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THE UNITED STATES NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

***MATCHMAKER V:
Establishing Colbert's Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group***



October 27, 2017

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the United States Naval War College Newport, RI in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

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Abstract

MATCHMAKER V: Establishing Colbert's Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group

A permanent peacetime coalition naval force, comprised of key allies and partners in the Indo-Asia-Pacific, should be established by the United States as a strategic tool to address China's emerging maritime power and increasingly assertive coercion to subvert regional order. This paper reviews the history of establishing the world's first permanent peacetime coalition naval force, NATO's Standing Naval Force, Atlantic, to include a review of the "Matchmaker" series of named NATO exercises that evolved into the innovative standing force. Applying the lessons of this history as a model, the paper proposes that in the contemporary strategic environment, Exercise Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) should be leveraged similarly to form a Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group.

Introduction

On Thursday, 9 February, at 1000, a committee of military leaders from various army, air and naval forces convened in Washington, D.C. Seventeen flag and general officers from thirteen nations assembled in a Pentagon conference room to receive a presentation introducing an innovative strategic proposal.¹

The briefing began by cataloguing the emerging capability of a rising power exhibiting a deliberate strategic shift toward the maritime domain. According to the U.S. Navy Admiral who introduced the brief, the leadership of this nation fully embraced Alfred Thayer Mahan's seminal work, *The Influence of Sea Power on History*.² Assessments of mere potential are being superseded again and again by rapidly fielded proven capability. What, until recently, may have been criticized as speculative forecasts were now irrefutable facts confronting military and political leaders.

With a growing appreciation of the value of sea power, in only two decades this historic land power has rapidly become the second great maritime power in the world. Beyond the rapid growth of their navy, the brief described an equally significant merchant and fishing fleet that blurs the line between conventional forces and a new kind of maritime militia, increasingly willing and capable of exercising significant political and economic influence. This new maritime power has dynamically emerged from confined territorial waters, intent on exploiting the high seas to exert global influence.

The senior military audience was already very familiar by firsthand experience with a steady increase in warship visits to foreign countries, a naval presence now extending to the Mediterranean Sea and an increasingly established normality of presence beyond territorial waters in such areas as the Philippine Sea—and beyond. In the past, if some believed in crisis

it would be a simple problem to neutralize the fleet in its near seas, the increasing capability and capacity of its forces were making old assumptions completely invalid. This rising power has rapidly operationalized a maritime component of grand strategy, effectively developing and exploiting this instrument of national power.

The inescapable conclusion of the brief: this rapidly maturing maritime capability necessitates a reappraisal of our own strategy.

As strongly as this familiar scenario likely resonates with contemporary audiences, this Pentagon briefing didn't occur in 2017. The archived NATO SECRET record of the meeting was declassified and approved for public disclosure in 2003. Rear Admiral Richard G. Colbert, the Assistant Chief of Staff for Policy, Plans and Operations on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) staff of Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT) made the presentation with Captain A. J. Bos, Royal Netherlands Navy, and Captain W.P.B. Barber, Royal Navy, to the 252nd meeting of the North Atlantic Military Committee in permanent session on February 9, 1967.³

The subject of Colbert's presentation was, of course, the Soviet Union. After framing the daunting challenge presented by the rapidly advancing Soviet navy, his innovative proposal of maritime strategy was to seize the initiative and establish a standing permanent NATO naval force in peacetime.⁴

Colbert was successful. The Standing Naval Force proposal was adopted in December 1967 and implemented on 13 January 1968,⁵ when the American USS *Holder*, Dutch HNLMS *Holland*, Norwegian RNoNS *Narvik* and British HMS *Brighton* formed the Standing Naval Force, Atlantic—the first peacetime permanent international naval force established in history.⁶ The force, known today as Standing NATO Maritime Group 1, has operated continuously throughout the last half century and was complemented through the years by the

addition of Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (formed originally as the Standing Naval Force, Mediterranean), a NATO On-Call Force, as well as two mine countermeasure groups established under the same rotating, international command architecture.⁷

The goals of the standing force were articulated in Colbert's presentation: (1) "maintain the naval art within NATO at a high level," (2) "provide continuous and visible evidence of solidarity and unity of NATO," (3) "be available at the first threat of a contingency situation for immediate deployment to the scene as an initial naval presence with some powers of deterrence," and, (4) "form a cadre around which could be built a more powerful and versatile maritime contingency force should the need arise."⁸

