

America's Deep Rationale for PACOM

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The United States Pacific Command (PACOM) describes the Asia-Pacific as its “Area of Responsibility,” a term so common in the US military it is known by the acronym “AOR.” It might be jarring to the people of some Asian states—particularly the Chinese—to learn that the US military claims “responsibility” over their country. Americans would certainly bristle if China established a North American Military Region within the People’s Liberation Army. Yet it is uncontroversial to Americans to describe themselves as having a “global cop” role for which they are uniquely qualified.

The question that arises is why the United States maintains a large military command devoted to the Asia-Pacific region (previously designated “the Far East” in an earlier era by the US bureaucracy) and why this command keeps large numbers of personnel and military units “forward deployed” (based in Asia). Answering this question requires an understanding of what I term the deep rationale for PACOM: the strategic logic that makes this huge investment on the other side of the world’s largest ocean appealing to Americans.

In common with all regional great powers of the past, including pre-modern China and fascist Japan, the United States purports to uphold a particular regional order—a specific and historically unique set of principles, rules and institutions governing the conduct of international affairs—that supports not only the self-interests of the sponsoring great power, but also the interests of the other states in the region. US officials routinely assert that most Asian countries, with the exception of “rogue” states such as North Korea, welcome US leadership in the region, including a US military presence in the form of US bases, regular transits by US military forces, and security cooperation between US and regional militaries. Washington has reiterated countless times the argument that the US military presence preserves the “stability” necessary for regional states to prosper. In the words of PACOM Commander Admiral Harry B. Harris in 2015, “The persistent presence of U.S. joint military forces throughout the Indo-Asia-Pacific for the last 70 years has safeguarded the rules-based international order. . . . a system that continues to benefit all nations--including China--by setting the conditions for stability, economic prosperity, and peace.”¹

How the USA Became a “Resident Asian Power”

The uniqueness of America’s position—hegemon² of Asia despite being geographically located outside of Asia—is highlighted by the common description of America as a “resident Asian power.”³

The largest part of the US government that actually “resides” in Asia is PACOM, in the form of US military bases in Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea. How this situation came about requires a brief historical review.

Americans have had three primary interests in Asia. The first is trade. To the US business community, access to such a large and economically productive part of the world is essential to American prosperity. The second US interest is security. From the time the United States became a major power able to project influence beyond its own shores, Americans sought to steer Asian affairs toward support for the interests of the United States and its allies. A final US interest is ideological.

Many important early American leaders saw the establishment of the new nation within the context of their Christian worldview. Biblical themes became a major part of the national self-identity.

These included two key ideas: (1) America was a “promised land” of bounty and relative security whose inhabitants would be free to serve God according to their conscience, having escaped the corrupt and constraining societies of Europe; and (2) since America was an exemplary society, Americans had a responsibility to share the blessings of liberty and democracy with the rest of the world. America sent many Christian missionaries into China and other Asian countries. After they returned home, these former missionaries and their family members became an influential constituency back in the USA, not only in advocating a paternalistic form of American engagement to help Asia develop (reflecting the well-meaning but somewhat arrogant outlook of a Christian missionary trying to convert foreign heathens), but also in shaping the knowledge of and attitude toward Asia of their largely ignorant fellow citizens.

The United States is often considered a historically Eurocentric country, far more focused on European affairs and relationships with European countries than on its engagement with Asia. According to a report by the US Congressional Research Service, members of the US Congress still consider Britain to be America’s closest ally.⁴ Yet when World War II broke out in Europe, the United States refused to intervene while Nazi Germany conquered nearly all of western Europe and was on the verge of invading Britain. America entered the war against Hitler only when Germany declared war on the United States after the Pearl Harbor attack. In contrast, America was a major player in Asia before World War II, occupying the Philippines, supporting fellow Western colonial powers, setting limits on Japan’s expansion into China, and enforcing these limits with economic sanctions against Japan.

“Manifest Destiny” was the rallying cry of Americans who argued that the young nation originally established on the eastern seaboard should expand westward to encompass all of the territory between Canada and Mexico up to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. Having accomplished this, America continued to extend its influence westward toward Asia. With its victory in the Spanish-American War 1898, the United States acquired its first Asian colony:

the Philippines, formerly under the control of Spain. Although Americans had gone to war with Spain partly out of outrage over reported Spanish atrocities against rebel communities in Cuba and the Philippines, Americans were themselves accused of numerous atrocities when they took up Spain's campaign against a Filipino insurgency.

