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The Obama Administration and the Asia-Pacific Security Environment

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The United States (US) is a 'resident' Pacific power and its Asia-Pacific neighbourhood is in the midst of profound strategic change. Since the end of the Vietnam War, Asia has benefitted from a unique balance of power, in which first the Soviet Union and then the People's Republic of China (PRC) were 'balanced' by the US-led coalition of Asian littoral powers. This geo-strategic military stability provided the opportunity for virtually all of the nations of the region to focus mainly on internal political stability and, simultaneously, on economic development. By gradually improving its military capabilities off-shore, albeit largely for strategically defensive purposes, China is beginning to 'intrude' into the maritime region that has been the preserve of the US and its allies for the past half-century. Analysing the strategic developments in the region and the related dynamic of power equations over the past decade, this paper argues that as long as China looms large in the security calculations of Asia, it is unlikely that there will be any organised regional push back of the US alliance architecture. Maintaining a balance of power is central to the strategic calculations regarding the Asia-Pacific and the US is the only possible hedge against a militarily assertive China. The challenge for the new US administration is to ensure that the region perceives US military capability as viable in the face of China's military improvements, while avoiding the perception that the US is trying to contain China.

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Introduction

The ability of the US to protect and advance its interests in the Asia-Pacific region will depend significantly on the reassertion of active leadership and engagement from President Barrack Obama's administration. Not only will it have to reassert active leadership and engagement, it will also have to reaffirm US commitment to the region and articulate a vision that will shape US policies.

A good reaffirming starting point is the presentation by US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates to the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2008. At the time, he was speaking as a member of the George W. Bush administration, but since he continues as President Obama's Secretary of Defense, his comments remain valid. They are also illustrative of the bipartisan policy continuity that has marked US Asian policy since the end of the Cold War. In his speech, Gates defined the US as "a Pacific nation with an enduring role in East Asia," one standing "for openness and against exclusivity" and committed to "mutual prosperity." Noting that US territory in the Pacific Ocean extended from the Aleutian Islands to Guam, Secretary Gates defined the US as a "resident power" in the region.[1]

While it is true that the US is a 'resident' Pacific power, it is also true that in the Asia-Pacific neighbourhood they reside in the midst of profound strategic change. This is a major development for those who must construct US security policy since heretofore Asia's security environment has been relatively stable and predictable. One big reason for this stability is that since the end of the Vietnam War, Asia has benefitted from a unique balance of power, in which the continental powers – first the Soviet Union and then the PRC – were 'balanced' by the US-led coalition of Asian littoral powers that included US friends and allies.

One of the most important reasons why this three and a half decade long period of stability existed is that a real military balance exists. The military capability of each side can prevent any attempt by the other side to intrude in a militarily significant way into their respective domains. The continental powers were safe from invasion, thanks to large armies, vast territories and nuclear weapons. Similarly, US friends and allies were safe from invasion and maritime blockade thanks to US and allied air and sea power, which is backstopped by the US nuclear arsenal.

As a result, this period of geo-strategic military stability provided the opportunity for virtually all of the nations of the region to focus mainly on internal political

stability and, simultaneously, on economic development. One new development is that this balance has the potential to change in the near future.

Seven Major Trends of Change

The last decade has witnessed significant and seemingly inexorable change. Today's security environment is in the process of change because of seven significant political-military-economic trends.

The Economic Centrality of Asia to the World

Despite the on-going global financial crisis, the foremost significant trend is that Asia is re-emerging as a central political and economic player and an engine of the global economy. The countries in East and Southeast Asia house almost one-third of the world's population, generate about a quarter of global output, and produce about a quarter of global exports. Asian manufacturers have captured a large share of global production chains. Asian governments and government-controlled institutions hold about two-thirds of the world's US$ 6 trillion-plus foreign exchange reserves. Until the recent financial crisis, growth rates in many parts of Asia in the last decade approached or exceeded double digits, lifting tens of millions of people out of absolute poverty. Asia's market-oriented policies and successful engagement with the global economy set a good example for other regions. By almost any measure, Asia is highly globalised. Growing wealth and technological sophistication mean that Asian governments and private actors have greater capacity than ever before to help stabilise the global economy and contribute to the solution of global problems. By the same token, Asia's growing demand for energy and other resources has created tensions among nations and environmental problems that yield new security threats and challenges. For example, Chinese and Indian demand for energy and other commodities was a major factor in the run-up of energy and commodity prices in 2006 and 2007, and will continue to influence global markets in the decades to come.[2]

The Rise of China and Its Strategic Impact on Asia

Directly related to the first trend the most significant trend for Asia is the economic development of China and its well considered military modernisation. This has introduced a self assured, rich, and increasingly powerful power into the Asian strategic mix. As

China improves its military capabilities in order to guarantee its security and field a military establishment worthy of a great power, it is in the process of undermining the existing continental-maritime balance. When combined with its already great economic and concomitant diplomatic influence, this makes China a major player in every aspect of Asian security.