The remarkable success of this initiative is evidenced in the five decades of sustained peacetime coalition operations since inception. The groups continue as a centerpiece to NATO's operational maritime strategy today—more than a quarter century after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Rear Admiral Colbert had an even more ambitious vision, though, writing after the formal adoption of his proposal, but before the first force assembled:

With this as a prototype conceivably we can follow suit with similar forces in time in the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, the Western Pacific, and very importantly Latin America. As the Soviet Union continues to expand its sea power worldwide, I can think of no more pragmatic and meaningful counter to their activities than the U.S. participating as partners with friendly countries in their various areas.⁹

A Return to Great Power Competition

Shift perspective from 1967 to 2017. In his three-and-a-half hour speech to open the 19th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party on October 18, 2017, President Xi Jinping intoned an emerging "new era", bellowing with pride for the China he described as a "great power" or a "strong power" 26 times—a "clear departure from the days when leaders in Beijing

depicted their country as a poor, modest player abroad,” according to a New York Times analysis of the speech.¹⁰

In 2016, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) began implementing sweeping reforms to the military that Xi and other Chinese leaders announced in 2015.¹¹ It is the latest phase of China’s long-term military modernization program, which leadership characterizes as fundamental to achieving great power status—Xi’s “China Dream” of national rejuvenation.¹² CCP leadership is clear and consistent that a strong military is a critical requirement to advance the dream.¹³

As China continues its emergence, Chinese strategists and analysts have clearly established a maritime vision:

One after another, nations have trained their sights on the sea. The strategic status and use of the sea are of obvious importance. Contradictions and contention for maritime rights and interests are increasingly violent. The 21st century is a Maritime Century. Facing the Maritime Century’s call, the Chinese Nation’s desire for resurgence has never been more strong and its maritime connection has never been more inseparable.¹⁴

With this vision, China has made concerted investments over the last several decades. Since the early 1990s it has worked painstakingly to develop an advanced capable navy.¹⁵ China’s published official figures show double digit military budget growth every year for the past two decades.¹⁶ Beyond official figures, estimates of actual increases have been even higher—as much as 40% in recent years.¹⁷ Additionally, considerations of purchasing power parity to gauge Chinese military spending are warranted in any international comparison.¹⁸

By 2015, the Office of Naval Intelligence reported China’s coast guard and maritime law enforcement fleet exceeded the combined size of Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.¹⁹ China launched more naval ships than any nation on the planet every year since 2013,²⁰ with no sign of abating. This investment has fueled China’s arrival as a formidable maritime force within its near-seas region, while increasingly operating in more-

distant waters, including round-the-world deployments in 2015 and 2017, more frequent operations in the broader Western Pacific, Indian Ocean, and even European waters.²¹

Converting this potential to power, China is leveraging its maritime muscle to assert sovereignty claims over disputed features in the East and South China Seas. Researchers have continued to document and quantify China's coercive multi-domain tactics. According to a Center for a New American Security March 2015 report by Christopher Yung and Patrick McNulty, studying more than 1,200 actions undertaken by the six claimants in the South China Sea, China has been the single most active user of military, paramilitary, economic, administrative and diplomatic instruments of coercion.²²

But why? The most difficult question for strategic policymakers, tying back to the themes of Xi's speech to the Congress of the Communist Party may be to discern strategic intent. Yung and McNulty suggest the key aim by China in South China Sea coercion may be to "[chip] away at the region's steadfast belief that the United States is a reliable guarantor of regional security."²³

Reconsidering Colbert's Proposal

Two snapshots of history, describing the strategic dilemma presented by a rapidly emerging revisionist maritime power. Though the principals have changed, the principles remain the same. Five decades after the first peacetime permanent international maritime force, it is time again to leverage Colbert's strategic innovation and establish an international Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group. Its purpose will be to maintain the naval art at a high level among partners committed to peace, security, prosperity and the rule of law in the Indo-Asia-Pacific; to provide continuous and visible evidence of solidarity against increasingly

assertive Chinese subversion of regional order; and, to form a cadre to build a more powerful and versatile maritime coalition should the need arise.

