

## **The U.S. “Pivot” to Asia & the Pacific**

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I'll begin with a slide that shows a number of the parallels between what we face now in East Asia and the Pacific and the era that preceded War I, which might better be called the European Great Power War.

We are again in a period of rising and declining great powers, arms races with new technologies, resurgent nationalism, territorial disputes, resource competition, complex alliance arrangements, economic integration & competition, and wild card actors, especially the Abe government in Japan and the North Korean government

The situation in East Asia needs to be understood in these terms.

As you know, President Obama has just completed a four nation tour to show U.S. will and its resolve to implement the so-called Pivot to Asia and the Pacific, otherwise known as the “rebalancing” of U.S. foreign and military policies.

In President Obama's meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Abe, he said that the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands fall within the U.S.-Japan alliance, and that the U.S. would back Japan if it came to war between Japan and China over these uninhabited rocks.

Obama also encouraged Japan's right wing Prime Minister to proceed with revising the reinterpretation of Japan's constitution, which is to say the evisceration of Article nine which is the foundation of Japan's ostensible post-war pacifism. Obama also reaffirmed U.S. insistence that a major new U.S. air base be built in Okinawa, where 75% of the more than 100 U.S. military bases and installations in Japan are concentrated, despite the overwhelming opposition of the Okinawan people.

The two leaders also consulted on the development of new U.S.-Japanese defense guidelines, which is to say their military planning. And, they agreed that Japan would restart

many of its nuclear power plants, despite the Fukushima catastrophe. Japan is to join with the U.S. in promoting the export of nuclear power plants as part of their nuclear alliance.

People should appreciate that deep historical wounds persist between the Japan and Korea, in large measure because the Japanese government has yet to fully accept its responsibility for the 35 years of really brutal colonization and occupation of Korea. Until recently, Prime Minister Abe even threatened to revisit Japan's official apology for the sexual slavery practiced during what was Japan's Fifteen Year War in Asia and the Pacific, what we call the Pacific theater of World War II.

A few weeks ago in The Hague, President Obama brought Japan's and South Korea's presidents together after they had refused to meet with one another for more than a year. They didn't exactly have deep or warm conversations, but the brief event opened the way for their two militaries resume discussions about military collaborations, especially intelligence sharing focused on North Korea and China.

To underline the potential dangers of the current situation in East Asia, let me point to several recent developments. In March of last year, with B-2 and B-52 bombers, the U.S. flew simulated nuclear attacks against North Korea, actions that could have resulted in calamitous miscalculations by Kim Jung Un's government. Again, shortly after China declared a new Air Defense Identification Zone that overlaps Japan's ADIZ, the U.S. sent B-52 bombers unannounced through the zone. And, during President Obama's recent trip to Asia, he flew through the zone unannounced as a powerful signal to Beijing.

These are the Senkaku/Diaoyu uninhabited islands which could serve as the trigger for the end of humanity. In both real and symbolic terms they are the focus of Japanese and Chinese geopolitical and resource competition.

The US is not the only provocative actor in the region. China has claimed sovereignty over 80% of South China Sea, whose mineral-rich sea beds are thought to hold massive amounts of oil and natural gas. The South China Sea is also critically important for moving the Middle Eastern and Persian Gulf oil that is essential for China's economy for the economies of other East Asian Nations. To reinforce its claims, China has sent its warships as far as the

waters off Malaysia and it has occupied the Scarborough Shoal, long thought to be within the Philippines territorial waters.

Another way to understand current developments is to think about what was discussed when Chinese leader Xi Jinping met with the President of the European council, Herman Van Rampuy.

The 2010 U.S. National Intelligence Council, the ultimate U.S. intelligence arbiter described what his happening in its Global Trends 2025 report: “the transfer of global wealth and economic power now under way, roughly from West to East” is “without precedent in modern history” and is a primary factor in the decline of “United States relative strength – even in the military realm.” Deconstructing this, they are saying that there are parallels to 500 years ago when Europe conquered the Americas whose gold and silver financed European colonization of much of the world and the industrial revolution.

