



Does China pose an immediate threat to U.S. strategic interests and, if so, will the envisioned Asian pivot address such concerns?

STRATEGIKA

CONFLICTS OF THE PAST AS LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT

From the Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict at the Hoover Institution

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Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.

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February 2014 | Issue 11



THE HOOVER INSTITUTION
Stanford University

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The Cycles—or Stages—of Chinese History

By Edward N. Luttwak

The logic of strategy and all that comes from it, including the idea of the “balance of power,” for example, is inherently universal, transcendental, and timeless, but each clan, tribe, nation, and state has its own peculiar political constructs—that is why seemingly homogeneous systems, for example parliamentary democracy, function in ways so radically different from country to country.

Equally, the elemental sense of the centrality of any polity takes very different forms, ranging from the quiet certitudes of the Kingdom of Denmark to that well-known Chinese construct, the *Tianxia* (whose logographs 天下 have been much seen in the Japanese press of late, their Kanji versions being identical). Literally “under heaven,” short for “all under heaven” or more meaningfully, “the rule of all humans,” it defines an ideal national and international system of ever-expanding concentric circles centered on a globally benevolent emperor, now Xi Jinping or more correctly perhaps, the seven-headed standing committee of the Politburo.

The innermost circle of the *Tianxia* is formed by the rest of the Politburo and top Beijing officialdom, while its outermost circle comprises the Solomon Islands along with the twenty or so other utterly benighted “outer barbarian” countries that still do not recognize Beijing, preferring Taipei. In between, all other Chinese from officials and tycoons to ordinary subjects and overseas Chinese fit in their own circles, further and further from the imperial core as do foreign states both large and small, both near and far, both already respectful (too few) and those still arrogantly vainglorious. It is the long-range task of China’s external policy to bring each and every state into a proper relationship with the emperor—that is, a tributary relationship, in which they deliver goods and services if only as tokens of fealty, in exchange for security and

prosperity, but even more for the privilege of proximity to the globally benevolent emperor.¹ All this is of course nothing more than an exceptionally elaborate rendition of universal ambitions that are merely grander for the greater—the Byzantine ranking of foreign potentates by their proximity to the emperor was only slightly less elaborate.

Nor is there anything peculiarly Chinese about the desire to bring other states into a tributary relationship—often better than a full incorporation, which may be unwanted for any number of reasons, and obviously superior to an alliance however close and secure but between equals, whereby there must be reciprocity, a quid for every quo, usually costly or irksome in some way. Hence from time immemorial, stronger clans, tribes, potentates, and entire nations have done their best to impose tributary relations on weaker clans, tribes, potentates and nations, obtaining goods and services for their forbearance and perhaps protection, or at least tokens of respectful subordination. Chinese emperors wanted no more than that, and unlike most recipients, not infrequently gave gifts more valuable than the tribute they received (as did many Byzantine emperors, by the way).

What is peculiar to China's political culture, and of very great contemporary relevance is the centrality within it of a very specific doctrine on how to bring powerful foreigners—indeed foreigners initially more powerful than the empire—into a tributary relationship. Specialists concur that this doctrine emerged from the very protracted (3rd century BCE to 1st century CE) but ultimately successful struggle with the Xiongnú (匈奴) horse-nomad state,² just possibly remote ancestors of Attila's Huns, but definitely the inventors of the Steppe State political

1 It was thus at Mao's lying in state, which I attended: diplomats accredited to Beijing were brought in to view the body in clusters, each forming a circle of the Tianxia—the innermost and the first to join us, most privileged guests, were the ambassadors of Romania, the Khmer Rouge, North Vietnam (soon to be demoted), and North Korea, with the Russian only coming in at the very end, in the outermost circle at that time.

2 Described in a military report in Book 88 of the *Hòu hànshu* (Book of the Later Han) attributed to Fan Ye (John E. Hill, tr.) http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/hhshu/hou_han_shu.html.



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system that would be replicated by all their successors, and more adapted than replaced even by the Mongols.³

Formidable mounted archers and capable of sustained campaigning (a primary objective of the Steppe State), the Xiongnú ravaged and savaged and extorted tribute from the perpetually less martial, and certainly cavalry-poor Han until the latter finally felt able to resist again. Even then, 147 years of intermittent warfare ensued until Huhanye (呼韓邪), the

paramount *Chanyu* (Qagan, Khan) of the Xiongnú, personally and formally submitted to the emperor Han Xuandi in 51 BCE, undertaking to pay homage, to leave a son at court as a hostage, and to deliver tribute, as befitted a vassal. That was a very great downfall from the familial status of earlier *Chanyus* of the epoch of Xiongnú predominance, who were themselves recognized as emperors, whose sons and heirs could have imperial daughters in marriage, and who from 200 BCE had received tribute from the Han, instead of the other way around.

