

Shaping Air and Sea Power for the “Asia Pivot”

Military Planning to Support Limited Geopolitical Objectives

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For roughly two decades, the US Department of Defense has been focused on creating weapons platforms and plans for “effect-based” operations with the assumption that they can be readily mixed and matched to achieve the desired strategic purpose. As Clausewitz famously argued, however, it is risky for military planners to decontextualize the notion of effects-based weaponry from the most likely political goals politicians will be seeking in the threat and use of force when confronting a peer competitor. Ultimately, everything depends on the level of political stakes or, in Clausewitz’s terms, the nature of the “political object.”¹

In East Asia, a rising China confronts the United States with a classic security dilemma in which new Chinese military capabilities could support both a commonsense and legitimate wish to secure its own interests *and* a more expansive vision for regional leadership that might harbor an aggressive geopolitical agenda. Thus, a wary United States finds it prudent to maintain an operational military advantage over China’s rapidly improving military capability. Yet, how the United States addresses that security dilemma via military procurement and the development of operational concepts could either detract from or enhance crisis stability when Chinese and US interests come into conflict. With this delicate balancing act in mind, we offer a conceptual framework for how the

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United States should prepare to use military power during peacetime deterrence, protracted crises, and war to resolve conflicting interests with another powerful state, such as China, when both powers also have substantial interconnected interests.

The international system has changed markedly, despite the continuance of traditional US bilateral alliances with South Korea and Japan. What is particularly unprecedented is the simultaneous growth or "rise" of South Korea, Japan, and China *together*, based firmly on economic rather than military power—that is, on manufacturing and financial rather than territorial gains. This is radically different from historical patterns of domination of both the Korean Peninsula and also Southeast Asian nations by either an imperial China or an imperial Japan.²

Based on these systemic changes in Asian relations, we argue that, as the US Navy and Air Force further develop the Air-Sea Battle concept, they need to even more deeply rethink their allegiance to what one may call "total battle doctrines" that see their strategic role as providing quick, total, overwhelming offensive victory against absolutely opposed adversaries.³ Specifically, the services should examine if and how certain force acquisitions and employment strategies for the Asia-Pacific could either exacerbate or mitigate the propensity for conflict escalation during any future crises. The historical literature has argued strenuously that capabilities and plans for winning a full-scale war (should one break out) do not necessarily make for peaceful deterrence in a non-crisis environment or for open diplomatic exchanges during a crisis atmosphere. This is because of the simple fact that latent or even fully fielded capabilities for major offensive strikes can signal a *policy intent* for upsetting a balance of power and interests to one's own unilateral advantage, even if such intent and interest do not in fact exist on the part of the side with such escalatory capacities.

We thus agree with the founding lead of the Air-Sea Battle concept development group at Headquarters Air Force that the United States will need "fresh theories and concepts . . . less tethered to its traditions of annihilation warfare" to manage future crisis in anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) environments effectively.⁴ But despite such initial analytic forays in policy and military journals, the question still left under-examined in US security debates and planning is whether it is better to "overcome the enemy's will" by thwarting its efforts to consolidate any gains in the operational battlespace or via incapacitating its ability to

field forces via deep strategic strikes on the adversary's homeland. The latter, for instance, has historically been advocated and even utilized to incapacitate leadership circles, annihilate deep military bases, or even hit dual-use value targets such as water, electricity, transport, and key industries.⁵ All of the latter was done, for instance, against Iraq in 1991.⁶

We contend that, given the shared interests of all current rising powers in retaining the global trade and manufacturing system currently in place, the military denial of enemy gains, if persistently achieved *without* strategic interdiction strikes, would more likely lead to crisis stability, conflict management, and deescalation of crises. It is also in sync with one of the central strategic observations of the *US National Military Strategy* of February, 2011, published under Secretary of Defense Robert Gates: "Denying an aggressor the benefits of achieving its objectives can be just as effective as in altering its strategic calculus through the threat of retaliation. The most effective deterrence approaches make use of both techniques, while also providing potential adversaries acceptable alternative courses of action."⁷

In short, when faced with a capable and determined adversary who nonetheless shares some core interests with the United States in the globalized socioeconomic order, we argue that the capabilities and plans needed to achieve the goal of *strategic denial* will more readily serve the policy needs of civilian leaders than escalatory deep strike options targeting leadership and infrastructural centers in an adversary's homeland. Any such strategic denial military options would need to exist within and be integrated across US air, sea, space, and cyberspace forces. In turn, this requires that weapons platforms and their support systems be designed and equipped to support maximum diplomatic bargaining and conflict management during crises involving a complex array of common and competing interests between great powers.

The Global and Regional Strategic Operating Environment

Military threats and force application must be suited to the emerging globalized age of "pragmatic multipolarity"—a loose system of network interactions based on tactical cooperation between states to bolster their domestic identities and further their shared international interests, rather than a system of competing, well-defined blocs based upon utterly

hostile ideological worldviews. The reality of unprecedented interstate socioeconomic networks in creating an internationalized form of national wealth makes rising powers on all continents fear the societal costs of upsetting financial and trade flows.⁸ Even many realist scholars acknowledge that the emerging international system is making traditional forms of conquest increasingly irrational.⁹

