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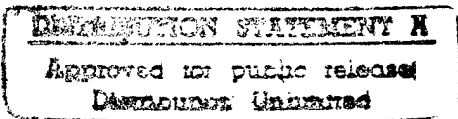
UNCLE SAM IN ASIA: WESTERN BASTION OR VULNERABLE SALIENT?

BY

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Maritime Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.



DMIC QUALITY INSPECTED 4

Signature: _____

13 June 1997

Paper directed by
Captain G.W. Jackson, USN
Chairman, Joint Military Operations Dept.

19970520 188

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

| | | | |
|--|-----------------------|---|------------|
| 1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED | | | |
| 2. Security Classification Authority: | | | |
| 3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule: | | | |
| 4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED. | | | |
| 5. Name of Performing Organization: JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT | | | |
| 6. Office Symbol: C | | 7. Address: NAVAL WAR COLLEGE 686 CUSHING ROAD NEWPORT, RI 02841-1207 | |
| 8. Title (Include Security Classification): UNCLE SAM IN ASIA; WESTERN BASTION OR VULNERABLE SALIENT? (U) | | | |
| 9. Personal Authors: Lieutenant Commander Robin L. Russell, USN | | | |
| 10. Type of Report: FINAL | | 11. Date of Report: 7 February 1997 | |
| 12. Page Count: 20 | | | |
| 13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy. | | | |
| 14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: U.S. Western Pacific defensive perimeter; Chinese threat; Japan; Southeast Asia; Spratlys | | | |
| 15. Abstract: General MacArthur, in his farewell address to Congress in 1951 accurately delineated the American strategy in the Western Pacific. Far from forming a strong defense, the American bases in Hawaii, Midway, Guam and the Philippines provided an avenue for the enemy advance during the early months of World War II, instead of their intended point defense. Hard earned gains in the Pacific through the war enabled the United States to establish a defensive perimeter to the shores of Asia through American (and other "friendly" nations) control over a chain of islands from the Aleutians to the Marianas. Any predatory attack from the Asian continent had to be an amphibious effort. No amphibious effort could be successful without control over the sea lanes and the air over those lanes. Today the threat is not from Japan, but from a growing Communist China. Though American operational commanders today provide a strong deterrent to the aggressive Chinese, shrinking American and Japanese defense budgets will soon allow China a technological edge in addition to their already overwhelming numbers. Soon, the American forward deployed forces may once again be a vulnerable salient against the Chinese threat. Cost effective alternatives for operational commanders are discussed. | | | |
| 16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract: | Unclassified X | Same As Rpt | DTIC Users |
| 17. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED | | | |
| 18. Name of Responsible Individual: CHAIRMAN, JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT | | | |
| 19. Telephone: 841-6461 | | 20. Office Symbol: C | |

Security Classification of This Page Unclassified

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INTRODUCTION

On 19 April 1951, General Douglas MacArthur appeared before a special joint session of Congress and delivered a valedictory address at the close of his distinguished career. No other American operational commander contributed as much to America's national interests in the Western Pacific, and none so accurately expressed the long term American strategic and operational interests in the Pacific as did General MacArthur before Congress on that day. He made it clear that prior to World War II, the western strategic frontier of the United States lay on the littoral line of the American west coast with control over an exposed island "salient" extending through Hawaii, Midway, and Guam to the Philippines. Through the early stages of the war that salient proved not a defensible highway of strength, but an avenue of weakness along which the Japanese successfully attacked. American pre-war strategy illustrated how the Pacific could provide the potential area of advance for any predator.

According to General MacArthur, the American victory in World War II allowed for a dramatic change in the U.S. Pacific strategy and operations. The American strategic and operational frontier expanded from its prewar salient to include the entire Pacific Ocean and American operational commanders were tasked with its maintenance. In theory it protected all of the Americas and the "free" lands of the Western Pacific region in much the same way a moat protected a medieval castle. The United States controlled the Pacific to the shores of Asia through American (and other "friendly" nations) control over a chain of islands from the Aleutians to the Marianas. Any predatory attack from Asian enemies had to be an amphibious effort. No amphibious force could be successful without control of the sea lanes of communication and the air over those lanes. From its island chain the U.S. could dominate, with sea and air power, every potential avenue of amphibious advance. With naval and air supremacy and small ground elements to defend bases, any significant threat from continental Asia toward the United States was bound to fail.¹ This American line of defense provided a natural barrier which conformed to the Cold War strategy of containment, yet it envisioned neither an attack against anyone, nor did it espouse the bastions essential for offensive operations. Properly maintained it provided an invincible defense against