It is this successful transformation of a once superior power first into an equal (signified by imperial marriages) and then into a subservient client-state that seems to have left an indelible residue in China's tradition of statecraft. It was achieved with a specific "barbarian-handling" tool box first described by its early practitioner, the scholar and imperial advisor Lou Jing (婁敬) 199 BCE.⁴ His method was first applied when the Xiongnú were still very strong and the Han were not only tactically inferior (their chariots were totally obsolete for fighting mounted archers) but also beset by political divisions, so much so that a 198 BCE treaty required the payment of an annual tribute in kind (silk, grain, etc.), and the formal attestation of equality for the *Chanyu* embodied in a marriage alliance, formalized by imperial letters that make the equality fully explicit.

³ See Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 206 ff.

⁴ In the *Shiji* (史记), the *Records of the Grand Historian* (or *Grand Scribe*) of Sima Qian, 司馬遷, Vol. 99, Cols. 2144 and 2179. Increasingly available in English translations.

The first barbarian-handling tool is normally translated as “corruption” in English translations, but perhaps “addiction,” or more fully “induced economic dependence” are more accurate: the originally self-sufficient Xiongnú were to be made economically dependent on Han-produced goods, starting with silk and woolen cloths instead of their own rude furs and felt. At first supplied free as unrequited tribute, these goods could still be supplied later on when the Han were stronger, but only in exchange for services rendered.

The second tool of barbarian handling, is normally translated as “indoctrination”: the Xiongnú were to be persuaded to accept the authoritarian Confucian value system and the collectivistic behavioral norms of the Han, as opposed to the steppe value system, based on voluntary allegiance to a heroic (and successful in looting) fighting and migration leader. One immediate benefit was that once the *Chanyu*’s son and heir married an imperial daughter, he would be *ethically* subordinated to the emperor as his father-in-law—remaining so when he became *Chanyu* in turn.

The much larger, longer-term benefit of the second tool was to undermine the entire political culture of the Xiongnú, and make them psychologically well as economically dependent on the imperial radiance, which was willingly extended in brotherly fashion when the Han were weak, and then contemptuously withdrawn when the Xiongnú were reduced to vassalage. What happened between the Han and the Xiongnú from the equal treaty of 198 BCE to the vassalage treaty of 51 BCE, remained thereafter, and still remains today the most hopeful precedent for Han dealings with powerful and violent states—evidently the assigned role of the United States in the present Beijing world-view.

The method forms a logical sequence:

Stage One: start by conceding all that must be conceded to the superior power including tribute, in order to avoid damage and obtain whatever forbearance is offered. But this in itself entangles the ruling class of the still-superior power in webs of material dependence that reduce its independent vitality and strength.

Stage Two: offer equality in a privileged bipolarity that excludes all lesser powers, or “G-2” in current parlance. That neutralizes the still powerful Other party, and isolates the manipulated soon-to-be former equal from all its potential allies, preventing from balancing China with a coalition.

Stage Three: finally, when the formerly superior power has been weakened enough, withdraw all tokens of equality and impose subordination.

Until the Chinese government decided—very prematurely I believe—to awaken the world to its classically imperial territorial ambitions by demanding the cession of lands, reefs, rocks, and sea waters from India, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam (demands that disturb and damage the concurrent *Tianxia* narrative of an alternative and more harmonious state system, disseminated even within the confines of Stanford University⁵), it was making much progress towards Stage Two, the stage of equality preparatory to the final stage of subordination.

Of this progress—now interrupted, one may hope—one example suffices, though Zbigniew Brzezinski and Robert Zoellick among many others have expressed similar notions: at the end Dr. Henry Kissinger’s very widely read *On China*, after 526 pages of historical retrospectives and personal reminiscences, definite prescriptions are offered, summarized in the heading

⁵ Stanford University Tianxia Workshop: Culture, International Relations, and World History May 6-11, 2011. The workshop will gather together a small group of distinguished scholars to engage in sustained conversations on the theoretical implications and practical values of the traditional Chinese vision of world order, or *tianxia* (all under heaven). Varied discourses indebted to *tianxia* have resurfaced in modern China in quest of moral and cultural ways of relating to and articulating an international society. **We believe that the Chinese vision may prove productive in exploring possibilities of world culture and literature in the tension-ridden yet interconnected world.** [author’s emphasis] http://www.stanford.edu/dept/asianlang/cgi-bin/about/tianxia_workshop.php

"Toward a Pacific Community," i.e. a harmonious US-Chinese "G-2" that logically proceed from his relentlessly benign assessment of Chinese intentions. Dr. Kissinger's G-2 is identical to that relationship very persistently advocated by Chinese officials high and low, and by senior advisors such as Zhen Bijian (郑必坚) of "Peaceful Rise" fame.