Consequently, Asian powers seek stable and gradual adjustments in the regional balance of power and interests rather than the Cold War norm of arms racing to remain superior in military and economic terms to dominate a much-feared ideological rival with a contending, aggressive value system.¹⁰ The US triumph over communism facilitated this pragmatic rather than ideological pursuit of power by generating a seemingly ingrained and durable transnational socioeconomic class with a common capitalist "culture" and a desire for the material benefits of capitalism.¹¹ This global elite speaks the same professional language of business and high finance and can translate between global market demands and domestic cultural idioms—which include the rise of "new wealth barons" in China as well as other powers.¹² Ultimately, elites in India, China, and Russia—as well as "middle rank" rising powers such as the core ASEAN members of Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia—generally seek whatever pragmatic financial, military, trade, and cultural relationships that will help them provide a better living for their own people.¹³ Power gain in terms of internal growth is inextricably linked to these countries' rejection of foreign policies that would base their external relations primarily on ideology or cultural values.¹⁴

This said, the goal of pursuing a political, military, and economic balance does not preclude all conflict. Rising powers in Asia all harbor some level of nationalist-based territorial claims based on legacy disputes in which the identity of peoples overlaps with swaths of disputed territory.¹⁵ Consequently, although the value of territorial conquest in economic terms has become almost nil due to the transnational and international nature of capital, labor, and manufacturing assets, the relative value of territory in nationalist terms (i.e., domestic identity) has skyrocketed.¹⁶

As a result, the international "friendships" and "alliances" of middle-rising and great-rising powers can vary depending on the situation, depending on both "material" interests (such as energy resource acquisition

and transportation) *and* on nationalist impulses relating to questions of self-determination and sovereign identity.¹⁷ Thus, for instance, the USAF Center for Strategy and Technology (CSAT) views Russia, India, and Japan more as China's competitors than its partners despite close cooperation in counterterrorism, transnational drug interdiction efforts, and energy deals in Central Asia via the multilateral Shanghai Cooperation Organization.¹⁸

Such a dynamic international system tends to be more familiar to, and accepted by, states in the larger Asian region than by the United States itself.¹⁹ As one former US diplomat to Southeast and Northeast Asia has argued, the United States retains a residual and enduring Cold War inclination to view countries as either "with us or against us" across the full spectrum of interests and issues.²⁰ However, in today's globalized East Asia, issues overlap and compete in complex ways, with no one party viewing itself as a complete and total "ally" with any other party,²¹ despite the relatively tight bilateral defense pacts between the United States and Japan and South Korea. There simply is no Asian equivalent of the Berlin Wall or the "Iron Curtain."

Thus far, Chinese military goals align with these very mixed geopolitical realities. Even the most wary analysts concerned with Chinese military advances are not assuming or arguing that China is seeking to straddle the globe with air, sea, and land forces. Despite ongoing buildups—including new surface and subsurface naval platforms—Chinese power projection is generally described as being thoroughly regional in character. As recently noted by CSAT, "significant Chinese force projection beyond Southeast Asia will be difficult," even though "China's military will be sufficient to deter and even repel almost any attempt at preemptive action against its mainland or territories or in its immediate vicinity." Instead of true "global reach" as defined by the United States, the USAF research team concluded that "China's military capability will be greatest from the mainland out to the 'second island chain'—the region extending south and east from Japan to Guam in the Western Pacific." In terms of actual operational military patterns, the research team concluded that "as a regional air and naval power, China will routinely cruise these waters with its carrier strike groups." The ultimate political strategic goal of the People's Republic of China (PRC) would then not be "policing the global commons," but rather policing the *regional* commons: "China will seek to assume the role of guarantor of the sea lines of

communication in the region, including the strategic Straits of Malacca. They will also be capable of selectively impeding [regional] commerce if they choose.”²²

Again, however, this brings to the fore the question of nationalism as China continues to experience formidable domestic socioeconomic turbulence due to mass migrations within and between its many large regions, including continued rapid urbanization, industrialization, and the formation of new working and middle classes with growing personal stakes in where China is and where it might be going.²³ For example, the Chinese government in the 1990s “needed nationalism for national integrity, leadership consolidation, and legitimacy, and prevention of what they saw as negative Western influence upon the minds of the people.”²⁴ As a direct result, “China’s rise has imbued the public with self-confidence, which interacts with China’s remaining sense of inferiority and is expressed in the form of aggressive nationalism. The economic rise of China has provided the basis on which a sentiment of love for and pride in the Chinese nation has grown notably since the mid-1990s.”²⁵ Indeed, twenty-first-century Chinese leadership

has stepped up “patriotic education” since 1994 by distributing “Guidelines for Implementing Patriotic Education” to reinforce “the power of national integrity” by “uniting people of all ethnicities.” Since the late 1990s, in short, the domestic political and developmental goal of Chinese leaders has been “The Great Revival of the Chinese Nation” . . . to “prevent the rise of the worship of the West” . . . by creating a social atmosphere in which “people can be infected and permeated with patriotic thought and spirit any time, any place, in all aspects of daily life.”²⁶

With such domestic social trends in mind, it is prudent for the United States to be prepared to deter strategic expansion of Chinese political interests and military capabilities in ways that could undermine South Korean, Japanese, and Southeast Asian nations’ sovereign economic and political security. Despite unease with China’s “muscle flexing,” the populations of important East Asian powers are, in essence, “sitting on a fence.” Their economies have become so interlinked with China’s that one Japanese international relations scholar has noted that “in 2004, China became the largest trading partner of not only Japan, but also South Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. . . . According to a March 2004 survey conducted by the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 70 percent of Japanese business leaders wanted a trilateral free trade agreement with China and South Korea.”²⁷ Additionally, Japan’s recent imperial past often seems to

cause South Korean leaders and citizens to fear the strategic intentions of Japan more than they do mainland China.²⁸

