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The purpose for combined, Stand-In Forces is sustained deterrence and containment of China. Containing China requires access within the first island chain and select littoral friendly nations collectively referred to as the first island chain in this paper. Friendly access within the first island chain hinges on the US resolve, commitment and credible military might; trust is paramount. Trust fundamentally is the foundation upon which other elements of national power can be exercised. "Trust" must be elevated to a level commensurate with military "Brotherhood." The relationships must have a sturdy foundation grounded in trust. Developing trust through the military element of national power can be cultivated, nurtured and sustained through Stand-In Forces. Trust is the bedrock upon which containment will be achieved.

This paper explores the geopolitical containment model offered by Halford Mackinder in 1904 and later refined by Nicholas Spykmen in 1944. Likening the containment model to the current operating environment within the Indo-Pacific region emphasizes the significance of the first island chain. Access within the first island chain must be achieved through meaningful partnerships. The strength of the relationships is directly proportional to the degree of trusted cultivated among the partners. Trust is a personal attribute; it cannot be developed without a forward presence in the region. Boots on the ground is necessary. Members must live, train, and fight together. They must be willing to die selflessly for one another as well. Combined and joint Stand-In Forces must maintain a forward military presence on and inside of the first island chain and cultivate trust among partners to nurture relationships to maintain a credible deterrent to contain China's expansion in the region.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**TITLE:**

Sustaining Allegiance within China's Rimland Through Stand-In Forces

**Major George P Fenton II**

AY 2019-20

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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** Sustaining Allegiance within China's Rimland through Stand-In Forces

**Author:** Major George Fenton II, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** The purpose for combined, Stand-In Forces is sustained deterrence and containment of China. Containing China requires access within the first island chain and select littoral friendly nations collectively referred to as the first island chain in this paper. Friendly access within the first island chain hinges on the US resolve, commitment and creditable military might; trust is paramount. Trust fundamentally is the foundation upon which other elements of national power can be exercised. "Trust" must be elevated to a level commensurate with military "Brotherhood." The relationships must have a sturdy foundation grounded in trust. Developing trust through the military element of national power can be cultivated, nurtured and sustained through Stand-In Forces. Trust is the bedrock upon which containment will be achieved.

**Discussion:** This paper explores the geopolitical containment model offered by Halford Mackinder in 1904 and later refined by Nicholas Spykmen in 1944. Likening the containment model to the current operating environment within the Indo-Pacific region emphasizes the significance of the first island chain. Access within the first island chain must be achieved through meaningful partnerships. The strength of the relationships is directly proportional to the degree of trust cultivated among the partners. Trust is a personal attribute; it cannot be developed without a forward presence in the region. Boots on the ground is necessary. Members must live, train, and fight together. They must be willing to die selflessly for one another as well.

**Conclusion:** Combined and joint Stand-In Forces must maintain a forward military presence on and inside of the first island chain and cultivate trust among partners to nurture relationships to maintain a credible deterrent to contain China's expansion in the region.

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THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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## *Acknowledgements*

The 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps issued his guidance in the summer of 2019. The overarching theme is naval in character with a necessity to reintegrate the Marine Corps with the Navy. As a Command and Staff College student I explored the Commandant's Planning Guidance and began attending the college's Future War Study Group chaired by Dr. Anne-Louise Antonoff. Through robust and lengthy discussions from other members and guest speakers I became intrigued by the concept of Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO), developed by Col (ret.) Arthur Corbett, USMC.

As an infantry officer I began to ponder the structure of future island-based ground forces and the type of tactical missions they may be ordered to execute. Col Corbett, who regularly attended the study group, greatly elaborated on the EABO concept and its challenges. It was his passion, first-hand expertise and insight that inspired me to pursue the exploration of what the composition of an island-based force may look like. I was convinced by Col Corbett that the EABO concept and the Stand-In Forces were essential to the future of global stability and the future of the Marine Corps. I channeled my research on the Stand-In Force and found it to be suggestively adaptive for containment missions.

Further study revealed a need for a strategy of containment toward China in light of China's developing technological capabilities and pursuit of regional hegemony. Dr. Antonoff suggested researching Mackinder and Spykman with respect to containing China. My research revealed that access to the rimland or first island chain would be paramount. Dr. Antonoff pointed out that I favored trust throughout my early drafts. Her

keen eye pushed me to examine trust to reveal that access to sovereign nations must be grounded in a high degree of reciprocal commitment. Dr. Antonoff further refined my work throughout the thesis development process which I could not have completed without her tutelage.

Research conducted with the help of the Gray Research Center and the Future War Study Group casted my analysis on a trajectory toward the proportionality of trust within relationships. As I viewed the goal of containment, I suspected that for the US to sustain access in the rimland we must first develop international military relationships based on trust. I view Stand-In Forces paramount to a maritime defense in depth which enables a containment strategy aligned with the preservation of Indo-Pacific island-nation sovereignty. Stand-In Forces become the enablers for a partnered trust among a brotherhood of military warriors committed to the defense of allied nations with the resolve to win.

Dr. John Gordon and Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Zack Anthony provided sustained encouragement and advice throughout the research and drafting process instilling a drive to continue to refine the thesis.

## Introduction

*We Americans are a do-it yourself people. We are impatient people. Instead of teaching someone else to do a job, we like to do it ourselves. And this trait has been carried over into our foreign policy.*

-President Nixon's address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam; Nov 3, 1969<sup>1</sup>

After decades of “engagement” with China, United States policy is shifting to “strategic competition” with the potential for Great Power conflict. The 2018 US National Defense Strategy expresses determination to place Sino-American relations on a “path of transparency and non-aggression.”<sup>2</sup> China’s ambition and behavior toward its neighbors in the First and Second Island Chains have nevertheless provoked concern in the United States and among its Asian allies. Forestalling a *fait accompli* against those islands will require a synergistic combination of geopolitical logic, political commitment, and military capability, all within the framework of a clear strategy of containment to ensure non-aggression. While the geopolitics of containment make the island nations vital to US national interest, it also makes those nations vulnerable to Chinese pressure. The US Marine Corps’ new concept of Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) demands both US and host-nation political commitment; the Stand-In Force concept, nested within EABO, will build reciprocity by cultivating mutual trust. The resulting partnerships will facilitate regional peace through strength.