That Stage Two could be achieved only by persuading the still-powerful Other party to accept equality *and its limitations*, most notably the isolation of the soon-to-be former equal from all its potential allies, preventing it from balancing China with a coalition. Indeed, Dr. Kissinger calls for the creation of a Chinese-American "commonwealth": one "which would enable [sic] other major countries such as Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, India and Australia to participate in the construction of a system perceived as joint rather than polarized between 'Chinese' and 'American' blocs." But Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam, India, and Australia are hardly likely to share Dr. Kissinger's optimism. Deprived of American support in facing Chinese demands, forced to become the objects of a Chinese-American entente, today's actual and potential allies would have to make their own accommodations, eliminating the one and only potential long-term counterweight to China, the coalescence of all lesser powers menaced by its expansionism. As the man said, history need not be remembered but must still be lived.



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books have been published in twenty-two languages.

With History as a Guide, the U.S. Must Clarify Its Policy Towards China

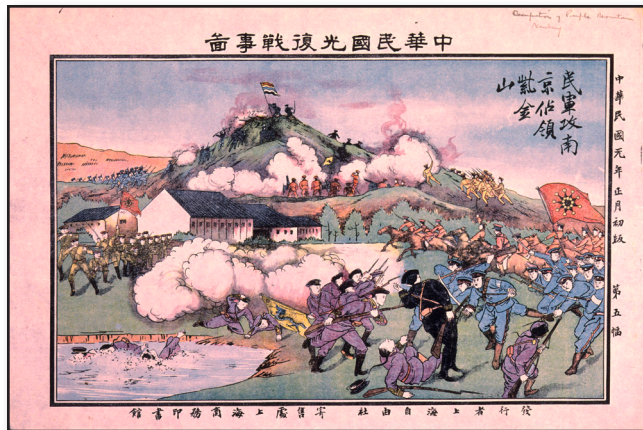
By Ian Morris

In January, I spent a week in Hong Kong as a guest of the regional government. I met with civil servants, business people, and members of think tanks and the Legislative Council, and saw enough PowerPoint slides to last me a lifetime. I heard so many opinions on Beijing's "one country, two systems" strategy that I lost track of them. I saw protests for and against every major government policy. But there was no sign of anxiety that China and the United States might be on a collision course.

Should there have been?

There are many reasons to say no. China's "peaceful development" (as the government now calls it, after deciding that "peaceful rising" sounded too threatening) since the 1980s has mostly dovetailed with American strategic interests. On the whole, China is an enthusiastic free trader, American markets welcome cheap Chinese goods and capital, and China is a responsible partner in regional security issues.

But there are also reasons to say yes. By 2008, China's softly-softly approach had been so successful that some neighbors felt—particularly after the financial crisis—that instead of staying on the Chinese bandwagon, they needed to form a counterbalance against it. With cooperation now working less well, China took a harder line.



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Against this background, strategists were tempted to draw what Edward Luttwak has criticized as “the inevitable analogy” between China and late 19th-century Germany. Back then, Britain was a globocop, guaranteeing free trade and financing industrial revolutions that would make other countries rich enough to buy

British goods. But Britain succeeded too well; by 1900 Germany had become rich enough to be a rival, talking of forming a European Customs Union and shutting Britain out of it. Britain’s economic success brought on strategic disaster.

The inevitable analogy implies that China is rerunning this scenario. By “Finlandizing” the West Pacific and South China Sea, it suggests, China is leaving the region’s governments unable to ignore Beijing’s lead—even if that includes shutting the U.S. out of the world’s most important markets.

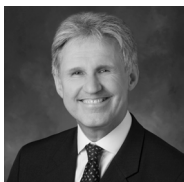
That would threaten vital U.S. interests, but is it really what China is doing? Rather than comparing China with Germany a century ago, the other rising economic giant of the late 19th century—America itself—might be a better analogy. Today, the American globocop enjoys a huge military lead over China, just as the British globocop enjoyed a huge lead over the United States around 1900—but not over Germany. The U.S. around 1900 had enough battleships to keep British fleets out of American waters, just as China today probably has enough submarines, mines, and missiles to keep American ships out of its littoral; but 19th-century America, like 21st-century China, was in no position to project power in long-range campaigns of conquest. Germany, of course, was all too able to do this.

