

# China's Anti-access/Area Denial (A2/AD) Capabilities: Is the U.S. Rebalancing Enough?<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Over the past two decades, American strategists have become increasingly concerned with the possibility that an adversary could reduce the credibility of United States military power projection by adopting an anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) approach to warfare. No other country has fielded forces with comparable quantity and quality to those of the United States, at least since the fall of the Soviet Union. Given mostly unrestricted U.S. global power projection over the past twenty years, coupled with advances in information technology, the consideration of countermeasure options has naturally gained traction in certain capitals around the world. The United States has also become more vulnerable to the A2/AD threat over time. Due to the atrophy of overseas bases since the end

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter draws upon testimony the author presented to the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission's hearing on "China's Active Defense Strategy and its Regional Impact," January 27, 2011. Also, a more comprehensive version of this essay is planned to be included in the forthcoming Winter 2014/2015 issue of *The Washington Quarterly*.

of the Cold War, it is unlikely that the United States will have sufficient forward-deployed bases and forces in the vicinity of a future conflict before it erupts.<sup>2</sup> Such trends further increase the incentives for an opponent to design capabilities that “interfere with the U.S. military’s ability to deploy to or operate within overseas theaters of operation.”<sup>3</sup>

While countries such as North Korea, Pakistan, Iran, and Syria possess some A2/AD capabilities, the country capable of posing the greatest challenge to the U.S. global reach is the People’s Republic of China (PRC).<sup>4</sup> In terms of anti-access, which refers to “the ability to *prevent* an opposing force from entering an area of operations,”<sup>5</sup> China is developing capabilities designed to have “the effect of slowing the deployment of [opposing] forces into a theater, preventing them from operating from certain locations within that theater, or causing them to operate from distances farther from the locus of conflict than they would normally prefer.”<sup>6</sup> For example, China has prioritized the advancement of anti-satellite and cyber weapons that could blind the communications networks the United States relies on to deploy and operate its forces.

The objective of area denial, on the other hand, is not prevention, but disruption—to compel the desired behavior by “impos[ing] severe costs on the enemy’s freedom of action

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Cliff et. al., *Entering the Dragon’s Lair: Chinese Anti-access Strategies and Their Implications for the United States* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2007), xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Cliff et al, *Entering the Dragon’s Lair*, xiii.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the evolution of China’s strategy, as well as its potential impact, see Thomas G. Mahnken, “China’s Anti-Access Strategy in Historical and Theoretical Perspective,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34: 3 (2011): 299-323.

<sup>5</sup> “The China Syndrome,” *The Economist*, June 9, 2012, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Cliff et al, *Entering the Dragon’s Lair*, xiv.

once it has [gained access]."<sup>7</sup> Chinese integrated air defenses, anti-ship cruise and ballistic missiles, maritime bombers, missile and torpedo-carrying submarines, and fast patrol boats are all designed to inflict prohibitively high costs on any country operating within the first island chain near the China mainland.<sup>8</sup> In short, the cumulative effect of China's increasingly capable layered air defenses, as well as its fighter, ship, and missile assets, could curtail U.S. freedom of maneuver.<sup>9</sup>

On January 5, 2012, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta issued new strategic guidance for the Department of Defense (DoD) on the priorities that would allow the United States to sustain its role as the preeminent leader on the global stage.<sup>10</sup> The major focus was that "while the U.S. military will continue to contribute to security globally, *[it] will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region.*"<sup>11</sup> Five months later, at the Shangri-La security dialogue in Singapore, Secretary Panetta articulated the following four principles meant to guide the U.S. rebalancing effort: to abide by international rules and order; and to emphasize partnerships, presence, and power projection.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "The China Syndrome," *The Economist*.

<sup>8</sup> The first island chain extends from the southern tip of Japan to northern Indonesia, to include Taiwan but not the Philippines. See "The China Syndrome."

<sup>9</sup> R. Jordan Prescott, "AirSea Battle As Presently Conceived," *Small Wars Journal* (January 11, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> For the complete guidance, see "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense," *U.S. Department of Defense*, January 2012, Available at: [http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense\\_Strategic\\_Guidance.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf). Last accessed Feb 6, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Italics in the original. "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership," 2.

<sup>12</sup> Leon E. Panetta, "The U.S. Rebalance Towards the Asia-Pacific" (delivered at the Shangri La Security Dialogue, Singapore, June 2, 2012).