### Statement of the Problem:

The 2018 Summary of the National Defense Strategy (NDS) oriented the US Department of Defense toward strategic competition. The document identifies China as a strategic competitor, armed with growing economic power, advanced military technology,

and eager to displace the US from the Indo-Pacific Region.<sup>3</sup> The 2019 Marine Corps Commandant's Planning Guidance envisions a Marine Corps that responds to the direction of the NDS by focusing on China and her "malign activities in the East and South China Seas."<sup>4</sup> China's growth and expansion are concerns for the US because US treaty allies are subjected to aggressive Chinese activities. The advent of China's advanced long-range precision guided munitions (LRPGM) changes the US approach to warfare that had resulted in overwhelming dominance over its adversaries of the past few decades. Developing new concepts and novel technology to operate within the range of the LRPGMs will allow the Marine Corps to address China's competitive strategy.

The Marine Corps adoption of the EABO concept postures forces to operate within China's weapons engagement zone (WEZ).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore in parallel to EABO is the Stand-In Force. The Stand-In Force exploits the advantage of a maritime positional defense in depth through the tactical employment of weapons that disrupt and confront adversarial actions while remaining cost effective and risk-worthy.<sup>6</sup> The Stand-In Force operates within the WEZ rather than beyond the WEZ. The positioning within the WEZ prevents these US forces from having to fight their way into and through the WEZ beginning from great distances away before engaging the adversary.<sup>7</sup> The Stand-In Force is designed to operate in what the Marine Corps calls "close and confined seas," in the face of deadly long-range weapons systems.<sup>8</sup>

There is nevertheless a sensitivity to the US presence in the Indo-Pacific where countries are concerned about the US's commitment to the region. Based on the US 2018 NDS, the US clearly is concerned about China. However, according to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the US commitment and concerns for other nations in the Indo-

Pacific region is confusing.<sup>9</sup> The US has allied nations in the region; however according to some experts, the US may not be entirely committed to fully support the allied nations. At the same time, others worry that the United States may provoke war by precipitous intervention in a crisis. At that point, US intervention to quell crisis may attempt too little and come too late.

One approach to achieving both reliability and non-aggression is through the concept of Stand-In Forces, but it requires the development of trust between the US and those nations hosting these forces. The geopolitical model of containment, advanced first by Halford Mackinder in 1904 and then revised forty years later by Nicholas Spykman, links the strategic objectives to tactical means by focusing forces in the areas that are along the periphery of China. Stand-In Forces offers a “way” to accomplish the “end” for containment. The challenge the US faces is how to position its forces in strategically important and tactically advantageous positions for sea control when such crucial access hinges on the permission of sovereign nations in the region. The nations in the Indo-Pacific are uncertain about the US commitment to the region. The US must convince those nations that the US is vehemently committed to their defense and prosperity as well as to the stability of the region. Demonstration of this commitment requires connecting strategic ends to tactical means by way of establishing a trustworthy relationship and brotherhood between the US and those key nations within the Indo-Pacific region. Such partnerships will guarantee operational access to key terrain and, in turn, achieve the strategic goals of containing China’s coercive and aggressive actions throughout the region.

## China

The United States' joint forces are orienting toward the Indo-Pacific Region where strategic competition exists with China.<sup>102</sup> In the past thirty years China has slowly yet persistently reshaped her nation's position on the global stage through economic growth and developing international reliance. China has modernized her military and her leaders are embodying advanced technology.<sup>11</sup> China has demonstrated a zeal for regional hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region by exercising coercive actions against smaller islands and weaker states globally.<sup>12</sup> Although the United States has had a long-term presence in the region for more than 100 years China feels that US involvement induces conflict escalation.<sup>13</sup> China rationalizes her military modernization and economic influence to be a response to the US regional presence.<sup>14,15</sup>

*China's National Defense in the New Era* declares a national defense policy that is fundamentally peaceful and takes on a defensive posture. The goals of the defense policy are to deter and resist aggression; safeguard national security and stability; oppose Taiwanese independence; quell separatist movements; and safeguard national sovereignty, maritime rights, space relevant interests, and overseas interests, while sustaining Chinese development.<sup>16</sup> China's defense policy states that China has no intention to pursue regional hegemony or expand its sphere of influence. China insists that its presence in the region is dedicated to harmony while developing friendly and supporting relations with other countries.<sup>17</sup> However, the Department of Defense's 2019 Annual Report to Congress addressing the Chinese military and security efforts, identifies that China is achieving its national goals through aggressive and intimidating actions.<sup>18</sup>

China has made substantial advancements in technology to bolster her anti-access area denial capabilities. Chinese rocket force research and development is refining intercontinental ballistic missiles and long range precision guided munitions capable of reaching ranges of up to 4000km.<sup>19</sup> Other areas of technological development include space launch vehicles, cyberspace systems, and weaponization of the electromagnetic spectrum.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout 2018 China reinvigorated their militarization of the Spratly Islands. China installed on the islands anti-ship and ground based weaponry capable of dominating the region.<sup>21</sup> The island militarization overtly contradicted public statements made by President Xi Jinping in which he ensured there would be no military development on the islands. Despite the ruling by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, China continued their expansion.<sup>22</sup>

Beyond the proximal seas, China has economically influenced the small country of Djibouti through various forms of aid and commercial motivations. Djibouti reciprocated by permitting China to develop a military-type base in a strategic area within the Horn of Africa.<sup>23</sup> China's success in this regard has empowered her to repeat this model with other weaker nations resulting in diplomacy favorable to China.<sup>24</sup>

On economic strong-arming, China has increased its loan services to other nations by more than US\$1.3billion within ten years. China owns more than 50% of external debt for several small Pacific Islands and provides a considerable amount of wealth for others. Two of those financially supported countries, Fiji and Tonga, sustain permanent and capable militaries. Additionally, China sought permission to build a naval base capable of supporting Chinese war ships in Vanuatu – another country financially supported by

China.<sup>25</sup> China's success in coercive actions has empowered her to expand her influence in regions well beyond her own border. To this end, China's technological advancements, military outposts, and diplomatic and economic strong-arming suggest that China is in a beneficial position to have the edge in the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war in the Indo-Pacific region.