The need for naval bases to sustain the new American presence in Asia was a motivation for Washington to take control of the Hawaiian Islands. President Grover Cleveland had said "Those islands, on the highway of the Oriental and Australasian traffic, are virtually an outpost of American commerce and the stepping-stone to the growing trade of the Pacific."⁵ Cleveland's successor William McKinley accomplished the annexation despite the objection of many members of Congress that this was imperialism.

Cleveland's interest in trade with Asia was shared by many US businessmen. The idea that America required economic access to Asia to sustain US prosperity was commonplace. The US government worried that the policies of other countries in the region might restrict this access. China was a focal point of these worries. At the end of the nineteenth century, the United States saw its economic opportunities in China threatened by the prospect that other powerful states would establish exclusive spheres of influence over various Chinese regions, effectually carving up China into a collage of colonial possessions, each under the economic domination of the colonizing government. This was the reason US Secretary of State John Hay in 1899 asked the governments of Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy and Japan to honor an "Open Door Policy" by guaranteeing all nations "equal treatment for trade and navigation" within their respective spheres of influence, rather than maintaining monopolies or exclusive privileges for their own nationals. The nature of US involvement in China was ambiguous. On one hand, Washington carried out policies in China typical of an imperialist power, including extraterritoriality, moving U.S. military forces through the country at will, and controlling the Chinese Maritime Customs Department. On the other hand, Americans claimed to be protecting China from colonization by the other great powers. This was one of the first instances of what would become a familiar theme of US policy in Asia: the United States using its influence in what Washington characterized was a benevolent and principled manner, but that also upheld US self-interests. The attitude of the Chinese themselves toward this US intervention is clear from their inclusion of the United States in the group of what they called the "eight imperialist powers."

Japan's policy in the early twentieth century presented a huge challenge to American plans for Asia, one that would shape US policy for decades afterward. To achieve and maintain great power status and self-sufficiency, Japan needed a colonial hinterland. Britain had Malaya, the Dutch had Indonesia, the French had Indochina, and the Americans had the Philippines. Tokyo sought to establish its own sphere of influence in the region. Before the 1930s Japan was, in American eyes, a country that supported the rules of international relations written by the Western countries including the United States. Japan's leaders appeared committed to upholding the basic principles of this liberal international order: adherence to international law and agreements, peaceful resolution of disputes, and working toward free trade. The American government assented to and even welcomed Japan's expansionism into certain parts of Asia early in the twentieth century. Washington saw Japan as a useful balancer against Russia and a force for modernization. It was better for Japan to control Manchuria than Russia, which did not support the Open Door policy. When Japan

opened the Russo-Japan War with a surprise attack on the Russian fleet in Port Arthur, China, a *New York Times* called the attack an “enterprising and gallant feat of the Japanese arms”⁶— a stark contrast with how Americans would characterize the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. US President Theodore Roosevelt mediated the settlement of the war between Russia and Japan, a task for which Roosevelt won the Nobel Peace Prize. His settlement struck a careful balance, reflecting the American wish that neither Japan nor Russia should be strong enough to disrupt the Western order in Asia. Japan got southern Manchuria and the southern half of Sakhalin Island, but not Vladivostok, any part of Siberia, or reparation payments from Russia.

In the secret Taft-Katsura agreement of July 1905, a memorandum of a discussion in Tokyo between then-U.S. Secretary of War William Howard Taft and Japanese Prime Minister Katsura Taro, the United States government accepted Japanese control of Korea, while Japan disavowed any intention to challenge U.S. control over the Philippines. The 1908 Root-Takahira agreement recognized Japan’s entitlement to control over Korea and Manchuria. Japan was a formal ally of Britain, a member of the League of Nations, and a signatory to the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty, which restricted Japan to building a smaller navy than those of Britain and the United States.