What are the major components of China's A2/AD approach and how does the U.S. rebalancing address these challenges? In this chapter, I will lay out a comprehensive characterization of China's active defense strategy—the A2/AD approach in American parlance. I will explore how China is responding to the U.S. declaration that it will rebalance toward Asia. I will then discuss some aspects of the rebalancing strategy manifested to date, their potential effectiveness, and what more could be done. Finally, I will argue that the Obama Administration will need to look beyond hardware responses to the kinetic and geographic components of China's A2/AD strategy in order to appropriately counter those political and deterrent components designed to erode U.S. credibility as a Pacific power. To this end, I present three balancing acts the United States must master in its renewed focus on Asia if it is successfully to counter China's A2/AD strategy at acceptable costs.

### **China's Active Defense Strategy: A Comprehensive Understanding**

China's active defense strategy was first promulgated on January 13, 1993, when Central Military Committee (CMC) chairman Jiang Zemin released the National Military Strategic Guidelines for the New Period (*xin shiqi guojia junshi zhanlue fangzhen*). That document provided the overall principles and guidance to plan and manage the development of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).<sup>13</sup> The operational component of these

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the history and content of these guidelines, see David M. Finkelstein, "China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines,'" in *Right Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military*, ed. Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007).



guidelines is known as active defense (*jiji fangyu*), which serves as "the highest level of strategic guidance for all PLA military operations during war and preparation for war during peacetime" based partially on "non-linear, non-contact and asymmetric" operations.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, China is now fielding capabilities designed to deter, deny, disrupt, and delay the deployment of U.S. forces into the Chinese theater.

China seeks to capitalize on U.S. weaknesses, specifically the great distances the U.S. needs to travel in order to engage China militarily. For example, China seeks to deny the U.S. military's ability to maneuver physically and engage Chinese forces with mass or precision by targeting U.S. communications and logistical networks, bases throughout East Asia, and U.S. ships and aircraft in the region. Chinese leaders also aim to exploit less physical vulnerabilities, such as a perceived lack of U.S. resolve and casualty aversion.<sup>15</sup> For these reasons, since 2005, U.S. observers and strategists have conceptualized China's active defense strategy as an A2/AD

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<sup>14</sup> "People's Liberation Navy-Doctrine," *Global Security*, Available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/plan-doctrine.htm>. Last accessed Feb 6, 2013. See also *The Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2010): 22. Hereafter cited as PRC Power Report 2010. See Andrew S. Erickson, "China's Evolving Anti-Access Approach: 'Where's the Nearest (U.S.) Carrier?'" *China Brief* 10:18 (September 10, 2010). China first recognized a position of dramatic military inferiority relative to the United States during the 1991 Gulf War. Since then, the PLA has focused on adopting asymmetric means to counter U.S. power projection capabilities. See Michael P. Flaherty, "Red Wings Ascendant: The Chinese Air Force Contribution to Antiaccess," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 60 (2011): 96.

<sup>15</sup> For the most comprehensive study on China's anti-access strategies, see Cliff et al, *Entering the Dragon's Lair*.

strategy, though China has never publicly acknowledged adopting such a strategy.<sup>16</sup>

The bottom line is that China's 'active defense' strategy covers a broad range of Chinese strategic thinking designed to raise the costs of military intervention by the United States. Specific aspects of the strategy include preventing the United States from operating from certain bases in theater, forcing U.S. forces to operate at farther distances from the theater of operations than preferred, or delaying U.S. deployment from outside the theater. The various means and objectives of the strategy are often confused. Therefore, I argue that it is best to conceptualize China's A2/AD strategy as encompassing four interrelated pillars:

- 1) *geographic* (increasing the distance and time required for U.S. forces to arrive in theater from areas of safety before China achieves its political objectives);
- 2) *kinetic* (degrading the U.S. military's ability to penetrate anti-access environments with an enhanced conventional precision strike system consisting mainly of cruise and ballistic missiles as well as attacks on key enabling capabilities, such as space-based networks that enable C4ISR missions;<sup>17</sup>
- 3) *political* (exploiting perceived weaknesses in political support and resolve of U.S. allies and friends, thereby keeping the U.S. out, because countries will not allow us to base there); and

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<sup>16</sup> Flaherty, "Red Wings Ascendant," 96. First mention was in the 2005 PRC power report to Congress.

<sup>17</sup> C4ISR stands for command, control computers, communication, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, which together provide the U.S. with domain awareness.

- 4) *deterrent* (making involvement so costly that the U.S. opts out of responding, or responds minimally, in a given contingency).

