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POST-COLD WAR EAST ASIA: A GEOPOLITICAL OVERVIEW WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR US FORCE POSTURE

by

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Abstract

Despite growing multilateralism and widespread economic interdependence, a post-Cold War "zone of peace" has yet to take shape in East Asia. Formal multilateral security agreements for cooperation and conflict resolution remain an unfulfilled opportunity. Regional stability is challenged by the insecurity and state-centrism of authoritarian regimes, threatening to upset East Asia's burgeoning liberal, multilateral order. China's volatile relationship with Taiwan is a particularly troublesome threat to East Asian peace and prosperity. Accordingly, US military force posture must play a central role in the deterrence of war and the promotion of multilateral regional security cooperation. Careful status quo management, effective conventional deterrence, and an emphasis on building security cooperation are crucial to preserving peace and maintaining stability in East Asia.

When the Cold War order collapsed and withered in the late 20th century, many observers looked forward to a new era of international relations. After four decades of nuclear superpower competition and a multitude of spin-off proxy wars, the post-Cold War order promised a "zone of peace" in which liberal, multilateral institutions and economic interdependence mitigated global conflict.

In East Asia today, such a zone has not yet come to pass. Though multilateralism is growing, formalized multilateral security agreements for conflict resolution and deterrence remain an unfulfilled opportunity. Meanwhile, regional stability is significantly challenged by the insecurity and state-centrism of authoritarian regimes, which threatens to upset East Asia's burgeoning liberal, multilateral order. China's volatile relationship with Taiwan is a particularly troublesome sub-regional threat to East Asian peace and prosperity. Accordingly, US military force posture must play a central role in the deterrence of war and the promotion of regional security cooperation.

The discussion below is presented from an American foreign policy perspective. As the sole superpower in a post-Cold War world, the US has a vested interest in maintaining the *status quo* of stable, peaceful economic development in East Asia. As a liberal democracy and free-market economic power, the US also has a self-professed interest in promoting an "open international economic system" and a "rules-based international order" that preserves access to resources, protects trade, and upholds democratic values.[1] Thus, the opportunity presented by multilateral institution-building, and the challenge posed by unstable illiberal regimes in East Asia, are framed by the United States' own core interests.

In contrast to the security-based regionalism that connected post-war Western Europe in organizations such as NATO and the European Economic Community (forerunner of today's

European Union), the regionalism emerging in East Asia is economics-based, de-linking economic growth from security issues.[2] Some East Asian states, led by autocratic regimes whose authority has depended upon economic growth and prosperity, have consciously tried to minimize, solve, or at least separate security disputes from continued trade and development. Such considerations clearly characterized China's current rise, as Chinese leaders diligently pursued settlement of long-standing border and territory disputes with neighboring countries in order to ensure that issues from the security sphere did not bleed over into the economic sphere.[3]

Although economic interdependence is arguably not yet ingrained enough in East Asia to serve as a deterrent to armed conflict, the potential exists for economic regionalism to evolve into multilateral security cooperation. The most prominent East Asian multilateral institutions do not share the sovereignty-pooling characteristics of Western institutions like the European Union or NATO—there is no commonly agreed upon existential threat in the region to foster a common foreign policy, nor has there been much enthusiasm for a common fiscal policy or shared currency.[4] Nevertheless, these institutions provide an already-functional framework upon which to build a regional security dialogue.

Formal multilateral security cooperation in East Asia represents an opportunity for Pacific states to demonstrate commitment to regional security in the present and invest in future peace. As several scholars have noted, participation in multilateral organizations has a "socialization" effect, instilling and validating common values as members work together.[5] Over time, values and norms become institutionalized, often leading to a code of conduct that binds member states to a common approach.[6] For example, if the economic cooperation currently embodied in the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) grew to encompass security issues, East Asian states

would have a well-established, familiar forum within which to negotiate disputes and de-escalate tensions.

