

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE PROPER UNITED STATES POLICY
WAYS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION
FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE

by

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This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

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Report Documentation Page			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188		
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 18 MAR 2005		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED -	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Proper United States Policy Ways in the Asia-Pacific Region for the Foreseeable Future				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Pierre Massar				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA, 17013-5050				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT See attached.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 24	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Lieutenant Colonel Pierre E. Massar
TITLE: The Proper United States Policy Ways in the Asia-Pacific Region for the Foreseeable Future
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project
DATE: 18 March 2005 PAGES: 24 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

According to Andrew Scobell and Larry M. Wortzel, "In the 21st century the Asian-Pacific region threatens to supplant Europe as the region of paramount national security interest to the United States." With the People's Republic of China as the world's most populous nation, and the United States as its most dominant, the current and future impact on the Asia-Pacific region will be both profound and contentious. The competition for economic advantage in the region will exacerbate political, economic, and military tensions as the People's Republic of China and the other nations in the region broaden their elements of national power and influence. As for the People's Republic of China's military, its sheer potential power and focus on modernization provides the region with a reason to be concerned, rational, and thoughtful. Within this mix of economic and military expansionism, the vital dynamic of time becomes significant. It is Asia's history to view time over a prolonged period as a resource to be managed to an ultimate and successful conclusion. The long term implications to the United States and the Asia-Pacific region will set the stage for a future point in history that may lead to armed conflict, or at a very minimum, China evolved into the preeminent and hegemonic regional power.

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THE PROPER UNITED STATES POLICY WAYS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE

For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill.
To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.

- Sun Tzu

According to Andrew Scobell and Larry M. Wortzel, "In the 21st century the Asian-Pacific region threatens to supplant Europe as the region of paramount national security interest to the United States."¹ What should be the United States main national security policies in this region of the world? The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze the current Asia Pacific policy within the context of assessing United States national and security interests in the region. It will identify several main United States national interests within the region, emphasize key issues, and recommend policy ways to advancing United States interests in the region. It will show that the United States must actively engage itself in the Asia-Pacific region with determination, foresight, and dynamic clarity. This paper will first examine the environment the United States must appreciate and understand.

The United States National Security Strategy is the defining source of our current strategic outlook. Within this outlook, three national interests hold primacy with respect to the Asia-Pacific region. They are Asia-Pacific peace and stability, Asian economic recovery and viability, and the integration of China into a regional security and economic framework.² The former two are categorized as being vital regional interests and the later as important. First, Asian-Pacific peace and stability directly supports our grand strategic goal of "work[ing] with others to diffuse regional conflicts."³ Second, Asian economic recovery and viability supports "ignite[ing] a new era of global economic growth through free markets and free trade."⁴ Last, the integration of China into a regional security and economic framework sustains "develop[ing] agendas for cooperative action with the other main centers of global power."⁵ In order to better understand the United States ability to advance its interests in the Asia-Pacific region, one must first examine the external and internal factors that affect these interests.

Pursuant to these interests, this paper will focus on three factors that are characteristic or related to the region that cannot change in short order. Arguably, the most challenging factor is the proliferation and spread of weapons of mass destruction within not only the region but also throughout the world. Weapons of mass destruction development (nuclear, chemical, and missile development) are primarily the cause of various nations in the region seeking to limit United States influence, and simultaneously, bolstering their own influence and perceived

prestige. For example, the introduction of a U.S. theater missile defense system would have an impact on the United States, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. Furthermore, economic and political challenges caused by the 1997 Asian economic crisis have at least temporarily challenged United States interests with respect to regional states, who hope to advance or modify their economic and political infrastructures. This may result in a loss of legitimacy within the political institutions and leaders of the region due to their perceived failure to appropriately manage the crisis (with the U.S. as a tacit and opportunistic player). Henry C K Lui's, in "China vs. the Almighty Dollar," charged that the crisis allowed the United States, through the use of the International Monetary Fund, to orchestrate "new agenda aims to open Asian markets for US transnational corporations to acquire distressed Asian companies ... to break down the traditionally closed financial systems all over Asia."⁶ China's economic issues may be "forthcoming due to currency policies, greater foreign direct investment, and increased international debt."⁷ Moreover, the developing nations of the region may have further challenges exacerbated by rigid and archaic domestic economic systems. Lastly, the United States does possess an opportunity to further its present and future national security interests. Presently, the United States is an integral and balanced partner and provides a relevant security role in the region (particularly with Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan). The United States possesses real political, economic, and military influence to further advance its interests due to its long history as an influential actor among Asia-Pacific states. However, due to its Cold War operating practices, its influence and approach was all too often in favor of traditional allies and partners. Furthermore, this influence was not applied to promising and developing potential security and economic nations. The values brought forth from this history in the various elements have helped define our role and influence and molded the character of the region. What should be the recommended American regional policy ways for the Asia-Pacific region?