The United States and China appear diametrically opposed to each other's influence and presence in the Asian rimland. The United States does not have the unilateral strength to mitigate or much less contain, China. Containment requires a firm partnership among regionally influential nations who seek to halt Chinese expansionism and its pursuit to become a regional hegemon.

It is in the interest of the United States as well as our Indo-Pacific partners to consider a strategy of containment for China. George Kennan's policy for the Soviet Union, for example, advocated for countering the Soviet Union's policy maneuvers through a long-term, patient, and attentive approach along shifts in the geopolitical landscape. The strategy was not war, but a steady and gradual fracturing and degradation of Soviet power.<sup>26</sup> Multilateral cooperation to mitigate and address shared concerns about the Soviet Union was a mainstay for many nations during the Cold War.<sup>27</sup> Emphasizing the value of containment policy towards China requires a closer look at the origins of containment theory, specifically that it was never intended to be executed unilaterally.

### **Containment**

Halford Mackinder in his 1904 paper offered a geographical view of the world that centered on the Eurasian continent. He showed that the region had been dominated by various clans, tribes, and empires throughout the past centuries. Emphasizing the

enormous size of the population within what is known as modern day Russian and Siberia, he highlighted the importance of actual population being a source of power. As the proponent of a theory of “land power,” he suggested that the vast expanse of natural resources yet to be discovered in Eurasia would empower Russia on a grand scale. Given that the Russian Empire at the time had demonstrated a propensity for continued expansion and potential world domination, Mackinder argued for containment of the rising superpower. The resources and manpower within the steppe areas of modern-day Russia were of more importance than just the Russian empire itself. Mackinder proposed that the region be characterized as a geographical pivotal area where a determined Russia, whether alone or in concert with another power guiding it (such as Germany), could leverage railways and natural resources to counter balance sea-faring nations. The pivot area specifically refers to the land-locked steppes within which lie the virtually invulnerable sources of strength of a combined and mobilized Russia.<sup>28</sup>

At the time Russia had developed plans for a trans-continental railroad that would unite the Siberian coast with Russia’s western European border. The railroad was viewed as a strategic asset enabling near real-time access to natural resources and people, which would feed Russia’s economic growth and power. Furthermore, the railroad would lessen Russia’s dependence on sea-faring nations to help move goods. Such actions could enable Russia to become a world power and pursue its aspirations for world hegemony.<sup>29</sup>

Because the heartland was landlocked, with its only rivers flowing north to the Arctic rather than south to the borders with other Powers, the pivot area could only be approached by land, by way of Eastern Europe or the lands bordering the pivot area to the South and East. Any attempt to halt expansion outward from the pivot area would require

land forces; and given the relative sizes of Russia and its neighbors, such an attempt would require a global coalition.

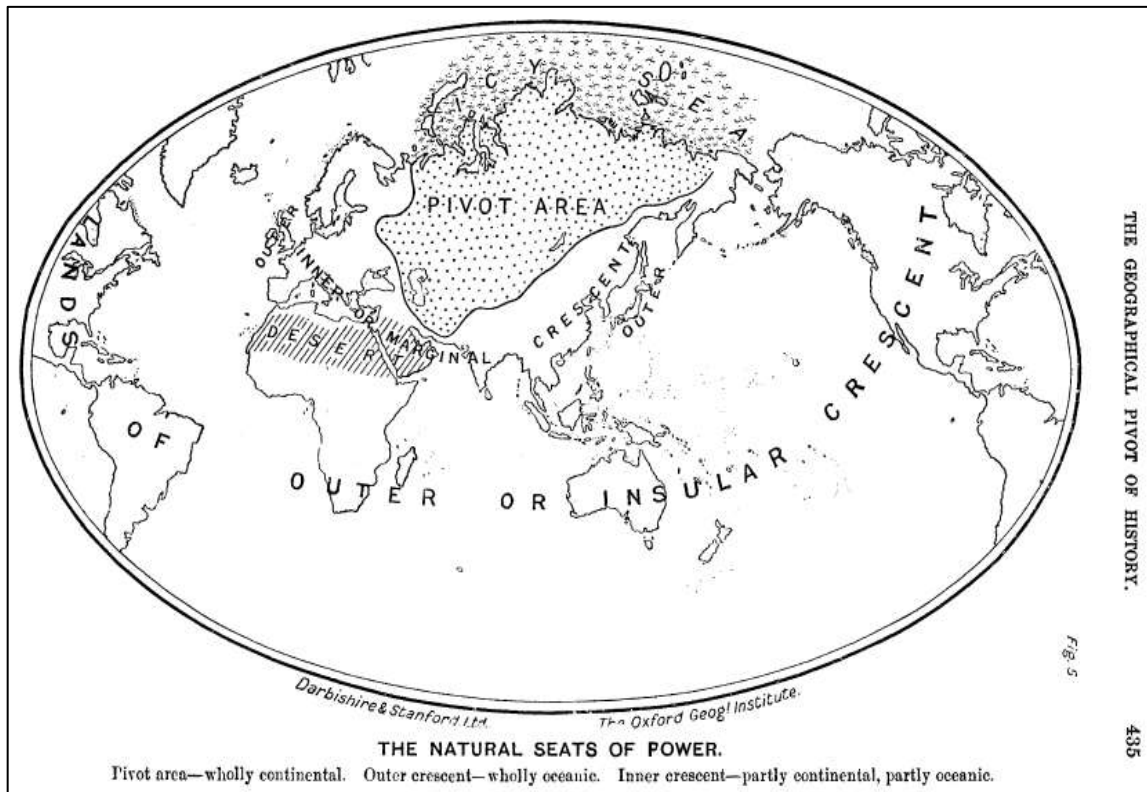


Figure 1<sup>30</sup>

Mackinder identified two areas beyond the pivotal area in the shape of crescents that could have world-wide implications (Figure 1). The first inner crescent is an area that borders both the pivot area and the sea. This area was largely influenced by sea-faring nations driven by commerce. Mackinder only observes the region to have influencing power over the pivotal area but it is Nicholas Spykman, forty years later, who brings out the significance of the inner crescent, or “rimland.” The rimland-pivotal area boundary is created by natural geographic features in mountain ranges and vast deserts. There are limited passageways along the boundary which allows the rimland to influence the pivotal

area which Spykman characterizes as the heartland (Figure 2).<sup>31</sup> Simplistically stated, the rimland is the gate keeper to the heartland.