Exactly how to encourage multilateral security cooperation in a region without a common existential threat, where ruling elites may be resistant to the sovereignty sacrifices that collective security entails, and where deep distrust based on historical enmity still festers between the major actors, is a question not easily answered. One possibility for deepening multilateral security cooperation in East Asia is through non-traditional security issues. In fact, dialogue between APT members on a joint approach to counter-terrorism and disaster relief has yielded promising results and built trust between regional security professionals, though this has not yet resulted in any formalized multilateral agreement.[7] The security of sea lines of communication (SLOC) is another potential growth area for multilateral security cooperation. With the ever-increasing demand on natural resources for the region's economies (most of which is transported by sea through the Strait of Malacca), multilateral SLOC security agreements offer "a means of dampening the lingering tensions and simmering disputes that prevail within Asia."[8]

Yet another option for encouraging the growth of multinational institutions in East Asia is to leverage China's sensitivity to regional perceptions. Since their precipitous rise to global economic prominence in the post-Cold War era, Chinese leaders have been preoccupied with demonstrating good intentions to the world, fearful of provoking backlash or containment that would endanger China's growth.[9] One of the key ingredients in portraying China as a "responsible power" is a commitment to "being a team player in multilateral institutions."[10] If security can be framed in terms of shared regional interests between China and its neighbors--for instance, in counter-piracy operations around the Strait of Malacca--China's participation and leadership may help formalize existing multilateral security arrangements.

While Chinese influence presents an opportunity for building peace and security in East Asia, it also contains the most dangerous challenge to the post-Cold War globalized order. As with other authoritarian regimes in the region, the domestic insecurity of China's ruling elite motivates political behavior that undermines the continued stability and development of East Asia. Attempting to solidify their increasingly tenuous hold on power, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership cadre routinely resorts to stirring up xenophobic, nationalist sentiment among the population.[11] Further, modern Chinese nationalism sometimes works hand-in-hand with centuries-old notions of Sino-centrism and cultural superiority, in which Mainland Chinese culture is elevated over the barbaric "periphery" in order to justify national territorial aspirations.[12]

The communist regime's propagandizing has had a predictably corrosive effect on international relations. If China continues to cultivate regime-reinforcing nationalism, its leaders undermine their own regional leadership role and sabotage the development of regional solidarity and greater multilateral cooperation.[13] Even worse, by selectively igniting the populace in a kind of controlled explosion of Sino-centrism, China's political elite may someday "paint themselves into a corner" that prevents a peaceful resolution to an external crisis.[14] This behavior is certainly counter-productive to American policy aspirations for liberal, open-market prosperity and security in East Asia.

Additionally, the domestic insecurity of authoritarian regimes like China's arguably weakens regional multilateral institutions. Excessively concerned over state sovereignty issues, externally-led multilateral initiatives, and their own fragile domestic leadership positions, Chinese leaders resist setting conditions for membership or shared authority, hampering the effectiveness and credibility of these institutions.[15] This, in turn, impedes the potential cross-

flow of existing multilateral economic arrangements into security issues.[16] Above all, China's leadership cadre has clearly demonstrated that the self-preservation of the regime is their most important goal, outweighing any regional security concerns.[17] Thus, the fundamental instability of CCP rule poses a complex challenge--to both the region and the world--endangering the significant developmental gains and budding multilateralism of post-Cold War East Asia.

China-Taiwan Relations and the Broader Threat to East Asia

The nightmare of Chinese missiles and combat aircraft streaking across the Taiwan Strait has dominated many planning sessions, from Washington to Taipei, Tokyo, and beyond. As stated above, insecure state-centric authoritarian regimes--typified by China--represent the greatest challenge to a post-Cold War, globalized East Asia. Stirring up self-serving outbursts of nationalist hysteria at home, then struggling to maintain control, many fear that CCP leaders may someday find themselves trapped in a conflict of their own making, without political options for peaceful resolution.[18]

As such, Chinese domestic insecurity, vis-à-vis the conflict-ridden relationship between China and Taiwan, represents the primary sub-regional threat to 21st century East Asia. Reducing this threat requires short-term *status quo* management and long-term shaping of values and norms in the political and military spheres. In the short term, the US must cultivate and formalize instantaneous communication channels with Chinese leadership while maintaining diplomatic pressure on Taiwan to restrain independence movements. In the long term, the US must invest serious effort in the development of a regional cooperative security framework and continue to build bilateral military relationships with China.