POLICY WAYS RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations must capture the dynamic and germane characteristics of a region that has not historically received a balanced application of American national power. This paper provides three important recommendations. Firstly, the United States must decisively and even-handedly foster a region committed to cooperation. Secondly, the Asia-Pacific region must be dedicated to free trade and commerce. Lastly, the United States must actively employ and integrate all elements of national power to create a synergistic outcome in dealing with the People's Republic of China. Given these three recommendations, how should the United States advance its policy implementing these ways and given means?

The answer lies with a measured and balanced, regional strategic approach consistent with the objectives, strategic concepts, and appropriate and synchronized application of means. The first specific recommended goal this paper will focus on is the decisive and even-handed fostering of an Asia-Pacific committed to cooperation.

First, the United States must resolve to improve bilateral and multilateral relations with countries in the region and increase general awareness of United States presence and benevolent advancement in the region (especially among traditional American allies in the region). First, we must be clear on one point: United States national interests drive our national policies. While there are those who believe the current Bush Administration “wants US hegemony in military power; hegemony in NATO; hegemony in the Pacific to contain the growing power of China; hegemony in the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other international financial institutions; hegemony in the Security Council; and hegemony over oil supplies from the Gulf,”⁸ the critical and unbiased national security practitioner is one who can analyze and discern fact from fiction, conviction from emotion, and truth from fantasy. While it is true that the United States currently enjoys strong and influential power in Asian Pacific regional matters, it is likely that this hard and soft power will be subject to the growing pressures of nations within the region itself. Therefore, a balance of both bilateral and multilateral approaches is needed while at the same time restraining unilateral tendencies. As John Ikenberry stated as a result of the events of September 11, 2001, “America’s nascent neoimperial grand strategy threatens to rend the fabric of the international community and political partnerships precisely at a time when that community and those partnerships are urgently needed ... It will trigger antagonism and resistance that will leave America in a more hostile and divided world.”⁹ Is there any hope for a true and effective multilateral approach to regional issues?

The short answer is yes. While progress to solve the North Korean nuclear problem using the six party talks is still inconclusive, the seeds of a new multilateralism on at least security issues in Asia may be germinating. However, for the true meaning and impact of multilateralism to occur, “the United States will have to pursue multilateralism as more than a tactic to pressure the North, and embrace it as a strategy to force a new security architecture in Northeast Asia.”¹⁰ Furthermore, “hope springs eternal” in our diplomatic actions in the region. With respect to Korean reunification, during a forum discussion sponsored by the Institute of New Asian Order, Okazaki Institute of Japan, and the United States Pacific Forum, the consensus of opinion was “that the Americans were actively stressing that it would serve the interests of Korea, Japan and even China for the United States to reorganize the 21st century order of Northeast Asia at its

initiatives and to continue to keep US forces in the region.”¹¹ Lastly, through pragmatic bilateral approaches, the United States can further its interests and be in position to influence events and actions. Under the auspices of the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment, their Asia 2025 study poignantly stated as a key strategic lesson that “[a] more active U.S. diplomatic and military effort to strengthen ties with India is the corollary to preventing a Sino-Indian alliance”¹² that could check growing Communist Chinese influence. Furthermore, it stated that the United States should be “strengthening bilateral alliances with Korea, Australia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Japan become central to limiting China’s exercise of its power in the South China Sea and western Pacific.”¹³