Given these interconnected as well as conflicting interests, it is no surprise that a comprehensive RAND study of South Korean, Southeast Asian, and Japanese security perceptions vis-à-vis the United States and China showed that neither the populations nor their associated elite politicians want their country to “buck” the status quo by becoming entangled in disputes between the PRC and its neighbors or the PRC and the United States. Also, none wishes to jeopardize its prosperity by undertaking a more explicit and expanded East Asian military role. The same RAND analysis showed that the popular viewpoints on foreign policy issues among the populations and leadership circles of both countries could “swing” if tension, pressures, or threats escalate in any one direction, including if the PRC were perceived as becoming more bellicose and assertive.²⁹

The Impact of the New Asian Geopolitics on Military Planning

All of the above points to one simple fact: although a total conventional war or even nuclear war could theoretically erupt between two nuclear-armed super powers who mismanage a crisis, the United States does not face in the foreseeable future a near-peer power that threatens it existentially as during much of the Cold War. The current international system is one of strictly bounded competition, with both overlapping and divergent policy priorities between all major powers—including even US friends and allies. Therefore, the United States has the luxury of preparing not to prevent the destruction of its homeland and its way of life, but of preparing to deny any opponent from making substantial coercive shifts in the balance of power.

Given this grand strategic political and economic reality, it behooves us to ask whether certain aspects of traditional notions of offensive strategic interdiction would serve the United States well in future disputes with this rising Asian power. As Clausewitz pointed out 180 years ago, the political aims of limited war require a different application of force than wars of unconditional capitulation. One crucial question, therefore, is which strategic US military developments may be stabilizing (or

potentially destabilizing) in deterring the PRC in geopolitically disputed areas such as Taiwan and the South China Sea.

Indeed, recent literature by Air Force and Navy officers has begun to define and argue for a range of capabilities that flexibly threatens not only greater or lesser military costs, but also lesser or greater policy stakes. For instance, evolving concepts focused on countering anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) strategies—such as the Air-Sea Battle—rightly argue that the United States should seek to maintain “escalation agility” and to “manage” escalation “to avoid relying on . . . capabilities that existentially threaten another nation or its leadership.”³⁰

Traditionally, the notion of an “existential threat” has been tied firmly to nuclear forces and nuclear strikes. This article, however, proposes that even escalation with certain *conventional* deep-strike capabilities may be viewed by some competitors as approaching an existential threat, given the geopolitical realities of a globalized East Asian operating environment. Thus, we further emphasize the point raised briefly by Vincent Alcazar in this same journal that an important element of escalation agility³¹—especially when dealing with an adversary that holds some major interests in common with the United States—is the capability to thwart without escalation the enemy’s ability to consolidate its objectives.

That is, under the umbrella concept of *strategic denial* at the level of military strategy and campaign planning, we further propose and define the operational, battle-level concept of *persistent denial*: the ability to apply sustainable pressure at a given escalation threshold to raise the adversary’s perceived cost of an anti–status quo action both prior to and during a militarized crisis. By avoiding escalation that would immediately threaten core defense interests of a sovereign competitor—which could quickly escalate the political stakes involved, possibly leading to an escalation spiral—lower-level military capacities and plans might give added credibility to US deterrent threats in a tense environment, reducing the likelihood that the United States be confronted with either “backing down” or committing to actions that raise the prospect of full-scale warfare. In sum: the ability to credibly and capably impose negative costs without dramatically escalating the political stakes involved would facilitate the eventual resumption of a stable and at least partially cooperative peace.

In this regard, the question when considering different employment and procurement policies in East Asia is whether leaders in Beijing could

distinguish between limited versus extensive US policy intentions based on the threat and possible use of such force. Limited US policy intentions may be especially hard to signal in future operational applications of weapon systems that may possess the ability to strike hundreds and perhaps thousands of targets deep in sovereign Chinese territory with relative impunity. That is, due to the deep-strike, precision, speed, and stealth of some new conventional missile and bomber forces being called for under the generic banner of both conventional prompt global strike (CPGS) and Air-Sea Battle, a rising China may in a crisis over limited geopolitical claims be hard-pressed to assess the scope of immediate US intentions, given the innately strategic effects of such platforms in terms of their ability to “decapitate” leadership or cause widespread “societal disruption.”³²

To the extent that the US Department of Defense is pursuing the latter specific goal in particular, it is courting the danger of making too little of a distinction between the universal, timeless need for decisive combat at the tactical level and the far rarer need to win an all-out war with a competitor at a truly strategic level of policy objectives. We infer these troubling consequences based on the core military characteristic often attributed to CPGS or global strike forces: to create “strategic level” military effects on deep Chinese target sets, a military operational and tactical goal that implicitly encompasses all-out political and/or military strategic objectives.

For instance, the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA), a leading, highly influential defense think tank with myriad Pentagon contracts and personal military connections,³³ has fretted that “the Air Force’s current bomber force lacks the capabilities and capacity needed to penetrate contested airspace to strike thousands of targets in future air campaigns.” In answer to this perceived deficit in the US deterrent and war-fighting posture, the CSBA has called for “one hundred new optionally manned penetrating bombers with all-aspect, broadband stealth, a payload capacity of approximately 20,000 pounds, and a range of 4,000–5,000 nautical miles. The bomber should have on-board surveillance and self-defense capabilities to permit independent operations against fixed and mobile targets in degraded C4ISR environments.”³⁴

This policy argument strongly resembles the traditional US Air Force focus on “strategic offensive interdiction,” broadly defined as the capability to deliver a strategic form of paralysis that literally disarms the

enemy without having to repeatedly fight its frontline forces. The latter has generally been achieved (or at least attempted) by applying pressure against more indirect political, industrial, infrastructural, and other military-supporting as well as societal targets, which in turn has been meant to undermine overall enemy political will and decision-making coherence. The latter exercise is generally what is meant by the term *offensive strategic interdiction*, whether advocated by theorists such as Giulio Douhet and B. H. Liddell Hart, or by the Air Corps Tactical School in the form of the "Industrial Web Theory," or more recently, in the planning documents and writings of Col John Warden III.³⁵