Late 19th-century America seems to be a better analogy with China than late 19th-century Germany, and U.S. strategy should aim to nudge China toward recognizing this. Xi Jinping needs to take Teddy Roosevelt as his guide, not Kaiser Wilhelm, speaking softly while carrying a big stick rather than noisily demanding a place in the sun. The big lesson of 1914, in fact, may be that globocops must send clear signals. After 1890, Germany consistently misjudged British intentions, and marched to war in 1914 still half-expecting that Britain would not honor its treaty obligations to Belgium.

If anything, American signals today are even more mixed than Edwardian Britain's. I saw this in person in mid-2011, when I was invited to a meeting in Canberra to discuss the difficult choice Australia faced between its main strategic partner (America) and its main economic partner (China). The conversations were tense; every option seemed worse than the last, and all seemed to hinge on what America might do. But just a few months later, Barack Obama announced the pivot toward Asia. "Let there be no doubt," he told the Australian Parliament. "In the Asia-Pacific of the 21st century, the United States of America is all in ... We will keep our commitments." West Pacific governments stiffened their spines; despite Chinese protestations, a flurry of collective security agreements followed.

But then it stopped, with Australia again leading the way. A new Defence White Paper in May 2013 dropped the tough talk and cut military spending back. A strategic pivot is only as valuable as the intentions behind it, and America's partners in the West Pacific just don't know if the United States will be there for them. "A distant water can't put out a nearby fire," says a proverb that Vietnamese officials like to quote to Americans. China's deputy chief of staff, however, has put the matter more bluntly: "U.S. power is on the decline, and leading the Asia-Pacific is beyond its grasp."

The people I met in Hong Kong were probably right not to worry about conflict in the West Pacific—yet. But in the absence of a more credible American commitment to defend its allies and open markets, that will change.



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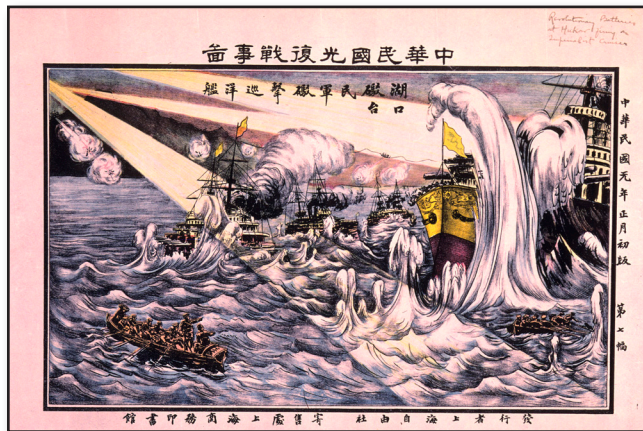
China, Time and Rebalancing

By Admiral Gary Roughead

In the mid-1990s I had the good fortune of being present at a conversation with a very senior leader of the Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) when the question was posed as to when China wished to have an aircraft carrier in its Navy. The very elderly leader responded, without hesitation, that it was an ambition in the "short term." When asked what he meant by the short term, he thought a moment and replied, "2050 would be good." Why this anecdote? First, it drove home to me the much longer strategic outlook and temporal perspective in China, and in Asia more generally; and second, for the purpose of this essay, it reminds that challenges to strategic interests, while not seemingly immediate, are always in play—none more so than in Asia today.

We are captured by global events of the day, and they are not to be ignored, but our overriding strategic interest is in Asia. Alliances of great consequence are there, nuclear postures are changing there, the preponderance of global defense expenditures are there, current points of friction and conflict are there, increasing environmental stresses with global consequence are there; and, above all, our current and future prosperity are tied to the growing economies there. In all of these, China looms large regionally and, increasingly, globally. While there are points of noteworthy cooperation, we are and will continue competing with China. That is just the way it is between established and rising powers.

Our approach and presence in the Asia-Pacific region enabled the growth and prosperity there. We have, with our allies and like-minded partners, created a security environment that has served the region well. Our approach has been, and must continue to be, that no one country dominates Asia. That objective, our role, and our strategic interests are being challenged by China. It is apparent in the growth in capability and capacity of the PLA (especially naval and air forces) and in the way China is defining (or redefining) maritime and air boundaries. Strategic



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space is being re-shaped spatially by military capabilities and behaviorally by dubious maritime and airspace claims. The latter is particularly critical and points to a fundamental difference in our strategic competition with China.

