

U.S.-Japan Allied Maritime Strategy: Balancing the Rise of Maritime China

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China's growing maritime power is changing the strategic balance among Asian powers. The continental power of Russia, China, and India dominates the Asian landmass, while the maritime power of the United States and Japan secures freedom of the seas in the western Pacific. Neither side has traditionally been able to project substantial conventional power into the realm of the other.¹ Now, however, the development of China's anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities is challenging U.S.-Japan maritime supremacy in the Asian littoral.

China has become more assertive, intensifying its territorial and maritime claims in the East and South China Seas. The announcement of China's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea and the harassment of the USS *Cowpens* in the South China Sea are just recent examples of Beijing's attempts to deny access by other maritime powers to its Near Seas (the Yellow Sea and the East and South China Seas), which are enclosed by the first island chain (a chain of islands from Kyushu, Okinawa, to Taiwan and Borneo). The first section of this paper analyzes the implications of China's A2/AD strategy through the two traditional naval concepts of *fortress fleet* and *fleet-in-being*.

The United States has made clear its intention to rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific, recognizing the challenges and opportunities posed by the rise of Asia as a whole and China in particular. It is not that the United States is "returning" to Asia; it never left this dynamic region. The rebalance requires the United States to maintain sustainable forces and power-projection capability to counter A2/AD threats in the region.² The second section provides an overview of the U.S. rebalance policy and options for a new U.S. maritime strategy.

Japan, under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, has just adopted the first National Security Strategy (NSS) for "proactive contribution to peace." Abe is also upgrading Japan's security policy through the establishment of a National Security Council (NSC) and the revision of the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG). Tokyo now aims to balance the rise of China through strategic diplomacy and to reinforce deterrence toward China by setting up a "dynamic joint defense force" to defend the Nansei Islands in the southwest of the Japanese archipelago. The third section of this

¹ Michael McDevitt, "The Evolving Maritime Security Environment in East Asia: Implications for the US-Japan Alliance," *PacNet*, no. 33, May 31, 2012.

² U.S. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, January 2012).

paper reviews the implications and challenges of the strategic diplomacy and “dynamic joint defense force” concepts.

Finally, as Tokyo and Washington have agreed to revise their bilateral defense guidelines by the end of 2014, this paper provides some recommendations for this revision.

Understanding China’s A2/AD Strategy

China’s A2/AD strategy can be understood better through two traditional naval concepts: fortress fleet and fleet-in-being.³ The fortress-fleet concept, as the American historian and naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan described and criticized, refers to a fleet that operates under cover of shore-based fire support as part of static coastal defenses. The concept of fleet-in-being—introduced by the British Adm. Arthur Herbert, Earl of Torrington in the 17th century—describes actions by an inferior fleet to undermine a stronger fleet through limited offensives or merely the very existence of the fleet.

China’s Fortress Fleet

Mahan observed the performance of the Russian Navy in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 as defensive, both strategically and tactically. Russian admirals kept their main fleet passively in port to defend coastal land features while sheltering the fleet under the fort’s big guns. Mahan criticized the Russians’ defensive strategic mentality for limiting the fleet’s freedom to maneuver and for avoiding any battle that might have advanced their strategic goals.⁴ Russia did not have a monopoly on this defensive mindset; the strategy was applied by other continental powers, including the People’s Republic of China.⁵

For China, using coastal defense to deny seaborne invasion is a historical requirement. China, despite its 8,700-mile coastline and great navigable rivers running to the Pacific, long remained a self-sufficient land power, facing the constant pressure of armed nomads across land borders. Its century of humiliation started in the mid-19th century, when Western powers exploited China’s vulnerable maritime approaches. China’s strategic weakness comes from the sea.

The concept of a fortress fleet thus fits China’s history. The missions of a continental power’s navy are subordinate to those of its army.⁶ Accordingly, the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLA Navy, or PLAN) assumes a defensive strategic posture. The PLAN augments the army’s coastal fortifications to help repel amphibious invasions. It also supports the PLA so that the army can take the offensive on the continent where China enjoys vast strategic depth, complex terrain, and massive manpower reserves. In short, the PLAN has been a fortress fleet by nature.

³ Christian Le Mière explains China’s maritime strategy with the “fleet-in-being” concept in Le Mière, “America’s Pivot to East Asia: The Naval Dimension,” *Survival* 54 no. 3 (June–July 2012): 81–94; James R. Holmes explains with the concept of “fortress fleet” in Holmes, “A ‘Fortress Fleet’ for China,” *Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* (Summer/Fall 2010): 115–28.

⁴ Holmes, “A ‘Fortress Fleet’ for China,” 117.