### *The Geographic Pillar*

China has come to understand how dependent the United States is on space products and services for commanding deployed troops, passing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) data, and enabling precision targeting and engagement. The Chinese believe network attacks or the employment of an anti-satellite (ASAT) weapon could delay the deployment of U.S. military forces by disrupting communications and denying information vital for determining location and the movement of forces. The PLA's ability to disrupt regional airfields, bases, and logistics nodes, as well as naval surface and carrier operations, could exacerbate the geographic challenges of power projection by forcing the United States to operate farther from the theater of conflict. Also, the PLA has moved many of its forces deeper inland in an obvious attempt to create greater geographic dilemmas for U.S. forces.

Investments directed at holding U.S. military forces at risk represent some of the most dramatic aspects of the PRC's rapid militarization modernization program. A2/AD capabilities include advanced and extended-range air defense, air-to-air and precision strike capabilities, C4ISR, and force projection enablers such as aerial refueling, airlift, and logistic capabilities.<sup>18</sup> Though many of the capabilities discussed below, under the kinetic pillar, could be employed to increase the time and distance required for U.S. forces to arrive in theater, the differentiation between the two realms is useful because it better explains how and why certain systems, platforms, or weapons are employed.

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<sup>18</sup> Flaherty, "Red Wings Ascendant," 99.

### *The Kinetic Pillar*

Aspects of the kinetic pillar of China's active defense have changed as well, especially as regards the extent of China's military reach. The range of aerial refueling capable SU-30MKK fighters deployed in Nanjing and Guangzhou Military Regions already can hold Okinawa at risk, as can H-6 bombers with air-launched cruise missiles that, with engine modifications, can strike as far as Guam.<sup>19</sup> The PLA has terminally-guided anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) systems that reportedly can engage adversary surface ships up to 1,000 nautical miles (nm) from the PRC coast, cued by increasingly sophisticated surveillance and attack networks.

The inventory of the PLA Navy includes: conventional and nuclear-powered attack subs; surface combatants such as guided-missile destroyers equipped with long-range anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) and SAM systems, such as the indigenously produced Luzhou and Luyang I/II DDGs, and the Russian procured Sovremenny II-class DDG; as well as maritime strike aircraft.<sup>20</sup> A number of these maritime strike aircraft, in particular the FB-7, FB-7A, B-6G, and the SU-30 MK2, can be armed with ASCMs to target surface combatants.<sup>21</sup> China's conventional and nuclear powered attack submarines—the KILO, SONG, YUAN, and SHANG-classes—also are capable of firing ASCMs.<sup>22</sup> The J-20 stealth

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>20</sup> For more, see Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Chinese Ship-Based Air Defense Systems," in *China's Strategy for the Near Seas* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Ronald O'Rourke, "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities-Background and Issues for Congress," *CRS Report for Congress*, (August 11, 2008): 46.

<sup>22</sup> *The Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2011): 29. Hereafter cited as *PRC Power Report 2011*.



fighter will increase China's ability to strike regional air bases, logistical facilities, and other ground-based infrastructure. In addition, the air defense component of A2/AD includes surface-to-air-missiles (SAMs): the HQ-9, SA-10, SA-20, and the extended-range SA-20 PMU2.<sup>23</sup>

China's burgeoning military capabilities have been accompanied by an evolution in thinking about where and how to apply the A2/AD approach. Previously, China was focused solely on developing a force that could deter, delay, or degrade U.S. intervention in a conflict involving Taiwan. In the past five years, however, Chinese writings have extended the same logic to potential conflicts in the South or East China Seas. In general, China has been looking beyond Taiwan since at least December 2004, when Hu Jintao put forth the new historic missions for the PLA to ensure China's sovereignty and protect its expanding national interests.<sup>24</sup> Given the right coordination and surveillance networks, China can now strike targets well beyond what Chinese strategists refer to as the first island chain, referenced earlier and defined by a line through the Kurile Islands, Japan, the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia (Borneo to Natuna Besar). Indeed, many Chinese capabilities can today range a second island chain, one that runs in a north-south line from the Kuriles through Japan, the Bonins, the Marianas, the Carolines, and Indonesia.<sup>25</sup> In terms of range, the second island chain encompasses maritime areas out to approximately 1,800 nm from China's coast, including most of the East China Sea and East Asian sea lines of communication (SLOCs). Though the full extent of the Chinese anti-ship

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<sup>23</sup> O'Rourke, "China Naval Modernization," 46.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the new historic missions, see *PRC Power Report 2011*, 16-17.