According the Department of Defense 2016 report on China's military and security developments, China created more than 3,200 acres across five major reclamation projects in the Spratly Islands before pausing in 2016.²⁴ Early in his 19th Congress speech Xi called out the Spratly development as a highlight of his first five-year term.²⁵

A search of the U.S. Naval War College collection for scholarly and peer-review articles on the South China Sea during the period of the land reclamation project produces 34,907 journal articles, book reviews, conference proceedings and books published²⁶ ...while China built 3,200 acres.²⁷ Expanding the search beyond scholarly and peer-review, produces 203,440 returns.²⁸ While the evidence might be fairly attacked as anecdotal—or more cynically anecdotal—it does paint an interesting picture: While the world's newspapers and magazines churn out hundreds of thousands of articles, while international relations scholars furiously research and publish on the topic, Western strategists seem to continue to flail to find a footing of response. And China continues the march to build and develop critical strategic infrastructure in international waters of the South China Sea and expand its influence.

China continues a relentless effort across domains described aptly by Yung and McNulty, while the West struggles to establish avenues to formulate “cost-imposing” strategies that to date have offered few tangible levers of influence to promote adherence to rule of law, advance effective conventional deterrence, provide peace and security, and safeguard sovereign rights.

A permanent peacetime naval coalition offers just such a tangible lever. The United States, with select allies and partners, should form a Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime

Group that will form the new foundation of multinational military cooperation in order to enhance regional security and buttress the rules based international order.

Confronting Feasibility

Opponents of this proposal may argue that a Standing Maritime Group is simply not feasible in the Indo-Asia-Pacific. The international relations environment is too complicated and the competing sovereign interests too splintered to create a coherent and enduring coalition for a standing naval force. Asia, after all, is not Europe and there is no analogous military alliance to NATO as a foundation upon which to construct a permanent international maritime force. Examining the existing potential for sustained military cooperation in Asia, critics might point to the ineffectiveness and ultimate dissolution of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) as well as the history of significant rifts even within the Australia-New Zealand-United States (ANZUS) treaty alliance, where differences in national policy over nuclear weapons kept U.S. Navy ships from visiting New Zealand for more than three decades.²⁹

In fact, even with the antecedent of a longstanding military alliance in Europe, the Standing Naval Force, Atlantic wasn't established until 19 years after the NATO alliance was formalized. Opponents might suggest, then, that even if the conditions could be established within the complex bilateral network of the contemporary Indo-Asia-Pacific environment, advanced coalition integration of a standing naval force still would be decades away from feasibility.

This criticism of feasibility does not stand up to scrutiny, however, and commits mistakes of oversimplification in both the model and the comparison. In terms of the model, NATO, as the partnership that produced and sustained standing naval forces for the last half century, has numerous complexities of its own and has seen the opening and closing of policy

and partner fissures, of varying severity, through the decades. A false veneer of perfect and perpetual alignment should not be accepted as a model of comparison, or as a necessary and sufficient condition set to be satisfied before acting elsewhere. The twenty-nine member nation alliance today, with three aspiring members in the wings, was founded by only twelve nations. Seams and contours of the alliance were evident from the beginning.

Consider the cases of just Iceland and France, for example, both founding members. When Bjarni Benediktsson signed for Iceland as a founding member in 1949, he represented a nation that did not then—and still does not today—even have armed forces.³⁰ More pointedly, on the continent President Charles de Gaulle withdrew France completely from NATO's integrated military structure in 1966. As evidence of the seriousness of this fissure, the alliance's political headquarters, based in Paris since 1952, as well as the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, in Rocquencourt since 1951, were moved to Belgium as a result. France would not announce a decision to fully participate in NATO structures again until April 2009.³¹ French naval forces, though, continued to exercise with NATO naval forces throughout this period, even maintaining naval liaison officers stationed in Norfolk, Virginia. In 1973, Colbert, then a four-star admiral commanding Allied Forces Southern Europe, successfully negotiated a treaty agreement for annual exercises.³² In a deeply symbolic piece of evidence of the long-term viability of naval cooperation throughout the complicated twists and turns of state relations, the French Navy's *Charles De Gaulle* Carrier Strike Group—based around the flagship French aircraft carrier named for its President who disintegrated NATO military ties—conducted extensive exercises integrated with Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 in 2015.³³

So, when examining the NATO model for comparison in the Indo-Asia-Pacific, it is important to apply the unvarnished, accurate—and complicated—history of the European alliance before any comparative conclusions of feasibility are drawn.

