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14. ABSTRACT Examining the lost capabilities created by the aforementioned gap as well as the short falls of relying on Western Pacific economic prosperity and the Air-Sea Battle concept, the United States and III MEF can better mitigate the impending gap via creative Theater Security Cooperation exercise scheduling, augmenting the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), and careful design of the elements sent to Guam and Hawaii. Since the end of WWII, III MEF has been the constant stabilizing force that not only the U.S. but also other nations in the region have come to rely on. In 2006 the United States and Japan agreed to close Marine Corps Air Station Futenma and relocate III MEF Marines from Okinawa to Guam. The gap caused by moving III MEF over 1,200 nautical miles to the east will weaken the United States' posture and has destabilizing effects on Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea – effects that can not be mitigated only by economics or vague strategic concepts. Some scholars believe China's economic machine is emerging as a more viable strategic solution than the U.S. has provided in the Western Pacific. The relatively recent economic partnerships in the region have created stability but have also given rise to some additional concerns, specifically territorial and defense challenges. China's thriving economy has translated into military capabilities that worry every nation in the Western Pacific, especially the United States. China's more recent military capabilities provide a substantial anti-access and aerial denial (A2/AD) threat in the region. In 2010 the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments developed the Air-Sea Battle (ASB) concept as a way to increase interoperability between the Air Force and Navy through integrated training and improved technical					

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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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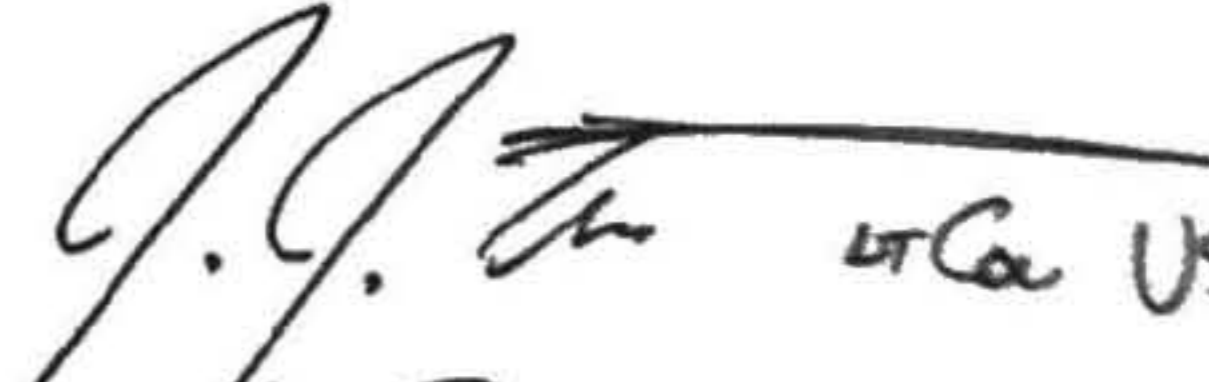
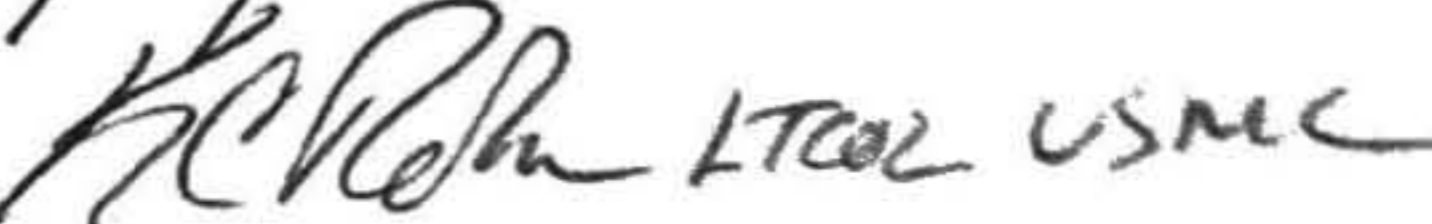
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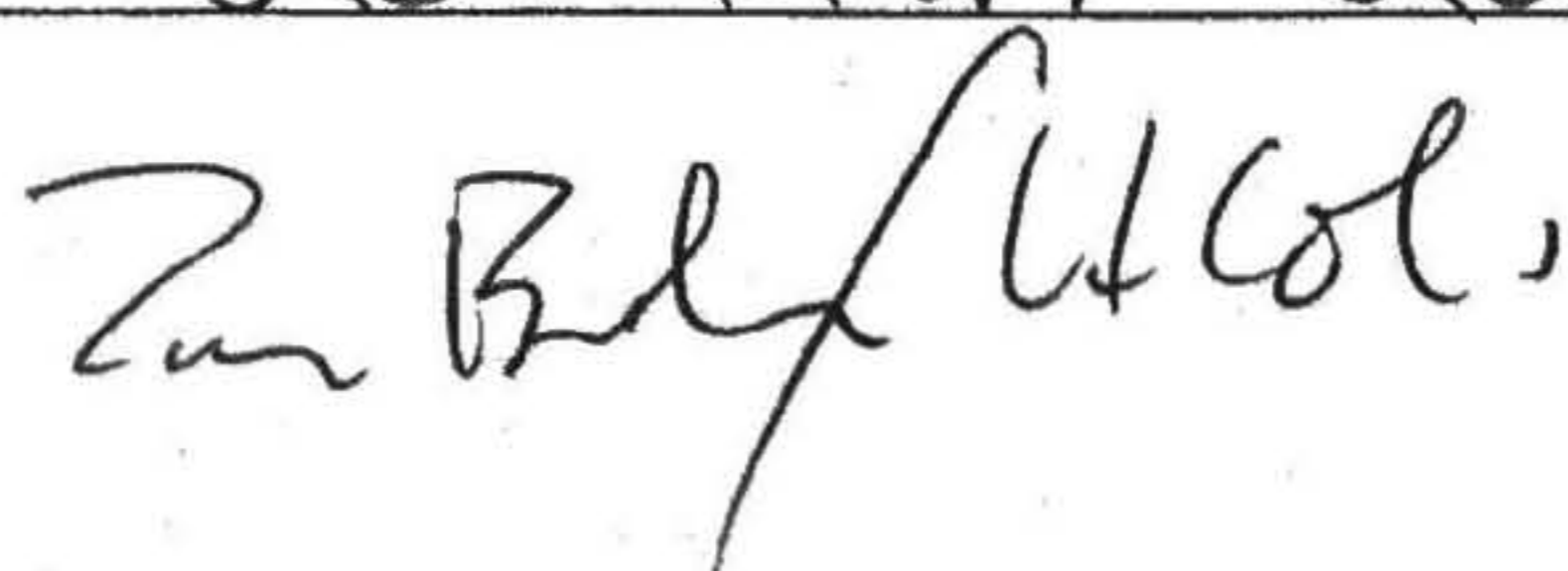
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Executive Summary

Title: Organizing III MEF in the Pacific

Author: Allen E. Szczepek, Jr.