Second, the United States must promote continued market and economic reforms within a context of understanding the unique characteristics of each country and commensurate with their obligations to the well being of the region. With the region “[p]roducing 60 percent of the world’s manufactured and agricultural goods, it is the motor force of the global economy.”¹⁴ Given the economic leverage the region possesses on the world economic system, one can better understand how these nations can pursue diplomatic and military interests that may or may not complement United States policy interests. This leverage applied both within the region and across regions can be a foundation of stress and anxiety. China’s economic surge produced tension throughout the Asia-Pacific region, and arguably, throughout the world. Demanding more resources and producing more of the world’s goods is creating ripples that are being felt worldwide. With this effect, “China has affected the world power-balance that our famously plain-spoken 43rd President has been forced to moderate his rhetoric toward Beijing.”¹⁵ Although the use of China is important in this discussion, it alone does not fully illustrate the full magnitude of this issue. To only name a few, the economic power of the countries of Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan provide added support to the discussion of this regional (and possibly global) power.

However, given this economic power, one will find the economic and related social infrastructure fraught with both archaic and inequitable biases. As was evident with the quick and devastating economic collapse in the region caused by the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the economic underpinnings of many of the Asia-Pacific nations are fragile. Furthermore, as we look at the almost thirteen-year recession in Japan, we can see financial, economic, and social inflexibility toward the effects of economic globalization and the mechanism to deal with the condition. Its inability to deal with restructuring its domestic economy away from its heavy export fixation, upgrading the living standard of its overworked population, and adjusting its

consumption patterns will challenge not only itself but also hamper and lessen its relationship as an influential ally of the United States with its international neighbors.

Lastly, we must participate in confidence-building methodologies to regional issues that will instill continued trust and commitment. This region's future is both extremely promising, and at the same time, potentially injurious to promoting our important national interests, policies, and programs. Issues surrounding economic viability, present and potential availability and distribution of key regional and global natural resources, and historical and potential geo-political transforming manifestations could and will influence the region (for better or worse depending on our actions or inactions). Let us examine potential ways to advance the recommended interest for each of the aforementioned regional objectives.

How can the United States improve bilateral and multilateral relations and provide constructive influence in the region? First, the reader must understand the various actors in the region can be prone to situational dependent motives. For instance, and as discussed earlier, while China may agree to a multilateral dialogue with respect to North Korea's weapons of mass destruction program, their preference in nation-state interaction suggests a preference for bilateral approaches. This is a result of their tendency to distrust alliance-oriented or rigid multilateral interactions with extra-regional players. Therefore, America must employ a dynamic, balanced, and multi-faceted approach to regional issues. The old phrase "the only thing constant is change" applies to this tactic. The North Korean weapon of mass destruction program directly threatens simultaneously American allies, neutral nations, China, and arguably, the world. Only through a sincere, determined, and flexible economic, diplomatic, military, and informational approach will this issue be truly resolved. This employment will be resolved using various resources. Resources such as food and trade arrangements (for instance, under APEC, UN, and WTO auspices), verifiable and proactive internal and external North Korean, American, and regional actor diplomatic assurances, and firm but restrained regional military posturing of the United States, South Korean, Japanese, and Chinese naval, air, and ground forces.

With respect to promoting continued market and economic reforms within a context of understanding the unique characteristics of each country and commensurate with their obligations to the well being of the region, the United States must seriously analyze, understand, and appreciate the level and composition of each Asia-Pacific nations' economic market infrastructure and culture. By consistently providing economic assistance and aid to developing nations, we can leverage appropriate influence to facilitate economic change. Reforms through advocating and promoting economic recovery and prosperity thru APEC,

bilateral and multilateral trade agreements (minimal use of trade sanctions or embargoes), and encouragement of reciprocal and beneficial business relationships with American and global corporations, will promote these reforms. Facilitating UN, WTO, and Commerce Department expertise, the United States can assist in developing and improving fiscal policy of nations with developing banking systems. The result will start the process to positively transform regional economic conditions consistent with each nation's capability to accept change. However and possibly more importantly, all the aforementioned actions will assist in supporting another regional objective: confidence building.