⁵ Clark G. Reynolds, *Navies in History* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 62.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

Adm. Liu Huaqing, the “father” of the PLAN, changed China’s maritime doctrine in the 1980s. Liu envisioned better coastal defense by expanding the PLAN’s operational areas out to the first and second island chains.⁷ In recent years, advances in military technologies have changed the implications for the modern fortress fleet. Land-based aircraft carrying antiship cruise missiles have greatly expanded the reach and accuracy of coastal defenses, providing bold access-denial capabilities to strike U.S. expeditionary groups hundreds of miles away from the Chinese coast. Plus, antiship weapons are cheaper than aircraft carriers. These relatively inexpensive weapons can keep the formidable U.S. sea-control fleet further offshore.⁸

China is adding a shore-based carrier killer to its A2/AD arsenal. It has been developing and testing this antiship ballistic missile (ASBM), based on the DF-21 medium-range ballistic missile, which could target moving U.S. aircraft carriers. Huge technological challenges remain, but mastering such a technology would be a “game-changer” in today’s strategic calculus. A successful ASBM program would greatly restrict the offensive strike capabilities of U.S. carrier strike groups in the western Pacific and undermine the credibility of U.S. defense commitments in Asia.

An important development for the fortress fleet of the 21st century is that high technology allows the fleet to leave the port. The concept of a fortress fleet originally referred to strategic and tactical defensive, when shore-based fire support reached only several miles. Today’s fortress fleet can be offensive, at least in tactical operations, under the aegis of longer-range antiship missiles and submarines. As a result, the PLAN has become more assertive in the Asian littoral.

Chinese Fleet-in-Being

Admiral Arthur Herbert, Earl of Torrington, decided not to engage the superior French fleet in the War of the League of Augsburg in 1690. The French were threatening to invade England but Torrington was confident that as long as he had a fleet-in-being they would not make the attempt. He favored keeping his fleet at the mouth of the River Thames and avoided any decisive naval battle until anticipated reinforcements arrived. On the other hand, Torrington employed aggressive tactical offensives to weaken his opponent whenever an opportunity arose.⁹ The concept of fleet-in-being assumes temporary strategic defense combined with offensive tactical operations. Once fully reinforced, the fleet can resume the strategic counteroffensive.

The fleet-in-being is a natural consequence of Communist China’s strategic tradition. Mao Zedong’s Red Army favored aggressive operational tactics, or “active defense,” before making a strategic counteroffensive, as seen in the Long March, the Sino-Japanese War of the 1930s–40s, and the Chinese Civil War. Likewise, the PLAN’s “offshore active defense” concept aims to create conditions for a strategic counteroffensive through “people’s war at sea,” or “guerrilla warfare at sea.”¹⁰

⁷ Andrew Scobell and Andrew J. Nathan, “China’s Overstretched Military,” *Washington Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (Fall 2012).

⁸ Holmes, “A ‘Fortress Fleet’ for China,” 118.

⁹ Reynolds, *Navies in History*, 62.

¹⁰ Holmes, “A ‘Fortress Fleet’ for China,” 120.

In essence, the fleet-in-being is a sea-denial strategy. The fleet does not seek sea control but attempts to deny enemy control of certain maritime areas through its presence and menace. China's massive submarine fleet and antiship weaponry are its primary tools for sea denial. A2/AD relies on wide-range ocean surveillance to detect and locate approaching enemy forces.¹¹ As a result, the PLAN encounters other navies more frequently in the Near Seas. In October 2006, for example, a Chinese *Song*-class attack submarine quietly surfaced within nine miles of the aircraft carrier USS *Kitty Hawk* as the forward-deployed flattop sailed on a training exercise in the East China Sea.

On the other hand, the PLAN needs to deny other countries' surveillance activities in the Near Seas. Beijing thus persists in a series of excessive maritime claims—or legal warfare—as a sea denial strategy. China's domestic law guarantees freedom of navigation in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) but denies such freedom in its “historic waters.” Its EEZ claims are based on the historical “occupation” of the waters in the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Sea.¹² Thus China does not accept surveillance activities by foreign military vessels in its EEZ and fails to recognize the airspace above its EEZ as international airspace. This forms the background to Chinese aggressiveness in the Hainan EP-3 incident in 2001, the USNS *Impeccable* incident in 2009, and the USS *Cowpens* incident in 2013. The announcement of China's ADIZ in the East China Sea is another attempt to deny Japanese and American aerial surveillance.¹³

China's paramilitary maritime law enforcement ships are also active in the Asian littoral waters.¹⁴ China is now integrating four of the so-called “Five Dragons” into a new Chinese Coast Guard. Those paramilitary ships have been employed in numerous cases, including the harassment of the USNS *Impeccable* near Hainan Island in March 2009, the standoff over the Scarborough Shoal in the Philippine EEZ from April to June 2012, and the confrontation over the Senkaku Islands after September 2012. China has found those paramilitary ships an effective way to demonstrate maritime jurisdiction while challenging other states' claims in contested waters without sending warships.

Despite its carrier and amphibious ship building programs, the PLAN will continue to be weaker than the sea-control fleet of the U.S. Navy in the western Pacific. Hence the fleet-in-being concept makes sense for the PLAN to deter any U.S. intervention. In other words, the PLAN will remain strategically defensive while tactically offensive. On the other hand, China's tactical offensive,

¹¹ McDevitt, “The Evolving Maritime Security Environment in East Asia.”

¹² James Kraska, *Maritime Power and the Law of the Sea: Expeditionary Operations in World Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 315–6.