aggression. In 1950, American reaction to the attack of South Korea by the communist North represented a rational reaction to the inherent threat to the cornerstone of the U.S. defensive perimeter, Japan. Both the Korean War and Vietnam conflict were fought in support of American containment strategies, but also in line with MacArthur's theory of a Western Pacific defensive perimeter.

The maintenance of this littoral defensive line in the Western Pacific was entirely dependent upon holding every segment, as any breach of the perimeter by an enemy would render the rest vulnerable. For this reason the United States could not afford to allow Taiwan to fall under Communist control. The loss of Taiwan would threaten both the Philippines and Japan, and might well force the American western frontier back to the coastline of Washington, Oregon and California. (Though the United States no longer maintains military bases in the Philippine islands, the democratic Philippines remains a friendly nation and ally.) Therefore, the recent Chinese actions in the Taiwan Straits, in addition to raising the philanthropic ire of the American populous, posed a threat to American strategic interests.

In addition to amphibious attack, contemporary threats have expanded to include cruise and ballistic missiles, and in the future may well include space borne weapons. Yet far from diminishing the necessity of maintaining a strategic western frontier along the Pacific perimeter, these complicated, relatively new dimensions of warfare serve to enhance the importance of American forward presence in Asia.

In consonance with a defensive perimeter along the Asian littoral, and as a natural development following the departure of American forces from the Philippines, the United States security alliance with Japan became even more important as the cornerstone of American defense policy in Asia. Of the 100,000 American military personnel forward deployed to the region, 47,000 are stationed in Japan. Despite the controversy in Okinawa over the rape of a 12 year old Japanese girl by American servicemen, and the subsequent protests for the removal of the U.S. military personnel from the island, the United States, Japan, and the non-communist nations of the Western Pacific remain committed to maintaining current American troop levels in the Pacific. The President recently completed a whirlwind trip through Northeast Asia which the White House lauded as strengthening the United States security commitment to the region and American resolve to remain engaged. But does the current American force structure meet

the spirit and intent of General MacArthur's strategy of a defensive perimeter along the Western Pacific? To adequately address the current American western frontier, a very real threat from mainland Asia is considered. This paper will furthermore examine the foundation for the current U.S. Pacific strategy, with an emphasis on the cornerstone of American forward presence in Asia - the renewed U.S./ Japan security relationship. It will briefly examine contending perspectives in the United States, Japan and East Asia - all significant to American operational commanders in the region. Finally, it will conclude with an assessment of the American Pacific strategy and operations, and propose viable, relatively inexpensive alternatives which would enhance the American strategic western frontier.

THE THREAT

With an economy booming at 12 percent per annum, the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) is emerging as the power of critical importance in the Western Pacific. The potential for China to become a 21st century economic powerhouse, dismissed as naïve after the Tianamen Square incident in 1989, is now highly credible. Most economists predict China will sustain an average growth rate of at least 7 percent over the next ten years. That means that its gross domestic product, unofficially estimated at \$1.2 trillion, would double by early next century, firmly establishing China as one of the world's top economic powers.² The PRC's economic success has allowed the Chinese to pursue an expansive military build up. It is reported that the PRC military spending has grown more than 10 percent in each of the last eight years and grew more than 11 percent in 1996. Today, Chinese defense spending represents over 9 percent of total Chinese budget outlays.³

One of the most significant developments in the PRC is the transformation of the Army. Ever since the Communist Party Congress of 1992, which sanctified China's move toward a market economy, the military has been in ascendancy.⁴ A significant reorganization has translated in to strengthened, professionally oriented corps of military officers determined to turn their once peasant Army into a technologically sophisticated fighting force. The Army is shifting from a large manpower - intensive force with relatively obsolete equipment to a smaller, more capable force. The total strength of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has dropped from approximately four million personnel in the mid-