This feasibility criticism also fails by oversimplification in the categorical description of an Asian security environment and U.S. alliance system too complex to untangle. To describe the region with deterministic characterization, as though here an inherent complexity of interests produced this difficult complexity of alliances ignores history. Deliberate policy choices were made by the United States, and the West more generally, in Asia as the Cold War emerged which produced the contemporary alliance system.

In his 2009 article “Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia,” expanded into a 2016 book, former director of Asian affairs at the National Security Council, Victor Cha examines the roots of bilateralism that emerged in East Asia, instead of multilateralism which took hold in Europe. Cha cautions international relations scholars not to neglect the critical variable: U.S. powerplay preferences.³⁴ Expanding on specific explanations of deliberate policy choices, rather than widely accepted views of broad deterministic conditions, Cha develops a two-by-two quadrant model³⁵ pitting target states against targeting states, varying from small powers to great powers. He then argues that in three of the quadrants, the “powerplay” favors multilateralism: cases of parity (where small states target small states, and large states target large states), and cases of cooperation to overcome disadvantage (when small states target large states). In the remaining quadrant, when a great power seeks control over a small target, bilateralism is preferred. This framework provides a lens to understand the post-World War II security environment of East Asia from the perspective of the United States, and helps explain the deliberate choices to develop what John Foster Dulles famously coined the “hub and spoke” system developed throughout the Truman and Eisenhower administrations.³⁶

Beyond deconstructing and refuting the criticism of feasibility, it is important to offer a constructive rebuttal that positively proves the feasibility of the proposal. Here it is worthwhile to revisit in more detail the history of the Standing Naval Force, Atlantic.

As a junior Ensign in 1939, after serving briefly on the newly-commissioned aircraft carrier, USS *Yorktown*, Richard Colbert was assigned to the destroyer USS *Barker* in the Asiatic Fleet. He would remain on the *Barker* for the next five years, eventually commanding the ship. His personal papers, archived at the U.S. Naval War College include the “Morning Orders” written by then-Lieutenant Junior Grade Colbert, Officer of the Deck, that scratched out the type written plan from the night before to prepare for a scheduled 1400 underway on December 8, 1941 (the day of the attack on Pearl Harbor for ships like *Barker*, across the dateline, moored at Tarakan Island, Borneo) and replaced the morning routine with handwritten ink, “Muster on stations,” and “Quarters – Emergency Drills.”³⁷ As an officer on *Barker* at the outbreak of World War II, Colbert got a front-row seat to the establishment of the Allies’ first unified Command—ABDACOM (American-British-Dutch-Australian Command). The Communications Officer on a U.S. Navy destroyer, he saw firsthand the challenges of cobbling together a coalition in haste, initiated by the urgent tyranny of necessity, only after the outbreak of war. This formative experience would inform his efforts twenty-five years later as he lobbied NATO navies to establish history’s first Standing Naval Force in peace.³⁸

Colbert wasn’t the first to propose a standing coalition force under the North Atlantic alliance. A Canadian delegate to a NATO anti-submarine warfare (ASW) symposium in 1960 proposed forming an ASW Group.³⁹ During the annual conference at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe in 1963 (still near Rocquencourt, before the French withdrawal from NATO’s military structures), amidst discussion on the mounting challenges in establishing

commonality in maritime logistics, Admiral Sir Charles Madden, RN, warned, “The only way to remedy... (the) situation,” is “to keep a NATO Group together for a longish period of time.”⁴⁰ The discussion advanced quickly from that conference to a detailed proposal for an extended exercise of four-to-six frigates. This proposal produced an agreement between the Allied Commanders and a firm commitment in 1964 to a new exercise named “Matchmaker” to be conducted in 1965.⁴¹ The momentum built: “Matchmaker” in 1965, was followed by “Matchmaker II” in 1966, and “Matchmaker III” in 1967. Rear Admiral Colbert joined the SACLANT headquarters in June of 1966. His own personal history cemented an abiding professional commitment to international naval cooperation—extending from *Barker* through his work as a Navy Captain establishing the Naval Command Course for international officers at the U.S. Naval War College.⁴² He was positioned perfectly to nurture and grow the “Matchmaker” series. By 1967, with “Matchmaker IV” already scheduled and being planned for 1968, Colbert was the ideal leader, in the right place at the right time to galvanize support across the alliance and transform “Matchmaker IV” into the Standing Naval Force, Atlantic.