The United States should participate in confidence-building methodologies to regional issues that will instill and reinforce continued trust and commitment. This will need to be incorporated into all actions involving our elements of national power. We must promote reciprocal free trade that is equitable and encourages regional interdependence. Furthermore, the United States can encourage economic actions to facilitate regional solutions to regional issues. We must promote continued military exchanges with pivotal and influential nations to foster an appreciation of capabilities and intent and reduce possible misconceptions. Additionally, expanding the Cooperative Engagement strategy especially with China will have significant and long-term benefits for both nations and reduce of ambiguities, misunderstandings, and misconception of US actions in the region. According to Dennis Florig, "China loom[s] as a long-term potential challenger to the U.S. in East Asia, but China, like Russia, seem[s] much more preoccupied with successfully entering the global system than with contesting U.S. leadership."¹⁶ Within a construct of engagement with regional actors, to the fullest extend possible, America should work within the mutual understanding of human rights of the populace vs. individual to foster issues beneficial to each. Moreover, nurture a positive, proactive, and understanding of the US role to facilitate change based on the unique character of each sovereign nation. The "one size fits all" approach has not and will not provide the desired endstate or promote long-term American interests in the region. Therefore, such action as increased emphasis on bilateral and historical multilateral allied regional security arrangements and partnerships will alleviate regional fears of waning commitment and unilateralism in regional issues. Such resources available include the focused and synchronized assets of the State, Treasury and Commerce Departments, United States Pacific Command, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to name just a few.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Lastly, the United States must simultaneously employ and integrate all elements of national power to create a synergistic outcome in dealing with the People's Republic of China. No discussion about American policy toward the region is complete without a thorough understanding and appreciation of the impact and influence of Communist China in this area of the world. Arguably, the People's Republic commands an almost near hegemonic influence in the area. Neither recent Administration has produced a comprehensive regional approach that leverages the full implementation of all the elements of national power for a regional effect. While the former Clinton Administration utilized a version of an active ways engagement, it was primarily selective in nature toward the economic element of power with only a nuance of the diplomatic component confined to narrowly focused issues (North Korea, in particular). Moreover, the current Bush Administration has not improved on this paradigm. Again, Bush's dealings with the People's Republic of China are once again primarily narrowly focused World Trade Organization and free trade issues, North Korean weapons of mass destruction development and on Global War on Terror cooperation measures. However, the issues concerning the Asian-Pacific region demand action more in tune with the past and present dealings of Europe. Issues such as collective regional security with the People's Republic as a stabilizing and responsible participant and regional economic integration that truly benefit the developing nations are just a few examples of the pressing matters facing the region and United States. The famous "China will never seek hegemony"¹⁷ statement by then Vice President Zeng Qinghong did not resonate or calm fears with many influential policymakers around the world. These policymakers and political actors share a feeling similar to the statement of former Senator John Ashcroft when he stated, "...there is a destabilizing force in the Pacific Rim today -- and it is not the Asian democracies. There is an entity, which through its emerging economic and military might, intends to assert its power -- and it is not the Asian democracies. There is a political system that sees as its enemy the free people of the world -- and it is not the Asian democracies. No, the expansionist force in Asia is Communist China, a country that cares little for international law, and even less for the sacred nature of human life."¹⁸ In examining the elements of national power, one will more fully appreciate the necessity for their integrated and harmonious application.

"Beijing has made impressive strides in relations with Russia and Central Asia. And Jiang, the originator of 'Great Power Diplomacy,' has gone beyond predecessor Deng Xiaoping's cautious dictum about world affairs: 'Adopt a low profile and never take the lead.'"¹⁹ The aforementioned was in reference to Communist China's first participation in a formal regional

bloc alignment, the six nation Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Combined with the Jiang-Putin summit held in Moscow a month later, many observers felt this new initiation of non-Western political and diplomatic arrangements “may be the beginning of a counterweight to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and an important pillar of a multi-polar world structure.”²⁰ Coupled with the signing of the Sino-Russian Treaty of Good-Neighborly Friendship and Cooperation agreement, there is cause for heightened sensitivity for a more active Mainland Chinese in world affairs. Furthermore, tied to the possible inclusion of more countries such as Mongolia, Pakistan and India, this “new paradigm” can only strengthen the idea of a new dynamic in this region (and possibly other regions). Without active and positive involvement of the United States in a multilateral context, Thucydides reasons for conflict (fear, interest, and honor) will motivate American foreign policy as opposed to understanding, cooperation, and respect. Having reviewed the diplomatic component of national power, the economic element should also be examined.