For decades, China's rulers have made "one China" policy a central pillar of the Party platform and a central topic in public discourse.[19] Any movement toward independence for

Taiwan is therefore seen by the CCP as an existential threat to their authority. Specifically, both the masses and the ruling elite in China believe that if the CCP cannot retain territorial control over Taiwan, it will lose its legitimacy as a governing authority.[20]

Meanwhile, Taiwan's domestic political growth since the 1990s has brought it into more frequent conflict with China. Its transition to institutional democracy was marked by assertive rhetoric and exploratory moves toward independence.[21] From President Lee Teng-hui's 1995 speech at Cornell University (which referred to Taiwan as a sovereign democratic entity) to successive Taiwanese presidential elections, China has responded to such assertiveness with military escalation in the Taiwan Strait as part of a coercive strategy.[22] Thus, any movement toward independence threatens to plunge China and Taiwan into open conflict.

The potential for the US, Japan, or other external powers to be drawn into an armed conflict between China and Taiwan further complicates the regional security picture. The disruptive implications for East Asian security and continued economic development are easy to imagine, though direct American military intervention is by no means guaranteed. The Taiwan Relations Act, passed by the US Congress in 1979, compels the US to assist in Taiwan's defense but does not specify the terms of assistance.[23] Instead, the US has pursued a policy of strategic ambiguity toward Taiwan since the late 1970s, keeping policy options open.[24] In an atmosphere of ambiguity, US military involvement in a future Taiwan Strait crisis will be affected by American domestic politics and public opinion. Polling conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs since 2006 indicates that over two-thirds of the American public would oppose the use of American combat forces in a conflict between China and Taiwan.[25] On the other side of a potential conflict, high-ranking Chinese military officials have publicly questioned whether the US has the political will to commit decisive resources in a battle over Taiwan.[26]

Developing policy approaches for the China-Taiwan situation is quite difficult, as illustrated by the unique characteristics of East Asian relations. Generally speaking, East Asia is not a zone of "Kantian" peace, in which extensive trade and inter-state economic activity militate against conflict.[27] Instead, the regional actors with the densest economic ties and most robust trade are also the ones with the deepest nationalist-based tensions, including China and Taiwan.[28] China's refusal to accept Taiwan as an independent state also complicates the usual thinking on inter-state conflict resolution via bilateral or multilateral dialogue. Taiwan is technically not a true sovereign entity (although it acts as such in trade and socio-cultural relations with other states around the globe) and Mainland China regards bilateral talks not as inter-state diplomacy but as a form of domestic politics.[29] In light of the complexity of China-Taiwan relations and the instability of Chinese domestic politics, US policy should be directed toward maintaining the *status quo* in the short term and targeting Chinese values and norms through closer involvement in security cooperation in the long term.

The *status quo* approach may also be framed in terms of what policy actions should *not* be attempted; namely, the US must not attempt to interfere in China's domestic politics. For the time being, we must accept the CCP's proposition that their continued reign is necessary to maintaining balance in Chinese foreign policy.[30] Pressuring the regime with coercive measures to promote democracy and human rights--as outlined in the current US National Security Strategy (NSS)[31]--may force the CCP into defensive or face-saving political positions that hamper inter-state communication and limit real de-escalatory options.

One policy action that would have an immediately positive impact is the establishment of a formal communication channel between Beijing and Washington, similar to the "hotline" between the US and USSR at the height of the Cold War. Over the past few decades, crises in

East Asia have escalated because of misunderstood intent. China has often relied on acts of political or military "theater" in its relations with Taiwan (and in generating domestic support for the CCP), but these are not always commonly understood.[32] US leaders can ill afford to let Chinese rhetoric or military exercises draw America into a series of escalatory actions leading to war. A permanent communication channel would allow Chinese and American heads of state the opportunity to accurately express the intentions behind the rhetoric.