1980s to roughly three million today. As a result, more money has been funneled into the development and production of modern missiles, aircraft and ships.⁵

Furthermore, Beijing is taking advantage of difficult economic times in Russia by acquiring a wide range of sophisticated weapons at dramatically reduced prices. Items of Chinese interest include MIG-31 interceptors, TU-22 bombers, T-72M main battle tanks, A-50 airborne early warning and control aircraft and S-300 ground-based antiballistic missiles.⁶ This equipment will beef up an already impressive arsenal consisting of Soviet made long-range SU-27 fighter aircraft, IL-76 transport and reconnaissance planes, and know how that give its bombers a range of more than 1000 nautical miles.⁷

Despite its recent emphasis on the development of conventional weapons, Beijing's wild card remains its nuclear weapons capability. The PRC now possesses a fully developed nuclear stockpile. Its nuclear weaponry includes eight intercontinental ballistic missiles, 60 intermediate-range ballistic missiles, and a nuclear-powered ballistic missile carrying submarine. Though small by U.S. and Russian standards, the Chinese Xia is equipped with 12 sea-launched ballistic missiles.⁸

Perhaps more threatening than the thought of the People's Republic of China possessing such a formidable military is Beijing's propensity to use it. In March, 1988, for example, the PRC fought the Vietnamese for possession of several islands in the Spratly Island chain. The Spratlys, comprising about 60 islands, are claimed in part or whole by six countries: the PRC, Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines. They are coveted not only because they offer the ability to oversee much of the maritime traffic between the Pacific and Indian oceans, but it is estimated that as much as one trillion dollars in oil and gas may lie in the geological structures beneath the Spratly seabed.⁹ During the conflict, the PRC displayed a disconcerting capability of maritime power projection. Throughout the campaign the Chinese Navy masterfully employed destroyers, frigates, supply ships, marines, and a surprisingly proficient amphibious force.¹⁰ Beijing followed up their successes with a military buildup on Hainan and Woody Islands. In a clear signal of the intention to dominate the South China Sea, the PRC recently built a military airstrip capable of accommodating the SU-27 fighters, and new naval facilities.¹¹ The SU-27s decisively alter the military balance of power in Southeast Asia as the PRC now has an air capability encompassing all of the region, including as far as Japan.¹²

Beijing was furthermore quick to exploit the withdrawal of the U.S. Navy from the Philippines, shortly thereafter occupying islands of the Mischief Reef, less than fifty miles from the Philippine coast. Clearly, the United States no longer dominates the whole of the Western Pacific littoral. With its newly established air fields, the PRC exercises maritime patrol over the approaches through the South China Sea and the waters of Southeast Asia, a gateway to the West coast of the United States.

AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

The dispossession of the Philippines meant the end of "one stop shopping" for American operational commanders in the Pacific. Lost were; Crow Valley, the only instrumented bombing range in the Western Pacific; Subic Bay ship repair and logistics facility, the most extensive and least costly shipyard in the region; Cubi Point Naval Air Station, the hub for airborne logistics and maritime patrol throughout Southeast Asia; and Clark Air Base, the center for United States Air power in the region. Moreover, the American evacuation of the Philippines leaves a vulnerable soft spot in the Pacific perimeter. For operational commanders, the cornerstone for the U.S. defensive perimeter in the Western Pacific shifted to Japan, leaving Southeast Asia with only a logistics support facility in Singapore. American operations have subsequently been dictated by two recent events, the Nye Initiative and the ensuing April 1996 Summit between President Clinton and Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto.

The security declaration, signed by President Clinton in Tokyo in April of 1996, had its beginnings in October 1994 on an aircraft bringing Secretary of Defense William Perry home from Beijing. During the flight, Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye,* National Security Council Asia Director Stanley Roth and Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord discussed the poor state of the U. S.-Japan relations, frayed largely by seemingly insurmountable trade disputes. The focus was to be on how to revive the bilateral security relationship which up until that time had been neglected. All agreed on the concept of the security declaration that was to be signed by the heads of both governments by late 1995. Dr. Nye emerged as the point man in what has been termed the "Nye Initiative." Dr. Nye proposed to transcend the economic bickering and "get back to fundamentals."³ He had the complete support of

* Doctor Joseph S. Nye, Jr., is Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. He is a former Chairman of the National Intelligence Council and a former Director of the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University.