Although the historical and intellectual pedigree of such ideas is undeniable, what is often missed in the debates is that this traditional approach to strategic airpower would have the simultaneous effect of destroying or seriously degrading PRC sovereign defense capacities overall, meaning that it would confront Beijing with not just degraded power projection but even a severely degraded ability to defend its own homeland. And given the PRC's historical focus on the sanctity of its current borders—as shown in both its intervention in the Korean War and later in bruising battles with both the Soviet Union and Vietnam in the 1970s, costing tens of thousands of casualties³⁶—degrading Beijing's ability to ensure its own sovereign defense is likely to escalate any hostilities rather than lead to a stable crisis resolution. Indeed, such threats would almost certainly run afoul of the innate nationalist impulses implicit in the millennia-long existence of collective Confucian culture in China,³⁷ and especially its felt "victim status" as a result of the "century of humiliation" visited upon it by external colonial powers from 1839 to 1945.³⁸

One might argue that the capability to win such a large war decisively would inherently deter an opponent from escalating to that point. However, in the security studies literature, the concept and empirical reality of diplomatically destabilizing weapons capabilities has been thoroughly analyzed and described under the rubric of "offensive dominance," as opposed to "defense" or "deterrence dominance." Large dataset statistical testing, together with in-depth case studies covering the great-power periods of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have together shown across different methodologies that when major powers harbor weapons at an operational level that can easily preempt the other side's forces quickly, this exacerbates the grand strategy-level condition known as "international

anarchy.” The decision calculus can quickly veer toward preventive war or preemptive strikes because decision makers are tempted through both opportunity and genuine fear to “strike first” to keep a rival from gaining a decisive operational, and hence, strategic edge.³⁹

Thus, a US approach to force procurement and employment that is overly focused on offensive strategic interdiction in order to secure victory—even of a nonnuclear variety—could easily have a deleterious strategic political effect during both periods of “general deterrence” in peacetime and during a diplomatic-military crisis. In essence, Bernard Brodie’s 1959 assessment of nuclear deterrence strategies is generally applicable here: “[A] plan and policy which offers a good promise of *detering* war is . . . better in every way than one which depreciates the objectives of deterrence in order to improve somewhat the chances of winning” (emphasis added).⁴⁰

In sum: as currently defined, the evolving CPGS and Air-Sea Battle concepts, based at least partially on the traditional airpower culture of the strategic offensive, may well fail to provide future US presidents with credible and politically viable options for limiting and deescalating the limited-stakes conflicts the United States would most likely encounter in the Asian Pacific theater. While it is of course easier in principle to “defeat the enemy” by destroying decisively its capacity to sustain frontline forces, this approach assumes that strategic defeat of the adversary (i.e., total victory) is what US decision makers would in fact be seeking in a crisis against most great-power competitors in most contexts. But as already described above, it is extraordinarily unlikely that US policymakers will in fact harbor such “total” goals or “policy objects” toward a rising China in the contemporary international system. And striking a wide array of deep target sets would likely be viewed by the PRC as a serious escalation of policy stakes, therefore inviting a dramatic PRC counterescalation (whether via cyber or space warfare) that would inflict costs on the United States incommensurate with the level of policy stakes involved.

An Alternative Vision for Force Development and Employment in the East Asia Theater

While strategic deep-strike conventional options, alongside traditional nuclear strike options, are both likely to be part of a twenty-first-century

US force structure, we argue that the main goal of the US military should be to possess the capability necessary to deter and prevent small conflicts from escalating into large-scale or even total war. It ought to be prepared for limited wars in which the denial of enemy aims can be achieved without the types of significant offensive strikes on enemy territory that would pose a much greater risk of escalation. This requires force types, levels, and doctrine that allow political decision makers not only to manipulate the threat of further escalation, but also to manipulate the expected benefits and costs of different settlements in a mutually defined bargaining space.

With this in mind, future conventional global-strategic-strike procurements, deployments, and strategy should be carefully evaluated in terms of their potential to contribute to undesired conflict escalation as well as their influence on PRC perceptions of US peacetime deterrent threats. The United States should not get rid of the threat of escalation to levels at which it can impose high costs on the enemy, but equally, it should not want to create a reality wherein the only two states of strategic relations are either the status quo peace or the strong risk of escalation to total, absolute wars of strategic paralysis. That is, despite the utility of proposed strategic, conventional, deep strike capabilities—given that they might be more credible than nuclear threats because they have a lower barrier to use—they should still be held in reserve and very cautiously signaled, activated, and deployed due to the adversary's perception of the severity of their consequences.

Based on this assessment—which in turn is based upon the geopolitical realities of the globalized East Asian operating environment summarized above—we conclude that the US defense community should consider acquiring more intermediate-range, smaller-payload solutions for selective offensive interdiction against purely military targets around the circumference of China (and particularly in the Asian "battlespace" beyond Chinese borders). This military procurement and employment goal would be far less destabilizing in times of both peace and crisis than the procurement and employment of weapons meant to range deep and wide across Chinese territory, threatening the obliteration of hundreds and perhaps thousands of dual-use civilian and military targets to completely "paralyze" the Chinese military machine or decapitate its leadership.⁴¹ This latter argument, in turn, is largely in line with Robert Pape's famous focus on the effectiveness of offensive strikes at an operational level against the adversary's direct military machine

and supply points (i.e., degradation of adversary *capabilities* via “battlefield interdiction”).⁴²

In short: capabilities for “deep strike” or “strategic offensive interdiction,” even if they do exist, should be deemphasized both symbolically and in operational capacity to ensure continued management of mixed interests with a rising China. Instead, the United States should enhance its ability to persevere in denying enemy objectives via highly effective, reliable, and sustained operational engagements within a strategically defensive employment posture. Deterrence in peacetime thus means explicitly preparing for limited wars or crises in which the United States will want a clear offensive advantage in individual engagements but will *not* be interested in significant strategic disruption to great powers’ capacities to defend their own territory.