Beginning with the economic crisis of 1929, however, the Western powers saw Japan gradually turn hostile toward the Western agenda in Asia. The global economic crisis shook Japan’s confidence in the Western international order. The Western countries themselves led a turn to self-protective nationalist policies that harmed the interests of other countries and damaged the international economic system as a whole. In the United States, the 1930 Smoot-Hawley Act raised tariffs on imports from Japan by 23 percent. From 1929 to 1931, Japan’s foreign trade shrunk by one-half. Japan had briefly experimented with democratic government during the 1920s, but the global recession created hostility among many Japanese elites, both civilian and military, toward capitalism and liberalism. Tokyo became less inclined to accommodate the Western powers while seeking to build up its sphere of influence in Asia.⁷

China became a strategic quagmire for Japan. The conflict there drew the Japanese into deeper military involvement while simultaneously worsening Japan’s relations with the Western powers, which acceded to Japanese control of Manchuria but not Japanese expansion into the heart of China. Chinese nationalist activism, with the support of local warlord Zhang Zuolin and later his son Zhang Xueliang, interfered with Japanese activities in Manchuria. Japanese forces in Manchuria responded by driving out Zhang’s troops, establishing a puppet “Manchukuo” regime in Manchuria, and launching a punitive campaign against Shanghai. The US government did not oppose Japanese control of Manchuria as long as the Manchukuo authorities did not discriminate against US business interests there. Believing, however, that their position in Manchuria was still vulnerable, Japanese military leaders extended the territory under their control into other parts of China. The 1937 Marco Polo Bridge Incident began what Japan expected would be a brief war to destroy Chiang Kaishek’s Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) government. Japanese forces indeed captured several major cities in eastern China, including Chiang’s capital Nanjing, within a year. But instead of surrendering, Chiang withdrew into China’s interior, which was too vast for Japanese soldiers to conquer. Instead of making Japan self-sufficient, the long and

grinding war made Japan even more dependent on imports of key resources from the Western countries.

Japan's war in China also alarmed the United States and the European colonial countries. American officials saw the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," which Tokyo officially announced in August 1940, as the kind of closed economic bloc that had the potential to seriously undercut US prosperity. Japanese troops entered Indochina, taking advantage of Hitler's defeat of colonial master France, and demanded that Britain close the Burma Road, an important supply route for China. The Western powers perceived these moves as evidence the Japanese intended to seize British and Dutch colonies in Asia. Fear of Japan's intentions deepened when Japan aligned itself with Hitler by joining the Axis alliance. Washington demanded that Japanese forces withdraw from China (other than Manchuria). In negotiations with Nomura Kichisaburo, Japanese ambassador to the USA, in October 1941, US Secretary of State Cordell Hull insisted that Japan abide by the main principles of the Western-built regional order: respect for other countries' territorial integrity, non-interference in their internal affairs, equality of economic opportunities, and political change in the Asia-Pacific only through peaceful means.

The USA gradually escalated economic and military pressure on Japan. America increased military aid to China, began a massive naval construction program, and moved the home port of the US Pacific Fleet from the US west coast to the middle of the Pacific, at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The United States reduced or cut off supplies of key resources to Japan, including scrap metal and oil. At this time Japan imported 90 percent of its gasoline, and 80 percent of its fuel of all types, from America. Without oil the war in China could not continue. For the military government in Japan led by Prime Minister Tojo Hideki, the choice came down to either abandoning Japan's aspirations to be a great power (predicated on maintaining a hinterland in China), or seizing an alternative source of oil. Tokyo chose the latter option. Taking the Dutch oil fields in Indonesia would require taking out British and American bases in Singapore and the Philippines, and holding these conquests would require destroying the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. The US-Japan war was essentially an attempt by Japan to overthrow the regional order instituted by the Western powers. Japan concluded it could not achieve its aspirations within the confines of that order and doubted America's ability to successfully defend it—parallels, perhaps, with the attitude of today's Chinese government.

The Pearl Harbor attack shocked and traumatized Americans. Many senior US leaders believed by late 1941 that war with Japan was imminent, but they expected it to start in Southeast Asia, not Hawaii. By moving four aircraft carriers and their support ships 3,500 miles undetected, the Japanese raiding force achieved an audacious and monumental tactical success that many US military commanders would not have believed was possible. While the raid was a military success for Japan, however, it was a political disaster. Japanese planners had hoped a decisive early blow would convince Washington to accede to a Japanese hegemony in the western Pacific. Instead, the perception of a dishonorable "sneak attack" early on a Sunday morning enraged Americans. Japan had indeed violated the Hague Convention of 1907, which Japan had ratified in 1911, and which requires a state to declare war prior to opening hostilities. (As is well known, Nomura and envoy Kuruo Saburo intended to deliver a message to Hull just before the attack, but because of delays they

delivered it after the attack. This message, however, said only that Japan was ending negotiations. It was not a declaration of war.)