Ambassador Winston Lord,[†] whose opinion that “no region is more important to American interests than the Asia-Pacific,” was founded in his long experience in the region and reflected in the understanding that “in recent years the Asia Pacific region has grown in relative importance, and trade patterns are 50 percent more across the Pacific than across the Atlantic.”¹⁴ With the help of Ezra Vogel, National Intelligence Officer for the Western Pacific and a man close to the Japanese officials Dr. Nye needed to meet, the initiative was warmly welcomed in Japan.¹⁵ Dr. Nye’s position was grounded in the understanding that international economic systems rest upon international political order. The United States in turn supports the Asian political order through alliances in the region and the continued presence of substantial U.S. military forces.¹⁶

Currently, the United States maintains its bilateral alliances in the Western Pacific with Australia, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and most importantly Japan. As a result of host-nation support provided by the Japanese, it is less expensive for American tax payers to base forces in Japan than in the United States. The Japanese pay nearly all of the yen-based costs of the 47,000 troops, or nearly 70 percent of the overall cost. Dr. Nye used the President’s analogy that the United States relationship with Japan is like a three-legged stool with security, economic and political legs. Problems with any one of the legs (implying the economic friction between the two countries at the time) could undermine the other legs (the security alliance in particular).¹⁷ He emphasized the parts of the American security strategy for the Western Pacific, including: reinforcing alliances; maintenance of forward-based troop presence; and the development of regional institutions to complement American alliance leadership, including the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC), and the ASEAN - Association of Southeast Asian Nations - Regional Form (ARF).¹⁸ For American operational commanders, reinforcing alliances translates to continued bilateral and multilateral exercises - critical to any successful combined operations against the growing threat from China, or from North Korea. American forward based presence affords a hedge against the “tyranny of distance,” or long transit times for U.S. forces to respond across the vast expanse

[†] Ambassador Winston Lord is the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Before assuming his present duties, he had been Chairman for the National Endowment for Democracy, Vice-chairman of the International Rescue Committee, and the Chairman of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s National Commission on America and the New World. Ambassador Lord’s government service includes his appointment as U.S. Ambassador to China from 1985-1989.

of the Pacific, during a crisis. Due to in large part to the consensus building nature of the Asian culture, however, it is doubtful whether regional institutions, such as the ARF, will ever provide an effective asset for operators to counterbalance a hostile China. The ARF was conspicuous in its absence during the recent incidents in the Straits of Taiwan, Korea and the South China Sea, for example. Some analysts of the Nye Initiative, however, are quick to point out other weaknesses.

One of the most outspoken faultfinders of the Nye Initiative and current American policy is Chalmers Johnson.[†] Dr. Johnson argues that the economies of the United States and Japan have largely reversed roles since the signing of the security alliance in 1960, but the conditions of the alliance have not changed significantly. Though the Japanese help bankroll United States servicemen in Japan, the American military presence in the region still costs American taxpayers \$35 billion annually.¹⁹ He contends that American troops in Asia represent a "hollow" force of "Superpower pretensions" that do little more than allow Japan and China a few years to consolidate their ascendancy before dictating the American departure.²⁰ Further, without the Cold War, a significant motive for the 1960 alliance, the security of the two nations should be renegotiated, not reinforced. In its current form, the alliance delays the inevitable when the Japanese will have to confront the problems of Article Nine in the Japanese constitution which prevents the Japanese military from participating in any activity other than defense of the homeland. According to Dr. Johnson, "only an end to Japan's protectorate status will create the necessary domestic political conditions for Japan to assume a balanced security role in regional and global affairs."²¹ Dr. Johnson argues that the underlying cause for maintaining the current U.S. force level in the Pacific is a Pentagon plan to maintain old Cold War spending levels and thereby avoid further cuts to the military.²² A new alliance, according to Dr. Johnson, should be based on current economic and political realities. Dr. Johnson may be more correct by recognizing the necessity for new alliances, particularly in Southeast Asia. A strengthening of our ties with Vietnam and Indonesia, for example, with bilateral alliances would dramatically improve the operational flexibility for American commanders in the Pacific. An American military presence in either or both of those countries would allow for a real time

[†] Chalmers Johnson is President of the Japan Policy Research Institute and author of two critical studies of Japanese government, Japan: Who Governs? and MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925-1975.

reaction to any Chinese aggression in the South China Sea and thereby fulfill the perimeter strategy espoused by General MacArthur.