¹³ To understand China's ADIZ, see Peter A. Dutton, “Caelum Liberam: Air Defense Identification Zones outside Sovereign Airspace,” *American Journal of International Law* 103 (2009).

¹⁴ For an overview of China's maritime law enforcement agencies, see Lyle J. Goldstein, *Five Dragons Stirring Up the Sea: Challenge and Opportunity in China's Improving Maritime Enforcement Capabilities*, China Maritime Study, No. 5 (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, April 2010), http://www.usnwc.edu/Research---Gaming/China-Maritime-Studies-Institute/Publications/documents/CMSI_No5_web1.pdf; and International Crisis Group, “Stirring Up the South China Sea,” Asia Report No. 223, April 23, 2012, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/223-stirring-up-the-south-china-sea-i.pdf>.

especially by paramilitary ships, raises the chance of accidents and unintended escalation.

Implications of China's A2/AD Strategy

The PLAN is a hybrid of fortress fleet and fleet-in-being.¹⁵ The concept of fortress fleet refers to anti-access and the concept of fleet-in-being leads to area denial. Both concepts indicate that the PLAN will become more assertive at the tactical level because of the Red Army's legacy and new affordable advanced technologies. Both concepts also suggest that the PLAN remain strategically defensive. A2/AD is an American term; Chinese strategic thinkers refer to it as "counter-intervention."¹⁶ Thus, in essence, China's maritime strategy is defensive.

An open question remains: In what circumstances would the PLAN launch a strategic counteroffensive? It is unlikely that the PLAN will become a dominant navy in the western Pacific in the foreseeable future. The PLAN needs to remain strategically defensive, at least against the United States. President Xi Jinping's proposal of a "new model of major power relations" indicates that China is seeking a strategic accommodation between China and the United States, or peaceful coexistence, based on "mutual respect for core interests." In other words, China's priority is to force the United States to acknowledge its territorial and maritime claims in the East and South China Seas.

China is seeking strategic stability vis-à-vis the United States. China is the only nuclear weapon-state under the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that is expanding its nuclear arsenal. The lack of a credible sea-based deterrent prevents Beijing from possessing assured destruction capabilities. China is acquiring credible second-strike capabilities with the anticipated introduction of JL-2 SLBMs coupled with DF-31 and DF-41 road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). China also plans to introduce up to five Type 094, or *Jin*-class, strategic nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) armed with JL-2 missiles, while constructing an underwater submarine base on Hainan Island in the South China Sea.¹⁷ In addition, China is developing a new hypersonic glide vehicle, which might add greater strategic strike capability.¹⁸ China might not achieve strategic parity with the United States but it could establish strategic stability with limited deterrence capabilities.

China's search for strategic stability with the United States raises the question of the stability-instability paradox. As China becomes more confident in its deterrent capability that can withstand a U.S. preemptive strike, the PLAN might launch further offensives in the "near seas" to change the territorial status quo.¹⁹ China's neighbors perceive Chinese assertiveness in the Asian

¹⁵ Holmes, "A 'Fortress Fleet' for China," 124–25.

¹⁶ McDevitt, "The Evolving Maritime Security Environment in East Asia."

¹⁷ Tetsuo Kotani, "Why China Wants South China Sea," *Diplomat*, July 18, 2011, <http://thediplomat.com/2011/07/18/why-china-wants-the-south-china-sea/>.

¹⁸ Bill Gertz, "China Conducts First Test of New Ultra-High Speed Missile Vehicle," *Washington Free Beacon*, January 13, 2014, <http://freebeacon.com/national-security/china-conducts-first-test-of-new-ultra-high-speed-missile-vehicle/>.

¹⁹ Brad Roberts, "Extended Deterrence and Strategic Stability in Northeast Asia," National Institute for Defense Studies Japan, Visiting Scholar Paper Series, no. 1, August 9, 2013, <http://www.nids.go.jp/english/publication/>

littoral as a common threat, and those countries seek stronger ties with the United States. Therefore China attempts to decouple the United States and its allies and friends in Asia by using economic leverage to prevent what it perceives as containment. If the decoupling succeeds, China might not refrain from challenging the existing regional order to legitimate its territorial and maritime claims.

The U.S. Rebalance and Its Implications

The United States was destined to become a Pacific nation with strong commercial interests in Asia. The United States has maintained forward military presence and unimpeded access to the region in order to overcome the “tyranny of distance.” The “Open Door” policy, the San Francisco system, and the Nixon Doctrine all reflected U.S. interests in Asia. To protect its interests, the United States fought a bloody war with Japan and a cold war with the Soviet Union in Asia. Today the rise of China poses both opportunities and challenges for U.S. engagement with Asia. The Obama administration’s pivot or rebalance to Asia reflects historical requirements. But the rebalance needs to be backed up by an appropriate military strategy to address A2/AD threats.