The dramatic success of China's "reform and opening up" economic policies have yielded the revenues necessary to underwrite a comprehensive modernisation of every aspect of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). For the first time in over two centuries, China is wealthy enough to finance a systemic and well-conceived modernisation that has already made the PLA – due to its size and pockets of excellence, such as its missile forces – the premier Asian military.[3]

Because it has a number of unresolved sovereignty issues of its coast, Taiwan being the most significant, China has adopted a military concept of operations aimed at keeping an approaching force from closing to within striking range of the Chinese mainland and Taiwan Strait. Specifically, China aims to deny the US military access to the region so it could not interfere with a PLA use of force to resolve many of its outstanding maritime strategic issues. To do this it is knitting together a capability that is composed of a very effective open-ocean surveillance system to locate approaching naval forces so they can be attacked by land-based aircraft armed with cruise missiles, by submarines with torpedoes and cruise missiles and, eventually, with conventionally tipped ballistic missiles that are able to hit manoeuvering ships. Starting in 2001 the US Department of Defence has characterised China's approach as an "anti-access" operational concept.[4]

By gradually improving its military capabilities off-shore, albeit largely for strategically defensive purposes, China is beginning to 'intrude' into the maritime region that has been the preserve of the US and its allies for the past half-century. Left unaddressed, this will have the effect of upsetting the decades-old balance of power that has been so successful in preserving stability in the region. The efficacy of the US strategic position in Asia depends upon US' ability to use the seas to guarantee the security of its East Asian allies, and pursue US national interests. By attempting to achieve security on its maritime frontier, China is creating a dynamic that, as its security situation improves, is making the security environment for many of its neighbours worse because a central element of the Chinese strategy in case of conflict is to keep US power as far away from East Asia as possible.

The China factor in the evolving Asian security environment presents most of China's neighbours with a strategic problem. The economic relationship that each nation has with China is central to the economic well being of both parties. At the same time, Chinese military modernisation presents a security challenge. For example, in the case of Japan the potential that China's anti-access strategy could isolate it in a time of crisis means that Japanese strategists and security planners will continue to keep a close eye on Chinese military modernisation. This has resulted in a decade long US alliance strengthening, which is Japan's way of hedging against the prospect of a threatening China.

The Possibility of Prolonged Stability Across the Taiwan Strait

During much of the last decade, the US hoped that the regime in Taiwan would not pursue reckless symbolic political gestures that would enrage China and potentially undermine stability across the Taiwan Strait. Creating senseless provocations, as China's capabilities to attack Taiwan with ballistic missiles improved, appeared to be a sure recipe for an eventual misjudgment that could involve the US in a conflict with China. The US believes that without moderation, Taiwan's security would be comprised.

The March 2008 election of Ma Ying-jeou as President of Taiwan put in place in Taipei an administration that is dedicated to a moderate approach to across Strait relations. The departure of Chen Shui-bian's administration has improved the political atmosphere between Taiwan and both China and the US. President Ma's approach to cross-Strait relations has the potential to dramatically shift the priority of the China-Taiwan relationship from military confrontation to political détente. His strategic pledge of "no unification, no independence, and no use of force," with the codicil that "Taiwan will maintain the status-quo in the Taiwan Strait" holds the promise of introducing a sustained period of stability in the cross-Strait dynamic.[5]

President Ma has been quite explicit that any reunification is something for the distant future and has made clear that unification is not his goal, and is not on the agenda during his administration. The strategic objective is to 'stabilise' the cross-Strait relationship. If this, in fact, happens it will have a dramatic impact on the strategic calculus of China, Japan and the US. Removing the prospect of conflict between the US and China over Taiwan would revolutionise US strategy in the region.