For the prize of sinking five obsolete battleships, the Japanese succeeded in turning an isolationist Congress into wholehearted supporters of a total war to roll back the Japanese empire and forcibly replace Japan's government and political system. Japan's defeat was sealed on Dec. 8, 1941, when the US Senate voted 82-0 and the US House of Representatives voted 388-1 in favor of President Franklin Roosevelt's call for a declaration of war (an uncompromisingly pacifist Congresswoman from Montana was the sole dissenter).

The unusual ruthlessness of the Pacific War highlighted civilizational differences between the United States and the region over which Americans aspired to exercise decisive strategic influence.

American elites were primarily white and most to one degree or another saw Asian societies as racially inferior. America's 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act banned most Chinese immigration to the USA. It was not until the end of 1943, deep into a war in which the United States and China were allies, that the US government repealed this law that was deeply offensive to the Chinese. In the bitter fighting between Americans and Japanese, Japanese forces committed atrocities such as the murder and enslavement of captive peoples and mistreatment of prisoners of war, but the American military carried out their kinds of outrages—including an unapologetic policy of aerial bombardment of cities and a lack of interest in taking prisoners.

The attack on Pearl Harbor generated one of the long-term lessons that Americans drew from their experience in the Second World War. Although the accuracy of this interpretation is questionable, to most Americans the Pearl Harbor attack meant the following: (1) US inattention to and lack of influence over affairs in the Asia-Pacific region can result in the emergence of dangerous situations; (2) these dangers can reach across the Pacific Ocean and pose dire threats to America; (3) the value of maintaining US influence over Asia-Pacific affairs is therefore incalculably high; and (4) no country other than the United States is capable of enforcing a regional order conducive to US interests. In the postwar era, the United States has maintained a bipartisan, permanent long-term internationalist policy in the western Pacific Rim. The rapid US military demobilization in the immediate aftermath of World War II briefly threatened to weaken this posture until the onset of the Cold War and especially the outbreak of the Korean War renewed America's commitment to keeping a preponderance of military power in eastern Asia. American leadership in defense of this regional order takes several forms: economic, diplomatic, cultural, and military. Management of the military aspect of US influence, arguably the most important, would be the purview of US Pacific Command.

Persistence of the Deep Rationale

After World War II there were two specific new imperatives for a resident US military presence in Asia. The first was deterring the spread of communism from China and the Soviet Union to additional Asian countries. Americans saw communism as a competing and hostile global system that threatened both the prosperity and security of the United States. The Soviets apparently aspired to absorb US trade partners into an exclusive communist trade

bloc. Moscow and Beijing also sponsored armed groups fighting to overthrow governments friendly to the USA and to replace them with communist regimes. Reassuring threatened and potentially threatened states was a corollary of this effort.

The second US objective was to deter American allies.⁸ South Korean leader Syngman Rhee and Republic of China leader Chiang Kai-shek wanted to fight for the reunification of their respective countries when Washington preferred stability. Many Americans, and not a few Japanese, feared Japan might relapse into militarism after the end of the US military occupation in 1952. The permanent stationing of US forces at bases in Japan effectually deterred Japan as well as the communist giants that threatened Japan, although it was impolitic for American leaders to speak this way in public. Even Chinese leaders recognized this as a benefit of the US maintaining a strong military position in East Asia.⁹

The essence of what Americans understood to be the lesson of the Pearl Harbor attack was still highly influential decades later, even into the post-Cold War era. In 1992 a leaked draft of a high-level US planning document gave rise to what became known as the Wolfowitz Doctrine, after then-Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz (although the actual author was Zalmay Khalilzad). The document reaffirmed in undiplomatic language the operative but usually unstated premises of US strategic policy in Asia. The key points of the document were that US policy should be to prevent a “hostile power” from dominating an important region (such as East Asia); the United States should be a selective and self-interested global cop, prepared to “address wrongs” that threaten US or allied interests “or which could seriously unsettle international relations”; and the United States should exercise the leadership necessary to deter other states from “aggression” or from “challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political and economic order.”¹⁰