The U.S. Sea-Control Fleet and Marines-in-Dispersal

The rebalance requires the United States to reinforce its sea-control fleet in the Pacific. Accordingly, the Pentagon plans to deploy up to four new littoral combat ships (LCSs) to Singapore and the U.S. Navy will assign 60 percent of its entire fleet to the Pacific by 2020. The new naval posture in Asia will strengthen U.S. engagement in the region through calls at regional ports, and engagement with regional navies through activities such as exercises and exchanges. The U.S. Navy is also replacing forward-deployed naval forces in the western Pacific with more capable ships and aircraft and seeking a basing option in Australia.

The U.S. Marines—another important element of U.S. sea power—are dispersing. The U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) now envisions itself as a “middle-weight” force, emphasizing the dispersion of lighter forward-deployed units for rapid response and increased engagement with regional partners for training and capacity building.²⁰ Since the number of U.S. amphibious ships is insufficient, the Marines seek opportunities to work with the Navy’s other platforms. In accordance with the new USMC force structure review, the deployment of up to 2,500 U.S. Marines in Darwin, Australia, was announced in November 2011. In February 2012, it was agreed that 4,700 U.S. Marines in Okinawa would be transferred to Guam, while another 3,300 will be deployed to Hawaii and Australia on a rotational basis.

The U.S. rebalance results in a force shift within Asia rather than a shift from the Middle East to Asia. The U.S. military posture in Asia long focused on Northeast Asia, specifically the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait. To balance the rise of China, however, the United States is shifting

visiting/pdf/01.pdf.

²⁰ Force Structure Review Committee, *Reshaping America’s Expeditionary Force in Readiness: Report of the 2010 Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, March 2011), <http://community.marines.mil/community/Documents/MarineCorpsConnection/e-mail%203-18-11/forcestructurereview.pdf>.

its focus from Northeast Asia to the entire Asia-Pacific. The United States is thus seeking opportunities to access the ports of U.S. allies (Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand) and new friends such as Vietnam.

Christian Le Mière described the recent U.S. move as “fleet-in-dispersal” to avoid direct confrontation with China, while hedging against Chinese aggression.²¹ Le Mière warns that this strategy would further encourage China’s assertiveness due to reduced U.S. presence in China’s Near Seas.²² But the U.S. Navy is increasing the number of ships it deploys in the region and is keeping the sea-control fleet in China’s Near Seas, as demonstrated by exercises with Japan in the East China Sea, with South Korea in the Yellow Sea, and with Southeast Asian countries in the South China Sea.

It would be more appropriate to describe the change in the U.S. force structure in Asia as marines-in-dispersal. The reduction of numbers of U.S. Marines in Okinawa and the first island chain does not necessarily encourage China’s assertiveness since the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), the first responder to crisis, remains based in Okinawa. In fact, marines-in-dispersal could further contribute to deterrence as long as the strategic mobility of the “middle-weight” Marines is guaranteed. Marines-in-dispersal also ensures increased engagement with regional partners.

The presumption of the U.S. rebalance is stability in other parts of the world. Although the Obama administration has sought to end the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Middle East presents numerous challenges. In particular, the civil war in Syria and the nuclear program of Iran remain sources of instability. More recently, Russian military intervention in Ukraine is destabilizing Eastern Europe. If the situation in other parts of the world becomes worse, the United States would need to review the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific.

Fiscal constraint is another challenge, and this is one of the primary issues the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) addresses. President Obama canceled his trip to Southeast Asia in October 2013 due to fiscal problems that led to the government shutdown, and regional countries remain concerned about the feasibility of the rebalance. If the United States fails to allocate sufficient defense assets to the Asia-Pacific to overcome A2/AD threats, that would undermine the foundation of the rebalance and the credibility of U.S. commitments to Asia.

In short, there are widespread concerns in the region about U.S. commitment to the rebalance. Regional countries are not assured by the U.S. engagement with China. For example, National Security Advisor Susan Rice referred to the operationalization of a “new model of major power relations” in her speech on the rebalance.²³ Such a statement would just encourage China to seek

²¹ Le Mière, “America’s Pivot to East Asia,” 86.

²² *Ibid.*, 92.

²³ Susan E. Rice, “America’s Future in Asia” (remarks as prepared for delivery at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, November 20, 2013), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/11/21/remarks-prepared-delivery-national-security-advisor-susan-e-rice>.

further accommodations from the United States. U.S. defense leaders also emphasize their willingness to expand mil-to-mil ties between the United States and China. Engagement with China is necessary, but the Obama administration should reassure allies and friends at the same time.

Air-Sea Battle or Offshore Control?

China is expanding its A2/AD capabilities. But the United States does not accept a situation that would deny the U.S. access to the western Pacific. This is not an arms race, as seen in the early 20th century, when a naval buildup program occupied a large part of the national budget. Instead, the region is witnessing a “military capabilities competition” between assured access and access denial.²⁴

The United States has been developing the concept of Air-Sea Battle (ASB) to maintain freedom of action under A2/AD threats.²⁵ ASB is not a strategy but a tactical concept designed to attack-in-depth through integrated operations across five domains (air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace). It preserves the ability to defeat aggression and maintain escalation dominance despite the challenges posed by advanced A2/AD threats. Its central idea is to develop networked, integrated forces capable of attack-in-depth to disrupt, destroy, and defeat adversary forces (NIA/D3). NIA/D3 requires three basic actions: (1) disrupt enemy surveillance systems (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance or C4ISR); (2) destroy enemy precision weapon launching systems; and (3) defeat enemy missiles and other weapons.