<sup>25</sup> "People's Liberation Navy-Offshore Defense," Available at:

*Globalsecurity.org*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/plan-doctrine-offshore.htm>. Last accessed Apr 2, 2013.

ballistic missile capability remains uncertain, China's ability to target U.S. carrier strike groups (CSGs) in the Western Pacific, or threaten to render them operationally ineffective with submunitions, would allow China to achieve its A2/AD goal without risk of further escalation or confrontation.<sup>26</sup>

China also has the world's most active land-based ballistic and cruise missile program, providing Beijing with a real capacity for conventional precision strike at significant range. The Defense Department's annual report to Congress for 2011 on Chinese military and security developments clearly lays out Chinese capabilities to deny U.S. power projection, noting some 1,000-1,200 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) and additional medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) capable of conducting precision strikes against land targets and naval vessels out to the first island chain.<sup>27</sup> China's MRBMs can extend PLA's range to 1,000-3,000 kilometers and other investments allow for even further reach.<sup>28</sup> According to publicly available analyses, the PLA has approximately twenty liquid-fueled limited range CSS-3 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), between fifteen and twenty liquid-fueled CSS-2 intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs), and about fifty CSS-5 road mobile, solid-fueled MRBMs, all of which are highly-relevant for regional deterrence missions.<sup>29</sup>

Though the quantity of Chinese SRBMs has not changed significantly in recent years, the quality has. China is fielding advanced variants with improved ranges, accuracies, and

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<sup>26</sup> ASBM is allegedly based on the DF-21D/CSS-5 solid propellant medium range ballistic missile. See anonymous, "On the Verge of a Game Changer," *Proceedings Magazine* 135, no. 5 (2009).

<sup>27</sup> *PRC Power Report 2011*, 30. Other conventional munitions in China's arsenal include Land-attack cruise missiles such as the YJ-63, KD-88, and DH-10 systems, ground attack munitions, anti-radiation weapons, and artillery-delivered high precision munitions. See *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *PRC Power Report 2011*, 30.

<sup>29</sup> *PRC Power Report 2010*, 34.

more sophisticated payloads, gradually replacing earlier generations of stocks with those capable of precision strike.<sup>30</sup> These modern variants could be used as terror weapons to convince allies and friends of the United States not to get involved in a particular contingency. Or, they could be used to strike air bases in Taiwan or Japan in such a way that the United States would not be able to generate enough sorties to contest air superiority, even if all countries involved had the will to support such operations.<sup>31</sup>

With its extensive and robust arsenal, China could thus deny the United States access to the region with strikes to runways, aircraft, and other equipment, thereby rendering air bases temporarily unusable. One recent RAND study had dire predictions for the survivability of U.S. air bases in Japan, arguing that China "could damage, destroy or strand 75 percent of aircraft based at Kadena" with just thirty-four missiles armed with submunitions.<sup>32</sup> In addition to the ASBM, long-range cruise missiles such as the DH-10/YJ100, and improved mobile ballistic and air defense missiles such as the HQ-9, could also be used as military impediments to U.S. regional power projection.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the PRC is developing new platforms and capabilities that will extend its operational reach, possibly as far as the Indian Ocean.<sup>34</sup> Though there are few indications that China's active defense focus has reached this point, the PLA's overall expansion in its military capacity

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Mahnken, "China's Anti-Access Strategy," 314.

<sup>32</sup> Wendell Minnick, "RAND Study Suggests U.S. Loses War with China," *Defense News*, October 16, 2008. For more on Chinese A2/AD challenges in a Senkaku scenario, see Oriana Skylar Mastro and Mark Stokes, "Air Power Trends in Northeast Asia: Implications for Japan and the U.S.-Japan Alliance," *Project 2049*, July 2011.

<sup>33</sup> General Norton A. Schwartz and Admiral Jonathan W. Greenert, "Air-Sea Battle," *The American Interest Magazine*, February 20, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> PRC Power Report 2010, 33.

allows it to plan for a much broader range of contingencies, all of which will likely feature ways to keep U.S. forces at bay.

### *The Political Pillar*

While the kinetic and geographic components of China's approach have received the most attention in Washington policy circles, the more elusive political and deterrent A2/AD pillars can be just as effective, if not more so, in undermining U.S. ability to project power in the region. The political pillar refers to the idea that, in a conflict, China will pressure countries with military threats or economic inducements to limit or deny the United States use of facilities necessary for power projection. As Congressional Research Service naval expert Ronald O'Rourke convincingly argues, "To threaten regional bases and logistics points, China could employ SRBM/MRBMs, land-attack cruise missiles, special operations forces, and computer network attack (CNA). Strike aircraft, when enabled by aerial refueling, could simultaneously engage distant targets using air-launched cruise missiles equipped with a variety of terminal-homing warheads."<sup>35</sup> Even during peacetime, though most countries want the United States to remain in the region, the priority on stability above all else may mean nations throughout the region might pressure the United States to accept a greater degree of parity with China, thereby displacing U.S. influence in the region to a certain degree.