Figure 2<sup>32</sup>

The second crescent characterized by Mackinder is the outer crescent, an area which Spykman refers to as the “off-shore continents.” In 1904, these territories either belonged to the British Empire, from the Dominions (New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Canada) to Africa, or else were allied or friendly (Japan and the United States). The off-shore continents have access to the rimland through the sea but are unable to interact directly with the heartland because of limited access to the passageways. The off-shore continents reinforce the power and capability of the rimland because the rimland owns the passageways to the heartland. An off-shore continent must work through the rimland to access the heartland.

Mackinder suggested after WWI that whoever controls eastern Europe – Germany, with its East Prussian territory, being the most likely candidate at the time – has the potential to control the heartland and further control the world.<sup>33</sup> Spykman more aptly argues “Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world.”<sup>34</sup> In short, Eurasia’s potential power is only as strong as permitted by the rimland’s control of the passageways.

This foundation of containment theory may have centered on the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union, but it offers a point of departure for the case of China. If one turns the Mackinder map 90 degrees counter clockwise, one sees a miniature version of the historical standoff between land power and sea power (Figure 3). Analogically, China is the yesteryear Russia; its vast interior stretching toward Central Asia being the equivalent of the pivot area or heartland;



Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, and the first island chain are the inner crescent or rimland; and the second island chains and trans-oceanic states are the outer crescent or “off-shore continents.” The containment of Chinese expansion into the South China Sea and throughout the Indo-Pacific is at stake. For the United States, safeguarding the security and independence of the littoral nations (“rimland”) and key island chains, including long-

standing allies in the Indo-Pacific region (“off-shore continents”), is paramount to halting the aggression by the East Asian heartland. Indeed, from this standpoint, more is at stake than the South China Sea, and Northeast Asia, specifically the Korean peninsula, may play a central role.

A strategy of containment requires access to the “rimland” nations and “off-shore continents,” or Indo-Pacific islands and allies. Although US access to the area is currently subject to question, commitment demonstrated through the military arm of national power is one way to reinforce relationships with allies. Containing China requires the development of trust with partner nations within the rimland and the first island chain; on this basis alone, it is possible to cultivate a relationship with the strength to defend the islands indigenous to the Indo-Pacific region against Chinese coercive action. The United States and other allies need to establish a strategic partnership with those nations. Sustaining access and cultivating an international sense of brotherhood in the Indo-Pacific region, however, requires the United States to reevaluate its own trustworthiness among the Indo-Pacific nations.

### **Trust**

Rushworth Kidder’s *How Good People Make Tough Choices* highlights the importance of trust among relationships. He emphasizes that trust is the foundational aspect upon which relations build. The degree of trust is proportional to the strength of the relationship. A relationship with weak trust does not reach its full potential and a relationship with sturdy trust becomes resilient and longlasting.<sup>36</sup> From a nation-state perspective, Kidder notes that an absence of trust inevitably destabilizes the nation. Governments without faith in their citizens become ineffective. Societies without strong

ethical fiber dissolve into crime-ridden communities. Without trust there is no relationship.<sup>37</sup>

The Marine Corps advocates a special trust and confidence among its members. Sowing and cultivating the trust begins with Marine Corps core values: honor, courage, and commitment. *Leading Marines* explains the core values as they relate to each Marine. The by-product of an ethos grounded in core values is trustworthiness. Honor is described as the “bedrock of our character.” Marines will be judged by their behavior and are expected to act with a high degree of responsibility. Acting responsibly requires a certain fidelity within one’s own personal morals and ethics which are shaped by Marine Corps core values. Marines are praised for their maturity, dedication, and dependability when required to hold others accountable, accept personal responsibility, and commit to their word.<sup>38</sup>

Part of influencing ethical actions is the development of individual courage. Marines exercise courage when making good decisions during challenging situations. Courageous behavior becomes an example for others to follow which in turn develops bonds among units.<sup>39</sup>

Commitment can be described as a determination to cultivate personal and unit discipline which strengthens the dedication to service and fellow Marines. Commitment to fellow Marines is a conscious act essential for combat situations. Without an unquestionable trust between Marines the strength of a unit and its combat effectiveness is weakened.<sup>40</sup>

The Marine Corps, because of its indoctrination of core values and high standards, has an exceptional understanding of the importance of trust and trust-building. Three joint

publications that emphasize this point among foreign counterparts are Joint Publication 3-20 *Security Cooperation*, Joint Publication 3-22 *Foreign Internal Defense*, and Joint Publication 3-24 *Counterinsurgency*.

Security cooperation (SC) interactions are activities that work through partner nation security forces to promote US interests, provide the US access, and ultimately build capacity and capability in-line with United States defense objectives.<sup>41</sup> The guidance provided by JP 3-20 accentuates the need for fostering quality relationships with the partner nation.<sup>42</sup> Foreign internal defense (FID) organizes and shapes host nation programs to defend and protect against societal threats.<sup>43</sup> JP 3-22 identifies the necessity to find a sincere faith among partners to address the threats with a unified front.<sup>44</sup> A counterinsurgency (COIN) operation will work to identify and eliminate the insurgent force by working with multiple nations to assist the host nation to legitimize their government and validate its authority to the population.<sup>45</sup> The COIN force pairs with the host nation authority and must develop a trusting relationship to defeat the insurgency and transition to a peaceful and legitimate governance.<sup>46</sup>

The Marine Corps has a foundation in developing responsibility and integrity within its members. The Department of Defense recognizes the importance of relationships when working with foreign partners and host nations. Rushworth Kidder reinforces that a meaningful and healthy relationship is only as good as the degree of trust forged between the parties. The relationship between the Indo-Pacific nations and the United States can be strengthened as illustrated through the following discussion of the East Asia Summit and the observations of Pacific Island expert Anna Powles and the recent actions of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.