The maritime domain is key in Asia. The vast preponderance of the flow of resources and trade take place on the sea. Critical straits in the Western Pacific define those flows. Vital fish stocks and potential energy sources are in Asian waters. Naval power is on the rise and it is not confined to China, but it is Chinese naval and air power that will compete with the U.S. There is immediacy in that competition and the strategic re-shaping that is taking place. The fundamental question is, will there be a transfer of sea power in the Pacific? It is not just about what China is doing, but more about what are we doing to maintain a dominant position at sea. The last transfer of sea power occurred between the United States and Great Britain. As with China today, the challenge was protracted, but in the case of the U.S. and Britain it was between countries of similar political values and commercial philosophies, and it was essentially seamless. Should we cede our maritime advantage in the Pacific it is likely to not be the same. Not only because of different approaches to freedom of navigation and maritime claims, but should a shift occur it is sure to shake our important relationships in the region.

Our rebalancing approach is right and can address our strategic concerns, but it must be substantive. It cannot only be pronouncements, sound bites, tweets, and what sounds good on the talk shows. It is about thoughtful concepts, close cooperation with and among our allies, and appropriate and efficient acquisition of relevant military, especially placing priority on naval and air capability and capacity. It must encompass economic and trade policy that values our

allies and key partners in the region, and it is about credible and predictable presence in the region. It is also about engaging and cooperating with China when our interests align. All require awareness, attention to detail, hard decisions with respect to budget priorities and intellectual honesty when, as Churchill advised on strategy, “occasionally looking at the results.”

The time is now to get serious about our rebalancing strategy and what is really required to deliver on that strategy. There is a saying in the Navy that time and tide wait for no one. Such is the case in Asia. By the way, the PLA Navy’s first aircraft carrier was at sea in 2013—37 years ahead of plan.



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Pivot?

By Angelo M. Codevilla

A successful “pivot” away from the Middle East would require understanding the reasons for failure there, and the mending of one’s ways.

U.S. foreign policy’s failure in the Middle East has been a classic case of insolvency—commitments in excess of the means devoted to fulfilling them. There never was enough U.S. power to cajole Egypt into any of the images that U.S. officials imagined, or to do so in Syria, or to prevent Iran from going nuclear, never mind to “solve” the Muslim world’s resolve to destroy Israel.

A “pivot” to the Pacific Rim would have to be serious about the problems to be confronted there, what U.S. interests require, and what force it would take to secure them. But team Obama defined its “pivot” simply as “more frequent personal trips to the region by ranking U.S. officials, more robust relationships with friends and allies, more engagement in Asian regional organizations, and more attention to regional issues.”

Meanwhile our army and navy continue to shrink, our capacity to defend against any but token ballistic missile threats is non-existent, and urgent calls from Japan, the Philippines, never mind Taiwan, for support against increasing Chinese pressure continue to be answered by wishful statements about how, surely, China knows that it must behave responsibly.

For America to be taken seriously by Asians who would like nothing better than to do so, U.S. officials would have to be clear about what limits they are willing to place on China’s reach, as well as about the means by which we mean to enforce those limits.

Seriousness means being able to defend Japan against all kinds of missiles, including Chinese ones. By technical necessity, such devices would defend America as well. Also, we would have to come to terms with the fact that a U.S. Navy of some 280 ships is little more than half the size of what is needed to keep Japan from going nuclear.

Reassuring the peoples of the Pacific Rim will also require the U.S. to defend Taiwan because, if China can bend Taiwan to its will, others will feel compelled to follow. But defending Taiwan requires more than a missile defense and a navy, because Taiwan lies well within the optimal range of China's strategy of controlling the sea from the land. China's weapons are optimized to sink carriers, while its aircraft would have the advantage over American ones fighting at extreme ranges from Guam.

Therefore any serious attempt to set limits to China's expansion in the southern Pacific—the first aim of which is Taiwan—would have to be based on Taiwan.

That, like the rest, would be provocative. But the combination of ends and means would be solvent. By contrast, the Obamians' "pivot" resembles the last several administrations' policies in the Middle East: grandiose objectives without visible means of support.

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The Perils of the Pivot

By Thomas Donnelly

Does a pivot from an underperforming Europe and chaotic Mediterranean to the Pacific make sense at this time? No—a global power that must “pivot” is no longer a global power. Even in World War II, the United States found itself forced to fight great-power wars simultaneously in the European and Pacific theaters. If the United States intends to preserve the current international order—and it’s uncertain that we do—it must retain the military capability to preserve a favorable balance of power in both the Pacific and the Mediterranean, or, perhaps more precisely, the Muslim world. This is all the more true in that, as it has matured, the current security order is highly globalized. In particular, the strong and rising nations of East Asia rely heavily on the energy resources of the Middle East, their secure supply and free flow, for their advanced economies.