A recent example of such efforts came from Chinese defense strategist and retired senior military officer Song Xiaojun. In an opinion piece published in May 2012, Song warned Australia that it could not reconcile its close economic relationship with China with the fact that it relies on the United States for security and would have to, at some point, choose which country to prioritize in its foreign policy

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<sup>35</sup> O'Rourke, "China Naval Modernization," 46.



decision making. He argued that "Australia has to find a godfather sooner or later," and whom Canberra chooses "depends on who is more powerful based on the strategic environment."<sup>36</sup> An editorial in a nationalist Chinese state-run newspaper also responded to the news that the United States will station 2,500 Marines in Darwin with the warning that Canberra is risking getting itself "caught in the cross fire" between China and the United States.<sup>37</sup> The first detachment of Marines from the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF), whose specialty is rapid response, arrived in April 2012.<sup>38</sup>

### *The Deterrent Pillar*

The deterrent A2/AD pillar – perhaps the most important and most difficult to counter-posit that Washington may opt out of responding in a number of contingencies, given that China's active defense initiatives exceed the political costs for the United States. This could preclude an intervention decision altogether, or involve a Beijing-directed preemptive strike on American forces attempting to deploy to the region, in the hopes of delivering the necessary psychological shock to the United States, its allies, and friends in the region.<sup>39</sup> As noted when discussing the kinetic pillar, Washington's uncertainty with respect to the maturity of the ASBM fleet and the risk it entails, "might deter carrier strike groups from entering the region in the first place."<sup>40</sup> In other words, the possibility of these capabilities may be enough to convince the United States to opt out of a conflict.

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<sup>36</sup> Philip Wen, "Canberra 'must pick strategic godfather,'" *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 16, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Malcolm Moore, "Chinese Anger at U.S. Base in Australia," *The Telegraph*, May 16, 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Panetta, "The U.S. Rebalance Towards the Asia-Pacific."

<sup>39</sup> Cliff et al, *Entering the Dragon's Lair*, 31.

<sup>40</sup> Mahnken, "China's Anti-Access Strategy," 315.

China's public response to the U.S. declaration that it will rebalance toward Asia reflects the beliefs underpinning the deterrent pillar. The main theme found throughout Chinese media sources is that the United States is too weak-willed to carry through its policies, which are in any case ill-advised.<sup>41</sup> The Chinese media further claims that the past ten years at war in Southwest Asia has eroded the U.S. sphere of influence and has seriously affected the state of U.S. regional hegemony in the western Pacific.<sup>42</sup> Chinese writers also note that, while the United States may want, theoretically, to return to being the main force in the Asia-Pacific, its economic dependence on China and its relative depletion of resources imply that it will fail to fulfill its proclamations and promises.<sup>43</sup> In short, so the argument goes, while the United States wants to protect vital interests in the region, its desire to do so at an acceptable cost trumps all other considerations. Concordant with this view, China believes it can increase the real and perceived costs of intervention, and successfully convince the United States to restrain itself. The ultimate result—ironically—is an American-self-imposed, anti-access doctrine.

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<sup>41</sup> For more on the growing importance of Asia, and China in particular, with respect to the West, see

张茉楠: 《警惕美国“平衡中国战美国力图重塑亚太经济合作与贸易格局》, 《中国经贸》, 2011年3月 and

王鸣鸣: 《发挥“领导作用”平衡各方力量美国全力推行“重返亚洲”战略》, 《人民日报》2011年1月26日

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阮建平: 《经济与安全“再平衡”下的美国对华政策调整》, 《东北亚论坛》, 2011年1月; and 张茉楠: 《警惕美国“平衡中国战略”——美国力图重塑亚太经济合作与贸易格局》, 《中国经贸》, 2011年3月

<sup>43</sup> 庞中英: 《中国也需对美“再平衡”》, 《社会观察》, 2012年6月;  
阮建平: 《经济与安全“再平衡”下的美国对华政策调整》, 《东北亚论坛》, 2011年1月

## U.S. Rebalancing and its Implications for the A2/AD Threat

Though not inspired solely by China's growing A2/AD capabilities, U.S. rebalancing toward Asia addresses many aspects of the challenge. This section evaluates recent diplomatic and military changes, made in the first Obama administration, designed to elevate the U.S. role in the region.