Fast forward to the here and now. In 2017, the conditions are set with a longstanding international maritime exercise in the Pacific poised to leverage in the same way. Since it was first conducted in 1971, Exercise Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) has matured from a surface navy-only affair between five nations (the U.S., Australia, UK, Canada and New Zealand) to the world’s largest joint military exercise—most recently, in 2016, including 25,000 sailors, soldiers, airmen and marines from 26 nations.⁴³ International commanders have been fully integrated into the exercise command and control structure. A myriad of integration, planning, logistics, and command and control issues have been methodically and deliberately resolved through 46 years of cooperation. RIMPAC, as an analogous “Matchmaker V,” is qualitatively and quantitatively in a much stronger and more mature position to launch a Standing Indo-

Asia-Pacific Maritime Group than the relatively nascent “Matchmaker IV” was when it was successfully used as the foundation for the Standing Naval Force, Atlantic.

Confronting Fallibility

With the counterargument of feasibility deconstructed and rebutted, opponents may argue that even if feasible, the proposal for a modern Colbert coalition in the Indo-Asia-Pacific is the wrong strategy. It keeps the nation’s strategic wheels stuck in the rut of counterproductive constrained thinking and succumbs to the fallibility described most notably by Graham Allison in *Destined For War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* To quote Allison, they might argue that “China and the United States are currently on a collision course for war—unless both parties take difficult and painful actions to avert it.”⁴⁴ On a tectonic scale of geopolitical forces, the “severe structural stress”⁴⁵ being felt in the international system as a rising China “threatens to upend”⁴⁶ the ruling United States will not be resolved by forming confrontational coalitions, they would argue. Such a coalition may be the catalyst of conflict that triggers a devastating quake of war between superpowers.

In some respects, this counterargument cuts right to the bone of a fundamental choice whether to confront or accommodate, whether to lead or defer. It may be instructive to examine Allison’s treatment more thoroughly, though, and consider its implications to the Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group proposal before deciding.

The practical construct of the Thucydides’s Trap Project that Graham Allison directs at Harvard has catalogued sixteen cases of a rising power disrupting a ruling power. By the analysis, twelve of the sixteen have resulted in war, while four have avoided it. After considering the analogous cases over the last five centuries, he distills “twelve clues for peace”⁴⁷ to glean from the lessons of history and escape the trap of war.

Rather than succumbing to the trap, it may be argued that access to the mechanisms at play in several of these “clues for peace” is *improved* by the establishment of a Standing Maritime Group. For example, his first clue is that “higher authorities can help resolve rivalry without war.”⁴⁸ A permanent international naval coalition in peace is first and foremost visible and continuous evidence of solidarity that can reinforce the authority of existing international order. As the coalition matures, it may actually become an even more direct reinforcing arm. It is not difficult to imagine a Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group conducting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, conducting anti-piracy patrols, and other security functions to enforce United Nations resolutions, for example. Over the long term, a Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group might also advance the coalition tendencies at play in his second clue, “States can be embedded in larger economic, political, and security institutions that constrain historically ‘normal’ behavior,”⁴⁹ referring in this case to the peaceful rise of Germany within the collective security environment of post-World War II. A third thread that weaves its way through the discussion of several of Allison’s clues is raising the perceived cost of war. Sustaining and strengthening meaningful coalitions, particularly as they begin to bridge and reinforce between the “spokes” created in the Dulles-designed bilateral treaty environment of the Indo-Asia-Pacific, can also raise the perceived cost of conflict for China and may, therefore, positively affect their calculus on whether to use military force as an instrument of coercion.