Examples of Questionable Commitment:

During the sixth East Asia Summit (EAS) held in November of 2011, the US was questioned with regard to its agenda within the Indo-Pacific region. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and military forces in Darwin, Australia were two topics considered. The Indo-Pacific nations viewed the TPP as a practical and alternative option to China's regional development.<sup>47</sup> However, the US military rotations into Darwin were viewed by the Indo-Pacific nations as a pre-emptive means to contain China in response to China's contested island development in the South China Sea. The TPP was a positive step in the region with the potential to bring regional economic growth which reinforced US commitment. However, the military presence in Australia was perceived to address China; which countered the positive US interest generated by the TPP. The competing US actions left the Indo-Pacific nations confused on the US's intentions in the region; economic growth versus deterring China. In response, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which plays a central role at the EAS, submitted that for the United States to gain regional trust it must operate with clear and transparent diplomacy.<sup>48</sup>

During the fourteenth EAS in 2019, the chairman's opening statement reinforced the importance of establishing mutual trust among regional leaders. Members of the EAS, including the United States, must address the challenges of partnered cooperation in the exchanges of regional development and security.<sup>49</sup>

During an interview hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Anna Powles expounds upon trust in the region by explaining how, in decades past, the US had to some degree neglected the Indo-Pacific nations and allowed China to court the region.<sup>50</sup> Powles continues to explain that the nations of the region are independent,

pursue their own initiatives, and desire direct coordination. The Indo-Pacific nations prefer direct engagement that establishes sincere relationships and exhibits a concern for individual national welfare and growth with minimal regard to China.<sup>51</sup> The United States must convince the Indo-Pacific nations that the United States' commitment goes beyond Chinese containment and is underpinned by a meaningful trustworthy relationship.

Based on the EAS Chairman's remarks and the observations highlighted by Anna Powles the United States is not doing enough to sustain access within the rimland. A presence in the region does little to encourage Indo-Pacific confidence in the United States, nor does the presence equal United States commitment to the nations. The US-Philippine relationship highlights the consequences of one such unmaintained transactional relationship.

The United States currently has access to the Philippines; however, the Philippines has voiced its concerns about being drawn into a war between China and the United States. The Philippines have viewed United States naval patrols throughout the South China Sea as somewhat escalatory and provocative towards China.<sup>52</sup> Filipino strategists describe the United States commitment to the Philippines as strategically ambiguous. This concerns the Philippines because they are routinely exposed to the coercive actions of China forcing them to carefully weigh their choice of who to align with – China or the US.<sup>53</sup>

In February 2020, Philippine President Duterte notified the United States about plans to end the long-standing security pact known as the Visiting Forces Agreement. The agreement permits the United States military to conduct bilateral training exercises with

the Philippine military. The Philippine-United States agreement will terminate in 180 days unless both nations decide against termination.<sup>54</sup>

Exercising the elements of national power within the Indo-Pacific region to develop relationships, sustain rimland access, and contain China is thus a complex problem. Geopolitics confirms that, if the United States seeks to pursue a containment strategy against China, the United States must retain access to the rimland. The uncertainty over continued access to the Philippines and other Indo-Pacific Islands, however, suggests that unilateral exercise of military power, untethered to regional commitments, may appear provocative and discourage nations in the region from granting the US critical access to their sovereign territory. Access will therefore depend on building secure, long-term relationships through which the United States can weave the exercise of military power into the defense of the interests and independence of local nation-states, thus building a local or regional framework for security.

Within such a framework, the imperatives of geopolitical logic on the one hand and local self-interest on the other can converge, as Spykman would confirm. Military power can encourage international relations when pursued through security cooperation and combined military exercises. Commitment demonstrated through the military arm of national power can thus reinforce relationships with allies. Military power is also capable of enforcing containment through tactical positioning of key weapons systems.

The Philippines position within the rimland provides military forces with key terrain to enforce containment. Through numerous military exercises, the United States has established a seasoned relationship with the Philippine military. However, more can be done.

The concept at the core of the 2019 Commandant's Planning Guidance, Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations, calls for a forward and persistent Marine Corps presence in the region, particularly in the form of a Stand-In Force. By means of the Stand-In Force, the United States can build the trusting relationship mentioned above, focused on the defense of the host island. Such mutual support will result in sustained allegiance and access and will consequently serve to contain China. We turn now to those concepts of the EABO and the Stand-In Force.

### **Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations**

While achieving the desired level of trust and cooperation will require a whole of government strategy implemented from top to bottom, from the highest elements of national statecraft down to the lowest tactical unit, the military element of national power offers an effective and reasonable approach to develop and cultivate the desired relationship. The EABO concept offers the option to deter China by controlling sea access through key water passages without vertical escalation of any conflict.<sup>55</sup> By challenging China with advanced precision-guided, surface-to-air A2/AD capabilities within its own weapons engagement zone, while also employing surface and subsurface unmanned, autonomous systems, the US and its partners can impose a cost on any Chinese attempt to launch an offensive *fait accompli* intended to seize or exploit territory in the first island chain.<sup>56</sup> By forestalling such attempts, US collaboration with host nation governments will serve manifestly to guard the latter's independence and territorial integrity, putting US policy in sync with local interests.