However, China has not yet persuaded itself to renounce the use of force when it comes to Taiwan because it fears a Taiwanese declaration of independence. Hence, US

strategy will still be shaped by the Taiwan Relations Act and the need to both help Taiwan defend itself through the sale of defensive military capabilities as well as the need to sustain a credible deterrent in the Asia-Pacific against aggression against Taiwan.

North Korea as a Nuclear Weapons State

In July 2006, North Korea attempted and failed to replicate its long range missile test of 1998. Although the long range missile failed, six other shorter range missiles tested on the same day did not. Then, in October 2006, North Korea successfully detonated a nuclear device. Although the test has been judged only partially successful by western experts, the fact remains a nuclear detonation did take place.

The nuclear test marked the failure of over 20 years of US diplomatic efforts by four different administrations to keep North Korea from obtaining a nuclear weapon. This track record clearly suggests that nothing short of regime change would have stopped North Korea from building a weapon. US policy is now focused on, first capping North Korea's ability to continue to produce weapons grade plutonium, and then rolling back to zero a programme that the country has invested so much time and treasure in constructing. Whether this objective can be verifiably achieved remains to be seen; meanwhile, the reality is that North Korea has fundamentally changed the strategic situation in Northeast Asia by demonstrating that it is on the cusp of fielding the capability to reach Japan, and perhaps Hawaii or Alaska with a nuclear weapon.

If the North Korea regime is able to take the next technical step and weaponise a nuclear device that could be fitted to a long range missile it could have an impact on Japan's decision to forswear nuclear weapons and depend on US extended deterrence. It is already having an effect on Japanese defence decisions regarding the necessity for fielding a ballistic missile defence system as well as modifying its command and control doctrine to account for the fact that time of flight for missile launched from North Korea at Japan is very short, and engagement decisions must be made within a matter of minutes.

It is foolish to pretend to understand North Korea's long-term objectives when it comes to nuclear weapons, but one possibility is it wants to be treated like India and Pakistan; a declared nuclear weapons state existing outside the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). Even in the highly unlikely case that others in the region would agree to accept North Korea as a nuclear weapons state because the US can deter use and maintain escalation dominance, such an outcome is remote. The US will never agree as long as

the prospect of a nuclear weapon falling into the hands of terrorist organisation(s) remains a legitimate concern and the current North Korean regime remains in place.

This fact has a significant impact on how the Republic of Korea (RoK) and Japan think about security. It has also created a diplomatic dynamic in which China's apparent leverage with North Korea places a premium on maintaining cooperative relations with China. To some degree the success of US policy of trying to achieve a fully denuclearised North Korea depends upon good Sino-US relations.

A New Strategic Relationship with India

The Obama administration should build on the successes of the Clinton and Bush administrations' India policy and recognise India's versatility as a strategic partner and responsible stakeholder in its own right. India does not wish to be perceived in the US as merely a hedge in the US strategy toward a rising China. Indeed, India has made clear it will not be anyone's cat's-paw in dealing with China or any of its neighbours. India itself is seeking to balance new and important ties between the US and China. The successful passage of the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement and India's decision to play a more responsible role in counter-proliferation efforts indicates a growing strategic convergence between the two nations.[6]

Efforts to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the fields of counter-terrorism, defence, counter-proliferation, and economics would help reinforce India's position in Asia. The US also recognises the key role that India plays in maintaining stability in South Asia. The fact that India's troubled relationship with Pakistan provides a pretext for the latter to expend too many military resources on the Pakistan-India border and not enough on the tribal areas on the Pak-Afghan frontier is a reality that will colour the US-India relationship. It will also stoke latent Indian anxieties over US meddling in the Kashmir dispute during the process of building stronger relations with the US. The US must remain a patient partner with India while encouraging greater interaction across a broad range of issues and areas, such as commerce, energy, and environment.

Cooperative Security in the Asia-Pacific

By electing to address the problem of North Korea and nuclear weapons through a multilateral diplomatic process, the US has consciously created a process that illustrates its willingness to invest political capital in what for all practical purposes is a regional cooperative security mechanism. After a slow start compared to Europe, over the past

two decades and especially during the past decade ideas about multilateralism or cooperative security have flourished. In recent years, new thinking about multilateralism and cooperative security in the Asia-Pacific region has been led by East Asian nations and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Although the US played a leading role in the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, other institutional initiatives – the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan and RoK) – and, more recently, the East Asia Summit (EAS), also known as the ASEAN Plus Six (adding India, Australia and New Zealand), have all been Asian inspired initiatives.