In seeking to maintain the *status quo* in the short term, the United States must also apply pressure on Taiwan. For experts like Susan Shirk, former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, this policy action represents the "ideal" solution to provide the CCP more political flexibility in its relations with Taiwan.[33] Successive US administrations have sought for decades to prevent Taiwan from provoking China by agitating for independence--this policy approach needs to continue if we are to ensure that China's fragile leadership has room to maneuver constructively with Taiwan in the near future.

While acting to preserve a stable *status quo* in the short term, the United States must also work toward demilitarization of the China-Taiwan relationship. To that end, the development of an East Asian cooperative security framework may moderate the behavior of regional actors through continuous interaction and dialogue on regional security issues. Reflecting the idea of "managed competition"--or what the USSR called "peaceful coexistence"--such a security framework may help uncover universal interests (common threats) and grow cooperation.[34] Indeed, a segment of Chinese politicians and academics believe that "omni-dimensional" regional cooperation, without identifying a specific threat, might be the most peaceful and productive way forward for China's foreign policy.[35] Possibilities for such cooperation include

non-traditional security issues such as SLOC security, counter-terrorism, and disaster relief, which East Asian states already perceive as a common area of concern.[36]

Unfortunately, any near-term amelioration of China-Taiwan relations via cooperative security frameworks would happen indirectly, through the soft-power influence of other security partners. Taiwan could not initially be a full member of any cooperative security institution because China does not recognize it as an independent state actor. Ideally, a framework that honors China's sovereignty and regional leadership role would also provide domestic "breathing room" for the CCP and allow the liberal approach of key partners like the US to rub off over time. Thus, the pursuit of cooperative security is clearly a long-term policy goal that will require continuous contact and persistent effort in order to be effective.

In the meantime, the US should build on existing bilateral military relationships with China as a complement to multilateral security cooperation. US Pacific Command (PACOM) is already actively engaged with its Chinese counterparts and has successfully coordinated bilateral military training and exercises with China, as will be discussed in detail below.[37] This relationship is extremely valuable for establishing common security interests, and also from a public relations perspective. Visible examples of Chinese/American security cooperation, like joint naval exercises, "would go a long way to diluting opposition to [US] military presence in China's neighborhood" and potentially defuse Chinese concerns over US support for Taiwanese independence.[38] And, of course, close and continuing relationships between Chinese and US military policy-makers hold the promise of values-shaping through frequent interaction. The CCP cannot currently tolerate the idea of an independent Taiwan for fear of losing control over its constituents and destabilizing the country, but with the right soft-power influence China may develop a stable, organic solution allowing room for Taiwanese autonomy or even statehood.

Until then, the threat of escalation and armed conflict in the Taiwan Strait looms large over the entire region, stemming directly from the domestic fragility of Chinese Communist Party rule and its volatile foreign relations with Taiwan. Historian Bruce Cumings asserts that this critical conflict represents one of the "largest stumbling blocks to East Asian peace, cooperation, and regional exchange."[39] In order to prevent a full-scale conflagration and work toward normalizing China-Taiwan relations, US policy must focus on maintaining the *status quo* now and drawing China into a regional security cooperation framework built for the future.

Posturing US Military Forces in East Asia

Considering the geopolitical conditions examined above, the posture of US military forces must be carefully calibrated to minimize conflict in East Asia and capitalize on opportunities for normalization and de-escalation. To that end, the overarching goal for the US military in its "re-balance" to Asia should simply be to prevent war. Complementary efforts stemming from this goal should include fostering and enhancing closer working relationships at every level of the Chinese military, in conjunction with US diplomatic efforts to increase multilateralism in the region. The underlying assumption for such a force posture is that in order to prevent war and encourage long-term, stable development, the US must engage the People's Republic of China diplomatically and use military-oriented confidence-building measures. Meanwhile, the fragile CCP must be permitted political "breathing room" to manage internal conflicts, so as not to endanger continued progress toward a more constructive role in the international system. To address the geopolitical realities and security issues stemming from China's rise in the region, America requires a "nuanced forward presence" in East Asia.[40]