JAPANESE PERSPECTIVES

Under the original Nye Initiative President Clinton was scheduled to visit Japan in November 1995, but canceled because of a confrontation with Congress over the Federal Budget. His trip was delayed five months and in that time the political and security climate had changed significantly: the outrage provoked by the rape in Okinawa of a twelve year old Japanese girl by U.S. servicemen had waned; Japan had a new Prime Minister who was more attuned to America's view of regional security; China had conducted recent military exercises in the Taiwan Strait; and North Korea had made incursions into the demilitarized zone separating it from the South.²³ On April 17 President Clinton and Prime Minister Hashimoto signed a joint declaration proclaiming the security relationship between the United States and Japan as the "cornerstone for achieving common security objectives and maintaining a stable and prosperous environment" in Asia.²⁴ The declaration, for the most part, amounted to an endorsement of the U.S. security policy in the region. Under the agreement, Japan will contribute 25 billion dollars over the next five years in host nation support, an increase over the previous support. It also incorporated a plan struck on the evening prior to President Clinton's arrival for the return of Futenma air base, two communications centers, a port facility and other military facilities on Okinawa. In the agreement, Japan agreed to pay all of the costs of the base closings in Okinawa, and for the transfer of American military personnel to other bases. An adherence to the current force level of 100,000 American military personnel in the region was also stated in the declaration, and significantly it incorporated an agreement for Japan and the United States to share transportation, food, refueling, medical care and weapons parts during peacetime, which brings the Japanese Self Defense Forces into a closer working relationship with their American counterparts.²⁵

The Chinese find themselves in an unusual situation as a consequence of the Summit. Historically, the U.S. - Japanese alliance has been at least non-threatening, and at best beneficial to regional stability and therefore benefiting Chinese economic interests. Yet, after the strengthening of the U.S. - Japan security treaty between President Clinton and Prime Minister Hashimoto, it may be difficult

for the Chinese to believe that the alliance is not directed against them.²⁶ Aspects of the accord can be perceived as based on a Chinese threat. Acknowledged in the agreement is "respect for democratic principles is growing," obviously drafted with Taiwan and not China in mind. Perhaps the most precipitous aspect of the accord however, is the statement pertaining to, "nuclear arsenals, unresolved territorial disputes, potential regional conflicts and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery." The Chinese have the largest nuclear arsenal; the unresolved territorial disputes equate to the Spratlys;²⁷ and aside from the generally acknowledged instability in Korea, China's claim that Taiwan is one of its provinces can be perceived as the most destabilizing factor in Asia.²⁸ But if the Chinese interpret the Summit as directed toward the PRC, then the larger international role of the Japanese Self Defense Forces must also cause concern.

Five years ago the first participation by the Self Defense Forces in "peacekeeping operations" was a major controversy in Japan and throughout the region. The Japanese populous, particularly the Socialists (the strongest opposition to the incumbent Liberal Democrats), feared an irreparable break with the Japanese "Peace" Constitution; while most nations in the Western Pacific expressed concern over a Japan which now seemed one step closer to its imperial heritage and the atrocities of World War II - vivid memories which unlike in Japan, are kept alive through museums and text books. Now, however, Japanese participation in peacekeeping operations seems commonplace. With positive results from missions in the Persian Gulf, Cambodia, Zaire, Mozambique and the Golan Heights, concern throughout Japan and the region has subsided.

Progress by the Japanese Self Defense Forces is far from stagnant, however. More money is being allocated for long-range defense. Japan is the first nation, for example, to order the latest generation of Airborne Early Warning and Control (AWACS) from the United States, and is considering buying its first military spy satellite. Also, the Defense Agency is studying participation in a theater ballistic missile defense program in collaboration with the United States. The system would incorporate the recently acquired Aegis system, now improved and incorporated in the Japanese built Kongo class destroyers.