While these institutions have frequently been criticised for being more interested in dialogue than in tackling substantive issues, the fact remains that by forming habits of cooperation and building mutual understanding they have contributed to peace and stability in Southeast Asia. The reality is that the trend toward cooperative mechanism is irresistible, and since China made the decision during the 1990s to embrace cooperative approaches rather than remain aloof, it has become a major diplomatic tool in its relations with their Asian neighbours.

East Asia is not alone in this trend. South Asia has the eight nations South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Pacific Islands have their 16 nation Pacific Island Forum (PIF), and most Central Asia nations along with China and Russia are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Northeast Asia is the only Asia-Pacific sub-region without a sub-regional organisation that addresses political, economic, or security related issues. Why have cooperative security concepts taken root throughout the region but not in Northeast Asia, where security problems associated with China and Taiwan and North Korea have long been much more immediate and dangerous? The reason stems from the nature of the security problem. Transnational or non-traditional security issues vary greatly from traditional power-based security issues, as the emphasis is on common challenges and the need to collectively find common solutions.

In Northeast Asia, continued reliance on formal security alliances as the instruments of choice is directly related to the type of security challenge faced by each US partner – Japan, RoK and, unofficially, Taiwan. The challenges presented to these partners are country specific, are unique in terms of geography, involve issues of sovereignty and share no common canonical enemy. They are most sensibly addressed by bilateral alliances.

However, over the last decade or so, factors have emerged which suggest that cooperative security in Northeast Asia may be coming into its own. The economic integration of this sub-region, with China as the hub of a network of relations because of its economic "open door" has gone on despite periods of tension between the countries of the region. Other aspects of globalisation such as the spread of popular culture, regional tourism, and sub-regional communications has created a new 'atmosphere' of sub-regionalism where the economic, communications, social, travel and cultural linkages among the nations make a region wide security structure seem plausible and desirable way to address shared interests such as energy security, sea lane security and reducing air pollution.

The political environment appears especially propitious for the development of a sub-regional cooperative security framework. Japan and China have improved relations. Similarly, relations between RoK and all of its neighbours (except North Korea) have improved. The improved atmosphere across the Taiwan Strait has made the possibility of conflict between the US and China more remote than ever. Even Russia, despite the angst it has created in Europe, has good relations with its Asian neighbours with the possible exception of Japan. Not that Russia and Japan are in crisis, but Japan is more neuralgic about Russia than others because of unsettled Kurile Island sovereignty issues and recent Russian Air Force violations of Japanese airspace.

The obvious model for cooperative security in Northeast Asia is the Six Party process. There has been a great deal of speculation over the eventual transformation of this issue-specific dialogue into a more permanent regional one. The US is interested in such a concept, but only so long as it is not perceived as being at the expense of US bilateral relationships. This is a new aspect of the Northeast Asia security landscape that could have a significant impact on the entire security architecture of the region.

The experience of dealing with the problem of North Korea has made the prospect a Northeast Asian Cooperative security dialogue that would address the non-traditional issues such as climate change, environment and, perhaps, energy security a much more plausible addition to the security architecture of the entire region. This also means that the US has the opportunity for leadership by embracing the value of cooperative approaches to security beyond North Korea's nuclear weapons programme.[7]

The US Responses Over the Past Decade

Over the past decade the US approach to the Asia-Pacific has been firmly nested within

the general policy of both Democratic and Republican Administrations since the end of the Korean War. The strategic vision for East Asia continues to be defined by five fundamental interests that have influenced US strategy toward the region for decades and, in some cases, for more than a century. These include: the strategic importance of access to Asian markets for US business; the importance of maintaining a permanent US military presence in the region, given the enormous distances that separate the opposite sides of the Pacific Rim; the prevention of domination of East Asia by a hostile or anti-US power; continued military bases in East Asia to sustain US military power overseas, along with the mutual security alliances that make them possible; and the encouragement of democratic development.