The economic component of national power is arguably the most preferred element in dealing with the People’s Republic. China’s trade surplus with the United States has “increased 27.1% in the first half of 2004, to \$68.5 billion ... and now has the largest [trade surplus] of any country in the world,”²¹ China “alone was responsible for 53% of the increase in the [United States] non-oil trade deficit through June 2004.”²² Concurrently, the United States trade deficit with the rest of the Asia-Pacific Rim has “increased 17% thus far in 2004 (with Japan increasing by 12.5%).”²³ Thus, the United States must borrow abroad to finance its trade deficits. The majority financed through long term government bonds purchased by the People’s Republic of China. With the aforementioned in mind, practically any economist might venture to state that the United States trade deficit poses potentially great risks for its economy. Furthermore, given “the eurozone’s trade deficit with China soar[ing] to EU41.1bn (\$48.1bn, £28.6bn) in the first 10 months of last year,”²⁴ Mainland China is truly developing as a significant world creditor; a distinction once held by the United States immediately following World War Two. The results of increased American (and Western European) trade deficits are symptomatic of the “rapid decline in the competitiveness of U.S. manufacturing industries.”²⁵ Coupled with ongoing trade negotiations to “float” its currency (which is based on the American dollar), China’s intransigence has “also made it more difficult for other Asian nations to allow their currencies to rise.”²⁶ It is no wonder that the primary topic of discussion of nearly every American official to China is trade-based. As their economy grows, so will their need for basic resources (predominately oil). It will be important to watch if China can successfully manage its transition to a market economy with broad-based growth as either an authoritarian regime or

possible developing democratic nation. The problem lies in that China has no history of democratic traditions. Without a doubt, economic factors are important to the well-being of all nations; however, the military aspects of can ultimately be the final arbiter of long-term prosperity and security.

According to John Gershman, “[i]t is by now virtually conventional wisdom that Asia is the critical area of strategic focus and military operations for the Pentagon. China will be pegged as the only likely ‘peer competitor’ around which U.S. strategic doctrine in the first quarter of the 21st century will be oriented.”¹²⁷ Notwithstanding the current focus on the Global War on Terror, the United States must look beyond this method of warfare to issues that may endanger its security with other state actors in the near and not so near future. In the Asia 2025 report, China is projected to be a threat whether is strong or weak, stable or unstable. Gershman stated, “A stable and powerful China will be constantly challenging the status quo in Asia. An unstable and relatively weak China could be dangerous because its leaders might try to bolster their power with foreign military adventures.”¹²⁸ These possible ‘foreign military adventures’ cause great angst among both military and political leaders. As one might expect, even challenging the status quo can have significant repercussions within the region for both the United States and between Asia-Pacific regional actors.

For the past sixty years, the most notable tension in the region is the United States relationship with Taiwan. While the United States officially advocates the “One China Policy,” the Mainland Chinese are very apprehensive about its application. Their eventual goal is to assimilate the “lost province” into Greater China. Diplomatically, this could be an option if both state actors can come to some mutual consensus and arrangement. In this arrangement, China prefers a bilateral arrangement with the United States (the Americans prefer an informal multilateral relationship to include Taiwan). However, as the last sixty years demonstrate, the military option of annexation will cause severe results to both. One only needs to read almost daily to see a China aspiring to develop a “Blue Water” navy with designs on “re-gaining their former status ... and continu[ing] to try to regain Taiwan.”¹²⁹

While Taiwan is an important issue facing the region, it is not the only concern. The Japanese are beginning to react to China’s actual or perceived bellicose actions. In the Channel News Asia International, a recent article provided details to “a plan to defend a chain of its southernmost islands in the East China Sea against invasion amid rising security concerns about China.”¹³⁰ Furthermore, in the article, a Japanese official stated, “China has been expanding its scope of activities as seen in the case of an invasion of Japanese territorial waters (by a Chinese nuclear submarine) last November.”¹³¹ The Japanese feel that “China, which has

a great impact on security in the region, is pushing ahead with enhancing its nuclear and missile capabilities in modernizing its navy and air force while expanding marine activities."³² Coupled with North Korea, it appears the Japanese are re-evaluating the military landscape and reacting, accordingly. Furthermore, the United States is beginning to further re-evaluate its posture.