ASB has caused widespread controversy among U.S. strategic thinkers.²⁶ ASB addresses the maintenance of power projection under A2/AD threats to deter potential aggressors while reassuring U.S. allies and partners by demonstrating U.S. determination. ASB provides a wide range of striking options, and the promoters of ASB have emphasized the importance of striking military assets on Chinese territory. But critics raise concerns about its escalatory nature. ASB assumes penetration of Chinese airspace and strikes on Chinese land territory, despite the fact that China has vast strategic depth and both a nuclear arsenal and a sufficient conventional arsenal to attack its neighbors. ASB also requires huge investments in high-end defense capabilities in an era of austerity. Ironically, ASB might lead to a reduction in U.S. defense commitments and credibility in Asia, if the United States fails to afford it.

T.X. Hammes denies that ASB is a sensible strategy to defeat A2/AD threats and instead proposes “offshore control,” or a blockade against China beyond the range of its A2/AD capabilities, to bring

²⁴ McDevitt, “The Evolving Maritime Security Environment in East Asia.”

²⁵ The details of the Air-Sea Battle are classified, but its essence is now available at U.S. Department of Defense, “Air-Sea Battle,” May 2013, <http://www.defense.gov/pubs/ASB-ConceptImplementation-Summary-May-2013.pdf>.

²⁶ For example, see Elbridge Colby, “Don’t Sweat AirSea Battle,” *National Interest*, July 31, 2013, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/dont-sweat-airsea-battle-8804?page=1>; and T.X. Hammes, “Sorry, AirSea Battle Is No Strategy,” *National Interest*, August 7, 2013, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/sorry-airsea-battle-no-strategy-8846>.

economic pressure to Beijing.²⁷ Offshore control aims to deter Chinese aggression by showing offshore control capabilities in peacetime, and, if deterrence fails, it creates time for diplomats to negotiate for peace. Offshore control does not include attacks on Chinese land territory, in order to avoid potential nuclear escalation, but instead wages submarine and aerial warfare to deny the PLAN access to its own offshore waters and skies. Offshore control is also cost-effective, as it does not require high-end military platforms.

Offshore control has its own critics, too. For instance, Elbridge Colby wonders whether a distant blockade against China is feasible, as China is an indispensable economic market for many countries.²⁸ If the United States gives up any option to strike the Chinese mainland, China could invest more into blue water capabilities for sea-lane protection. In addition, China could strike its neighboring countries if they cooperate in an offshore blockade. Without U.S. willingness to destroy the sources of attack on Chinese territory, allies and partners may choose to bandwagon or to acquire an independent nuclear option.

There is a need to fill the gap between ASB and Offshore Control. Jeffrey Kline and Wayne Hughes offer such a solution.²⁹ Kline and Hughes support ASB as appropriate in a high-end conventional war but propose a war-at-sea strategy to reduce ASB's escalatory nature. The war-at-sea strategy envisions limited naval warfare without striking on land. Like offshore control, the war-at-sea strategy aims to deter Chinese aggression. If deterrence fails, the war-at-sea strategy denies Chinese use of the waters inside the first island chain by using submarines, small guided-missile combat ships, and interdiction along the first island chain. If China strikes U.S. allies and partners, the U.S. military would retaliate with ASB.

The 2014 QDR, which implicitly endorses the war-at-sea strategy, calls for high-end military superiority in the western Pacific. The United States will shrink the existing littoral combat ship (LCS) program and launch a new high-end ship program since the LCSs cannot provide sufficient combat power in Asian waters. The primary challenge for the war-at-sea strategy is how to deter low-intensity conflicts, as China's coercion with paramilitary forces escalates. ASB might deter high-end conflicts while maintaining escalation dominance. But the 2014 QDR fails to provide a sufficient prescription for a counter-coercion strategy.

Japan's National Security Strategy and Dynamic Joint Defense Force

One of the outcomes from the interaction between China's naval buildup and the U.S. rebalance is the realization that Japan needs to take greater security responsibility in Northeast Asia. Prime Minister Abe has made clear his intention to bolster security policy with the establishment of the NSS and the NSC and the revision of the NDPG. Abe is determined to protect national territory by

²⁷ T.X. Hammes, "Offshore Control: A Proposed Strategy for an Unlikely Conflict," *Strategic Forum*, no. 278 (June 2012); and T.X. Hammes, "Offshore Control Is the Answer," *Proceedings Magazine* 138/12/1, 318 (December 2012).

²⁸ Colby, "Don't Sweat AirSea Battle."