Since the end of the Cold War, maintaining a decent balance of power and constraining the voracious appetites for violence prevalent in the central and western Muslim world—violence that has even periodically infected the otherwise quiet and democratically oriented Muslims of Southeast Asia—has been a central task for U.S. military forces. The global security “good” that results is of paramount benefit to our allies and to the developing world, goes a long way toward explaining why, even at a time of relative decline, the United States retains its geopolitical clout. Conversely, if now the rest of the world becomes convinced that America has renounced that role, there will be global consequences. Trying to “lead from behind” is the result of a retreat.

So the “Pacific Pivot” is in fact a turning away from the demands of primacy, and no amount of increased presence there can “rebalance” a global system that has become fundamentally unbalanced. Unlike the pivot away from Europe—where, thanks to a century of U.S. and allied effort, a durable peace is solidly in place—the pivot away from the Middle East is an opportunity

for increased geopolitical competition, one that is already attracting the attention of outside powers, and conflict. The U.S. withdrawal is making the Middle East a power vacuum, something human nature abhors.

There is indeed, a Pacific pivot underway, one that is also a de facto withdrawal. There is (and has been for some time) a slight shift in the basing of U.S. forces from the Atlantic to the Pacific, but the value of that is more than undercut by the overall reduction in forces and the rebasing of forward-stationed forces in the western Pacific. The Marines moving to Australia are, essentially, being moved from Okinawa, and the overall U.S. posture in Japan and Korea has been and will no doubt continue to be reduced. In the southwest Pacific, Guam is becoming a dangerously exposed outpost that has limited strategic or logistics value; it's a juicy target with limited "throughput" capacity. Our posture in the South China Sea—where the absence of U.S. patrols is creating opportunities for the Chinese to play "bumper boats" with impunity—was crippled by the loss of the Philippines and the failure to renegotiate substitute arrangements.

The sum total of the global re-posturing of the U.S. military is that, in ways not seen since the end of World War II, the force is largely based in the continental United States. The current "pivots" all but complete the retreat.

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The Rhetoric of the Pivot Signals the Diminution of America's Global Influence

By Josef Joffe

To the question: "Does a pivot from an underperforming Europe and chaotic Mediterranean to the Pacific make sense at this time?" Thomas Donnelly replies: "No—a global power that must pivot is no longer a global power." "No" would be correct, if we use as benchmark that old "two-and-a-half wars" strategy by which the U.S. faced a single superpower competitor challenging Washington all over the world. Correct, too, if we measure the "pivot" against the classic postwar model: a grand strategy based on forces in situ—ready to deter and to pounce.

But neither benchmark still holds. There is not now, nor will there be for quite a while, a power that can replicate the old Soviet threat. Above all, Europe is no longer the main theater of the global rivalry. The Warsaw Pact is no more, and neither are the million men it fielded east of the Elbe River. So, it makes sense to draw down from 300,000 U.S. troops at the peak of the Cold War to about 30,000 today.

It makes sense to shift to the Pacific, the current arena of the great-power competition with China. This is where, like the Soviet Union of yore, China is probing the U.S. periphery: challenging and wooing American allies, building an area-denial capability, and deploying projection forces reaching halfway across the Pacific.

By countering these moves, the U.S. is acting precisely as a global power—shifting to where the new threats are (though there may actually be more shifting *within* the theater than inserting new assets).

Yet the more significant shift pertains to grand strategy. The traditional American way relied on forward-based forces—on entanglement that spelled certain commitment. It was “bonding,” rather than “balancing.” Obama is returning to an even older tradition, which is over-the-horizon or offshore balancing. This echoes the British model of the 18th and 19th century: fleets, bases, and airborne platforms. Such a strategy does not necessarily betray America’s abdication as a global power; after all, Britain filled that role quite nicely in centuries past.

The problem is not in the geographical shifting, but in the rhetoric and behavior of the last 6 years. These indicate retraction as well as unwillingness to use force, except in microscopic doses (i.e., drones, special ops). It is, not to put too fine a point on it, the apparent transformation of the One and Only into an XXL medium power, like a very large France or Britain. The guiding quest is for “nation-building at home.” Compared to these trends, “pivoting” and “rebalancing” are at best the icing. It is the shrinking cake—Obama’s words and deeds—that matters.

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Have We Forgotten the Middle East?