In short, US military posture in East Asia should accomplish three objectives: 1) prevent war through conventional deterrence while protecting US interests, allies, and partners in the

region, 2) avoid provocation or escalation leading to war, and 3) build and nurture mil-to-mil relationships with Chinese counterparts, working toward multilateral security cooperation in concert with US diplomatic efforts. As such, this section will begin by outlining US deterrence requirements, concepts, and programs that underpin deterrence efforts in the Pacific theater. Following on from deterrence, this section will explore policy options and potential modifications of the current force posture directed at easing tension and mitigating the risk of future conflict. Finally, opportunities for greater US-PRC military cooperation, with an eye toward shaping China's continued rise on the global stage, will be outlined.

As China expands into contested areas in East Asia, and into the global commons beyond, it presents a strategic challenge to the US. As the region's erstwhile guarantor of security and development over the past 70 years, the US now finds its access and maneuver directly challenged.[41] Meanwhile, age-old ethnic and territorial disputes between China and US allies throughout the region threaten to explode into open conflict as China's military becomes increasingly assertive.[42] To prevent war with China, the US military's conventional deterrence capabilities in the Pacific theater must be credible, flexible, and resilient. Our military power must be credible enough as a forward force-in-being to prevent unilateral escalatory action, especially in contested "hot spots" like the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, the South China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait.[43] It must also be credible enough to reassure allies and trading partners in the relative absence of comprehensive, multi-lateral security mechanisms in East Asia. As for flexibility and resilience, the US should continue to develop operational concepts that ensure effectiveness in the face of robust anti-access/area denial (A2AD) measures. US forces must be able to deny, or at least complicate, any Chinese first-strike advantage while maintaining

diplomatic space for political or military options during a crisis. Lastly, US force posture must preserve enough room and retain enough strength for an effective counter-punch.

Security analyst Jonathan Solomon outlines the challenge and the prescription for US deterrence perfectly, saying

> the core element of conventional deterrence credibility stems from the prospective aggressor's perceptions of the defender's resiliency in the face of a withering conventional first strike across multiple warfare domains. The defending force must not only be able to absorb this attack, but also quickly reconstitute itself so that it stands a reasonable chance of neutralizing or destroying enough of the aggressor's forces and supporting military infrastructure…to slow the aggressor's offensive progress and deny it relatively easy, cheap attainment of its political objectives.[44]

Today, the US achieves credible deterrence through its forward presence and projection of power in the region. From a "strategic triangle" of main operating bases (MOB) in Alaska, Hawaii, and Guam, forward operating bases (FOB) in Japan and South Korea, and an array of "forward operating sites" throughout Asia, PACOM controls over 300,000 personnel, thousands of aircraft, and hundreds of ships.[45] Independent evaluation has found that PACOM's current force posture is sufficiently organized, trained, and equipped to deter war in the Pacific.[46] Indeed, this paper does not recommend significant changes to force posture in the Pacific theater for the purpose of deterrence. As Solomon notes, however, the US must remain committed to the maintenance and continued development of deterrence capabilities and operating concepts, if our conventional deterrence is to remain effective.[47] To avoid delving into fiscal rationalizations, which are not necessarily relevant given the limited scope of this paper, this paper assumes that such capabilities and concepts are supportable within current and projected budget conditions.

Of the operational concepts in development, none are as relevant for the Pacific theater as the Joint concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons (JAM-GC), formerly known as Air-Sea Battle (ASB).[48] The current iteration of the US military's efforts to counter anti-access and area denial (A2AD) measures, JAM-GC is being widely integrated into PACOM

operations to support conventional deterrence in East Asia.[49] While contributing to the credibility of the conventional deterrence force, JAM-GC also provides a framework for flexibility and resilience. It combines the coordinated air and sea lines of effort that characterized ASB with plans for sustained ground, space, and cyber operations.[50] By integrating US forces across all warfighting domains, JAM-GC is designed to exploit advantages, strengthen command and control, and identify areas for adjustment in order to maintain an effective deterrent.[51] Until the threat of conflict in East Asia abates, potential adversaries must be made to understand that US forces can absorb any first-strike action, remain organized, and sidestep A2AD measures with enough strength to inflict serious costs--through JAM-GC, US force posture presents exactly this kind of complication in an adversary's decision-making calculus.