Reaction to Japanese Self Defense Force initiatives by traditional Japanese adversaries has been remarkable. In September 1996, two ships of the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force made a port call at Pusan in South Korea for the first time since 1945, following a Seoul initiative. Equally as extraordinary, the Japanese Air Self Defense Force plans to send a group of pilots to Russia for jet fighter training late in 1997 - a Russia to which the Japanese have fostered a deep antipathy since the Soviet Army's occupation of the Kurile Islands in northern Japan in the final days of World War II.

All of this signals the continued shift toward the end of legitimate pacifism in Japan. Since the end of the War, the most vocal opposition to the Self Defense Forces has been the Social Democratic Party. In 1994 the Social Democrats abandoned their decades long opposition to the U.S. - Japan security alliance through a political union with the popular Liberal Democrats. In so doing, the Socialists likewise renounced their belief that the Self Defense Forces were "unconstitutional." The only Japanese domestic organization remaining to question the Japanese military is the small Japan Communist Party.

External forces have also combined to foster a stronger Japanese military with a greater role in regional security. Fifty-one years after the end of the war in the Pacific, fears of renewed Japanese militarism have dissipated, while concerns over regional security have escalated. Japan's Western allies now feel the time is right for Japan to play a larger role in providing and maintaining security in the Pacific and UN peacekeeping operations. The geopolitical reality reflects a shrinking United States military in Asia, leaving a vacuum. The Japanese military, under a Japanese civilian democracy, offers a sensible option, particularly in light of the alternatives. While the end of the Cold War signaled an end to the threat of the Soviet Union, it added impetus to the rising Chinese threat and regional flashpoints, including the straits of Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula.

In a radical shift in Japanese defense planning, China has replaced Russia as the primary defense worry. In the annual Japanese White Paper, Defense Of Japan 1996, the traditional threat of troops stationed in the Russian Far East is diminishing, while "China's moves in developing nuclear capabilities and modernizing its naval and air forces, as well as expanding its activities on the seas...need to be closely watched."²⁹ "The Korean Peninsula is of course an issue of immediate concern," according to military analyst Kensuke Ebata of Jane's Defense Weekly, "but in the long run, China is the major unstable factor

in Asia and the (Japanese) focus has moved from Russia to China.”³⁰ U.S. defense planners would do well to likewise officially recognize the PRC as a threat to American vital interests in the Pacific. This would not only allow for contingency planning, but provide a policy in step with American allies along the Pacific Rim and allow U.S. operational commanders to train realistically in a combined environment.

American allies in the Western Pacific have likewise shifted from a traditional position opposed to Japanese support. Allies now welcome Japanese financial support and the efforts by the Japanese Self Defense Forces in United Nations activities. Currently the Japanese Self Defense Forces are restricted to transport and logistical support, while the use of fire arms remains a controversial, and often divisive issue between JSDF and their international their counterparts.

Yet, the Japanese government has placed significant constraints on the growth of the Self Defense Forces. Japanese plans for the military reflect severe fiscal restraints. Long kept below one percent of the Japanese gross domestic product through consensus of the ruling parties, the 1995 budget was 45 billion dollars, forty-four percent of which was directed toward personnel and another 12 percent toward maintaining U.S. forces in Japan.³¹

Currently, the American overseas forward deployed military forces in Japan are a strong deterrent to Chinese aggression, as evidenced by the recent events in the Taiwan Strait. With shrinking defense budgets in both the United States and Japan, and a growing, more capable Chinese military, U.S. operational commanders will soon be faced with strategic dilemmas similar to their predecessors in 1940 - this time with a vulnerable salient in Japan. Strategic and operational alternatives, however, exist throughout the Western Pacific region.