The resilience of the US government’s belief in the necessity of something like PACOM is illustrated by the Obama Administration’s “rebalance to Asia” policy (originally “pivot to Asia”) announced in 2012. This was a time of war-weariness in American society. The long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq had proved unexpectedly costly and produced results that were at best ambiguous. Many Americans began to believe US foreign policy was excessively interventionist. At the same time, beginning with the Great Recession of 2007—2009, the feasibility of keeping large US military forces forward deployed in eastern Asia came under serious question in the United States.¹¹

Automatic funding cuts mandated by the Budget Control Act of 2011 threatened to starve the US military of the resources it claimed were necessary to carry out its assigned worldwide missions. Amidst this turmoil, however, the White House announced that the US military presence in the Asia-Pacific region would not be diminished, even if reductions were needed in other geographic regions. A gradual relative increase of American military assets in Asia had already begun as early as the George H. W. Bush Administration. The US Navy plans to increase its total number of ships from 275 in 2005 to over 300 by 2020. It also plans to increase the percentage of ships that are forward-deployed, even though shifting the home ports of military units from within to outside the United States is often politically unpopular both at home and in the new host country. The Obama Administration affirmed that even in relatively difficult financial circumstances, Asia would see a modest buildup

rather than a drawdown of US forces, with the percentage of the US Navy's ships based in the region increasing from its current 55 percent to 60 percent by 2020.

In its present form, the deep rationale for PACOM can be summarized as follows: (1) Exercising early, direct and short-range influence over the international relations of Asia is desirable because allowing nature to take its course may result in outcomes that are not in America's economic, security or ideological interests; and (2) Although the benefits of maintaining US strategic leadership in the Asia-Pacific region are incalculable, the US government presumes that these benefits justify the immense financial cost that Americans pay to sustain this leadership.

Built into this rationale are two important unexamined—and questionable—assumptions.

First, the likelihood of outcomes seriously harmful to US interests is high if America does not remain closely engaged with Asia. Asia needs a babysitter from outside the region. Otherwise the result will be war and/or the rise of an evil empire, with eventual catastrophic impact on the well-being of Americans. Historical experience, however, does not necessarily support this assumption. A common phenomenon in international relations is balancing behavior: if a threatening state emerges, several other states will band together against it, signaling to the threatening state it will not gain by acting aggressively. This often deters war and recommitments governments to the principle of pursuing their goals through peaceful cooperation. In other words, if PACOM disappeared tomorrow, we might find that Asian states themselves successfully took over the task of maintaining regional peace, stability and prosperity.

A second questionable assumption has been that the United States can maintain its position of strategic leadership in Asia indefinitely. Paying the costs of hegemony will remain relatively easy because the United States will face no serious challenger (indeed, precluding such a challenge is one of the goals and benefits of hegemony) and the US economy will always supply the government with a bounteous supply of revenue. Both of these conditions, however, are disappearing. A strong China increasingly pushes against the limits imposed by the US-sponsored regional order, seemingly willing to risk conflict to achieve its aims. Maintaining US dominance was easy when the states unhappy with this situation were weak. But maintaining the status quo requires more effort and more acceptance of risk on the part of the United States now that China has formidable military forces and massive economic leverage. Furthermore, long-term structural economic problems in the United States raise questions about the willingness of the American people to continue tolerating what is by far the largest expenditure on defense of any country on earth. The total US defense budget for 2016 is over US\$767 billion,¹² nearly as much as the combined military spending of all the other governments in the world combined. It is difficult to identify the exact portion of this amount represented by PACOM, but since PACOM is the largest of the US military's regional combatant commands we can surmise that Americans spend roughly \$200 billion to \$300 billion to maintain US "hegemony" in Asia.

The Rationale Under Challenge

With times getting tougher strategically and financially, calls for a less ambitious US strategic policy in Asia have increased. One alternative US grand strategy is the “offshore balancer” approach. This strategy would take advantage of America’s unusual geographic good fortune of being situated in a relatively safe part of the globe, with two large oceans separating the United States from the world’s other major powers. Instead of trying to be the strongest power “resident” in Asia, the United States would draw back its military forces and commitments and allow the countries geographically situated in Asia to work out their differences and achieve a stable peace. If they were unsuccessful and a conflict broke out, the United States could choose whether and when to intervene. Americans could thereby delay paying the costs of regional management, and enter a fight only after the adversary was already weakened by a war with local countries.¹³ The offshore balancing strategy implies that the United States would no longer automatically take action to block or counter Chinese assertiveness, would no longer enforce international norms, and would no longer promise to defend friends in peril.