The terminology of "advanced basing" found within the EABO concept mirrors Pete Ellis's "*Advanced Basing in Micronesia*." The two concepts are similar in nature,

except where Ellis found it necessary to conduct joint forcible entry operations (JFEO), the US today need not do so if it implements EABO in a timely fashion. A critical geopolitical advantage lies with the US and its allies and partners, which US policy lacked in the 1920s: sovereign independence. At the same time, the Southeast Asian “rimland” states primarily lay within Western empires; Northeast Asia, i.e., Korea belonged to Japan. The many nations of the “rimland” and the “off-shore continents” – Southeast Asia and the first and second island chains – belonged for the most part to empires, whether European or American. Imperial annexation of the Philippines by the United States in 1898 had not resulted in Congressional approval to build adequate defenses there. Moreover, in the First World War, Japan had seized the islands of Micronesia from German colonial control and then gained a mandate to keep them under the Treaty of Versailles. American defense of the Philippines from the predator of the day, Japan, thus had nowhere to go, no sovereign nation who the Americans could turn to and share the burden or defend its own interests. The US Navy had no access to key territory essential to supporting a fleet in local waters.

Today’s EABO concept, by contrast, exploits the advantages *and* promotes the security of local sovereignty. As a sovereign nation, the Philippines can help itself, as can many of the other island chain nations (“off-shore continents”). The rimland, likewise, from South Korea to Singapore, offers many strengths and partnerships on which to build.

EABO is designed to meet requirements for naval forces given a paradigm shift associated with future war.<sup>57</sup> The paradigm shift centers on the introduction of long range precision guided munitions, which can target naval vessels at distances mitigating key elements of US military strength. Furthermore, the US distance to the region is vast and

any attempt after an adversarial first strike to respond would take a great amount of time. By positioning US forces and equipment in partnership with well-trained and well-equipped friendly forces within the area ahead of time, the EABO concept provides strategic commanders with the ability to deter or repel adversarial intrusion and counter *fait accomplis* that would prevent the US from acting against overt aggression or infringement on “treaty allies and economic partners.”<sup>58</sup>

Pete Ellis’s concept was based on the premise that to relieve the Philippines it was necessary to impose our will on Japan, and to impose our will on Japan it was necessary to project naval forces across the Pacific. The US therefore adopted an offensive strategy to cross the Pacific in pursuit of Japanese defeat. Projection of forces required “sufficient basing” to support the naval fleet.<sup>59</sup> The US adopted an offensive strategy based on Pete Ellis’s work to cross the Pacific in pursuit of Japanese defeat.<sup>60</sup> EABO, far from supporting an attack on China, derives from the premise of a positional, maritime, active defense in depth, founded on land-based sea control and sea denial in close and confined waters. The offensive component to the wartime scenario consists of a blockade being maintained to keep Chinese forces canalized within the island chains.<sup>61, 62</sup> In peacetime, however, the proliferation of low-signature, highly mobile expeditionary advanced base (EAB) shooter capabilities —manned and unmanned, multi-domain, surface, air, and sub-surface— within an adversary’s WEZ acts as a means to deter nefarious actions. Should deterrence fail, vertical massing of effects will inflict significant cost against China while exploiting horizontal dispersion to maximize deception and uncertainty.

More specifically, as a critical part of the EABO concept, a “stand-in” force operating throughout the rimland is to engage with a local “inside force” to establish

expeditionary advance bases for support of any follow-on forces and to exercise sea denial and sea control in close and confined waters. This stand-in force will carry the lion's share of the work in peacetime and provide a vital advance guard in wartime. It will impose cost on the enemy while maintaining a maritime defense in depth, thus exercising conventional deterrence without conducting provocative measures that risk preemption or escalation. A closer look at the Stand-In Force concept will reveal opportunities for building trust and establishing secure access within the vital island chains.

### **Stand-In Forces**

Stand-in forces may be rotating units within the first island chain capable of striking against China's weapon systems, air craft, and fleet vessels. The stand in force can deter a fait accompli because of its offensive capabilities, yet may be viewed as defensive in nature by the host nation.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, this deterrent capability, by remaining defensive, will also reduce the likelihood of vertical escalation, thus promoting trust on the part of the host nation.

Moreover, by eschewing unilateral action and cultivating cooperation, moreover, the Stand-In Force further cultivates local trust in US policy and gains trust of its own in the capabilities of the local forces. The Stand-In Force operates with the host nation's force. The partnered nations share the burden of sustained defensive security, they develop mutual trust, and they demonstrate commitment to one another.

A rotational deployment of US personnel to the first island chain, operating beside the host nation forces in the shared deterrence of China and provides the US with a sustained presence throughout the littoral "rimland" and the island-chain "off-shore continents." While the key to US presence in the region is through regional partners, the

caveat to presence is that the US government must demonstrate an unquestionable, credible commitment to the host nation. The United States must be persistent and at ease with its partners; it must be willing to invest and commit to partnerships, and it must demonstrate resolve to stand firm in stressful times.

Admiral Davidson, commander of Indo-Pacific Command, has outlined an approach to regional commitment in the Indo-Pacific region with a series of large scale multi-lateral exercises, continued equipment interoperability, nation access, and multi-nation port development.<sup>64,65,66</sup> Stand-In Force operations are aligned with Admiral Davidson's current efforts throughout the region. The guidance provided by the 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps values a forward and persistent presence in the Indo-Pacific region with an intent to control the seas.<sup>67</sup> A forward presence within the first island chain also eases the tyranny of distance and time that hinders American forces should they need to deploy from the continental United States (CONUS).

The stand-in force will act as a combat credible unit capable of deterring Chinese tactical actions at key choke points throughout the first island chain.<sup>68,69</sup> The Stand-In Force will have to become proficient in working with the host nation counterparts creating a defensive architecture that serves as the blunt layer force within the maritime defense in depth.<sup>70,71</sup> The Stand-In Force's posture is a credible coercive measure against aggressive Chinese activity Chinese activity, but the tactical relevancy of the Stand-In Force is only applicable with sustained access.<sup>72</sup> The Stand-In Force needs to be capable of imposing a cost on China that forces them to reassess their decision-making calculus, while simultaneously having the added benefit that their presence cultivates genuine trustful

relations with the host nation based on mutual shared interests. Without trust, there can be no access.