²⁹ Jeffrey E. Kline and Wayne P. Hughes Jr., "Between Peace and the Air-Sea Battle: A War at Sea Strategy," *Naval War College Review* 65, no. 4 (Autumn 2012), <http://www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/e3120d0c-8c62-4ab7-9342-805971ed84f4/Between-Peace-and-the-Air-Sea-Battle--A-War-at-Sea>.

investing in the Coast Guard, increasing the defense budget, exercising collective self-defense, and revising the constitution in order to establish a robust national defense force. At the same time, Abe envisions strategic diplomacy and strengthened partnerships with the United States, India, Australia, and other like-minded nations that share universal values in order to recover Japan's economic power and to shape China's behavior in the international arena.

Japan's Strategic Vision

The essence of Abe's strategic vision is the combination of internal balancing (restoring national power to balance the rise of China) and external balancing (allying with like-minded maritime nations to address China's excessive maritime claims).³⁰ Abe understands the best source of national power is the economy. Abenomics' three arrows address monetary easing, stimulus spending, and growth strategy with structural reforms. Abe is also determined to reform Japan's national security by reversing the decline in defense spending, introducing effective decisionmaking, and relaxing self-imposed restrictions on defense policy.

Abe and his followers envision a coalition among Japan, the United States, India, and Australia—establishing a “democratic security diamond”—as a key enabler for strategic diplomacy.³¹ In addition, Abe aims to strengthen ties with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), visiting all 10 member countries last year and hosting a special Japan-ASEAN summit meeting in December 2013. He also visited countries in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa and plans to visit Pacific island nations and Latin America. Abe's strategic diplomacy has two objectives. One is to seek the recovery of Japan's economy by securing energy supplies and opening new markets. Another is to seek understanding for Japanese efforts to address China's attempts to challenge the liberal rule-based order.

Japan's NSS reflects this strategic vision. It recognizes the ongoing power shift between the United States and other emerging powers such as China and India, and calls for a proactive Japanese contribution to peace to maintain the liberal international order. Proactive contribution to peace is antithetical to passive one-nation pacifism. Japan will proactively contribute to the improvement of the regional and global security environment. The NSS puts particular emphasis on the importance of securing the “open and stable ocean.”

Good order at sea requires a liberal approach to the international law of the sea, as reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Such an approach assumes freedom of navigation in maritime commons as a community right, protects sovereign rights of littoral states over maritime resources, and promotes peaceful solutions to maritime disputes. This is the essence of the NSS as a maritime strategy.

Japan is neither going to contain China nor appease Beijing under Chinese military pressure. The

³⁰ Michael J. Green, “Japan Is Back: Unbundling Abe's Grand Strategy,” Lowy Institute Analysis, December 17, 2013, <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/japan-back-unbundling-abes-grand-strategy>.

³¹ Shinzo Abe, “Asia's Democratic Security Diamond,” Project Syndicate, December 27, 2002, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe>.

rise of China provides both challenges and opportunities to Japan. On one hand, Japan is going to build sufficient defense capabilities and partnerships to discourage Chinese assertiveness, while encouraging Beijing to play more responsible and constructive roles. To that end, Japan needs to establish a robust defensive wall to secure southwestern Japan, while building the capacity of like-minded partners to promote freedom of the seas.

On the other hand, Japan should develop a robust engagement strategy for China. Tokyo should make every effort to communicate and build confidence and trust with Beijing to reduce tension and the risk of clashes and escalation. It is important to work with regional partners because they are concerned about the high tensions between Japan and China and are reluctant to take sides. Japan and China agreed on maritime consultation and crisis communication, and the implementation of those mechanisms is a priority despite China's reluctance. Japan should engage in confidence building with China through multilateral exercises, counterpiracy operations, and humanitarian assistance/disaster response (HA/DR).

Nevertheless, confidence building and crisis management with China are not easy. The problem is not the lack of a mechanism but the lack of a spirit of confidence building and crisis management. The Chinese say trust needs to come before confidence and demands compromise first. Plus, China does not pick up the phone during crises. For instance, the U.S.-China Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) has failed to prevent crises such as the recent USS *Cowpens* incident. China does not preserve the spirit of the 1972 U.S.-USSR Incidents at Sea (INCSEA) Agreement and monopolizes the consultations to achieve its political objectives to deny U.S. surveillance in China's claimed EEZs and stop U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.³² This is why deterrence and hedging still matter.

Japan's Dynamic Joint Defense Force

The concept of a dynamic joint defense force is not new. The December 2010 NDPG emphasized the defense of the Nansei (Southwestern) Islands to meet challenges from China's growing military power.³³ The document, reflecting the changing regional and global security environment, also abandoned the decade-long "static" defense posture and introduced a new concept of "dynamic defense" that envisioned an increased operational level and tempo of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF).

The dynamic joint defense force is an updated version of the dynamic defense force that calls for further integration of the JSDF. Through the dynamic joint defense force the JSDF will be strengthened in both quantity and quality. Since the defense of the Nansei Islands requires air and maritime superiority, the dynamic joint defense force envisions active and regular surveillance for seamless response to "gray zone scenarios" between peacetime and wartime. Japan plans to

³² Pete Pedrozo, "The U.S.-China Incidents at Sea Agreement: A Recipe for Disaster," *Journal of National Security Law & Policy* 6, issue 1 (January 2012).