Other analysts have recommended a partial US strategic withdrawal from Asia or a grand compromise with China. In the view of former Australian government senior official Hugh White, the basic problem is a contention over “primacy”: the United States insists on keeping its position as the strategically strongest country in the Asia-Pacific region (largely through PACOM) and actively opposes China becoming a great power, while China wants so badly to become a great power that it will go to war over this issue if necessary. White’s solution is that the United States should unilaterally downgrade its standing in Asia from superpower to great power and stop standing in the way of China becoming a great power. China will be satisfied as a great power rather than the dominant power, White says, which is fortunate because he believes a China striving for regional dominance would plunge Asia into a long era of warfare. He recommends a “Concert of Asia”--composed of China, the United States, Japan and India--that would jointly manage peace and stability in the region.¹⁴

A diminished strategic role for the USA and greater strategic influence for China, along with joint management of regional affairs according to an agenda that would require China’s assent, would relieve PACOM from taking sole “responsibility” for maintaining regional stability.

Some commentators recommend that the United States drop specific policies that annoy the Chinese in order to buy improved overall US-China relations. Most of these policies are implemented in whole or in part by PACOM. One prominent example is close surveillance of China from the air or sea outside of China’s territorial waters limit (12 nautical miles from the coastline) but within China’s exclusive economic zone (200 nautical miles from the coastline). The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, of which China is a signatory, does not prohibit spying from this area, but the Chinese nevertheless vigorously oppose it. Chinese pushback led to the 2001 collision between US and Chinese aircraft off Hainan Island and to the harassment by Chinese vessels of the US Navy ships *Impeccable* and *Bowditch* in 2009 and 2001-2003, respectively. Critics have questioned whether US surveillance off the Chinese coast is justifiable or productive.¹⁵ Some observers agree that China has a valid point when it argues military surveillance by foreign units is a fundamentally hostile act and should not be legal within a country’s exclusive economic zone. Others make the point that this activity has more detriment than benefit to the United States:

it creates a major point of bilateral contention while the additional value of this form of intelligence collection (compared with other, less obtrusive means) is arguably low. Therefore, some analysts argue, PACOM should stop doing it.

Another argument that regularly recurs in policy debates is that the United States should stop supporting a de facto independent Taiwan. PACOM plays into current US policy in three ways: first, by offering the US Department of Defense recommendations on US arms sales to Taiwan; second, by implementing engagement programs between the US and ROC militaries; and third, by providing the forces that would wage war should Washington decide to intervene in a military conflict between PLA and ROC forces. The argument that the US government should abandon Taiwan starts with the observation that Taiwan is the single largest bilateral problem in the US-China relationship, one in which the outbreak of a war between the two nuclear powers is not difficult to imagine. Gaining at least nominal political unification with Taiwan, or at least preventing permanent Taiwan independence, is a vital interest for China's CCP regime, which has vowed to recover "lost" national territory. Since 1950 Beijing has blamed the United States for perpetuating the separation. Therefore, the argument goes, Washington could win goodwill and ally Chinese fears of US "containment," as well as possibly remove a major regional flash point (if, as PRC analysts predict, Taiwan was to quickly fold and seek an accommodation with Beijing once it lost its American protector) by strategically divesting from Taiwan. A recent spin on this argument is Charles L. Glaser's idea of a US-China "grand bargain" in which the US government "ends its commitment to defend Taiwan" in exchange for Beijing's promise to "peacefully resolve" its maritime territorial disputes and "officially accept the United States' long-term military security role in East Asia."¹⁶ Other analysts propose a US abandonment of Taiwan as part of a larger package of US concessions Washington should make in exchange for comparable strategic concessions by China.¹⁷