This basic conclusion brings to the fore the in-depth work of historical analysts and political science theorists writing on “crisis management” during the height of the 1980s Cold War. According to this literature, any two parties to a dispute are unlikely to reach a negotiated settlement on limited, partial policy objectives unless they also restrain the *means* utilized in the militarized dispute. Limitations of military options, in their view (based on thorough empirical survey of great-power diplomacy from 1648 onwards) should encompass the following requirements: “Maintain top-level civilian control of military options,” including “the selection and timing of military actions,” which “may extend even to control over specific tactical maneuvers and operations that might lead to an undesired clash with the opponent’s forces.” Further, the military means used must allow decision makers to “create pauses in the tempo of military actions,” in which “the momentum of military movements may have to be deliberately slowed down in order to provide enough time for the two sides to exchange diplomatic signals and communications, and to give each side adequate time to assess the situation, make decisions, and respond to proposals.” Therefore, there must be close political and military cooperation in advance of crises to design weapons platforms, doctrine, and training for their use; otherwise, “military forces may have been designed and structured in ways that rob them of the flexibility needed in a crisis. Military doctrine governing use of forces may, as in the events leading to the outbreak of World War I . . . deprive governments of the kinds of limited mobilization and deployment options required for careful management.”⁴³

During a militarized crisis or even a limited war with the PRC, US political leadership will want Chinese leaders to receive US signals of intent so that crisis bargaining can continue in the background. They will therefore not want US joint forces to undermine the PRC leaders' ability to continue leading their country throughout the crisis or war. This includes leaders in Beijing keeping in touch with frontline developments among their armed forces at all levels, from tactical to operational, while still conducting a coherent strategic defense of their own mainland territory.

Thus, the United States should be wary of planning to hit targets—and seriously funding and fielding platforms that can hit targets—that would be seen by the Chinese as simultaneously denuding their ability to carry on offensive-defensive campaigns in East Asia and their capabilities for homeland, sovereign defense at a more strategic level. The United States may, in a limited war, want to eventually denude Chinese capacities for power projection in its near abroad, but it is highly unlikely US decision makers will want to treat China as it did Japan during World War II—or Saddam Hussein in 2003 or Milosevic in 1999—by forcing China to retreat from positions on its own internationally recognized sovereign territory. Instead, statesmen would likely want to feel their way forward during a crisis, testing the opponent's response to limited offensive strikes and robust defensive parries, then reformulating military intentions and plans along the way, with the political object in sight at each tit-for-tat iteration during hostilities.

In particular, contemporary social science research indicates that during crisis bargaining or limited wars involving limited political goals, adversaries should ideally have both political time and physical geographic space to learn the facts of the matter in regards to the adversary's immediate intentions as well as their long-term strategic intent in grand political terms.⁴⁴ Correctly assessing these factors—on both sides—ideally allows the creation of new policy options on both sides that may not have existed before the crisis, especially ones that do the psychologically difficult chore of sensitive, practical value tradeoffs between competing ends,⁴⁵ that is, what international mediators call "congruent bargaining," where new package options allow for mutual gain on limited issues despite continued competition at a strategic level.⁴⁶

In other words, the limited but decisive use of force at the tactical or campaign level can reveal very important information to an adversary

about the likely outcome of any escalatory step it might take.⁴⁷ This includes “updated information” about probable diplomatic pushes to demand more political benefits at the bargaining table.⁴⁸

Consequently, during militarized crises between major powers with interests held in common as well as in conflict, time itself becomes a strategic commodity of great worth. The question then becomes: have the US Navy and US Air Force devised platforms, doctrines, employment strategies, and campaign plans at an operational level that give their political leaders the strategic asset of decision-making time in a potential faceoff with China over issues that are short of total war?

Operational Coercion to Support Strategic Accommodation

[Weapons] have to be produced and tested before war begins; they suit the nature of the fighting, which in turn determines their design.

That, however, does not imply that the political aim is a tyrant. It must adapt itself to its chosen means, a process which can radically change it.

—Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

To be clear about the limits of our bounded critique of airpower theory, we accept that US forces need to be prepared to deliver strategic “decision through major battles” if the adversary is intent on escalating.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, we still contend that US forces must also be postured to provide political leaders with decision-making time and the flexibility *not* to escalate via persistent denial. If US military preparations to address the Chinese security dilemma proceed inartfully along traditional lines of emphasis, US political leaders may find their military ill-equipped to provide the strategic thought, doctrine, and weapons platforms needed to conduct effective and flexible coercive diplomacy during crises and limited wars.

The key to a revamped Air Force–Navy joint force posture is the recognition that, at their core, crises and limited wars are both political processes, and as such, incorporate *both* military coercion *and* strategic political accommodation. Therefore, any future military tools and doctrine

for deployment and force application in a crisis must have as a latent goal the ability to support accommodation at a strategic political level while still bringing about decisive defeats in combat at an operational level of wartime decision making. This new joint force posture might be labeled "Shaping Joint Forces to Allow Strategic Political Accommodation during Protracted Crises over Limited Geopolitical Goals."