³³ The English text of the NDPG is available at the Ministry of Defense website, http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/national.html; the NDPG was first written in 1976 and revised in 1995, 2004, 2010, and 2013.

introduce the next-generation P-1 patrol aircraft, additional 19,500-ton helicopter-equipped destroyers (DDHs), and unmanned aircraft to enhance surveillance capabilities. Ground-based radar systems in the Nansei Islands will also be enhanced, while early-warning and fighter aircraft based at Naha Air Base will be reinforced.

The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) is also protecting against small-scale invasions by strengthening intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and antisubmarine warfare (ASW) to defend Japan's surrounding waters. The major area of responsibility for the JMSDF is the East China Sea and the Philippine Sea, or what Japanese naval strategists call the Tokyo-Guam-Taiwan (TGT) Triangle.³⁴ The new DDH is a primary platform for ASW and it can support amphibious operations. It could be a platform for vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) aircraft in the future, too. The JMSDF also plans to introduce a new type of smaller, faster, multirole combat ship to be operated in the A2/AD threat environment.

In addition, the submarine fleet will be increased from 16 to 22. Due to the lack of Chinese ASW capabilities, the expansion of the submarine fleet enhances sea-denial capability vis-à-vis the PLAN. To patrol the waters along southwestern Japan, it is estimated that at least eight submarines are necessary (six for the Okinawa island chain and two for the Bashi Channel). Typically, a boat requires two backups for training and maintenance. Thus a submarine fleet of 24 is ideal, but a fleet of 22 provides more operational flexibility than the current fleet of 16.³⁵ On the other hand, for the effective use of the reinforced submarine fleet, the JMSDF needs to recruit and train more submariners.

One of the primary objectives of the defense of the Nansei Islands is to prevent China from obtaining air supremacy along the island chain. Seventeen islands in the island chain have civilian airfields, and the Naha, Shimojishima, and Ishigaki airports can operate fighters and large transport aircraft. Those islands need to be protected against Chinese amphibious and airborne invasions so that they can remain open for use by Japanese and American forces. Existing military airport facilities are vulnerable to Chinese ballistic missile attack. Therefore the utilization of commercial facilities on the Southwestern islands is important in terms of dispersion of vulnerability as well.

Ground troops are still indispensable for the defense of the Nansei Islands. The Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) will become lighter and more mobile with Ospreys and light armored vehicles that can be transported by air. The JGSDF will also have an amphibious unit with amphibious assault vehicles; however, the JGSDF plans to purchase the old-generation AAV7 amphibious assault vehicles, which are not suitable for operations in coral reefs, when 85 percent

³⁴ Tomohisa Takei, "Kaiyoshinjidaini Okeru Kaijojeitai" [Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force in the New Maritime Era], *Hatou*, no. 199 (November 2008).

³⁵ Masao Kobayashi, "Sensuikan 22 sekitaiseino Kaijoboei" [Maritime Defense under a 22-Submarine Force], *Gunji Kenkyu* [Japan Military Review], December 2011.

of the Southwestern Islands are covered by coral reefs. The defense of the Southwestern Island chain requires a new type of amphibious assault vehicle.

Rapid deployment of combat troops, armored vehicles, air-defense units, and ground-to-ship missile launchers is a key enabler of the defense of the Nansei Islands. The introduction of the C-2 next-generation transport aircraft is crucial. Since the Nansei Islands stretch for a thousand miles with limited access facilities, the use of existing commercial air and port facilities is indispensable. The joint use of existing U.S. facilities, the selection of joint supply base sites, and the utilization of civil transportation companies are also urgent. Prepositioning near the Southwestern Islands is another option to consider.

The introduction of amphibious capabilities is expected to be a first step toward a robust joint force. There are two options. One is to establish a permanent joint command with a permanent joint task force.³⁶ The other is to establish a permanent joint command without a task force.³⁷ A permanent task force is not a priority. It would be desirable to launch a joint command first and exercise amphibious operations, combining various air-sea-land units as an ad hoc task force. A permanent task force can be organized later, if it is found to be appropriate.

The concept of a dynamic joint defense force makes strategic sense. In essence, it is a Japanese version of an A2/AD strategy along the Nansei Islands. The demonstration of an enhanced defense posture would send a deterrent message to Beijing. It also fits into the war-at-sea strategy to deter Chinese aggression. However, discouraging China's low-intensity aggression in gray zones remains a challenge. The Japanese Coast Guard (JCG), which will be reinforced by 2017, is the first responder to such gray zone challenges. Nevertheless, it will continue to be difficult to manage the situation in the East China Sea given China's robust paramilitary ship building program. Moreover, China's increased air operations in the vicinity of Japanese airspace poses an even tougher challenge.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The rise of maritime China has brought about changes to the seas in Asia. Analysis of China's A2/AD strategy through the concepts of fortress fleet and fleet-in-being leads to the conclusion that advances in precision weapons allow the PLAN to assertively expand its operational areas in the Asian littoral. More importantly, the analysis indicates that China could seek strategic stability with the United States, raising the problem of the stability-instability paradox. For Japan and the United States, the fundamental challenge is to discourage China's low-intensity assertiveness under the gray zone environment, while maintaining high-end deterrence.