Most convincing, though, in rebutting the Thucydides’s Trap attack of fallibility may be instead to look to those rare unicorns of success Allison and his team have catalogued—when war was avoided. Importantly, in the context of studying a strategic tool (in this case, standing international naval coalitions) developed in past conflict (the Cold War) and proposing we re-fashion and re-apply this tool in a contemporary strategic environment, it is

especially worth noting that one of the four cases the Harvard team produces that managed to defy Thucydides’s “inevitable” war is the United States vs. the Soviet Union. Indeed, Allison cites the Cold War as “one of history’s greatest successes in escaping Thucydides’s Trap.”⁵⁰ That assessment alone may give opponents of the proposal pause to reconsider whether a tool from “one of history’s greatest successes” in avoiding war might not be applicable to this contemporary challenge.

Other voices have contributions to offer as well. Consider, for example, Singapore’s first premier and visionary statesman, Lee Kuan Yew—who Henry Kissinger described as “a man of unmatched intelligence and judgement.”⁵¹ Certainly a visionary in the power dynamics at play in Asia, Yew had clear advice for American policy makers. There are at least three pieces of his advice that inform this debate, perhaps none more important than, “If the United States wants to substantially affect the strategic evolution of Asia, it cannot come and go.”⁵² In 2011, two years before the arbitration case was initiated by the Philippines, and five years before the law of the sea tribunal ruled, Yew offered a second insight, “China will not let an international court arbitrate territorial disputes in the South China Sea, so the presence of U.S. firepower in the Asia-Pacific will be necessary if the United Nations Law of the Sea is to prevail.”⁵³ Finally, in a 1996 speech in Washington, D.C., Yew spoke about pragmatic strategy for addressing a rising China, extolling the advantage of strengthening “America’s side of the chessboard Japan, Korea, ASEAN, India, Australia, New Zealand...”⁵⁴ Taken together, Yew’s three pieces of advice build a compelling prescription for a Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group—permanent partnered presence, with credible American firepower, that pragmatically strengthens pillars of Indo-Asia-Pacific security and prosperity.

Another voice to consider in the discussion of fallibility is Michael Auslin, a contrarian in many respects, and author of 2017’s *The End of the Asian Century*. Former U.S. Treasury

Secretary and President Emeritus of Harvard University, Lawrence Summers, described his work as a “powerful antidote to the Asiaphoria that dominates conventional wisdom.”⁵⁵ Assessing the economic, military, political and demographic risks of Asia, Auslin proposes a broad strategic risk management framework to “not only draw America’s current allies closer together but to encourage other Asian powers to forge deeper relationships with the United States and Asia’s leading liberal nations”⁵⁶ that will bring about greater cooperation and coordination while also serving “as a basis for engaging China and Russia...”⁵⁷ Our aim should not be an “inflexible new alliance system... but the construction of a community of interest based on a common set of rules, norms, behaviors, and coordination among the region’s leading nations.”⁵⁸ He calls for a set of “concentric triangles” linking Japan, South Korea, India and Australia in the outer triangle as the foundational anchor structure with an inner triangle connecting Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore—with further participation by Thailand and outreach to Vietnam.⁵⁹ This triangle construct resonates perfectly with the concept of a Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group.⁶⁰ Ready-made to integrate current RIMPAC participants in the anchor triangle and immediately engage the critical partners of the inner triangle, while offering a tangible and enduring mechanism to engage China and Russia—both now and in the future.

Together, Graham Allison, Lee Kuan Yew and Michael Auslin represent diverse views that converge to illustrate a central truth in the value of the Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group: it is not an end, it is a powerful lever of ways and means to balance risk and offer tangible, flexible and adaptive access across a broad range of coordinated strategic lines of effort. Ongoing efforts, like the Asian Maritime Security Initiative and the Southeast Asian Maritime Security Initiative, along with country-specific projects, proposals and still just percolating developments like the burgeoning interest in ASEAN defense cooperation, could

all be advanced with a Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group as a tangible coalition by, with and through which diverse strategic effort may be focused and translated to action.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the choice may be between the provocative and the pernicious. Action and inaction. There is a wide range and depth of scholarship cataloguing the coordinated effort across domains to advance Xi's march of "...Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era."⁶¹ As Allison writes in his conclusion to *Destined for War*,

To conceive and construct a grand strategy proportionate to this challenge will require senior government officials to devote not just their political capital but also their intellectual acumen. Contrary to (President Barack) Obama, US national security *does* need (George) Kennan today—along with modern-day equivalents of Marshal, Acheson, Vandenberg, Nitze, and Truman.⁶²

I propose adding Colbert to the list of necessary modern equivalents.⁶³ The Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group is no substitute for grand strategy, but it will certainly undergird and contribute to its component maritime strategy, just as the standing naval forces of the Cold War contributed then.