Thesis: Examining the lost capabilities created by the aforementioned gap as well as the short falls of relying on Western Pacific economic prosperity and the Air-Sea Battle concept, the United States and III MEF can better mitigate the impending gap via creative Theater Security Cooperation exercise scheduling, augmenting the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), and careful design of the elements sent to Guam and Hawaii.

Discussion: Since the end of WWII, III MEF has been the constant stabilizing force that not only the U.S. but also other nations in the region have come to rely on. In 2006 the United States and Japan agreed to close Marine Corps Air Station Futenma and relocate III MEF Marines from Okinawa to Guam. The gap caused by moving III MEF over 1,200 nautical miles to the east will weaken the United States' posture and has destabilizing effects on Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea – effects that can not be mitigated by only economics or vague strategic concepts.

Some scholars believe China's economic machine is emerging as a more viable strategic solution than the U.S. has provided in the Western Pacific. The relatively recent economic partnerships in the region have created stability but have also given rise to some additional concerns, specifically territorial and defense challenges. China's thriving economy has translated into military capabilities that worry every nation in the Western Pacific, especially the United States. China's more recent military capabilities provide a substantial anti-access and aerial denial (A2/AD) threat in the region.

In 2010 the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments developed the Air-Sea Battle (ASB) concept as a way to increase interoperability between the Air Force and Navy through integrated training and improved technical interoperability to counter China's A2/AD. However, the ASB concept neglects mention of any land component. A strategic concept dismissing the one component required for a decisive conclusion, and only using half of the United States' services is faulty. Though the Joint Operational Access Concept attempts to fill in the missing pieces of the ASB concept, it still fails to understand the roles of services in securing national interests in the Western Pacific.

Conclusion: III MEF's impending relocation to Guam provides a unique opportunity to assess the military's presence in the Western Pacific while highlighting the pitfalls of relying on economics or incomplete concepts. Finally, though forward permanent basing may not always be available, there are options for units like III MEF to mitigate gaps created in U.S. security and stability in the Western Pacific. Creative Theater Security Cooperation exercise scheduling, augmenting the Marine Expeditionary Brigade, and careful design of the elements sent to Guam or Hawaii provide ways to mitigate the gap left by III MEF moving to Guam.

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Preface

From playing High School football to serving in a Marine Fighter Squadron, I have spent a majority of my life in the Western Pacific. While stationed in Japan in 2005, I began hearing rumors about Marines leaving Okinawa and relocating whole units to Guam. One year later, the rumor came true but it was still overshadowed by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, there appears an end to the Marine Corps' operations in the Middle East and the U.S. says following Afghanistan, its focus will pivot to the Pacific. Realizing Japan and the U.S. had taken great strides to relocate III MEF, I began to wonder how the United States could defend U.S. interests in the Western Pacific while moving the longest tenant and most responsive arm of U.S. security – the Marines – 1,200 nautical miles away.

Recently a lot of discussions centered on securing U.S. interests via economic partnerships or faulty concepts but very little on what has already been working. Scarier still, the predominant discussions did not adequately address the scope of concerns, histories, and interests existing in the region. Finally, those solutions have the potential to create an equal or even greater problem. This essay, with tremendous contributions from Dr. Eric Shibuya, Dr. Thomas Bowditch and Mr. Jonathan Geithner, is my attempt to highlight the flaws of those recent discussions and provide a few recommendations on what III MEF can do to mitigate the new 1,200 nautical mile gap.

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Whatever must happen ultimately should happen immediately.

-Henry A. Kissinger, Time Magazine: Volume 128

INTRODUCTION

The Marine Corps maneuver warfare philosophy “seeks to shatter the enemy’s cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope.”¹ In most instances, the actions are focused at a weakness (gap) vice strength (surface) relating to the enemy’s forces. In all instances, the Marine Corps must have the initiative, exploit the enemy’s gap(s), and operate at a higher tempo to be successful. A gap will be created in the Western Pacific – one that the United States, and particularly the Marine Corps, must address properly.

In February 2009 the government of Japan and the government of the United States signed an implementation agreement reducing the number of III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) Marines by approximately 8,000 and relocating them from Okinawa, Japan to Guam.² The reduction was the product of a 2006 Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee agreement to reduce the Marine presence on Okinawa by approximately one half.³ As the U.S. realigns its foreign policy focus from Iraq and Afghanistan to the Pacific, it must recognize the consequences of splitting III MEF, moving forces approximately 1,200 nautical miles apart, and mitigate this large gap. Some Pacific theater oriented scholars believe the intertwined regional economic system is the answer to further peace and stability in the region while the Department of Defense (DoD) places its faith in the Air-Sea Battle concept. Regardless of the common arguments contending economic dependencies between China⁴, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan⁵, and the Air-Sea Battle concept mitigate this gap, many situations still exist that necessitate a strong U.S. Marine Corps presence in the Western Pacific – specifically, the constant deterrent, rapid war fighting response options, and humanitarian aid. Examining the

lost capabilities created by the aforementioned gap as well as the short falls of relying on Western Pacific economic prosperity and the Air-Sea Battle concept, the United States and III MEF can better mitigate the impending gap via creative Theater Security Cooperation exercise scheduling, augmenting the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), and careful design of the elements sent to Guam and Hawaii.

