijing choose participation over confrontation. There is already great interest in Europe, India, and Washington in establishing a code for acceptable behavior in space. Chinese opposition to a new U.S. and allied ISR/strike combine should be met with a multilateral program to create an acceptable code for regional military transparency, with the intention of moving toward eventual missile controls. Such codes could also be pursued for conduct in cyberspace and other territorial disputes such as in the East China Sea. Effort should be made to seek China's participation in the development of these codes, but Beijing should not be allowed to hold up progress.

Conclusion

As the Obama administration formulated its rebalancing, or pivot, from 2011 to 2012, it began to answer some of the questions about how it would enhance U.S. deterrent capabilities beyond numerous reports



Japanese Defense Force soldiers participate in civilian evacuation drill during exercise Cobra Gold, Rayong, Thailand

U.S. Marine Corps (Carl Payne)

of the Air-Sea Battle Office's early focus on seeking to enhance the joint capabilities of existing U.S. forces operating against A2/AD threats. The August 2012 revelation that the United States intends to place long-range radar in Japan and the Philippines opens the door to consideration of a next generation of deterrent capabilities for this region based on the creation of a regional ISR network wedded to new U.S. and allied missile capabilities. This would constitute a measured symmetrical nonnuclear response to China's quickly emerging ISR/strike network.

By pursuing a strategy of seeking multiple codes of conduct with its Asian and other allies, the United States may also be able to channel and moderate potential conflicts with China, provided China decides to join new global norms of behavior. Recent events give hope that China will willingly invest in these codes of conduct. Reports indicate that Beijing and Washington are considering sharing resources during joint operations, such as antipiracy patrols in the Indian Ocean.³⁹ These important military-to-military connections could serve as a bridge to further agreements on conduct. However, simultaneously, China may be looking to test another antisatellite weapon, a followup to the 2007 test that drew international condemnation.⁴⁰ If tested, this weapon could derail other programs that may otherwise lead to entrenching various codes of conduct. Ultimately, until more concrete progress is made on these codes, next-level deterrent capabilities can serve to prevent conflict. **JFQ**

NOTES

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³⁴ Ty Cobb, "Good-Bye Counter-Insurgency; Hello Air-Sea Battle," *Harvard Law School National Security Journal*, November 29, 2011, available at <<http://harvardnsj.org/2011/11/good-bye-counter-insurgency-hello-air-sea-battle/>>.

³⁵ "S. Korea, U.S. Wrap Up Marathon Missile Talks," *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), October 8, 2012, available at <http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/10/08/2012100800614.html>.

³⁶ This is a conclusion of coauthor Richard Fisher based on multiple conversations with U.S. and Taiwanese officials in 2011 and 2012.

³⁷ The suggestion to seek the stationing of a U.S. carrier group in Australia was made in Center for Strategic and International Studies, "U.S. Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific: An Independent Assessment," August 15, 2012, available at <http://csis.org/files/publication/120814_FINAL_PACOM_optimized.pdf>. For the Australian reaction, see Brendan Nicholson, "No US military bases here, says Smith, but Washington confirms plan as part of Asia-Pacific pivot," *The Australian* (Sydney), August 3, 2012, available at <www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/defence/no-us-military-bases-here-says-smith-but-washington-confirms-plan-as-part-of-asia-pacific-pivot/story-e6frg8yo-1226441806566>. In April 2013, Huntington Ingles Industries revealed a ballistic missile defense (BMD) version of the LPD 17, equipped with a large S/X-band radar and provision for up to hundreds of vertical-launched missiles, a novel radar, and BMD platform that would help to mitigate such sovereignty concerns.

³⁸ Li Jing, "China sets up new department to flex economic muscles for global goals," *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), October 11, 2012, available at <www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1057321/china-sets-new-department-flex-economic-muscles-global-goals>.

³⁹ Donna Miles, "U.S., China to Consider Sharing Resources During Joint Missions," American Forces Press Service, October 12, 2012.

⁴⁰ Gertz, "China to Shoot at High Frontier."