For United States, while "China is at least two decades away from being able to deploy a fully functional carrier and aircraft,"³³ it appears China is following a more Mahanian approach to national power. As a result of an internal study at the Office of Net Assessments, it appears "China is adopting a 'string of pearls' strategy of bases and diplomatic ties stretching from the Middle East to southern China that includes a new naval base under construction at the Pakistani port of Gwadar."³⁴ In summation, the article infers that China is building up military forces and setting up bases along sea-lanes from the Middle East to project its power overseas and more than likely to protect its oil shipments. The following illustrates both the military and bilateral political Chinese efforts underway with various countries in the region:

- Bangladesh: China is strengthening its ties to the government and building a container port facility at Chittagong. The Chinese are "seeking much more extensive naval and commercial access" in Bangladesh.
- Burma: China has developed close ties to the military regime in Rangoon and turned a nation wary of China into a "satellite" of Beijing close to the Strait of Malacca, through which 80 percent of China's imported oil passes.
- China is building naval bases in Burma and has electronic intelligence gathering facilities on islands in the Bay of Bengal and near the Strait of Malacca. Beijing also supplied Burma with "billions of dollars in military assistance to support a de facto military alliance," the report said.
- Cambodia: China signed a military agreement in November 2003 to provide training and equipment. Cambodia is helping Beijing build a railway line from southern China to the sea.
- South China Sea: Chinese activities in the region are less about territorial claims than "protecting or denying the transit of tankers through the South China Sea," the report said.
- China also is building up its military forces in the region to be able to "project air and sea power" from the mainland and Hainan Island. China recently upgraded a military airstrip on Woody Island and increased its presence through oil drilling platforms and ocean survey ships.
- Thailand: China is considering funding construction of a \$20 billion canal across the Kra Isthmus that would allow ships to bypass the Strait of Malacca. The canal project would give China port facilities, warehouses and other infrastructure in Thailand aimed at enhancing Chinese influence in the region.³⁵

All of the aforementioned issues concerning China may signal a harbinger of things to come: a possible new 'Asian Cold War.' All the indicators of growing political tensions, territorial rivalries, competition over energy resources between Japan and China, and China's military build-up could be foreshadowing the future conditions if the United States does not actively employ and integrate all elements of national power to create a synergistic outcome in dealing with the People's Republic of China.

RISK ANALYSIS

These recommendations cannot be considered complete without a discussion as to the risks associated. Consideration of suitability, feasibility, and acceptability are ever-present in this paper. There are those who profess the need for the "United States to lead a new order, and second, the emergence of a hegemony state that has absolute superior strength in the region should be prevented."⁹⁶ While this approach could achieve the ends sought, its long-term effects could be much more damaging. The following risks should be considered. Primarily, the nation must possess the necessary and essential will to implement the recommended policy and strategy. Secondly, intransigency among the nation-states of the region to deal with each other or the United States in a helpful fashion degrades our ability to influence resolution and cooperation. Continued population and environmental pressures cause the scarcity of resources to override regional security for national survival. Lastly, irresponsible nations in the region place short-term desires over long-term stability with respect to weapons of mass destruction or continued build-up of conventional arms.

CONCLUSION

If it is time that "[t]he Asia/Pacific region is the geopolitical center of the struggle for world power,"⁹⁷ then the current United States ends in the region include Asia-Pacific peace and stability, Asian economic recovery and viability, and a regionally integrated China. The art and science of constructing adequate and effective ways and means to achieve these ends are available to us. The United States should more decisively and even-handedly foster a region resolved to cooperation and dedicated to free trade and commerce for all its nations. Because for the continued security of the United States, "The challenge lies in identifying a new grand strategy that captures the critical characteristics of the new international security environment and identifies appropriate ends, ways, and means for organizing and executing the search for security in the post-Cold War world."⁹⁸

WORD COUNT=4846

ENDNOTES

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