Any fact that needs to be disclosed should be put out now or as quickly as possible, because otherwise the bleeding will not end.

-Henry A. Kissinger, *Time Magazine: Volume 128*

BACKGROUND

III MEF can trace its roots back to WWII. Since then it has supported or been the main effort for operations in every country in the Western Pacific. From forcible entries via amphibious assaults to demobilization efforts to disaster relief operations, III MEF is America's constant, ready response force in the Pacific. Prior to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, III MEF consisted of about 22,000 Marines. Other than the approximately 3,000 Marines on Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Iwakuni and other bases in the Pacific, all III MEF personnel reside on Okinawa.⁶ During the last decade the number of III MEF Marines decreased drastically to support the wars but is anticipated to return to pre-war levels in the next few years.⁷

The 2009 agreement did not assign specific units to move but did stipulate the interconnected nature of the move with facilities, funding, and personnel.⁸ Simply stated, III MEF's move depends on "tangible progress made by the Government of Japan toward the completion of the Futenma Replacement Facility"⁹ – to be located in a northern prefecture of

Okinawa – as well as funds for III MEF’s relocation. III MEF’s movement away from Okinawa and the other Western Pacific nations seems in stark contrast to the United States’ foreign policy focus. As the impending shift of locations for III MEF looms on the horizon, one common reason scholars contend U.S. interests are still secure is the relative recent shift in economic relations between China and its neighboring Western Pacific nations.¹⁰

Ezra Vogel said, “A key starting point for Chinese Communist Party foreign policy strategies has been to identify the main enemy and then potential collaborators against the main enemy.”¹¹ This strategy sets the foundation of how China perceives its economic role in Pacific relations. From WWII until 2005, the U.S. has been the leading economic partner to Western Pacific nations.¹² That changed while the U.S. was engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan. During that time, China fully abandoned its inwardly focused foreign policy and started to emerge as the Pacific’s economic hegemon. Though a large military confrontation with any of its enemies seemed inevitable following WWII, China has recently enjoyed a less hostile environment and seeks influencing foreign policy via economic means. Economically, the U.S. is currently China’s main competitor in the Pacific. Additionally, China’s economic successes have given way to improved military capabilities.

The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) labels the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) as the United States’ greatest military threat in the Pacific – capable of locking the U.S. out of the region and leaving its allies vulnerable.¹³ As such, advances in technology and, perhaps more worrisome, China’s industrial growth rate have given birth to legitimate anti-access and aerial denial (A2/AD) capabilities in the Pacific. China’s A2/AD is comprised of long-range radar and jamming systems, ballistic missiles brigades, space facilities, advanced air-to-air missiles and aircraft, and naval surface and subsurface assets comparable to U.S. models.

Shifting focus to the Western Pacific region requires the U.S. to address the A2/AD threat. In 2010 the CSBA developed the Air-Sea Battle concept as the answer. The Air-Sea Battle concept was conceived as a way to increase interoperability between the Air Force and Navy through increased training and improved technical interoperability to counter China's A2/AD.¹⁴ For these two services, the concept is a good start in addressing the challenges in the Pacific, specifically the vast areas they must cover and the bases they occupy. The improved interoperability between the Navy and Air Force would be required to execute the two stages of the concept. Stage One begins with the United States withstanding an initial attack from China



Figure 1: Notional “Keep-Out” Zone
Source: Center for Strategic Budgetary Assessments

and ending by “seizing and sustaining the initiative in the air, sea, space and cyber domains.”¹⁵ Stage Two is less well defined but essentially reverses China’s initial gains, secures freedom of movement in the region, and enables the “larger U.S. strategy” options in ending the conflict.¹⁶ The Air-Sea Battle

concept mentions ground forces only as an element the U.S. has used and relied on from a sanctuary. “That is, the main operating bases, ports and facilities from which they are supported and resupplied have been largely invulnerable to serious conventional attack since WWII.”¹⁷

Using a constructed conflict to explain the necessity for the Air-Sea Battle concept, the CSBA posits an A2/AD line 1,500 nautical miles east of China’s coast (figure 1) that further

highlights distances and challenges III MEF could encounter when the move occurs. However, the concept never acceptably addresses the strategic deterrent provided by forces already inside the aforementioned posited denial area. The Air-Sea Battle concept and economic relationships alone do not adequately mitigate III MEF's move to Guam. The major consequences follow.

We cannot always assure the future of our friends; we have a better chance of assuring our future if we remember who our friends are.

-Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years*

THE MARINES ARE MOVING

Though many hurdles remain after Japan and the United States decided to relocate Marines from Okinawa to Guam, very few people are questioning anymore *if* it will happen and instead are directing their efforts on *when* it will happen. When done, the United States has the potential to further weaken its posture and allies in the Western Pacific. MCAS Futenma will be relocated to the northern portion of Okinawa while III MEF units or component elements move off the island. Guam is the location most referenced when the move is discussed but Hawaii, Australia, and the Philippines are also options for parts of III MEF. These other locations affect U.S. security and stability differently but this section will focus on the Western Pacific – specifically, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and to an extent, China.

TAIWAN

Taiwan has been a point of international contention since the Republic of China permanently relocated from the mainland and put the strait between itself and the PRC in 1949. It is possible that the U.S. would have a presence on the island of Taiwan akin to its presence on

the Korean peninsula had its attention not been diverted by North Korean actions in the summer of 1950. If the Marines had not proven their importance in the Pacific following WWII, they would prove it via their part in the actions staving off communist aggression during the Korean War. Following the initial North Korean invasion into South Korea, the U.S. saw Taiwan (Formosa) as the key to containing Communist expansion in the western Pacific.¹⁸

The U.S. interest in Taiwan has grown exponentially since then and the Marines' presence on Okinawa serves as part of the U.S. policy "to preserve and promote extensive, close, and friendly commercial, cultural, and other relations between the people of the United States and the people on Taiwan, as well as the people on the China mainland and all other peoples of the Western Pacific area."¹⁹ Currently only 350 nautical miles away, III MEF Marines are within 24 hours of placing a significant ground force on the shores of Taiwan to promote those relations. At almost 1,500 nautical miles, III MEF Marines on Guam would not only triple that response time to Taiwan but would also face a myriad of logistical concerns, notably in organic airborne refueling and available seaborne transportation. A majority of the organic III MEF airborne assets are capable of making the trip to Taiwan and back from Okinawa. None of those assets can say the same from Guam. Reliance on seaborne transportation like Austal's High Speed Vessel, base ported out of Okinawa,²⁰ will also be more difficult if III MEF forces need to get from Guam to Taiwan. To further understand the gap in capabilities, the movement of III MEF must be looked at from the extreme spectrums of military responses available to Taiwan - humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HADR) to conventional military actions.