By Williamson Murray

One of the bizarre aspects of the arguments of those urging a pivot of U.S. military capabilities from Europe and the Mediterranean to the Pacific is their failure to mention the Middle East, which is already threatening to dissolve into a massive civil war among the haves and have nots, the Sunnis and the Shi'a, and assorted other malcontents. It appears to rest on the comfortable assumption that the United States will never again have to commit ground forces in a serious conflict as well as the strange belief that since the United States will soon become energy independent—actually it will be at least a decade or more, if the Obama regime were actually to support the idea—then it follows that America need not consider the commitment of significant forces to that nasty area known as the Middle East. In fact, in Washington, a city where the concept of a grand strategy has disappeared along with any knowledge of history, the supposed strategy of a pivot to Asia represents little more than a procurement raid, encouraged by an administration eager to slash and burn the defense budget without any serious thought or analysis. In fact, the real problem is that the international environment is more uncertain at present than at any time since the very first years of the twentieth century. To place its strategic emphasis largely on the Pacific represents the most careless of strategic bets, but then as the wag once said: “God takes care of drunks, Irishmen, and the United States of America.”

WILLIAMSON MURRAY serves as a Minerva Fellow at the Naval War College. He graduated from Yale University in 1963 with honors in history. He then served five years as an officer in the US Air Force, including a tour in Southeast Asia with the 314th Tactical Airlift Wing (C-130s). He returned to Yale University, where he received his PhD in military-diplomatic history under advisers Hans Gatzke and Donald Kagan. He taught two years in the Yale history department before moving on to Ohio State University in fall 1977 as a military and diplomatic historian; in 1987 he received the Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award. He retired from Ohio State in 1995 as a professor emeritus of history.

Pivot? What pivot?

By Ralph Peters

The Obama administration's masturbatory announcement of a strategic military pivot from Europe (and, by implication, the Middle East) to the Pacific region combined historical illiteracy, strategic naivety, and political cynicism. Within the Pentagon, the "pivot" is simply part of the ploy for budget dollars (espoused by the Navy and Air Force). Within the Obama White House it was viewed as a chance to burnish the president's strategic credentials. In reality, the pivot is much ado about nothing.

In 1492, Columbus discovered the Americas. In 2012, Obama apparently discovered the Pacific. But the notion that the United States has ignored the Pacific region simply reveals the astonishing lack of historical perspective in an administration that sees the past as a blank page upon which anything convenient might be written.

The United States has been the key Pacific power since the final years of the Nineteenth Century and the Spanish-American War. Even then, we already had been an important military presence in the extreme western Pacific for a half-century, since Commodore Perry's "opening" of Japan in the 1850s. Prior even to that, American gunboats had been witness to the European involvement in China as we showed the flag to safeguard our China trade. Far from neglectful, we have been attentive for two centuries.

Indeed, throughout most of the twentieth century our military involvement in the Pacific was more extensive and consistent than our engagement in Europe. From the occupation of the

Philippines and other inherited territories, through the deployment of Army regiments on the Chinese mainland and Navy gunboats on Chinese rivers (plus a Siberian interlude), we were anything but absent. Between 1941 and 1945, historians with arcane interests may recall a minor conflict with Japan. Then came the Korean War and an enduring U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula. We fought in Vietnam, with incursions into Cambodia and operations in Laos, and we long based U.S. forces in Thailand. We returned the key naval base at Subic Bay to Manila at the Philippines' request (a demand Manila quietly rues, given China's saber-rattling today), but we maintain key bases in Japan, on Guam, in Hawaii—our enduring Pacific outpost—and elsewhere in the region. We have enduring alliances with English-speaking Pacific powers, sealed in the blood of wartime alliances. And, on the civilian side, American entrepreneurs have been making fortunes out of China for two centuries.

Obama's Pacific pivot? A few hundred Marines sent to Australia.

When have we been absent from the Pacific? By contrast, the last century saw U.S. forces stationed only on European (initially, only British) soil from 1942—and our European presence had already dwindled by three-quarters before the Obama presidency.

All the fuss ignores two obvious points. First, the United States is and must remain both a Pacific and Atlantic power, with strategic power projection beyond those great buffer oceans. Second, the current administration views everything as politics, hence the absurdity of trumpeting a course of action—the pivot—that discourages old allies in Europe, while antagonizing potential enemies in Asia. Were we strategically serious about a pivot toward East Asia, we would have shut our governmental mouth and just done it, quietly coordinating with allies and letting prospective enemies draw their own conclusions.

Combining a Pentagon fight for dollars with the most-strategically amateurish presidential administration in our history, the Pacific Pivot initiative made nonsense of deadly serious concerns.