There are three key, strongly linked concepts in this strategic and doctrinal statement: *strategic political accommodation*, *protracted crises*, and *limited geopolitical goals*. These seemingly simple terms have huge strategic import and implications for weapons systems in the tens or hundreds of billions of dollars.

The first term clearly connotes that it is not the overarching, grand-strategy policy goal of the United States to enact regime change, invasion, occupation, paralysis, widespread infrastructure destruction, or even destruction of all armed forces upon the adversary, despite the fact that it is a major power with at least some issues in contention with US interests. Secondly, *protracted crises* connotes that, despite common interests, there are issues in dispute over which we may not be able to prevent escalation to periods of overt hostility and the much-heightened threat of force over a lengthy period of political tensions. Again, repeated crises since 1947 over the Taiwan Straits, including one in 1995 that involved Chinese "bracketing" of Taiwan with medium-range missile launches and the dispatch of two US aircraft carriers, would seem to show the relevance of this phenomenon.⁵⁰ Finally, *limited geopolitical goals* implies that US interests are not served by the complete defeat and incapacitation of even our sovereign competitors in a twenty-first-century global order defined by "complex interdependence" and common efforts to battle transnational scourges such as illicit trafficking in humans, drugs, money, and small arms.⁵¹ It also suggests that although the United States has significant interests in East Asia, far fewer interests there are truly "vital" than commonly, and casually, assumed.⁵²

It is in this specific doctrinal and strategic context that we should evaluate US congressional and US Air Force pursuit of new "post-boost hyper-glide" missiles with conventional munitions alongside calls for a long-loiter, stealth, unmanned, intercontinental bomber with conventional munitions for taking out whole target sets over a major power's sovereign territory. Namely, such weapons might have effects on the

adversary's strategic political assumptions of US intent that are genuinely unwanted by the United States.

Ideally, the United States should acquire an intermediary strike capability and doctrine/concept that can still effectively contest anti-access and area denial efforts by the PRC and others but without threatening immediate strategic defeat. This suggests that there is a definite advantage of having a “nick the archer, kill the arrows” military capability. It would persistently deny enemy objectives over a protracted period to give decision makers on both sides the opportunity to “learn” at relatively low cost, such that nationalism and internal politics do not override central decision makers' wishes to de-escalate. Such uses of the military instrument also create time for top elites to “tame” possibly recalcitrant bureaucratic actors, who inevitably will need guidance via strong leadership within a cabinet-level setting.⁵³ Simply put, limited tactical engagements that demonstrate to the adversary the US ability to persevere for protracted periods via pure “denial” of objectives could be very useful in ending a militarized crisis far short of intensive strategic interdiction of key enemy military assets behind the front lines.

Such an operating environment may seem daunting to US Air Force and US Navy planners. However, potential solutions to the above dilemmas exist and should be funded and prioritized relative to capabilities that have a deep-strike mission. This brings the analysis down to the lowest level of policy detail: the desired, broad operating characteristics for weapons platforms.

Although the Air-Sea Battle concept purports to “produce forces that are more likely to have a stabilizing effect,” existing declassified discussions of “integrated attacks-in-depth to disrupt, destroy and defeat an adversary's A2/AD capabilities” may imply a more offensive stance than advocated herein.⁵⁴ Given that the dictates of escalation control and crisis bargaining with the PRC will prevent US politicians from striking missile, command and control, or air bases on Chinese soil as a first step (or even a second step), the USAF and US Navy should pursue the ability to achieve air superiority over limited, well-defined domains that together disallow a unilateral Chinese invasion of Taiwan as well as undisputed Chinese control of “sea lines of communication” (e.g., shipping lanes for resupply of Kadena, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea with weapons, trade, food, etc.). This, in turn, may require large numbers of

platforms for continuous sorties to dispute control of the air and the sea for protracted periods.

In this environment, joint military actions may need to tolerate the difficult position of accepting some additional cost and risk of less-than-decisive tactical- and operational-level engagements to better preserve the likelihood of achieving the grand strategic objective. All of this may then require naval ships, submarines, and airplanes that are highly mobile and hard to track, fix, locate, and target, to protect convoys, break any PRC blockades if necessary during a crisis to resupply front-tier locations, and back up the US Air Force in creating air superiority. This, in turn, will require naval weapons work together as a network to establish limited, temporary, but firm control over moving geographic domains, or what classic naval theorist Julian Corbett has called "elastic cohesion."⁵⁵

If the PRC or other rising power should misread US resolve over an issue and launch a military action, it is essential the United States possess the capability and, importantly, the plans, concepts, procedures, and doctrine that will allow it to successfully mount persistent denial campaigns that do not involve significant penetrating strategic strikes so as to provide as much diplomatic space and time to achieve crisis resolution without escalation. Indeed, a credible persistent denial capability forces the decision to escalate upon the enemy, which in the current international environment gives a strong "moral" advantage to the United States in any such conflict.⁵⁶

Finally, if crisis escalation should be needed because the above steps prove too passive of a shield or too symbolically light for success in crisis bargaining, we advocate the ability to fly long-range, stealthy, penetrating missions into Chinese airspace or territory (or launch munitions from outside the surface-to-air missile (SAM) bubble surrounding Chinese territory) to degrade frontline military targets alone. This would encompass air bases close to China's coastal areas, ammunition and fuel supply depots, long-range artillery pieces, medium-range ballistic missile units, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. However, during such strikes, there would be signaling by every reasonable means in advance of and during the conflict that the United States will do all it can to avoid massive degradation strikes against any dual-use, civilian-military infrastructure (as well as even deeper strikes on other military targets).