III MEF conventional military options in support of Taiwan are minuscule. Whether attacking a common foe or defending the island nation, Taiwan and III MEF forces are nothing more than a speed bump against any capable adversary. However, like a speed bump, the design

around its physical location conveys more than its actual presence. III MEF's presence on Okinawa serves as message of deterrence – a reminder of U.S. resolve and willingness to defend interests in the region. Moving half those forces more than 1,200 nautical miles away sends an equally opposite message. Another message III MEF has communicated to the region is one of willing, rapid humanitarian or disaster relief assistance.

III MEF disaster relief and humanitarian aid missions are exercised more than any others in the Western Pacific due to the frequent earthquakes and tropical storms in the region. Though a developed state, Taiwan has had difficulties in responding locally to typhoons and mudslides. In one case the president of Taiwan reoriented the nation's military away from its predominant mission – defending against a possible Chinese invasion – and focused solely on disaster relief.²¹ Additionally, Taiwan has experienced approximately 24 earthquakes since December 2011.²² Most of its earthquakes are imperceptible but Taiwan is part of the same seismic region that devastated Japan in March 2011. If III MEF is not organized appropriately, the extra 48 hours of added response time could translate into devastating losses due to the inability to provide rapid aid to U.S. friends and allies.

JAPAN

Japan's reasons for moving III MEF Marines off Okinawa are numerous. Desire to regain lost territory occupied by U.S. bases, pressure from the local Okinawan government, and increasing military self-reliance are a few. Ill-conceived political promises and posturing have attributed to the train of actions ending with III MEF in Guam. Two key factors remain overlooked. The first is Japan's reliance on the U.S. for offensive operations. The second is the Western Pacific countries that remember – and fear a return of – Japan's rise.²³ Both factors are significantly eased with the Marine presence on Okinawa.

Japan's Constitution states the country will forever renounce the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.²⁴ Though Japan has recently begun to participate in support operations around the world, it has followed its constitution by only maintaining self-defense forces. Further, the Treaty of Mutual Security and Cooperation between Japan and the United States ties both militaries together in the event of armed conflict.²⁵ Limited to forces authorized only to operate in its sovereign territory, confronting ongoing island territory disputes²⁶ and fears concerning possible Chinese expansion validate III MEF as a deterrent provider and offensive capability for Japan.²⁷

During an address at the Waseda University in Tokyo on 29 Jan 2010, U.S. Ambassador to Japan John V. Roos said, "The III Marine Expeditionary Force in Okinawa brings together the core capabilities of all of our other services into a rapidly deployable self-contained fighting force."²⁸ Referencing emergency or contingency response options, he further communicated to his Japanese audience the role the Marines play in the Pacific – HADR to combat operations such as the armed seizure of critical infrastructure and air strikes.²⁹ In order to employ any of the assets Ambassador Roos mentioned, III MEF headquarters and airborne assets are required. To employ them quickly, they must be positioned appropriately.

Rapid response from Okinawa to any Western Pacific region is already difficult, the 1,200 nautical mile gap between Guam and Okinawa make it more so. Air Force and Navy assets help provide strategic deterrence and response options but ground forces are required for security during HADR, to execute amphibious operations, and meet the current requirements for regional Operational Plans (OPLANs). Though OPLANs can be rewritten, III MEF's piece will be glossed over until the governments of Japan and the United States identify the units to move *and* begin the relocation.

SOUTH KOREA

OPLANs have been required in the Western Pacific since North Korea invaded South Korea in the summer of 1950. The two countries remain at war today. Plans designed to handle “various levels of internal turmoil in [North Korea]”³⁰ continue to change, however, South Korea’s commitment to III MEF support of OPLANs has not. This is no more evident than in the South Korean admission that Marines will still lead amphibious assaults even following a transfer of operational control in 2012.³¹ III MEF has continued to be a deterrent for further conventional North Korean aggression. The Marines’ rapid response in 1950 executing Operation CHROMITE has not been lost on North Korea and the mere presence of III MEF is seen by South Korea as a stabilizing factor today.

For South Korea, the III MEF presence is also a reminder of the freedom they gained following WWII and Japanese expansion. Tensions still arise in political arenas and, most notably, textbooks on the events surrounding Japan’s occupations of WWII. Sin Ju-Bak, A professor at Seoul University, believes the “failure to address how the Japanese invasion and colonization paralyzed the everyday lives of Koreans and Chinese stands as a testament to the lack of atonement by Japan.”³² Disagreements still abound in territorial claims as well.³³ Tensions are not limited to South Korea; The Philippines’ interpretation of events of WWII differs from that of Japan’s.³⁴ The Philippines, South Korea, and Japan³⁵ have looked at the U.S. military services – specifically the Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps – as the stabilizing forces in the Western Pacific. Describing the importance of III MEF forces in the region, Bruce Klinger said “removing Marine Corps assets from Okinawa would leave the United States with a two-legged security stool in a region where steadiness and support are essential.”³⁶ III MEF Marines on Guam will still provide balance to this security stool, provided the III MEF units are

split so that they can still execute those missions the United States, its allies, and competitors have come to expect.