The US policy reactions to the evolving strategic landscape of the Asia-Pacific have been clear, practical and transparent. There have been no shortage of official statements in the form of Congressional testimony by responsible officials, speeches, official documents approved by the White House, such as the March 2006 National Security Strategy, and the Department of Defence (DoD) Quadrennial Defence Reviews (QDR). Among the most recent was a presentation on Asia by Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte on July 28, 2008 at the Brooking Institute, where he said:

> *For 60 years, the US presence in Asia has had a calming effect on relations among the regions major powers. Our military alliances with like-minded Asian partners have allowed many of the region's powers to trade their swords for ploughs and harvest the gains of global trade. Our alliances with Japan, RoK, Australia, the Philippines and Thailand remain the foundation of peace and security in Asia*.[8]

Meanwhile, the Bush administration did, and one assumes the Obama administration will as well, keep a close eye on Chinese military modernisation. Perhaps the clearest statement that illustrates 'why' is found in the 2006 QDR. It says:

> *China has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the US and field disruptive technologies that could over time offset traditional US military advantages*.[9]

During Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's recent Asia trip she made clear that the Obama administration has characterised US policy toward China as "positive and

cooperative" and it has the goal of "broadening and deepening" the overall relationship. During the Bush administration, the official characterisation was *candid*, *constructive* and *cooperative* so the Obama formulation is apparently intended to put a more positive spin on Sino-US relations. This will probably mean that the word 'hedge' will disappear from official statements about China; perhaps because Chinese interlocutors considered hedge a synonym for 'contain.'[10]

The Obama administration will face the challenge of sustaining the military equilibrium in the Western Pacific. The Bush Administration's DoD had been quite specific about the importance of maintaining US military presence in East Asia. In the 2006 QDR, specific reference is made to the rotational deployments of Air Force bombers to Guam, in order to provide "... Pacific Command a continuous bomber presence in the Asia-Pacific region." The 2006 QDR also announced that the US Navy (USN) will adjust its force posture so that at least six operationally ready and logistically sustainable carriers are available for deployment. It also indicates that the USN needs to ensure that 60 per cent of its submarine force is home ported in the Pacific. The reason given for these shifts is to enable the Pacific Fleet to improve its engagement, presence and deterrent posture. Guam has become a centrepiece in the DoD's on-going efforts to enhance capabilities in the Asia-Pacific.[11]

It seems clear that the US is intent on not losing ground as China's military modernisation improves its capabilities. As China's capabilities improve, so too have US capabilities in the region. The US is intent on maintaining its current advantages that allow it to shape and deter. While some might characterise this as an arms race, what in essence is actually taking place *is a capability competition* between China and the US. The US goal in this competition is to possess sufficient capability to convince any potential adversary that it cannot prevail in a conflict.

The Obama administration also inherits the Bush administration's efforts to 'transform' the US military posture in Japan and RoK so that the US military is better positioned to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The objective for the transformation of the US presence in RoK is to break the Cold War model of US soldiers stationed along the de-militarised zone (DMZ) as a so-called "trip wire" while at the same time making US presence in RoK closer to the Japan template in terms of the relative freedom for the employment of US forces on regional missions, that are not directly related to the defence of RoK. Senior US commanders in RoK have recognised RoK's military strength and ability to act as the first line of defence against a potential North

Korean invasion and, as a result, have agreed to shift operational control of forces dedicated to the defence of RoK to its military in 2012.[12]

Just as the changes in RoK are resulting in a reduction of ground force strength, base changes in Japan are also scheduled to take place. Unlike RoK, the objective in these discussions is not to break a Cold War mold, but rather to strengthen the US-Japan alliance by reducing US presence in areas that do, or could, cause friction with the citizens of Japan and result in anti-alliance public opinion. The details of actual implementation were approved in Washington on May 1, 2006. A centrepiece of the plan is to dramatically reduce Marine Corps presence in Okinawa by relocating some 8,000 Marines and approximately 9,000 dependents to Guam by 2014 – which removes them from Okinawa but keeps them in the region – while relocating many of the remaining US Marine Corps (USMC) facilities in Okinawa further North out of the congested southern portion of the island.

Most of these changes involve a considerable expenditure of funds by Japan before they can be actually implemented. In the years since the plan was agreed upon not much has actually transpired. Since the agreement Japan has had three Prime Ministers. There is good reason to be skeptical regarding the implementation of the ambitious plan for Okinawa. In the absence of strong public pressure on the Japanese government these plans may never be executed. This means that many of today's frictions, such as aircraft noise and incidents between US military and Japanese civilians caused by close proximity will remain with the possibility that a major incident such as an aircraft accident in a crowded civilian area could cause considerable damage to the alliance.

A Return to an Old Trend: Japan in the Region

During Junichiro Koizumi's premiership it appeared that Japan would have to be included in any list of significant trends in Asia. Japan appeared to be on an inexorable path toward becoming more of a 'normal' great power in the sense of changing its self defence oriented security identity of the past 60 years. Whether or not such a trend was ever real, or merely an artifact of overheated rhetoric, the fact is that today Japanese security policy is evolving along the predictable path of previous decades. In other words, the Koizumi era was an aberration, and not the norm.