What this all boils down to is a massive reconstitution and sustainment capacity for either short- or long-range forces for offensive tactical engagements in service of a denial campaign. The latter would exist alongside a quite numerous, but limited, capability to do limited escalations that may also be needed to supplement short-range forces to actually, fully achieve crisis denial of enemy aims. All of this then translates into a requirement for intermediate-range bombers or stand-off missiles that have a greater range than fighter-bombers but still have limited payloads, or in other words, a high-precision bombing capacity that could not easily degrade and destroy entire infrastructure networks in an unlimited war—the latter of which constitutes a wartime goal best left to the background threats of strategic conventional and nuclear forces. The passed-over concept of an “FB-22” intermediate-range and smaller-payload bomber that might replace the old F-111 Aardvark, for instance, might fill this capability niche.⁵⁷

In conclusion, we recommend that the United States broadly seek to *deny* without innately and immediately threatening strategic levels of destruction, and to hit countermilitary or counterforce targets in incremental, piece-by-piece ways during crisis bargaining without simultaneously hitting or seriously threatening countervalue targets. The above descriptions alone could be used to guide thousands of pages in micro-level, detailed policy and engineering studies by the US Air Force and US Navy. We will leave that to those with more intimate knowledge of combat planning and operations. 

Notes

1. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 80–81.

2. See for instance William H. Overholt, *Asia, America, and the Transformation of Geopolitics* (Cambridge, UK, and Santa Monica, CA: Cambridge University Press and RAND, 2008), 16–31, 103–22, 154–85.

3. On the historical evolution of the offensive concept of battles of annihilation in the West (both Europe and America) from roughly 1815 onwards, see Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 137–76 for nineteenth century segueing to World War I, and 253, 266–67, 300–45 for US applications to naval and especially air operations.

4. Col Vincent Alcazar, USAF, “Crisis Management and the Anti-Access/Area Denial Problem,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (Winter 2012), 44.

5. See Heuser, *Evolution of Strategy*, 313–45, especially the sections on “Strategic or City Bombing,” “Decapitation,” and “Panacea Targeting.”

6. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books/HarperCollins, 1992), xi–xxi.
7. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America, 2011: Redefining America's Military Leadership* (Washington: Government Printing Office, February 2011), 8.
8. Overholt, *Asia, America, and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, 16–29, 51–58.
9. Robert Art, "The United States and the Rise of China: Implications for the Long Haul," in *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*, eds. Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 264–73, 281–82; and Stephen Van Evera, "Primed for Peace: Europe after the Cold War," in *The Cold War and After: Prospects for Peace*, eds. Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 200–2. Van Evera in particular has opined that Europe has become "primed for peace" because nationalism, self-determination, and modern transnational "just in time" manufacturing, trade, and financial networks make traditional interstate war beside the point. Because of these remarkable changes in the international system since World War II, senior historian John Mueller (not known for either hyperbole or for pacifism) has argued that with the final fall of the Berlin Wall, nuclear weapons themselves are virtually irrelevant to major-power peace, due to these very dynamics alongside the hugely destructive nature of modern conventional warfare. See John Mueller, "The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Postwar World," in *Cold War and After*, 45–69.
10. Dilip Hiro, *After Empire: The Birth of a Multipolar World* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), 274–75; and Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 118–76.
11. Overholt, *Asia, America, and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, 11–27, 49–53.
12. Ibid., 219–36; and Col John P. Geis II, "Harmonious Discordance: China in 2030," in *Discord or "Harmonious Society"? China in 2030*, Occasional Paper no. 68, ed. Geis et al. (Maxwell AFB, AL: Center for Strategy and Technology, February 2011), 94–98, 101–2.
13. Hiro, *After Empire*, 274–75; and Geis, "Harmonious Discordance," 99–100.
14. The converse is true for the traditional Western great powers, as seen for instance in the case of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an admittedly ideological, values-based alliance involving democratic-capitalist states with strong shared values on domestic governance.
15. For an overview of rising Asian nationalism in general (including major border and territory issues), see Overholt, *Asia, America, and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, 33–42, 54–55, 63–103, 139–69.
16. On "bisecting borders" see Bikash A. Roy, "Bisecting Borders: Neo/realism, Issues, and War," presentation at 1995 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago. For Chinese nationalism specifically, see Andrew Scobell, *China's Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15–39. For the rise of nationalism as a broad sociopolitical and socioeconomic movement in states all across the globe, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 1983), 1–46, 155–85; Hein Goemans, "Bounded Communities: Territoriality, Territorial Attachment, and Conflict," in *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*, eds. Miles Kahler and Barbara F. Walter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25–61; and David Newman, "The Resilience of Territorial Conflict in an Era of Globalization," in *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization*, 85–110.
17. Overholt, *Asia, America, and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, 27–62.