Executing the operational concept outlined by JAM-GC in East Asia will require the US to leverage asymmetric advantages in air superiority, precision strike, and submarine warfare. Several programs in operation or development within Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) contribute to deterrence in such a way--Continuous Bomber Presence (CBP), Theater Security Packages (TSP), and Rapid Raptor. TSP and Rapid Raptor offer the capability to forward-deploy and disperse small contingents of fighter aircraft, even from stateside bases, throughout the region.[52] TSP involves the augmentation of PACAF assets through regular integration of stateside fighter units into operations in the Pacific.[53] This not only increases firepower and presence in theater; it affords opportunities for training and familiarization of US and allied aircrew.[54] Rapid Raptor, a concept still under development, enables the generation of F-22 sorties from a range of dispersed forward operating sites in the region, with requisite mobility support from an attached C-17.[55] Though not scaled for major combat operations, TSP and Rapid Raptor nonetheless

offer commanders a flexible, defensible capability to project power through air superiority in the event of a crisis.

Likewise, CBP--currently executed from Andersen AFB in Guam--enables the US to flexibly project its dominant long-range bomber capabilities across the Pacific.[56] A common criticism of the US' use of forward bases in the Pacific is their supposed vulnerability to theater ballistic missiles; however, the agility inherent in operating B-52 and B-2 bombers from MOBs on US territory and recovering at dispersed sites gives CBP the persistence and survivability needed for deterrence.[57] US bombers operating within the CBP framework have been used to assert freedom of navigation rights in international commons (as demonstrated by B-52 sorties through the China's unilaterally-declared Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea)[58] as well as to demonstrate resolve in the face of North Korean saber-rattling (as in the overflight of B-2 bombers across the Korean Peninsula in 2013).[59]

These operations play a fundamental role in reassuring the US' commitment to security for its allies and partners in East Asia. On top of the visible reassurance factor of US air power projection, the negotiation and cooperation on distributed land bases in East Asia demonstrates US commitment to regional security, at least bilaterally. Though not permanently established like FOBs, forward operating sites used by CBP, TSP, or Rapid Raptor missions still represent strategic "skin in the game" for the US--as opposed to sea-basing, which tends to express unilateralism (by imposing sovereign US territory in the global commons) and decreased commitment to East Asian security (because such bases are moveable and withdrawable from the region).[60] Furthermore, both CBP and TSP/Rapid Raptor operations facilitate multi-national cooperation and training opportunities with allies supporting the recovery, dispersal, and

generation of US forward air power.[61] This represents a key tenet of PACAF strategy, one which will be discussed in more detail below.

As PACAF extends credible, flexible, and resilient deterrence through air power, US Navy submarine assets provide essential deterrence in the maritime domain. The US must remain fully invested in its submarine force, maintaining both the nuclear strike mission and conventional attack from its MOBs in the Pacific as the ultimate decision-making complication for a naval adversary. Despite Chinese advances in anti-submarine warfare, US submarines prevent general sea control and, as Solomon notes, their "high survivability within a contested zone means they would not be vulnerable to preemptive attack."[62]

Ultimately, the extent to which US military power is seen as credible, or provocative for that matter, is as much an issue for diplomatic consideration as it is for military strategists. US diplomacy must be able to manage the inevitable tension between maintaining a credible operational deterrent and stoking the fires of a security dilemma in East Asia. The presence of any military deterrence force is bound to stir up "some degree of fear or resentment," and it is vital to ensure that such fear and resentment does not close off avenues of cooperation and diplomacy between China and the US.[63] This will require a credible US diplomatic corps with a solid understanding of Chinese strategic culture. Of particular importance is translating the intent of US military posture, as China's strategic elite are prone to interpret US military maneuvers as "containment."[64] In order to maintain an effective deterrent while tamping down a potential security dilemma with China, the US must be prepared to communicate intentions and demonstrate resolve in clear, unambiguous terms.