Constitutional changes necessary to create 'normal' armed forces and permit their employment abroad beyond peacekeeping are now perceived as political non-starters. At the same time, for good reasons, Japan is strategically focussed closer to home and

is worrying much more about security in its neighbourhood. Preoccupation with threats close to home is how the Japanese for much of the past six decades have approached security policy. This is what has been 'normal' for Japan, and the trend is in the direction of returning Japan's outlook to the period before the year 2000.

Assertive Russia: Not Yet a Trend

Russia's pre-planned response to Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's strategic blunder has changed the West's perception of Russia's strategic weight in the international system. It has also raised concerns about the direction of the vector of Russia's approach to security – will it go beyond self-defence and attempt to recreate a Russian sphere of influence? It also means that internationally more gravity will be accorded to Russian interests and threat perceptions. In Asia, the most visible manifestation of Russian assertiveness took place before it invaded Georgia. In February 2008, four Russian Bear bombers on a reconnaissance mission of US naval exercises in the Pacific apparently violated Japanese airspace during the course of the mission. This was followed a month later by two Bear bombers that were intercepted by US fighters approaching Alaska without having filed a flight plan.[13] An influential Japanese scholar has been especially outspoken about Russia, comparing its attack on Georgia to the 1931 Manchurian Incident, which provided the pretext for Japan's invasion of Manchuria.

At issue for Asian's is whether Russia will act like a big 'rogue?'[14] This does not seem likely in Asia. The Russians themselves have much to worry about when it comes to the Russian Far East. They claim that only 6 to 8 million Russians live East of Lake Baikal, which relates directly to their concerns about the growing sinicisation of its Far East. Far from being a threat, they worry about their own security. It is not surprising the Russian government has worked to sustain good relations with its Asian neighbours. Not only is the Russian Far East sparsely settled, but the military forces of China, Japan, and even RoK are more capable at sea and in the air than Russian Far Eastern forces.

Some Historic Perspective

To put this era of a strategic change in Asia in context it is worth remembering what strategists with a historic perspective have long recognised – everything changes but geography. For example, politically and strategically, the Asia-Pacific is very different

today from what it was 100 years ago. By 1909, Japan was the predominant military power in the region. It was the weakness of China and its former tributary state Korea that was the cause for instability as European nations and Japan competed to carve out extra-territorial concessions and spheres of influence. By that time Taiwan had been a Japanese colony for over a decade.

Fast-forward to today. Instead of worrying about a potentially hostile Japan, the US has an obligation to defend Japan. Instead of trying to protect the island territory of the Philippines from the hegemonic Asian power it now has an implied obligation to defend the island nation of Taiwan from the predominant Asian military power – China. While the relationships between Japan, RoK, Taiwan and China have been turned topsy-turvy, US strategic circumstances have changed the least – only the names of friends and potential enemies have changed. The US still has to consider how best to protect its vital interests and meet defence obligations that are thousands of miles away from its homeland and are in the 'backyard' of a rapidly modernising Asian military power.[15]

Conclusion

The USN and US Air Force are nearly 60 per cent fewer than they were at the end of the Cold War. This greatly reduces US flexibility in maintaining a strong overseas presence capable of honouring defence commitments and providing regional stability. Attempting to maintain today's level of capability in East Asia by sending forces based in the US on routine 6 or 8 month rotations is not sustainable over the long term; forces need to be permanent and on bases in East Asia. Without fixed facilities available in Japan and RoK, sustaining today's level of US military capability in East Asia would not be possible.

As long as China looms large in the security calculations of all of its Asian neighbours, it is unlikely that there will be any organised regional push back of the US alliance architecture. Maintaining a balance of power is central to strategic calculations regarding the Asia-Pacific and the US is the only possible hedge against a militarily assertive China. The new challenge for the US is to ensure that the region perceives its military capability as viable in the face of China's military improvements, while avoiding the perception that the US is trying to contain China.

The Obama administration must also decide if translating the Six Party Process into a more permanent institution makes sense for the future. East Asians are definitely

inching toward institutionalised multilateralism and there is no reason for the US to not embrace it, as in Europe. It will not undermine US bilateral alliances and the best way to shape outcomes that support US interests is to be part of the process. Becoming a part of Asian multilateral organisations would balance US political and military influence in East Asia – combining an alliance based security presence and a multilateral based political presence.