RALPH PETERS is the author of twenty-nine books, including works on strategy and military affairs, as well as best-selling, prize-winning novels. He has published more than a thousand essays, articles, and columns. As a US Army enlisted man and officer, he served in infantry and military Intelligence units before becoming a foreign area officer and global scout. After retiring in 1998, he covered wars and trouble spots in the Middle East and Africa. He now concentrates on writing books but remains Fox News's strategic analyst. His latest novel, *Hell or Richmond*, a gritty portrayal of Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign, follows his recent *New York Times* best seller, *Cain at Gettysburg*, for which he received the 2013 Boyd Award for Literary Excellence in Military Fiction from the American Library Association.

The Faces of Janus

By Barry Strauss

If the United States were to stop worrying about Europe and the Mediterranean and “pivot” to the Pacific, it would be less a pirouette than a plunge. Countries with worldwide interests don’t have the luxury of withdrawing from anemic or troublesome areas unless those areas really don’t matter. Neither Europe nor the Mediterranean fits that criterion.

Declarations of withdrawal are unlikely to work out unless countries are ready to suffer the consequences. When, for example, King Philip V “pivoted” away from the support he promised Hannibal for his war against Rome, he only guaranteed that the Romans would eventually come after him—as they did, when they destroyed his power at the Battle of Cynoscephalae in 197 B.C. When in 1950 the U.S. stated its lack of interest in the Korean Peninsula, the result was the Korean War.

To be sure, some pivots have worked out. The British “pivot” from the rebellious Thirteen Colonies after the Battle of Yorktown in 1781 freed Britain to build a new empire in Canada, India, and the Antipodes. If the United States had “pivoted” away from Vietnam in the early 1960s instead of making a commitment to war there, it might have been spared an ordeal. There would have been a cost, of course, but it might have been lower than the one Americans paid.

For all the changes in the world, when Europe sneezes the U.S. will still catch cold. The Mediterranean may be a pleasure basin but it is too close to the oil regions of the Middle East for the U.S. to turn its back on.

BARRY STRAUSS (Cornell University) is a military historian with a focus on ancient Greece and Rome. His *Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter That Saved Greece—and Western Civilization* was named one of the best books of 2004 by the *Washington Post*. His books have been translated into nine languages. His latest book, *Masters of Command: Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar and the Genius of Leadership* (Simon & Schuster, May 2012), was named one of the best books of 2012 by *Bloomberg*. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the German Academic Exchange Service, the Korea Foundation, and the American Academy in Rome. In recognition of his scholarship, he was named an honorary citizen of Salamis, Greece.

The “Pivot” Invites the Perception of Retreat

By Bruce S. Thornton

Several of our Strategika commentators correctly make the point that as the global enforcer of order, the United States cannot afford to shift attention and resources from one region of the world to another, but must maintain a stabilizing and deterrent presence pretty much everywhere. To speak of a “pivot” toward the Far East suggests something different: that we have decided Europe and the Mediterranean do not need as much of our foreign policy attention, which in turn creates the perception of retreat from those regions. And our rivals may see such withdrawal as creating a vacuum they are all too eager to fill.

Recent events in Ukraine, on top of the on-going crisis in Syria and the Iranian push for nuclear weapons, confirm that we still have national interests in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, and that perceptions of our weakness can provoke aggression. Nor are things helped by the Secretary of Defense’s recent announcement of military cuts that will compromise our global deterrence capabilities. Saying we will no longer be capable of waging two major wars simultaneously, but fighting only one while conducting a holding action in the other, can also be interpreted as a pullback from our global responsibilities. We may think these sorts of subjective or even irrational perceptions belong to our benighted past and are silly for us rational moderns—to paraphrase our Secretary of State, a 19th-century mindset in a 21st-century world—but our enemies and rivals still make foreign policy calculations based on what they think our behavior means. And even if such calculations are incorrect, they still can motivate action, as when Hitler declared war on the United States in part because of his erroneous perceptions of us as mongrel cowboys, based on stale anti-American clichés and his childhood reading of Karl May novels.

Vergil said, “Possunt quia videntur posse”—“They have power because they seem to have power.” It works the other way too. Seeming powerless can make one powerless.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Does China pose an immediate threat to U.S. strategic interests and, if so, will the envisioned Asian pivot address such concerns?

1. Does China mostly aim to negate U.S. forward positioning off its coasts or to acquire a blue-water navy and a global military presence?
2. Would a stronger American military alliance with frontline Asian powers check or only goad Chinese aggression? If the former, which nation/s should be our focus (e.g., Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan)?
3. Given current trajectories how soon will the Chinese and American militaries reach rough parity?

STRATEGIKA

CONFLICTS OF THE PAST AS LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT

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