CHINA

China is a major influence on how the United States balances that “security stool.” III MEF could be the most valuable leg of that stool considering the other military services have a need to provide balance throughout the world in global prepositioning and response but Okinawa houses the only permanent, forward deployed Marine Corps presence. This has been a discernable message to China especially when tensions have risen regarding territorial disputes, historical inaccuracies, and perceived political insensitivities surrounding visits to the Yasukuni Shrine.³⁷ Klingner said:

“The Marine presence is also a clear rebuttal to perceptions of waning United States resolve in the face of a rising and assertive China. Withdrawing the U.S. Marines from Okinawa would only affirm that perception and lead Asian nations to accommodate themselves to Chinese pressure.”³⁸

To avoid a perception of withdrawal, the United States must take steps in reaffirming to China its commitment to provide security and stability in the Western Pacific.

LOST CAPABILITIES

Though 8,000 Marines constitute a majority of Marine forces in Japan, some III MEF ground forces will still be located on Okinawa after the movement is complete. However, recent plans detailing the command and control, ground and air units moving render the deterrent capabilities remaining ineffective. III MEF training and inter-service cooperation could benefit from the relocation, but with the direction and execution spread from Okinawa to mainland Japan to Guam and possibly further, the Marines on Okinawa stand to lose a tremendous amount of speed in responding to crises. Without the United States’ primary ability to maneuver quickly in response to any contingency, the gap in strategic deterrence will continue to be a driving factor in regional affairs and potentially invite further actions harmful to U.S. interests in the

Pacific. In order to mitigate this gap, the U.S. must consider alternatives to splitting III MEF forces between two locations or develop new methods of deploying Marine units in the region.

Each success only buys an admission ticket to a more vexatious problem.

-Henry A. Kissinger, *The Presidents – A Reference History*

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AS AN ANSWER?

The United States has relished in strong economic ties with South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines. However, not every country believes the United States is the only option in providing security via economic stability in the region. A 2005 Congressional Research Service report said:

There is little doubt that China is using its rising economic and political power backed by its modernizing military to attempt to reduce U.S. influence in its periphery and to establish itself as the central power in the region.³⁹

Some scholars like Jian Yang believe China's economic machine is emerging as a more acceptable and viable strategic solution than that the U.S. has provided in the Western Pacific.⁴⁰ However, China's rising economic successes create military capabilities and tensions that still require a U.S. response; coupled with the standard North Korean posturing, the decision on the pieces of III MEF to relocate is critical.

A rising Chinese economy has created a rise in military capabilities and influence, one that other Western Pacific nations cannot match. Regardless of Zheng Bijian's "China's Peaceful Rise Theory" emphasizing China's strategy of avoiding the fate of rising powers that use force to gain resources and hegemony,⁴¹ a rising economy has certain impacts on military spending. The first of which is a nation's inherent desire to self-determination, which requires

an ability to defend itself from foreign aggression. The second is the desire to further its national interests. This security dilemma is very real to the nations surrounding China. If unchecked, China could use its military presence to assert its claims on territories in the East China Sea⁴² – a presence Japan or any other Western Pacific nation could not match.

Japan is not the only nation with current territorial disputes in the Pacific. China, North and South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines assert rights, either historically or via maritime law, against another Western Pacific nation.⁴³ Though the risk in forcibly acquiring these lands is argued as the driving factor in continued diplomatic solutions, it can also be said that the length of some of these disputes (some well over 65 years) continues to color and aggravate the underlying tensions between those nations. Only the unreasonable would discount the United States influence in deterring aggression in this area. Any aggression would hinder freedom of navigation in the area and potentially open the door to further hostilities between competitors. The United States purposefully avoids discussions over claims in the Western Pacific but III MEF is part of the U.S. presence that deters nations from employing military means to assert their claims.

NORTH KOREA'S PART

The last major time a country in the Western Pacific used military means to assert its claims was when North Korea invaded south of the 38th Parallel in 1950. China aided North Korea then, militarily, and now China is there for North Korea economically. North Korea relies primarily on China for food and energy. Though relations between Pyongyang and Beijing have been questioned recently,⁴⁴ few question the influence China has over North Korea.

North Korea is familiar with III MEF, specifically its amphibious capabilities. Annually North Korea observes the United States and South Korea participating in Exercise Ulchi-

Freedom Guardian incorporating elements of both nations' militaries – specifically U.S. amphibious capabilities. This annual event is generally a catalyst for intensified North Korean posturing but is not necessarily required to instigate open hostilities on the peninsula. Since the armistice of 1953, countless military skirmishes have erupted between North and South Korea. Most recently, North Korea sank a South Korean naval ship in March 2010⁴⁵ and bombarded South Korean military forces and civilians on the island of Yeonpyeong in November 2010.⁴⁶ Should North Korea ever decide to flex its full military might south of the 38th Parallel again, they need first heed the words of General Burwell Bell (Ret.), former commander of U.S. Forces Korea on 1 Mar 2011:

[The Marines on Okinawa] have a critical role in any Korean contingency. They were my deep operational ground maneuver unit. Without them, it would be WWII all over again. When the North Koreans consider the potential for the United States Marines to interdict their logistics sites and fragile supply lines deep in their rear areas, the likelihood of the North seriously considering a sustained ground offensive drops drastically.⁴⁷

Economically, China's growth has a proportionate effect on North Korea's economy. However, the likely direction North Korea chooses to go with its improved economy is not conducive to stability in the region. III MEF may still be capable of that role referenced by General Bell but an additional 1,200 nautical miles has been added to interdicting those rear areas. To conduct meaningful amphibious operations, III MEF must effectively organize to mitigate firepower and logistical challenges associated with moving units to Guam or Hawaii.

RELYING ON ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

Economics is only one of the four commonly accepted instruments of national power. III MEF is an element of another. As with all international relations, the tune of one instrument of national power intrinsically affects the harmony with the others. Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan understand China's economic growth and the effect it has on the Chinese military buildup. They acknowledge the U.S. military's presence provides a strong deterrent should

China consider the employment of military forces to further its political agenda in the Pacific – the same deterrent the United States. has provided against North Korean aggression. The movement of III MEF to Guam, farther away from U.S. allies as well as China and North Korea, sends a distinct message to both sides – however, one side likes the message more. Another message must be sent, one that states III MEF is still a deterrent the United States requires and will use in the Western Pacific. By organizing III MEF elements correctly, through extended Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) exercises, and via rapid response exercises between Guam, Okinawa, and U.S. allies, III MEF can continue providing those missions the region has come to expect.