### *Military efforts*

The DoD rebalancing strategy is designed to counter the two most concrete pillars of China's A2/AD strategy: the kinetic and geographic components. Forward-deploying more assets in the region, such as the MAGTF Detachment already deployed to Australia and the dedication of 60 percent of U.S. warships to the Asia-Pacific Theater by 2020, addresses the geographic pillar.<sup>44</sup> To mitigate the risks associated with the kinetic pillar, the United States has invested in new aerial-fueling tankers, a new long-range stealthy bomber, advanced maritime patrol and anti-submarine warfare aircraft, and the U.S. "is improving missile defenses, and continuing efforts to enhance the resiliency and effectiveness of critical space-based capabilities."<sup>45</sup>

New operational concepts such as "Air Sea Battle" are meant to guide U.S. efforts to organize, train, and equip its military forces in ways that mitigate challenges posed by all four pillars. Air Sea Battle "relies on highly integrated and tightly coordinated operations across war-fighting domains"<sup>46</sup> in order to "to disrupt and destroy enemy A2-AD networks and their defensive and offensive-guided weapons systems in

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<sup>44</sup> Panetta, "The U.S. Rebalance Towards the Asia-Pacific." Before, 50 percent of U.S. naval assets were dedicated to the Pacific and 50 percent to the Atlantic.

<sup>45</sup> Italics in the original. "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership," 4-5.

<sup>46</sup> Schwartz and Greenert, "Air-Sea Battle."

order to enable U.S. freedom of action to conduct concurrent and follow-on operations."<sup>47</sup> In its rebalancing efforts, the DoD has committed itself "to invest as required to ensure its ability to operate effectively" to include "implementing the Joint Operational Access Concept (e.g., Air-Sea Battle)."<sup>48</sup>

The current U.S. operational response also relies heavily on investments in and the deployment of antiballistic missiles (ABMs), as well as other counter-strategies designed to evade, confuse, and defend. High-tech investments include a next-generation missile interceptor jointly developed with Japan.<sup>49</sup> To defend ships at sea, the United States continues to invest in Aegis/Standard Missile ABMs and, to defend air bases ashore, in Patriot PAC-3 ABMs. Vulnerabilities at fixed bases have also been identified, although substantial steps to harden and disperse such assets remain immature. But most importantly, American officials recognize the need to present a credible, survivable, crisis-stabilizing force posture, given the enhanced threat environment, and have directed efforts in hardening, dispersal, warning and active defense at U.S. regional facilities. For example, Army Chief of Staff, General Odierno, referenced the option of pre-positioning equipment in the Pacific aboard ships and out of harm's way, available for crisis response or to help train allied militaries in the region.<sup>50</sup>

### *Diplomatic efforts*

Though the military aspects of rebalancing have received the most attention, the State Department has also been directing parallel and complementary diplomatic efforts.

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<sup>47</sup> Prescott, "Air-Sea Battle As Presently Conceived."

<sup>48</sup> Italics in the original. "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership," 4-5.

<sup>49</sup> Panetta, "The U.S. Rebalance Towards the Asia-Pacific."

<sup>50</sup> "Army Jockeying for Role in 'Air-Sea Battle,'" *National Defense Magazine*, February 21, 2012.



These efforts are not only “designed to reassure America’s Asian allies that it will do whatever is needed to shield them from Chinese bullying,”<sup>51</sup> but also they address the political vulnerabilities of America’s Asian presence. U.S. attempts to reduce the American footprint in Okinawa, in order to make the U.S. presence more politically sustainable, while simultaneously developing Guam as a more resilient strategic hub for U.S. military operations in Asia, is one such example.<sup>52</sup> As Secretary of Defense Panetta articulated at Shangri La, strengthening U.S. alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines and Thailand, as well as partnerships with Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Singapore, Vietnam and New Zealand, are critical to U.S. efforts to increase presence and ensure stabilizing U.S. power projection in the region. The security and defense relationships the United States has with these countries have intensified in recent years. An example of this dynamic is the comprehensive memorandum of understanding the United States signed with Vietnam in 2011.<sup>53</sup>

While all these initiatives are a step in the right direction, to be truly effective the United States needs to, in the words of Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia Kurt Campbell, sustain regular high-level engagement opportunities, not just with treaty allies, but also with other influential countries in the region.<sup>54</sup> To this end, the Obama administration has moved beyond a reliance on the traditional hub-and-spokes network of bilateral alliances, with the United States at its center, to strengthening its multilateral regional participation

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<sup>51</sup> “China Syndrome,” 34.