Recommendations:

Developing such trust by using foundational concepts from Kidder, *Leading Marines*, and Joint Publications, the United States has available an approach toward sustaining access. Partnership with sovereign island states will provide many opportunities for sustaining allegiance, as well as bolstering host nation defense, by means of sharing US Stand-In Force capabilities. Exercising the ideas presented in *Security Cooperation and Foreign Internal Defense* is a starting point for the Stand-In Force. However, the Stand-In Force needs to offer more than cooperation and advice on internal defense. The Stand-In Force must encourage reciprocal information exchanges. The Stand-In Force must be as much a warrior student as a warrior teacher. The relationship forged between the Stand-In Force and the host nation counterpart will become grounded in brotherhood-mentored trust. Every opportunity to learn must be reciprocated. Expanding on tangible increases in military strength will forge cohesion, particularly as the Stand-In Forces introduce new tactics, new equipment and new concepts. Hi-tech weapons would likely serve well in this rimland and off-shore continent environment.

Like deterrence, trust depends on military credibility, which requires much thought to be put into exploiting new and emerging technologies without necessitating massive new investment. Deterrence requires maintaining an advantageous imbalance between the cost of employment and the cost of countering such capabilities. Conventional deterrence in the future operating environment will also require counterbalancing deception in

position and movement – an imperative that places a premium on lightness and stealth – with lethality of effects and speed of decision making.

This tension suggests several key objectives for acquisitions and development. First, low-signature, small-footprint, rapidly mobile units will nevertheless need force protection, all the more so as the Stand-In Force must rely on its own devices prior to the arrival of the legacy fleet. Being light, mobile, and stealthy, however, it cannot arm itself extensively and so will need to win the “hider-seeker” competition. Finally, the Stand-In Force and the host-nation Inside Force must be able to operate with low-signature means in a potentially electromagnetic spectrum compromised environment. These considerations suggest at least three basic functional prerequisites for Stand-In Force success – mobile and long-range fires; cheap, numerous, and unmanned and/or autonomous vehicles and platforms; and electromagnetic signal management – with maximum exploitation of opportunities for ubiquitous sensing.

One weapon system in particular with the potential to impose significant destructive cost is the high mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS). HIMARS is a multiple launch rocket system capable of being maneuvered quickly about the battlefield as the system sits upon a tractor-trailer type chassis.<sup>73</sup> The HIMARS offers the flexibility to launch a rocket attack against an adversary potentially transiting a waterway choke point before displacing from its firing position to a hide site or subsequent firing position. The system can range targets at 32km with the M26 artillery rocket and up to 45km with the extended range variant.<sup>74</sup> Nor is HIMARS the only option; the addition of an internal global positioning system combined with inertial guidance and canards allows the

extended range guided multiple launch rocket system (GMLRS) to address targets beyond 70km.<sup>75</sup>

The HIMARS and GMLRS should become focal weapon systems within the Stand-In Force architecture. The cost-imposing and mobile weapon system can be easily maneuvered and concealed in a jungle environment. Furthermore, providing the host nation substantial training with the intent for partner employment reinforces the US commitment to the host. Partnered training could be initially conducted within the US with subsequent employment and sustainment training conducted within the host nation.

The Stand-In Force must be proficient in command and control of unmanned systems.<sup>76</sup> Unmanned systems can exploit both the air and sea domains while mitigating risk to personnel. In the future operating environment, unmanned and autonomous systems will be widely used.<sup>77</sup> An unmanned aerial vehicle such as Boeing's ScanEagle can be launched from just about anywhere as it only requires a mobile launching unit, eliminating the need for a runway. The operational mobility offered by ScanEagle will provide the Stand-In Force an expeditionary drone capable of operating above 15,000 feet (4572km) and loitering for 20 hours.<sup>78,79</sup> This capability to look beyond the fringes of island chains to gain operational reach via surveillance and reconnaissance provides the stand-in force an extensive view of their battlefield.

Unmanned surface vessels (USV) offer a varying degree of flexibility to maintain battlefield situational awareness beyond the island chain and potentially serve as a platform for anti-air, anti-submarine and anti-surface missiles. USV technology is growing and has provided naval units support in mine-counter measure operations, anti-submarine warfare, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and fast inshore attack craft

training.<sup>80</sup> The potential for utilization of a USV has yet to be fully explored. A Stand-In Force could employ USVs to conduct the aforementioned missions in support of naval operations while supporting a maritime defense in depth throughout the rimland. Ballistic or electromagnetic weapons on such platforms may levy a unique problem set for the adversary, complicating his decision and targeting cycle by requiring him to address a multitude of threats at once. This is an example of saturating the sea domain with small water craft equipped with damaging systems. A Stand-In Force with such capability provides a unique, effective, and lethal solution.

The unmanned systems' capabilities should be shared and explored with the expertise of the host nation in mind. The US portion of the Stand-In Force will likely have developed ideas and tactics for employment. However, the host nation should be very much a member with respect toward further tactical employment and development, not least because optimal employment will depend significantly on hydrography, geography, and terrain.

The electromagnetic spectrum is rapidly becoming another great consideration in the future operating environment.<sup>81</sup> Defensive electromagnetic spectrum operations (EMSO) are a necessity for the Stand-In Force to serve as an additional layer to operational security and concealment to thwart detection by the enemy. One example is the compact laser weapon system (CLaWS) – a mobile laser designed to disrupt enemy UAS. The CLaWS can be mounted to a vehicle providing ease of mobility throughout the island.<sup>82</sup>

An offensive EMSO weapon system with potential benefits to the stand-in force is the communication emitter sensing and attack system (CESAS II). The system is

employed by signals intelligence operators and is capable of jamming enemy communication systems. The vehicle mounted system is 670 pounds with a man-portable version at 180 pounds. Potential exists for the CESAS II or another offensive EMSO system to be utilized in support of Stand-In Forces.<sup>83</sup>

In the spirit of partnership and brotherhood, the US would be wise to share the information and train host nation counterparts in basic technical operations. Tactics, techniques and procedures would be refined and tailored to support the host nation's unique challenges reinforcing the appeal of military cooperation. Yet the benefit of such training can go both ways.