High office teaches decision-making, not substance.

-Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years*

A WESTERN PACIFIC DETERRENT WITHOUT MARINES?

During the last decade the United States has spent a financial windfall on its strategic plan for Iraq and Afghanistan and prioritizing the wars within them. However, recent economic pressures and DoD constraints forced the United States to develop a strategic plan based off the national budget vice creating a DoD budget around the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. An article from the CNAS acknowledges “these constraints are driving strategy, not the other way around.”⁴⁸ This method of developing strategic plans off a budget is not shocking to most countries, but vastly different from the way the U.S. planning policies had recently been working. In a knee-jerk reaction, the Air-Sea Battle concept was born. It aims to “maintain a stable military balance in the Western Pacific Theater of Operations (WPTO), one that offsets

[China's] People's Liberation Army's (PLA) rapidly improving A2/AD capabilities."⁴⁹ The concept has gained speed and is the focus of effort regarding future Pacific initiatives.

Primary author of the Air-Sea Battle concept, Jan van Tol, explains the intent of the Air-Sea battle concept as:

“[Minimizing] Beijing's incentives to achieve its geopolitical ambitions through aggression or, more likely, coercion. This requires that the US military sustain its ability to project sufficient power in the region to defend US interest and protect its friends and allies. This is the key to maintaining the stable military balance that has preserved the peace in the Western Pacific.”⁵⁰

Projecting sufficient power is not a new concept to the United States. As already outlined, III MEF is one of those tools. The target of a balanced military preserving the peace is also not new. However, requiring only the United States Navy (USN) and United States Air Force (USAF) – half of the country's services – to provide the balance is new. For both the USN and USAF, the Air-Sea Battle concept serves as a good starting point from which to focus on complete integration in the Pacific. All ready integrated with the Navy, it can also serve as a foothold for Marine elements to better integrate systems and training in the region. However, the Air-Sea Battle concept's aim to solve U.S. future concerns in the WPTO with only two services seems too good to be true, and it is. Not only does the concept counter the lessons of the past 100 years of history and disregard III MEF's strategic influence, but also discounts China's response. Arguably China's A2/AD capabilities were a response to U.S. force projection and forcible entry capabilities in the Pacific. If the U.S. counter-response is the Air-Sea Battle concept, the United States has engaged in a “tit for tat” industrial battle it is destined to lose. The Air-Sea Battle concept can be an effective *piece* in protecting U.S. interests in the Pacific but it cannot be a lone strategic or even operational answer to regional concern over China's growing military capabilities. As it stands, the concept is designed to mitigate China's military component with only two from the United States. Instead of confronting the current and future

Pacific A2/AD challenges with a concept of anti-anti-access / anti-aerial denial, the United States should focus on ground forces embedded with regional allies – in the sovereign territory of a neighbor.⁵¹ China is much less likely to confront a nation or restrict any access to a country hosting U.S. troops. Deescalating potential conflicts and removing assets from potential contentious areas, yet still providing stability, III MEF forces serve as a credible show of force. Integrated and positioned smartly, they also provide a better response to A2/AD.

In neglecting the ground domain in the Air-Sea Battle concept, it is simple to infer ground forces – or amphibious forces like III MEF – will not be needed initially, or, if they are needed, can be acquired from somewhere else or via different means. An October 2011 Center for New American Security report stated that, by cutting the number of ground forces, less risk is incurred than canceling naval and air modernization programs because the U.S. military can build up additional ground forces more quickly than it can acquire additional naval and air forces once production lines have closed.⁵² This must assume unskilled, inexperienced ground forces – not the kind we need in as complex an environment as the Western Pacific unless the United States is willing to accept the same losses experienced in WWII. Also, building up ground forces still requires time, leading one to believe that “rapid response” ground forces are not required. Trained amphibious operators take time to build and are an indispensable element in Pacific. General Douglas MacArthur’s Operation CHROMITE proved both these facts.⁵³ Finally, commonly referring to cuts of personnel using a ground combat metric – a metric that simply lumps Soldiers and Marines together – as done in the CNAS report,⁵⁴ is incorrect. Marines, specifically those in III MEF, are amphibious in nature. They are outfitted, trained, and employed differently than U.S. Army soldiers. Though recent national requirements mandated

the Marines shift to more ground than amphibious operations, the draw down from Iraq and Afghanistan and reorientation to the Pacific means a return to the amphibious environment.

After the Air-Sea Battle concept's publication in 2010, the Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC), published in early 2012, tried adding a new twist in potential strategic, vice Pacific-centric, A2/AD concerns. Still centered around A2/AD and maintaining U.S. freedom of action, the JOAC addresses A2/AD conceptually, vice strategically centered on China. It attempts to integrate the other services by discussing the concept of "Cross Domain Synergy" – a term generically referring to the effective employment of complimentary vice additive capabilities to establish superiority in some combination of domains.⁵⁵ Unlike the Air-Sea Battle concept, the JOAC addresses land forces across its domains but still fails in understanding the roles and relationships of land forces to naval and air forces. The JOAC states land forces "could be used to seize advanced bases on the outskirts of an enemy's defenses from which to project air and naval power into the heart of those defenses."⁵⁶ However, the JOAC fails to address the purpose of that air and naval power projection – *to support the land forces*. Additionally, as a strategically focused document, it fails to understand the strategic deterrent provided by land forces already positioned inside an A2/AD area. Despite the JOAC's misguided concept of ground forces now supporting the Navy and Air Force in a general warfare situation, it is at least a start in recognizing the invaluable capabilities of forcible entry and civil security operations III MEF brings to the WPTO. III MEF cannot wait for these concepts to mature; it cannot wait for conceptual designers to fully recognize III MEF's contribution to the WPTO. III MEF's move to Guam and the design of its future forces must focus on remaining a constant deterrent and providing both rapid war fighting response options and humanitarian aid for Western Pacific nations.