The U.S. rebalance is a geostrategic requirement. The U.S. sea-control fleet and marines-in-dispersion support it. But due to fiscal constraints, its credibility and sustainability are challenged. In order to deter Chinese aggression and reassure allies and partners, the United States

³⁶ VAdm. (ret.) Hideaki Kaneda, former commanding officer, Escort Fleet, advocates this option.

³⁷ Lt. Gen. (ret.) Kazuhito Mochida, former commanding general, Western Army, advocates this option.

needs to implement the rebalance with a robust counter-A2/AD strategy. It is desirable for the United States to maintain flexible deterrence options with ASB; by adopting the war-at-sea strategy, the United States can maintain its influence in the Asia-Pacific.

China's assertiveness in Japan's southwestern front and the U.S. rebalance to Asia require Japan to take a proactive security role. Abe's strategic diplomacy and the introduction of a dynamic joint defense force make strategic sense. Japan is pursuing internal balancing and external balancing at the same time to meet the challenge of rising Chinese power. Economic recovery is the key to internal balancing, while the engagement strategy with China must accompany external balancing. The new defense concept is a war-at-sea strategy with A2/AD capabilities.

The defense of the territorial status quo of the Senkaku Islands and the Nansei Islands in general is the test of the U.S.-Japan alliance. To dissuade China's assertiveness, the two allies need to provide sufficient deterrence and seamlessly respond to gray zone challenges, while assuring regional partners. The revision of the U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines provides the best opportunity to show the determination of the two allies. Here are some recommendations for the revision:

1. *Adopt a war-at-sea strategy.* To deter Chinese aggression, Japan and the United States should maintain sea-denial capabilities inside the first island chain and sea control beyond the first island chain. ASB provides a wide range of striking options for the war-at-sea strategy, from attack-in-depth to interdiction along the first island chain, all in a high-end A2/AD environment. Denying China's use of the Near Seas and the straits along the first island chain requires cooperation from Australia, India, and ASEAN.
2. *Review the division of labor.* Today's allied division of labor, described as "spear and shield" (Japan provides defensive capabilities and the United States provides offensive capabilities), is obsolete. Japan should take a proactive role in defending its territory with both a short spear and a big shield, while the United States provides a supporting role with a long spear and big eyes to deter escalation. In addition to seamless and constant ISR, primary roles for Japan are tactical air combat, underwater capabilities, ASW, mine/countermine, and air defense operations. Japan's ground-to-ship missile system contributes to sea denial but the system needs to be upgraded, given the improvements in China's air defense. U.S. primary responsibilities include attack-in-depth by bombers, carrier air wings, and submarines, and unmanned and space-based surveillance. The development of joint and combined ASB operations under the new division of labor makes sense for the efficient use of respective defense capabilities in a period of austerity.³⁸
3. *Enhance strategic mobility.* Since the lack of transport capabilities is a common challenge for Japan and the United States, cross-service allied operations—for example, U.S. aircraft transporting Japanese ground troops, or Japanese naval ships transporting U.S.

³⁸ See Sugio Takahashi, "Counter A2/AD in Japan-US Defense Cooperation: Toward 'Allied Air-Sea Battle,'" Project 2049 Institute Futuregram 12-03, March 2012, http://project2049.net/documents/counter_a2ad_defense_cooperation_takahashi.pdf.

Marines—should be promoted. Utilization of Australian and South Korean platforms is also desirable.

4. *Launch a joint freedom of navigation program.* China's excessive claims in the western Pacific need to be addressed in order for the allies to continue maritime and air surveillance in China's Near Sea. The United States is the only nation that has a freedom of navigation program to challenge littoral countries' excessive maritime claims, but its operational tempo is decreasing. To counter China's legal warfare, Japan and the United States should develop a joint freedom of navigation program. The two militaries should conduct proactive operations to physically challenge China's excessive claims and patrol the East and South China Seas.
5. *Jointly develop new capabilities.* Japan and the United States should jointly develop capabilities such as a new type of amphibious assault vehicle to be operated in coral reefs and a new littoral combat ship, especially for mine warfare operations in high-intensity threat environments. Joint study of antiship ballistic missile defense should also be considered.
6. *Develop a counter-coercion strategy.* Japan and the United States need to work on confidence building and crisis management with China. Nevertheless, to discourage China's low-intensity coercion, Japan and the United States need to develop an asymmetric strategy to shape China's external behavior, while responding to China's gray zone challenges. As long as China continues aggressive actions in the East China Sea, Japan and the United States should deepen their cooperation with Taiwan, given that China claims the Senkaku Islands as part of Taiwan. The Japan-Taiwan fishery agreement of 2013 provided a good example. The allies can also encourage Taiwan to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) or facilitate security cooperation, for instance, on cyber defense. Plus, the allies can demonstrate interdiction capabilities vis-à-vis China along the first island chain, as economic growth is a primary source of legitimacy for the Communist Party.

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