Defenders of the original rationale, however, are fighting back. Many observers recommend that in the face of allegedly increased Chinese "assertiveness" since 2009, the United States must at least stay the course of forward deployment and demonstrate determination to enforce the rules of the Asian order, if not strengthen its security posture to signal to China a willingness to escalate if necessary. In either case PACOM operations are the primary policy tool. Ashley Tellis calls for strengthening the states around China that are friendly with the USA so they can stand up to Chinese bullying.¹⁸ Strengthening might include both arms transfers and joint military cooperation. PACOM would be the main vehicle for the latter. John Mearsheimer advocates building "a balancing coalition with as many of China's neighbors as possible," with the goal of producing an Asian version of NATO. He also promotes a recommitment by the United States "to maintain its domination of the world's oceans, thus making it difficult for China to project power reliably into distant regions like the Persian Gulf and, especially, the Western Hemisphere."¹⁹ Both of these courses of action would require maintaining if not strengthening PACOM by deploying a large amount of US military capability to the western Pacific. Retired US Navy Admiral Michael McDevitt recommends several explicitly PACOM-centric policies to counter Chinese assertiveness, including helping the Philippines improve its military capabilities, making "US air and naval presence in the South China Sea . . . a visible daily occurrence," and holding longer military exercises with South China Sea littoral states, inviting other

countries such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and India to participate.²⁰ Similarly, Robert Sutter's call for enhancing and employing US strengths counterposed against Chinese vulnerabilities includes a prominent role for PACOM: closer security cooperation with Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan; and more shows of US military force in the region.²¹

The rationale for PACOM appears rooted in America's historical experience. The Pearl Harbor attack reinforced the American view that control over events in Asia is necessary to US well-being. I say "reinforced" because Washington was already trying to engineer in Asia conditions conducive to American self-interest long before the Pacific War. The Pearl Harbor attack was as much a result as a cause of American intervention in Asia. In a sense the rationale for PACOM is over-determined by both history—more accurately, the general American interpretation of history—and by the forces of international politics. At the deepest level, PACOM is a reflection of America's superpower status, based on the calculation that extending US influence over an important but faraway region is desirable and feasible. The desirability will likely never change, but the continued feasibility is uncertain. Powerful and wealthy countries have the luxury of striving for higher levels of security. We can see similarities in the security policies of the USA, Japan and China over the last century. When the United States attained the ability in the late 19th century to significant project into the Pacific, it joined the major European countries as an imperialist power in Asia. When Japan industrialized and modernized at the turn of the century, it soon aspired to its own empire in Asia, and achieved a short-lived Asia-Pacific hegemony during the Pacific War. Post-Deng China is now seeking to leverage its increased relative power to gain greater control over China's periphery. Each of these countries saw increased strategic influence over the region as a means of increasing national security. The rationale that underlies PACOM stems naturally from America's position of relative strength--capability generates the rationale, not the reverse. Should America's edge in capabilities erode, we can expect that any successor hegemonic state in the region will similarly attempt to control its external environment by projecting strategic influence through military power.

¹ Adm. Harry B. Harris, "Remarks as Delivered," Stanford Center–Peking University, Beijing, China, Nov. 3, 2015, <http://www.pacom.mil/Media/SpeechesTestimony/tabid/6706/Article/627100/admiral-harris-speech-at-stanford-center-pekings-university-beijing-china.aspx>.

² "Hegemon" is a term used by international relations scholars to describe a country that is much stronger than any other the other countries in its region and consequently holds near-dominant influence over regional international affairs. In such a situation a "hegemony" prevails.

³ Many US officials have used this term. An example is then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, "Remarks on Principles for Prosperity in the Asia-Pacific," July 25, Hong Kong, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/07/169012.htm>, accessed Mar. 1, 2016.

⁴ Derek E. Mix, "The United Kingdom: Background and Relations with the United States Analyst in European Affairs," Congressional Research Service, Washington, DC, Apr. 29, 2015, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33105.pdf>, accessed Feb. 24, 2016.

⁵ Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 54.

⁶ *New York Times*, Feb. 10, 1904, p. 8.

⁷ Akira Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War 1941-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 2-3; LaFeber, *The Clash*, 154; Stephen R. Shalom, "VJ Day: Remembering the Pacific War," *Critical Asian Studies* 37, no. 2 (June 2005), <http://www.zmag.org/zmag/articles/july95shalom.htm>, accessed June 12, 2006.

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- ⁸ Victor Cha, "Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia," *International Security*, vol. 34, no. 3 (Winter 2009/10).
- ⁹ Gerald Curtis, "U.S. Policy Toward Japan, 1972-2000," in *New Perspectives on US.-Japan Relations*, ed. Gerald Curtis, 10 (Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2000); Michael Schaller, *Altered States : The United States and Japan since the Occupation* (UK: Oxford University Press, 1997).
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