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Asians tend to keep a long term, broad perspective of the United States. A predominantly Confucian culture of ancestor reverence and centuries old traditions, combined with the fact that leaders of many nations throughout East Asia were in authority before the Clinton Administration and will likely remain in power long after, lends itself to a pessimistic outlook of the American commitment to Asia. During President Clinton's lightning visit to Korea, Japan and Russia he hit all the right notes: the U.S. will remain a Pacific power; the U.S.-Japanese relationship is the cornerstone of American policy in the

region; Japan must assume a greater role; U.S. will remain committed to the region and will maintain 100,000 military personnel in Asia and so on. But the predominant regional views of the Administration's initiatives come from a historical perspective. This chronology was recently published in the front page editorial of the influential Far Eastern Economic Review under the caption, "The Long Good-bye?":

1975 - The United States is forced to evacuate its personnel from the rooftop of its Saigon embassy as the city falls. A Newly united Communist Vietnam gains control over the American- built naval station at Cam Ranh Bay.

1976 - All U.S. bases closed in Thailand and troops withdrawn.

1977 - President Jimmy Carter announces that all 33,000 American troops will be pulled out of South Korea over the next five years.

1990 - U.S. Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney announces a three-phase adjustment plan that will see the number of overall American forces in the Pacific - about 135,000 personnel - reduced by %10 in the first year alone.

1992 - The United States withdraws from its largest naval station in the region, Subic Bay in the Philippines, after almost a century of military presence. Other bases, including Clark Air Base, are also evacuated.

1994 - U.S. Defense Secretary Les Aspin embraces a win-hold-win strategy that rejects the possibility of fighting on two fronts at once; although later abandoned, South Koreans see it as a sign of wavering U.S. resolve.

1996 - President Bill Clinton announces that the U.S. will return land now occupied by bases to Okinawans, but says that U.S. troop strength in east Asia will remain unaffected at 100,000.³²

With this consistent reduction in American forces in the region, some Asian leaders are losing confidence in the United States. "There is a strong feeling that the U.S. presence should be here, but that the level of the commitment seems to be declining," according to Juwono Sudharsono, vice-governor of the National Defense Institute in Jakarta.³³ The U.S. withdrawal from the Philippines, however, led to more visible support for a continued U.S. presence by nations throughout Asia. Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia offered ship-repair facilities, while aircraft bombing training ranges were offered by Thailand, Malaysia, Australia and Singapore. These invitations are strategic gold mines for American operational commanders. Even a small facility in any of these Southeast Asia nations would be more in keeping with General MacArthur's vision of a defensive perimeter. It would allow for closer monitoring of Chinese activities in the South China Sea, and in the event of a crisis would provide critical infrastructure so necessary to quick response to a major regional contingency, much as Bahrain provided U.S. forces in the Gulf War. These opportunities were especially appealing as each offered host nation support. Seoul and

Tokyo, for example, both pledged to increase their financial support for maintaining American forces in their countries. Japan offered to pay 73 percent of the cost (up from 60 percent), and the Republic of Korea offered to assume 30 percent of all won-based stationing costs.³⁴ Unfortunately, only the offer from Singapore was accepted.

The recent inconsistencies in the President's foreign policies further add to Asian concern over the U.S. commitment to the region. During President Clinton's first term, China went from an aggressive provocateur in the Straits of Taiwan and illicit trader of nuclear technology to the sought-after key to peace between the Koreas. North Korea was denounced for violating the armistice with the Republic of Korea, and at the same time the Administration pressed ahead with private talks with Pyongyang on reducing its missile sales and is offering economic incentives for North Korea to freeze its nuclear energy program.³⁵ This from a president who once vowed to bring Beijing to heel during his first election campaign, who swore that North Korea would not be permitted to go nuclear and whose Secretary of State promised the Chinese that Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui would not be given a U.S. visa (President Lee eventually spoke at the commencement ceremony at Cornell University, his alma-matter).³⁶ To most Asians, the Clinton approach to policy in Asia is not strategy based, but political expediency, which in turn suggests a lack of resolve, and more importantly a lack of long term interest. From this perspective, the Okinawa rape caused the Clinton Administration to react, which reinforces the belief that the U.S. is not proactive in its dealings with Asia and will eventually withdraw from the region. "Look at the Bill Clinton and Tomiichi Murayama governments, then look at China's and think which is more consistent and predictable - its Beijing."³⁷ states Motofumi Asai, a professor of international relations at Tokyo's Meiji Gakuin University. Any vacuum left by a shrinking American presence would be filled somehow, as it was in Southeast Asia after the American withdrawal from the Philippines. The booming economies in Southeast Asia allowed the nations of the region capital enough to buy a lot of firepower, and the U.S. withdrawal resulted in an unprecedented arms race. In 1991 Southeast Asia accounted for over thirty five percent of all imports of major weapons and weapon systems in the world - more than any other region.³⁸ The cost of a further draw down of U.S. military from the region would be to Asia's stability, and directly impact American economic interests in the region most critical to the U.S. economy.