Avoiding provocation and enabling de-escalation is the second objective of US force posture in East Asia. Successful deterrence and defense of US interests in the region hinges on

an awareness of how our force posture is interpreted by potential adversaries--especially China. Calibrated correctly, US power projection should not inflame conflict or compel adversaries to lash out militarily. A key component of this calibration is the use of MOBs, FOBs, and forward operating sites for basing and sustainment.

The US military requires extensive land and sea-basing to project power and maintain its conventional deterrent capability in East Asia.[65] Despite calls to the contrary, this paper takes the stance that the US does not need, nor should it pursue, additional MOBs or FOBs. Neither should the US shift focus onto sea-basing at the expense of existing land bases and forward operating sites. Instead, US force posture should continue to rely on MOBs on US territory in Guam, Hawaii, and Alaska to do the heavy-lifting of power projection and sustainment, while continuing to develop an extensive network of forward operating sites to maintain flexibility and dispersal. PACAF's current concept of "places, not bases" neatly reflects this recommendation.[66]

Also known as "runways and relationships," PACAF's concept emphasizes a whole-of-government approach to securing agreements on aircraft basing, training, and operations from established bases around the region.[67] In this way, the US is able to gain strategic access and dispersal options while remaining unpredictable and resilient to potential area-denial threats.[68] "Places, not bases" is thus a critical enabler for power projection via CBP and TSP. Additionally, the US accrues benefits from increasing military contact through training and exercises with Pacific partners, promoting security cooperation in the region.[69]

Strategic messaging and clear communication must play a large role in mitigating conflict and facilitating de-escalation in East Asia. As discussed above, politically the US and China would benefit greatly from the establishment of a direct communication channel between heads

of state. Militarily, measures to increase openness and transparency regarding demonstration of military capabilities, as well as procedures to prevent dangerous military confrontation between units operating in the commons, should help defuse potentially escalatory actions and reduce miscommunication. Both of these proposals are grounded in well-established precedent, from the Treaty on Open Skies to the Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities (PDMA) between the US and the former Soviet Union.

Devised and enacted in the spirit of arms control verification between two nuclear superpowers, Open Skies exists as "one of the most wide-ranging international efforts to date to promote openness and transparency of military forces and activities," enhancing "mutual understanding and confidence by giving all participants…a direct role in gathering information about areas of concern to them."[70] Under the terms of the treaty, unarmed observation aircraft, flown by multi-national crews, overfly each other's territory collecting information on military force disposition with an approved range of sensors.[71] An agreement such as this between the US and China would alleviate the anarchy inherent in international relations, providing more detailed "bargaining information" through which to understand strategic intentions.[72] For both sides, an Open Skies deal provides the opportunity to clearly signal the intent of force posture. It would also serve to underline the ramifications of each side's capabilities for status quo maintenance. Achieving greater mutual understanding of strategic intent and capabilities then potentially reduces the possibility for miscommunication to grow into open conflict.

At the tactical level as well, the US and China must take steps to prevent miscommunication from escalating into violence. As previously mentioned, the PDMA treaty between the US and the Soviet Union (most recently updated in 1989) stemmed from decades of dangerous encounters between aircraft, ships, and even ground forces that could have led to

wider conflict between the two rivals.[73] PDMA established procedures for communication on common radio frequencies, in a hybrid Russian-English brevity code, to allow individual units to signal intent or request a "knock-it-off" of dangerous behavior like lasing, jamming, or aggressive intercepts.[74] These procedures were developed and agreed upon largely by military professionals, taking a practical rather than political approach to the issue of military confrontation.[75]

Now, US military leaders must reach out to their counterparts in the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) to forge a similar agreement. Chinese political leaders have thus far been averse to negotiating such agreements, based on overconfidence in their ability to engage in brinksmanship and "[manipulate] crisis instability to coerce opponents."[76] A concerted diplomatic and military effort must be made to demonstrate the necessity of a new PDMA treaty before the next US reconnaissance aircraft collides with a Chinese interceptor over the South China Sea.