The intersection of the central strategic trends addressed in this paper guarantee that the future Northeast Asian security environment will be different from the one that has functioned so well for so many years. Whether it will be as effective remains to be seen, but so long as its foundation rests on US presence and bilateral alliances it has a good chance of preserving the stability that has made the Asian economic miracle possible.

Notes

1. Secretary of Defence Robert Gates, Speech, Shangri-la Dialogue, Singapore May 31, 2008, www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspex?speechid=1253
2. This section is drawn from Ralph Cossa, Brad Glosserman, Michael McDevitt, et al. *The United States and the Asia-Pacific Region: Security Strategy for the Obama Administration,* March 2009. p. 20-22. Available at www.cnas.org/node/723
3. For a comprehensive and authoritative discussion of Chinese military modernisation see especially the Department of Defence, *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the Peoples Republic of China.* The 2008 report and .pdf versions of the reports of previous seven years are available at www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/China_military_report_08pdf. Other official sources include the Department of Defence, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, February 6, 2006, www.defenselink.qdr/report/Report2006203.pdf
4. 'Anti-access' is a US coined term, first introduced in the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review, and is now commonly used to characterise attempts to militarily defeat both US Air Force based within striking range of the Taiwan Straits and approaching US Navy Aircraft Carrier Strike Groups sailing to the defense of Taiwan. See, for example, Ronald O'Rourke, "Chinese Naval Modernisation: Implications for US Navy Capabilities – Background and Issues for Congress," *CRS Report for Congress*, Order Code RL33153, October 18, 2007. p. 1. According to the PLA's *Science of Military Strategy* the Chinese characterisation for what the US terms anti-access is "offshore defence" where both the PLA Navy and Air Force play central roles. The PLA Navy is charged with developing the "strategy of offshore defence" while the PLA Air Force is charged with the "strategy

of offensive air defence." See also Michael McDevitt, "The Strategic and Operational Context Driving PLA Navy Building," in Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell, eds., *Right Sizing the Peoples Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military*, p. 481-522, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, August 2007.

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9. Department of Defence, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, February 6, 2006, www.defnselink.qdr/report/Report2006203.pdf; The latest and most comprehensive is the 2008 Annual Report to Congress, "Military Power of the People's Republic of China." At the press conference announcing the roll-out of this report on March 3, 2008 DASD David Sidney, the official who is still responsible for the preparation of the report, took pains to point out that while Department of Defence authored the report it reflected the judgment of the collective view of the administration; www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transscript.aspx?transcriptid=4165
10. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, Asia Society Speech, New York, February 13, 2009. www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/02/117333.htm and Secretary Clinton remarks in Beijing, February 21, 2009, www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/02/119432.htm
11. *Quadrennial Defense Review*, photo caption, p. 37 and 47.
12. Victor Cha, "US-Korea Relations: What's the Beef About?" *Comparative Connections: A Quarterly E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations*, Pacific Forum CSIS, Vol. 10, No. 2, July 2008, www.csis.org/pacofr/ccejopurnal.html, p. 47 and Richard Lawless, "The US-RoK Relationship." Prepared statement before the House Committee on International Relations," September 27, 2006. In the author's possession.
13. For the over flight of the US Navy ships off Japan see, AFP.google.com/article/ALcqCqcmYUG of February 18, 2008. For the intercept of the Bears off Alaska see CNN.com/US/2008/US/03/26/US-Russian-planes, March 26, 2008.
14. Kenichi Ito, "What Does Russia's Action Mean to Us*?" AJISS Commentary No. 43*, The Association of the Japan Institutes of Strategic Studies, http://www2.jiia.or.jp/en_commentary/200809/09-1.html
15. Between 1905 and 1932 US policy objectives to 'bandwagon' with Japan were followed by trying to constrain, or in today's terminology, shape Japanese behaviour through the combination of naval arms limitations agreements and multilateral security guarantees at the Washington Conference of 1920-21. As it turned out Japan refused to be 'shaped' and

belated US attempts to arrest Japanese expansion through economic sanctions and the posturing of the main US fleet 'forward' in Pearl Harbor as a deterrent also failed to alter Japanese behaviour. If there is lesson for today from the last century it would seem to be "do not fall behind in a military capability competition with a rising Asian power".