CONCLUSIONS

Clearly, the People's Republic of China is a threat to stability in the Western Pacific, and therefore a threat to the vital interests of the United States. The end of the Cold War signaled the end of the American strategy of containment, and brought an end to the American military facilities in the Philippines. With the loss of the century old bases in the Philippines, a vulnerable soft spot developed in the hard earned American Western Pacific defensive perimeter. Despite a deterrent arms build up in Southeast Asia by the non-communist American allies in region, attempts to deter the expansionist Chinese failed. The PRC occupied islands in the Spratly and Paracel Island chains in the South China Sea with the purpose of power projection. Only an American show of force in the straits of Taiwan stopped further Communist Chinese aggression against the Taiwanese.

With a growing economy and corresponding rise in Chinese nationalism, the communist Chinese government (albeit under the guise of communism with "Chinese tendencies") is finding its control over the populous less tenable. It will continue to be so, until the mainland Chinese employ a government more representative of the Chinese people. Given current trends, the communist government may find itself threatened by the continued growth and success of capitalism within the PRC. In that case the path to self preservation for the communist government may well be in a play for the renewed sense of Chinese nationalism - uniting all mainland Chinese in a regional conflict against a foreign enemy. Consequently, American operational commanders must prepare for a conflict with China. Failure to do so, is to risk the fate of American commander in the Philippines, Guam, and Hawaii in the early stages of World War II. With U.S. economic trade now well over 50 percent in Asia, however, there is a great deal more at stake.

The consensus throughout the Pacific rim, with the possible exception of China and the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea, is that the United States military must stay active in Asia, and that American military presence remains crucial in maintaining regional stability. Operational commanders must make every effort to reinforce this correct perception of the American long term commitment to the region, and thereby act as a dampener for the tremendous fluctuations in U.S. foreign policy. They must further military to military contacts, and expand bilateral and multilateral exercises whenever possible.

The United States and Japan have important and complementary roles to play in the region, and the relationship between the two remains the cornerstone of peace and stability in Asia. Dr. Nye conceived a successful framework which enabled the President to secure the Japanese endorsement on the crucial renewed U.S. security plan with the Japanese. His initiative should be a model for similar accomplishments with other nations in the Western Pacific, particularly in Southeast Asia. With a consistent foreign policy, the nations in the region may well extend invitations to establish military facilities with host nation support, much as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Australia did when the U.S. bases were closed in the Philippines. Ironically, invitations may come from the Philippines, who experienced Chinese aggression first hand with the occupation of Mischief Reef, or from the Vietnamese, who suffered from Chinese expansionism in the Spratlys in 1988. Acceptance of such an invitation is not unprecedented, as our facilities at Sembawang in Singapore attest. Operational commanders must exercise every opportunity to train with their counterparts throughout the region, including with former enemies, such as Vietnam.

The Japanese military, with increasing public support throughout the region, continues to modernize. Continuously changing and improving technologies make the line between self defense and offensive capability less and less clear. The JSDF technical improvements clearly provide the foundation for more aggressive and autonomous future operations, and the current trend for a larger role by the JSDF should be encouraged. American operators have little to fear from a strong Japanese military under a democratic civilian government, and everything to gain.

Currently, the American forward deployed forces in Asia are an adequate balance to the growing Chinese threat. However, without a clear, proactive foreign policy in Asia, the Clinton Administration risks the gradual decay of the hard earned American western strategic frontier. A continued reactive foreign policy may soon result in the inability of the United States to counter an aggressive enemy attack from the west on foreign soil. The United States must not force itself, in colonial fashion, upon any nation. Instead, it should accept the invitations by Pacific rim allies for basing, repair and training facilities, before those offers expire. The cost of acceptance, even without host nation support, must in the long run be less than having to once again fight our way back from the west coast of the United States.

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