RELYING ON THE WRONG CONCEPT

On 8 Mar 2006, Admiral William Fallon, Commander of U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), said “Guam may be further back, but it leaves us space from which to maneuver.”⁵⁷ This may be true from an Air-Sea Battle or JOAC perspective but it is as far from the truth when considering the unique response options III MEF brings to the WPTO. Neither concept acceptably addresses the domain that has proven dominant in the WPTO – the littorals. Whether it is humanitarian aid missions or forcible entry from the sea, III MEF owns this key domain in the Western Pacific. Identifying the concept’s design flaws, Dr. Jim Lacey said it best: “Any concept or strategy that places the elements required for a decisive conclusion to military action in a secondary role is flawed from the start.”⁵⁸ III MEF is one part of that decisive element but it is moving over 1,200 nautical miles away from the preponderance of this domain (figure 2). Fortunately, the U.S. still has options in mitigating the gap caused by moving III MEF.



Figure 2: Okinawan Ranges
Source: Heritage Foundation

No country can act wisely simultaneously in every part of the globe at every moment of time.

-Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years*

MITIGATING THE GAP

At first glance, considering the range of options III MEF provides and the proven response time, the pivot in theater priorities from the Middle East to the Pacific coupled with III MEF's movement seems contradictory. However, moving parts of III MEF to Guam provide a few benefits as well, specifically survivability of headquarter elements and service interoperability. Regardless, creative Theater Security Cooperation exercise scheduling, augmenting the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), and careful design of the elements sent to Guam or Hawaii will aid the United States in mitigating the impending deterrence and capability gaps resulting from the move of III MEF assets.

THEATER SECURITY COOPERATION EXERCISES

Cooperative exercises with Western Pacific countries have been an integral part of III MEF's mission. Due to III MEF's air, sea, and land missions as well as characteristics, the Marines seamlessly fit into a majority of Pacific Command's TSCs. Current TSC exercises provide numerous mutual benefits to the United States as well as its friends and allies but must be readdressed to reinforce the United States' Pacific focus. Carrying on with business as usual as a significant force moves farther away from the region, touting a new Air-Sea Battle concept or JOAC, does not reinforce that focus. The six-month deployments Marines will begin to Australia⁵⁹ is a good start but serves primarily to address South Pacific concerns and the Australian's developing amphibious capabilities. This new relationship does, however, address why more creative TSC scheduling is required. While capabilities change and Australia's

increasing role in stability relies on amphibious operations in the Southern Pacific, so too must its exercises with the United States to these ends. Similarly, changes in rulers, regional economics, and military roles and capabilities – specifically in China and Japan – require III MEF to address the exercises used to cooperate with the sophisticated, transitional, and underdeveloped militaries⁶⁰ in the region.

A way III MEF can use TSC exercises to mitigate the move is Unit Deployment Program-like rotations. Generally battalion sized units deploy on six month rotations to the WPTO to augment III MEF. III MEF can use the Australian example and apply it to a more broad area. Sharing host nation bases, airfields, and ports provides III MEF with its rapid response options at relatively little cost. Additionally, the tangible benefits to the host nation are immense. Security and stability in the Pacific would be a byproduct of co-location. Of course this this level of cooperation and scheduling exceeds III MEF's scope. However, a quick cost-benefit analysis could prove certain small-scale ground forces co-located and living on the sovereign territory of U.S. Pacific allies more beneficial to securing U.S. interests than III MEF deployments back and forth from Okinawa, Hawaii and Guam.

MEB AUGMENTATION

Currently, III MEF's golden asset is the 3rd MEB. Scalable, flexible, and joint capable, 3rd MEB is the key to strengthening III MEF relationships in the WPTO. 3rd MEB is the type of operational unit to which General Bell alluded – critical to any Korean contingency or capable of forming a joint task force for HADR or combat operations. 3rd MEB is the only continually forward deployed MEB and will act as III MEF's command *and* control hub in the WPTO when III MEF Headquarters moves to Guam. However, like all other Marine units, it also has come second to the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As forces depart the Middle East it is critical

that resource allocation be prioritized to III MEF and the MEB. As elements of both are further spread thin between Guam and Okinawa, more support assets will be required to facilitate deployments, TSCs, and ensure timely crisis response options. Simply put, if you hammer gold thin enough you can see through it. So to can you see through any arguments contending III MEF will still be able to execute its missions and provide the same deterrent, with the same effectiveness. As the deployment-to-dwell ratios for active-duty Marines normalize back to 1:2⁶¹ following Operation Enduring Freedom, augmenting the MEB with an additional battalion will help alleviate the time, space, and allocation challenges. The Marines in Australia could be used to mitigate TSCs and response time in the Southeast Pacific, but the United States and III MEF must be careful to avoid overextending itself. Those forces are not going to be ready to execute the range of responses Marines on Okinawa have been executing for at least the better part of a decade. Any other host nation models similar to that in Australia will experience the same challenge. Additionally, Marines in Southeast Asia do not solve the time-space response gap in the WPTO after III MEF moves to Guam. An additional, forward deployed, battalion in the Western Pacific can help mitigate the larger gap the 3rd MEB will inherit. The bottom line – more III MEF Marines are needed to augment the Pacific if the near-term U.S. security and deterrence posture in the Western Pacific is to remain on the gold standard.

III MEF DESIGN

Once Japan and the United States agreed to reduce the Marine presence on Okinawa in 2006, two primary plans have been put forward. The plans proposed seemed to revolve around command and control. The first, the Agreed Implementation Plan dated 2006, proposed sending major headquarter elements to Guam and Hawaii. The second, the WestPac Alignment Proposal dated 2009, incorporated the movement of full maneuver elements to similar location(s). Neither

plan accurately identifies the challenge before III MEF – organizing not along a war fighting function like command and control, but along the operational needs of the United States and its allies.

Hawaii

Currently home to Marine Forces Command Pacific (MARFORPAC) and PACOM, Hawaii should also host two infantry battalions and a Marine Air Group (MAG). The MAG should consist only of those medium and heavy lift helicopters that cannot be stationed on Guam or Okinawa. These elements should only remain on Hawaii until Guam, Okinawa, or another Western Pacific nation is capable or willing to host a greater Marine presence. Hawaii serves as more a door to the greater Pacific theater vice a strategic enabler. As such, it should only be used to hold those units deemed a lower priority in the Western Pacific or units – like MARFORPAC – integrating with higher headquarters’ forces.