<sup>52</sup> Panetta, “The U.S. Rebalance Towards the Asia-Pacific.”

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Dr. Kurt Campbell, “Doing More Without More,” (keynote address given at the 2012 annual CNAS conference, Washington, D.C., June 13, 2012). Available at: <http://www.cnas.org/node/8439>. Last accessed Apr 2, 2013.

as well. President Obama's decision to join the East Asia Summit and personally attend the November 2011 meeting reflects this shift in U.S. priorities.<sup>55</sup> In 2012, Secretary Panetta was the first American Secretary of Defense to meet privately with all defense ministers of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Moreover, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton regularly attended the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), making efforts to elevate the role of the organization.<sup>56</sup> In July 2012, Secretary Clinton embarked on a grand tour of Southeast Asia, attending the ARF, the EAS Foreign Ministers Meeting, and the U.S.-ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference, in addition to being the first Secretary of State to visit Laos in fifty-seven years.<sup>57</sup> In Laos, Clinton also announced an additional commitment of \$50 million to the Lower Mekong Initiative, thereby pledging financial and technical support to Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam to improve infrastructure, health care, education and their ability to manage environmental issues.<sup>58</sup> These examples indicate a clear break with America's historical diplomatic strategy in Asia.

With the establishment of programs, and vis-à-vis routine and regular order, the State Department strives to sustain a high level of operational engagement that spans every aspect of societal engagement to include trade and people-to-people relations in addition to traditional state-to-state engagements.

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<sup>55</sup> For more on these efforts, see "Fact Sheet: East Asia Summit," *The White House Office of the Press Secretary*. Available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/19/fact-sheet-east-asia-summit>. Last accessed Apr 2, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Panetta, "The U.S. Rebalance Towards the Asia-Pacific." The author would also like to thank Ely Ratner for his input.

<sup>57</sup> "U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Historic Laos visit," *BBC News*, July 11, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Patrick Barta, "Southeast Asia Gets a Boost from Clinton," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 13, 2012.

The ultimate goal is a multipolar system, with the U.S. military the first-among-equals, which would create the stability necessary to allow commerce to flourish as it has the past few decades. U.S. policy in the region needs to give equal weight to the economic dimensions of relationships, because strong economic ties serve as the foundation for political relationships and eventually military cooperation. Because all aspects of U.S. policy in the region are mutually reinforcing, the State Department needs also to create an environment conducive for enhanced U.S. business presence. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a proposed multilateral free trade agreement between the United States and countries in the region, is an attempt to liberalize and integrate these economies further.<sup>59</sup> But in Southeast Asia, in particular, where most countries cannot meet the TPP standard, the United States needs to refocus its economic and investment efforts to promote the economic component of its relations. Countries in the Asia-Pacific region prioritize economic development, and as long as the U.S. economic presence diminishes in contrast with that of China, the United States is ceding influence.<sup>60</sup>

*What more can be done?*

To date, the military components of the rebalancing have received the most attention, primarily because they are highly visible. But when determining which meetings to attend or what platforms to pre-position, considerations should center more intensely on the political and deterrent pillars of A2/AD, because China is willing to accept military setbacks in

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<sup>59</sup> Participant countries include Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. For a solid analysis of TPP, see Brock R. Williams, "Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Countries: Comparative Trade and Economic Analysis," *Congressional Research Service*, May 30, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> For more on this, see Campbell, "Doing More Without More."

a given contingency if overall political objectives are achieved. While the State Department has amplified diplomatic efforts in the region, it remains unclear whether such efforts will lead to enhanced access in these countries "when the balloon goes up" in a crisis.

For desired access to occur, it is logical to assume that U.S. allies need sufficient reassurances that the United States can and will protect and shield them from Chinese military coercion and economic warfare. For these potential allies, the weighing of both short- and long-term consequences of such an allegiance will be paramount. For Washington, alleviating the concerns of allies, and convincing them to join in what may be an indirect conflict against China, will be difficult even if the balance of regional power is still tipped in the U.S. favor. Regardless of such specific and detailed calculations, a coordinated diplomatic strategy designed to signal U.S. resolve and improve American access to regional third parties is a cost-effective and necessary complement to U.S. military strategy.