Timing matters. Allison includes timing as its own "clue for peace"⁶⁴ There seems to be a moment of unique opportunity opening. Today's security environment in the Indo-Asia-Pacific—from Chinese coercion in the South and East China Seas to North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile testing—is closing some of the historical fissures in relations between Indo-Asia-Pacific powers and "like-minded democracies are increasingly drawn together."⁶⁵ In Japan, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe secured a resounding supermajority victory in parliamentary elections which may pave the way toward reform of the pacifist constitution⁶⁶ and remove longstanding legal obstacles that have complicated coalition operations for Japan's self-

defense forces. 2018 is the 50th Anniversary year of the Standing Naval Force, Atlantic. It is also, coincidentally, a RIMPAC year. The proverbial iron is hot.

Late in his career, Admiral Colbert wrote an unpublished article proposing an Indian Ocean naval force.⁶⁷ He detailed three phases to establish a standing force there: in phase one, port visits and bilateral exercise engagement, phase two builds upon the first with a “part-time” training/exercise force—like “the UNITAS naval training operation which has proved so successful in Latin America ... and the NATO Matchmaker,” finally expanding in phase three into a permanent standing naval force—“comparable in organization and operation to the NATO Standing Naval Force Atlantic.”⁶⁸

In the contemporary Indo-Asia-Pacific, phase one and two are complete. We have decades of bilateral engagement and nearly fifty years of “Matchmaker” equivalence in RIMPAC. It is time now to choose the provocative over suffering the pernicious, seize Colbert’s initiative and leverage RIMPAC 18 as though it were “Matchmaker V” to establish a Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group.

NOTES

1. "Military Committee Meeting On Thursday, 09 February 1967 At 1000 Hours," NATO Archives Online, RECORD-MC-252-67-PERM uploaded September 7, 2017. 1.
2. *Ibid.*, 4.
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52. *Ibid.*, 28.

- ^{53.} *Ibid.*, 39.
- ^{54.} *Ibid.*, 41. Note: Lew Kuan Yew also included the Russian Federation in his list of states which the pragmatic strategist should draw to “America’s side of the chessboard.” While this may have seemed more achievable in 1996 than 2017, it bears consideration for long term strategy.
- ^{55.} Auslin, Michael R., *The End of The Asian Century: War, Stagnation, and the Risks to the World’s Most Dynamic Region*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2017. Back cover.
- ^{56.} *Ibid.*, 196.
- ^{57.} *Ibid.*, 196.
- ^{58.} *Ibid.*, 196.
- ^{59.} *Ibid.*, 196.
- ^{60.} Note: Auslin shares several very tangible and prescriptive proposals that develop from his concentric triangle framework worth their own deliberation, though not included in the discussion here of the Standing Maritime Group proposal. For example, on pg. 197 Auslin proposes senior defense minister meetings rotating between Tokyo, Seoul, Canberra, and New Delhi. A Standing Indo-Asia-Pacific Maritime Group would bring immediate coherence to this kind of senior defense meeting framework, much like the North Atlantic Military Committee framework of NATO.
- ^{61.} Buckley and Bradshear.
- ^{62.} Allison, *Destined for War*. 238.
- ^{63.} Note: Of interest, when considering the interaction of naval strategists to grand strategy deliberations during the period, the Colbert Papers include and refer to correspondence between George Kennan, Paul Nitze and Richard Colbert, to include a January 8, 1969 handwritten letter from Kennan to Colbert (box 15, folder 6).
- ^{64.} Allison, *Destined for War*. 199.
- ^{65.} Pant, Harsh V., “India, Japan, Australia, and the US: The Return of Asia's 'Quad',” *The Diplomat*, April 28, 2017.
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