Guam

Guam should house the command elements of III MEF, 1st Marine Air Wing, 3rd Marine Division and the 3rd Marine Logistics Group. Additionally, an operational reserve consisting of at least two battalions and a MAG should be moved to Guam. Together, the command elements can provide integrated and concise directions to those maneuver elements throughout the region and the battalions can take advantage of the training opportunities on Guam. The operational reserve would provide that “space from which to maneuver” Admiral Fallon alluded to in his 2006 speech.

Japan: Okinawa and Iwakuni

The United States and III MEF need the 3rd MEB. Okinawa is as close as possible to the “center” of the Western Pacific and the 3rd MEB’s missions range the spectrum of military

response options; therefore, it and all likely subordinate commands should remain on Okinawa. Additionally, training and support elements augmenting the MEB should remain on Okinawa. Okinawa will remain III MEF's nucleus for Western Pacific operations so the most capable Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) elements should remain on the island. This means housing the deployed light attack and heavy lift helicopters as well as tilt-rotor elements. Finally, a Marine regiment with at least two infantry battalions should remain on Okinawa.

As the most operationally capable and flexible MAGTF element of III MEF, the 3rd MEB and its support elements remaining in Okinawa sends a message to the region of U.S. commitment to protecting its interests. By remaining on Okinawa, the MEB will also be optimally postured to rapidly aid Western Pacific allies in any range of missions. Coupled with fixed-wing assets in Iwakuni, a MAG composed of light attack and heavy lift helicopters as well as tilt rotors on Okinawa allows III MEF to maintain the strongest elements of 1st MAW forward and capable of engaging in Western Pacific joint and combined exercises. From Okinawa and Iwakuni, these assets have the capability of ranging any country in the Western Pacific. The same cannot be said of Marine aircraft on Guam. In fact, no other Marine aircraft other than the KC-130 can fly from Guam to another base in the Pacific without USN or USAF help.⁶² Without the preponderance of 1st MAW assets on Okinawa, a greater level of dependency and complication emerges between III MEF and the USAF to move Marine personnel and gear around the WPTO. Also, the regiment will be used to supplement TSCs, integrate with host nation forces, and postured to deploy to the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand⁶³ or other nations in the Pacific. Finally, and equally important, a logistical regiment should be stationed at each location, tailored to support the units at each location as well as fulfill OPLAN requirements.

The Design Answer

As previously noted, III MEF serves a different purpose to each nation in the WPTO, so to should its presence. In Hawaii, the III MEF forces will stand ready to bridge the gap between the continental United States and the Western Pacific region. On Guam, III MEF commanders can effectively coordinate and command forces. The forces on Okinawa will be positioned to provide the control for HADR to the immediate Western Pacific region, amphibious capabilities to the Korean peninsula, and the forward deterrent and stabilizing force that the United States and its allies have come to rely on. This recommendation favors a decentralized approach emphasizing unit dispersion and host nation integration. The Marine Corps envisions itself as the lead in joint and multinational operations.⁶⁴ One of its mandates requires the establishment of enduring relationships. III MEF must use this opportunity to design itself around strategic interests and lead the way in integrating joint, coalition, interagency, and host nation relations in the Western Pacific. III MEF's structure *will change* when assets move from Okinawa to Guam causing gaps in either capabilities or response times. This proposed structure best mitigates these gaps. Ultimately, one thing *cannot change* – the U.S. commitment to security and stability in the Western Pacific, regardless from where it is done.

It is, after all, the responsibility of the expert to operate the familiar and that of the leader to transcend it.

-Henry A. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*

CONCLUSION

The Air-Sea Battle concept and Western Pacific economic ties alone cannot ensure security for U.S. interests in the region. The defense of U.S. interests requires the integrated efforts of all services and departments. Recent Defense Strategic Guidance stated “the maintenance of peace, stability, the free flow of commerce, and of U.S. influence in this dynamic region [depends] in part on an underlying balance of military capability and presence.”⁶⁵ Incorporating and transitioning all major domains in the WPTO, III MEF is an integral part of that balance. Balance also requires the United States follow through on its international treaties and obligations – like III MEF’s relocation. However, to “be responsive and capitalize on balanced lift, presence, and prepositioning to maintain the agility needed to remain prepared”⁶⁶ the United States requires III MEF to adapt, decentralize, and synthesize its efforts with allied forces and nations to mitigate the 1,200 nautical mile gap.

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- ⁵⁷ House Committee on Armed Services, *Military Readiness: Hearing before the Readiness Subcommittee*, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., March 8, 2006.
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- ⁵⁹ Ben Packham, “2500 US marines on Australian soil to increase defence ties,” *The Australian*, November 17, 2011, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/obama-in-australia/us-president-touches-down-at-fairbairn-airforce-base/story-fnb0o39u-1226197111255> (accessed December 14, 2011).
- ⁶⁰ Sheldon W. Simon, “Theater Security Cooperation in the U.S. Pacific Command: An Assessment and Projection,” *National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) Analysis*, volume 14, no. 2 (August 2003), 6.
- ⁶¹ Senate Armed Services Committee. *The 2010 Posture of the United States Marine Corps*, 111th Cong., 2nd sess., February 25, 2010, 6.
- ⁶² Marine fixed wing aircraft, including the MV-22, can aerial refuel off of Marine KC-130’s but USAF refueling aircraft are the predominant method used for large navigation legs. Additionally, KC-130’s are multi-role aircraft and are subject to other higher priority missions. Only the USAF and contractors have aircraft that serve a pure aerial refueling role.
- ⁶³ The U.S. has begun advocating for an Australia-like model around the Pacific. Namely, putting U.S. forces at allied posts and bases on a more permanent basis. Stratfor Global Intelligence, “The Philippines Weighs an Increased U.S. Military Presence,” January 30, 2012, http://stratfor.com/analysis/philippines-weighs-increased-us-military-presence?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=official&utm_campaign=link (accessed February 14, 2012).

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⁶⁵ U.S. Department of Defense. *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century Defense*, by the Honorable Leon Panetta, Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2012, 2.

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