### **A Way Forward**

China's strategists are betting that not all wars are won by the side with the strongest military. Indeed, China's experience in fighting the Korean War proves that a country willing to sacrifice blood and treasure can overcome a technologically superior opponent. In the next section, I outline three balancing acts that, if mastered, will allow the United States to signal resolve to China and provide reassurance to friends and allies.

*The United States needs to learn to accept risk without being reckless.* China is masterful at chipping away at U.S. credibility through advancing militarization and the coordination of coercive diplomacy. China often uses limited military action as a signaling tactic to establish the credibility



of its determination to set a baseline from which an escalation can take place if its demands are not met. Assertive Chinese activities in the South China Sea in 2012, including Chinese patrol boats attempting to ram a Philippine vessel, Chinese vessels cutting or disabling the cables of Vietnamese survey ships, and detaining 21 Vietnamese fisherman for seven weeks, demonstrate that China elevates risk to slice away at the interests of others—in this case to promote its interpretation of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) rights.<sup>61</sup> The great strategist Thomas Schelling captures this approach when he writes it is “the sheer inability to predict the consequences of our actions and to keep things under control...that can intimidate the enemy.”<sup>62</sup> Because China introduces risk for exactly this reason, the U.S. focus on reducing risk of escalation through crisis management, though necessary, is unlikely to produce a marked change in Chinese behavior. Such futility is reinforced by a tendency among the ranks of the U.S. military to focus on worst-case “great battle” scenarios, instead of the less lethal engagements that characterize Chinese coercive diplomacy.

*The United States, while promoting stability, must permit the possibility of escalation.* To signal to China that the United States will not opt out of a conflict, the Obama Administration must signal willingness to escalate to higher levels of conflict when China is purposely testing U.S. resolve. If countries think the United States cannot (or will not) protect its allies, they may begin to gravitate towards China. For U.S.

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<sup>61</sup> For a more comprehensive list, see “Key Asian Indicators: A Book of Charts” (Asian Studies Center, The Heritage Foundation, July 2012). For more on Chinese coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea, see Oriana Skylar Mastro, “The Sansha Garrison: China’s Deliberate Escalation in the South China Sea,” *Center for a New American Security (CNAS)*, Flashpoints Bulletin 5, September 2012.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 109.

allies, enhancing credibility may mean bolstering allies' capabilities, diversifying basing for aircraft, strengthening passive defenses at air bases, and being prepared to respond in kind if China launches an attack. However, if the United States takes a tough stance, increasing its observable military presence (and thus its vulnerability), China may react strongly by punishing American allies and partners—many of whom count on China as their number one trading partner. General anxiety about the U.S. ability to balance all these competing requirements could reduce U.S. political access to the region, thus increasing the effectiveness of the political dimension of China's anti-access strategy.

*The United States must achieve engagement without encirclement.* If China feels encircled, it may react in ways that are destabilizing for the region. American strategists must examine their approach to regional basing to ensure that it strengthens America's relationships with its allies and partners, addresses any Chinese concerns of containment, and reliably facilitates the forward deployment and sustainment of American military forces in the region. It is the responsibility of American policymakers to make clear to U.S. allies and partners that it is not necessary to choose between China and the United States. Instead, the United States and its allies should publicly seek a positive and constructive relationship with China, while striving for the maintenance of a robust military edge necessary to guard against potential Chinese aggression and coercion. Strategic distrust is likely to linger because the leadership in Beijing seems convinced that the United States seeks to constrain or even upset China's rise.<sup>63</sup> But in conjunction with prudent changes to American force

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<sup>63</sup> For a more comprehensive analysis of China's position, see Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, "Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust," *Brookings Institution, John L. Thornton China Center Monograph Series*, March 4, 2012.

posture in the region, talks among the top civilian and military leaders of both countries might alleviate such distrust and lead to agreements on modalities to reduce tension in the commons, encourage mutual restraint in the deployment of especially destabilizing new capabilities, and create a better level of mutual understanding about the security situation on the Korean peninsula and Taiwan.<sup>64</sup>

Ultimately, the American objective in the region must be peace and stability at an acceptable cost. Given this, it is critical to understand the four components of China's A2/AD strategy and how best to maintain the U.S. position as a Pacific power. In addition to regularly attending meetings in the region and developing new technology, new platforms, and new operational concepts designed to defeat China's A2/AD strategy, the United States needs to accept risk without being reckless, permit the possibility of escalation while promoting stability, and promote engagement without encirclement. By mastering these three balancing acts, the United States will be able to maintain peace and stability in East Asia without sacrificing American interests.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., xii.