Beyond preventing full-scale war, closer cooperation with the PLA should be the ultimate objective of US force posture in the Pacific. From collaboration on non-traditional security issues to joint exercises and cultural exchanges, the US must establish and nurture working relationships that are resistant to the vagaries of regional conflict. PACOM is addressing this objective through a commitment to theater security cooperation (it is also one of PACAF's five lines of operation in East Asia).[77] An extensive amount of joint exercise and exchange with the PLA is already taking place under the aegis of PACOM and PACAF, and has yielded constructive results as the two sides increase professional contacts.[78] As PACOM's commander has stated, the strategic intent of theater security cooperation in the Pacific is for US and Chinese

military personnel to "maintain a mature consistent dialogue, even through periods of heightened tension, to ensure that miscommunication and miscalculation are avoided."[79]

The arena of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) is particularly suitable for the further development of mil-to-mil relationships between the US and the PLA. Natural disasters such as typhoons, volcanos, and earthquakes represent the most ubiquitous threat to stability and security in the Pacific.[80] Coordination of military efforts in response to natural disasters represents an opportunity to establish common operating procedures, agree on common threats, and share capabilities, leading to a greater degree of trust between forces. The commonality and trust gained from successful HADR cooperation supports wider US strategy for preventing conflict and building toward multilateral security cooperation in East Asia.[81]

Security cooperation based on HADR also confers a level of prestige to the PLA, and to China in general, which may be useful in shaping China's role in regional security. The recent humanitarian evacuation of non-combatants from Yemen, undertaken by Chinese naval vessels conducting counter-piracy operations nearby in the Gulf of Aden, provided a golden opportunity for China to demonstrate its potential as a responsible global power.[82] *Xinhua*, the official mouthpiece of the CCP, declared that "the humanitarian nature of Chinese armed forces' overseas missions indicated that China is willing to help when it is able and ready," and China's foreign minister was quoted as saying that the operation reflected "the principles of 'internationalism and humanitarianism held by the Chinese government.'"[83] US engagement on security cooperation must capitalize on the prestige-enhancing characteristics of such operations--not only will they yield closer mil-to-mil relationships, but they have the potential to create long-term political maneuvering room for the CCP by satisfying the nation's thirst for recognition and respect as a global player.

The hope for improved conflict-management through security cooperation and exchange with China relies on the long-term normalization of US-Chinese political and military relations. However, if exercises and exchange programs are purposely suspended by China during periods of tension, these programs still potentially function as "canaries in a coal mine," perhaps offering early warning of impending conflict. Further, even if cooperation and exchange is suspended during a conflict, previously-established working relationships among military and diplomatic professionals who have come to understand each other's underlying strategic concerns, may serve as a critical source of diplomacy needed to re-establish contact.[84]

On a more idealistic note, joint US-Chinese development of a major weapons system could engender mutually beneficial military cooperation and send a powerful message about how the two powers view their relationship moving forward. Although prospects for such intricate cooperation seem unlikely today, prolonged and successful relationship-building over the coming decades make this a tantalizing possibility. In fact, there is some precedent for such a proposal in last year's overtures to India by former US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel.[85] Joint US-Chinese development should initially involve platforms tailored toward non-traditional security cooperation or law enforcement, which couldn't be used as an instrument of aggression in existing East Asian disputes. A Chinese-American search-and-rescue helicopter, maritime patrol aircraft, or littoral patrol vessel, possibly for export or lease to developing Asian states, could represent the potential fruit of years of increasing security collaboration and enhanced military relationships between the two Pacific powers.

Challenges aside, there is cause for optimism when viewing East Asia's post-Cold War progress through the lens of American strategic interests. Multilateral institutions and approaches, though still relatively weak, are on the rise in East Asia. In time, this may instill a

sense of regional solidarity and identity, providing potential opportunities for cooperation on economic and security matters. A carefully-tuned US military posture in the Pacific theater should contribute deterrence, conflict management capabilities, and continuing US-Chinese military relationships from the strategic down to the tactical level. In the end, US diplomacy and military posture must constructively shape China's rise, forestalling conflict and preserving time and maneuvering-space for China's ruling elite to integrate into the global rules-based order as a responsible power.

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