The host-nation Inside Force can provide significant support to the Stand-In Force conducting engagements for purposes of land-based sea control and sea denial. Additional strengths from which to draw from the tropical host nations include cultural immersion, jungle warfare, and host nation logistics. Cultural immersion is the most valuable aspect for consideration because, when understood and appreciated, it proliferates the sowing of brotherhood and commitment between the nations.

Barak Salmoni and Paula Holmes-Eber emphasize the importance of culture and discuss it in detail in their book, "Operational Culture for the Warfighter." Salmoni and Holmes-Eber submit that when US and coalition service members have a clear understanding of the host nation's worldview and social structures, then those service members will be able to draw more sound and informed conclusions based on the decisions and actions observed by the native population.<sup>84</sup> When the Stand-In Force understands the culture, it has greater potential to build trust with the host-nation counterpart, which will directly influence the strength of their relationship. The strength of

the relationship is directly proportional to the host nation's allegiance in sustaining access and assisting in host nation defense.

Stand-in forces should be manned with units who are fluent in tactical operations in the jungle environment. The jungle environment and considerations described in Marine Corps Tactical Publication 12-10c *Jungle Operations*, which describes the jungle environment and associated operational consideration, offers valuable insight into a realm the Marine Corps is just beginning to re-explore. Field Marshall Slim praised the Japanese forces during the Burma Campaign for their exploits in the jungle, as they allowed it to work to their advantage against the well-trained British forces. The Stand-In Force must approach the jungle environment with a quicker learning curve than the British did in Burma and become comfortable enough to take advantage of the growth and not view it as an obstacle.<sup>85</sup> Who better to teach this mindset than the host nation counterpart? While the Jungle Operations manual will be a starting point for understanding the terrain, instruction and practical application from experts within the host nation will greatly augment it, allowing for a nuanced understanding of operating in a jungle or tropical environment.

Perhaps one area where the Stand-In Force experiences a gap is in the realm of tactical logistics. Exploring the logistics gap through the classes of supply highlights the exchange and expertise requested from the host nation. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 4-11 *Tactical Logistics* explains ten classes of supply that are typically acquired and issued to units on a cyclical rotation.<sup>86</sup> Given that a Stand-In Force could persist forward for six to seven months before being replaced with another Stand-In Force the Class-II items do not initially appear to be a concern. However, Classes one and three

through ten could at first only be brought in sufficient quantity to sustain the first few weeks before requiring replacement. The Stand-In Force needs to be inexpensive, hard to find, and requires a low signature profile.<sup>87</sup> Preventing the massing of material in the form of a hardened and easily targetable base allows the force to meet the operational need described by Col Corbett in his *Marine Corps Gazette* article, “Stand-In Forces.” Tackling logistical sustainment through the host nation mitigates the need for the massing of material at fixed and developed locations.

Beyond jungle survival as described in *Jungle Operations* and other periods of instruction and given during past bilateral engagements, the Stand-In Forces need to move past survival and embody a jungle way of life. Doing so induces a term referred to as “21st century foraging” where the Stand-In Forces live off the host nation.<sup>88</sup> Class I moves away from pre-packaged rations and instead incorporates the adoption of local cuisine contracted through local shops and farms. Class III requires a reliance on the host nation infrastructure where the Stand-In Force is the consumer. Class IV materials and methods can be acquired and taught by the host nation counterpart. Classes V, VI, VII, and IX may require a reliance on the host nation military supported by US government programs or perhaps through non-standard means of stockpiling.<sup>89</sup> Class VIII supplies with regard to Role I may remain organic within the stand-in force. Aspects of Role I and Role II capabilities may extend into the host nation as members of the stand-in force would be host nation citizens. Class X items sustain the potential for exploration to help support the host nations effort to protect and sustain themselves.

## Conclusion

The end state for the Stand-In Force is sustained deterrence and containment of China. Containing China requires, as Nicholas Spykman's geopolitical logic suggests, peace-time access to and cooperation with the first island chain, whose constituent states enjoy independence and autonomy of decision making. Access to island nations in the Western Pacific and Micronesia, however, can no longer be taken for granted. Still, this situation offers marked strategic advantages over the conditions that prevailed at the time of Pete Ellis's "*Advanced Base Operations in Micronesia*" and the US posture pre-World War II. The US and its local and regional partners must take advantage of this opportunity while it lasts. Dependable, proficient military partnerships can greatly expand the geographical reach, timeliness, and impact of operations to deter and, if necessary, contain Chinese aggression.

Fundamentally, however, this construct rests on the basis of peacetime access. Access in the first island chain hinges on the quality of US relations with the region's individual nations. The relationships, according to Kidder, must have a sturdy foundation grounded in trust.<sup>90</sup> Developing trust through the military element of national power can be achieved and sustained through the employment of Stand-In Forces. At the same time, gaining access for such military cooperation will require strategic-level cultivation of trust through other means, from diplomacy to economics.

The entire construct falls within the framework of containment of China, less to guard American national security than to preserve the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the island chain nations. Without the latter, there can be no defense against Chinese aggression in the Eastern Pacific; and without US support and security,

there can be no adequate preservation of national sovereignty among the island chain nations. The logic of containment depends on the stern realities of geography.

The focus of effort for the US is therefore to enrich a sincere and meaningful trusting relationship with nations throughout the rimland that emphasize the defense and welfare of the host nation. The focal point for the US pivot to the Indo-Pacific is certainly China. But the “key” lies within the US attention throughout the periphery. Containment begins with access. US access, although present, is not permanent and it relies upon a bond of trust with periphery and rimland nations. The key nations must believe that they can depend on the US to aid in their defense against Chinese nefarious actions.

Peacetime deterrence and wartime containment of China hinges on US dependability within the Indo-Pacific. Containing China is not a unilateral measure given the current era of regional prosperity and sovereignty. A trans-Pacific surge will not provide timely resistance. US military aid must instead look to a maritime defense in depth of the rimland. Such defense must begin now with a credible, cost-imposing Stand-In Force in partnership with a well-trained and respected host-nation Inside Force, both reciprocating teaching and learning. This kind of brotherhood can only develop if based on a foundation of mutual trust, from the highest strategic level to the lowest tactical unit. The time to build this trust is now.

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