18. Col Blaine D. Holt and Col John P. Geis II, "Harmonious Society: Rise of the New Boxers," in *Discord or "Harmonious Society"?* 40; see also Hiro, *After Empire*, 278–80.
19. Overholt, *Asia, America, and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, 41–42.
20. Ibid., xxv–xl, 1–16, 63–64, 230–62. See also Franklin B. Weinstein, "The Concept of a Commitment in International Relations," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 13, no. 1 (March 1969): 39–56; and Hiro, *After Empire*, 272–76.
21. Overholt, *Asia, America, and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, 33–35, 41–56, 139–85; and Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*, 118–76.
22. Geis, "Harmonious Discordance," 103–4. For similar points made within the same overall study, see Ralph A. Sandfry, "China's Military Modernization," in *Discord or "Harmonious Society"?* 71–92.
23. Overholt, *Asia, America, and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, 37–38.
24. Akio Takahara, "A Japanese Perspective on China's Rise and the East Asian Order," in *China's Ascent*, 235.
25. Ibid., 219.
26. Ibid., 230–31.
27. Ibid., 218–21.
28. Overholt, *Asia, America, and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, 85–95, 128, 154–69.
29. Evan S. Medeiros et al., *Pacific Currents: The Responses of U.S. Allies and Security Partners in East Asia to China's Rise* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG736.pdf. See also Overholt, *Asia, America, and the Transformation of Geopolitics*, 154–86.
30. CAPT Philip Dupree, USN, and Col Jordan Thomas, USAF, "Air-Sea Battle: Clearing the Fog," *Armed Forces Journal*, June 2012, 30. For escalation management more specifically, see Alcazar, "Crisis Management and the Anti-Access/Area Denial Problem," 57.
31. Ibid., 56.
32. See for instance the capabilities called for in Mark A. Gunzinger, "Sustaining America's Strategic Advantage in Long-Range Strike," *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*, <http://www.csbaonline.org/publications/2010/09/americas-strategic-advantage-long-range-strike/>. See also the Committee on Conventional Prompt Global Strike Capability (Naval Studies Board and the National Research Council of the National Academies), *U.S. Conventional Prompt Global Strike: Issues for 2008 and Beyond* (Washington: National Academies Press, 2008), 1–60, 87–146.
33. Greg Jaffe, "US Model for War Fans Tensions with China and Pentagon," *Washington Post*, 1 August 2012.
34. Gunzinger, "Sustaining America's Strategic Advantage in Long-Range Strike."
35. For both sides the of the debate—the "indirect approach" of hitting "the enemy as a system" to "paralyze them" so as to undermine "political will" (i.e., "strategic interdiction") versus hitting military targets and their immediately supporting bases (i.e., "battlefield interdiction")—see Heuser, *Evolution of Strategy*, 314–45; and Dag Henriksen, *NATO's Gamble: Combining Diplomacy and Airpower in the Kosovo Crisis, 1998–1999* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 31–62.
36. Andrew Scobell, *China's Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 79–93, 119–43.
37. Lt Col Scott E. Caine, "The Influence of Culture, Demographics, and Education on the Development of the Middle Kingdom," in *Discord or "Harmonious Society"?* 7–25.
38. Ibid.; and Geis, "Harmonious Discordance."

39. Karen Ruth-Adams, "Attack and Conquer? International Anarchy and the Offense-Defense-Deterrence Balance," in *Offense, Defense, and War: An International Security Reader*, eds. Michael Brown et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 400–3, 407–16, 428–34; and Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 238–42.
40. Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1959), 409.
41. For recent examples of planning around this long-standing military-strategic goal in airpower theory, see Jaffe, "US Model for War Fans Tensions with China and Pentagon." For the classic arguments regarding high-density bombing of infrastructure, industry, leadership, and even population centers to paralyze and disorient adversary decision-making and war support functions, see Heuser, *Evolution of Strategy*, 297–336, 342–44.
42. Heuser, *Evolution of Strategy*, 312, 328, 342, 344, 350, 465–67.
43. Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 206–7.
44. Janice Gross Stein, "Deterrence and Reassurance," in *Behavior, Society, and Nuclear War*, vol. 2, eds. Philip E. Tetlock et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 31–33.
45. Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 128–42; John Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 103–9; and Lebow, *Between Peace and War*, 102–7.
46. Roger Fisher et al., *Coping with International Conflict: A Systematic Approach to Influence in International Negotiation* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 138–57, 209–15.
47. The importance of using a period of militarized crisis bargaining to "learn" via clarifying one's own interests, examine one's own assumptions, and "educate" the adversary—as opposed to simply using a period of heightened hostilities to issue threats of punishment—is explicated in both the rational choice/game-theoretic and cognitive-psychological literatures in political science. See Stein, "Deterrence and Reassurance"; James D. Fearon, "Deterrence and the Spiral Model: The Role of Costly Signals in Crisis Bargaining," presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, 30 August–2 September 1990, San Francisco; Frank C. Zagare and D. Marc Kilgour, *Perfect Deterrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and R. Harrison Wagner, "Bargaining and War," *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no 3 (July 2000): 469–84.
48. For the logic of "information updating" (logic-based learning), see the game-theoretic explication of unilateral deterrence, massive retaliation, and flexible response deterrent relationships in Zagare and Kilgour, *Perfect Deterrence*, 133–254.
49. Clausewitz, *On War*, 98.
50. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Strait Talk: United States–Taiwan Relations and the Crisis with China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 13–17, 231–52.
51. Moises Naim, "The Five Wars of Globalization," *Foreign Policy*, 1 January 2003, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2003/01/01/five_wars_of_globalization.
52. Alcazar, "Crisis Management and the Anti-Access/Area Denial Problem," 47.
53. Lebow, *Between Peace and War*, 305; and James L. Richardson, *Crisis Diplomacy: The Great Powers since the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 248.
54. Dupree and Thomas, "Air-Sea Battle," 12, 30.
55. Julian S. Corbett, *Principles of Maritime Strategy* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), 128–35.
56. On the constraints created by relations with third nations beyond the bilateral dispute alone, see for instance the discussion of the international moral costs of different bombing

and targeting strategies in the war against Milosevic's Serbia in Scott A. Cooper, "Air Power and the Coercive Use of Force," in *Immaculate Warfare: Participants Reflect on the Air Campaigns over Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq*, ed. Stephen D. Wrage (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 12–13.

57. Christopher Bolkom, *Air Force FB-22 Bomber Concept*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington: CRS, May 2004).

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