Joe Nye is an interesting figure. He served as the Deputy Secretary of Defense official under President Clinton, and has long been one of the primary authors of U.S. Asia-Pacific policy. For many years, with China in mind, Nye has been warning about dangers of rising & declining powers. Twice in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he explains the dominant powers (the United States and Britain) failed to integrate rising powers (Germany and Japan) into their system, resulting in catastrophic world wars. Nye has therefore pressed engagement, as well as containment, with China.

Just before Hillary Clinton promulgated the Pivot to Asia and the Pacific, in a *New York Times* article Nye outlined its rationale. He wrote: “Asia will return to its historic status, with more than half of the world’s population and half of the world’s economic output. America must be present there. Markets and economic power rest on political frameworks, and *American military power provides that framework.*” A bold statement that the U.S. military is the foundation of East Asia’s economic and political order.

Kurt Campbell, Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs during Obama’s first administration explained this differently. He announced that “It will be important for China to accept that the United States is going to plan an enduring, strong role in the Asia-Pacific region.

But the United States does want a stronger, deeper relationship with China, and we have made that undeniably clear.”

The U.S.-China relationship is best described as competitive/interdependence. The U.S. is trying to manage China’s rise, but there is the danger that miscalculations could trigger a catastrophic war.

The Pentagon is telling us that China’s military is increasingly potent. It has an aircraft carrier – albeit built in Ukraine and long used as a floating hotel - and a growing naval capacity. China is developing missiles designed to destroy U.S. aircraft carriers, and it is building its next generation of warplanes. Anyone who reads a newspaper knows that China is competing with the U.S. in cyber warfare capabilities, and there is an arms race in space as China deploys advanced satellite information & warfare technologies.

Robert Kaplan, who is anything but a liberal or pacifist, reports that China “is developing asymmetric and anti-access niche capabilities designed to deny the U.S. Navy easy entry into the East China Sea and other coastal waters. China is not remotely capable of directly challenging the U.S. militarily. The aim...is dissuasion...that the U.S. Navy in the future will think twice as [China’s military] expands, and three times about getting between the First Island Chain and the Chinese coast.”

To appreciate China’s perceptions and approach, try to project yourself into the mindsets of a people who suffered 150 years of humiliation, beginning invasions from their coasts by Britain, other European powers, the United States and Japan. As they restore what was long China’s historic role, the last thing they want is to be threatened by Japan or by any other power.

You also have Armitage and Nye, a Republican and a Democrat, who reflect the United States” consistently bipartisan approach to Asia and the Pacific. They drafted a report just before Prime Minister Abe came to power in which they addressed what had been a period of Japanese economic stagnation and drift in U.S.-Japanese relations. Their report included a direct challenge to Tokyo: Will the drift continue, or will Japan remain a first tier nation? When Abe came to US to meet with President Obama shortly after becoming Prime Minister, he gave a direct response, saying that Japan will indeed remain a “first tier nation,” using

Armitage's and Nye's exact formulation. To appreciate the import of this exchange, remember that since it came into being in 1952, the US – Japan military alliance has had pretty much the same role in Asia that NATO has had in Europe. With more than 100 U.S. military bases and installations across Japan, the Alliance has been, and remains, the foundation of U.S. regional domination. As former Prime Minister Koizumi described his nation, Japan is an “unsinkable aircraft carrier for the United States.”

Let me say a few words about Prime Minister Abe. There is a misapprehension that Japan is a pacifist state. It currently is the world's sixth biggest military spender, and it has a navy and air force thought to be more advanced than China's. Abe is about to reinterpret the constitution, and he has denied that what took place during Japan's Fifteen Year War, 1931 to 1945 was aggression. Just last week 150 members of Japan's parliament went to Yasakuni Shrine where the spirits of Japanese Class A war criminals are enshrined. The visit was a symbolic recommitment to Japanese militarism.

Abe is looking to increase Japanese military spending, and he denies the existence of territorial disputes with China and Korea. Until recently he threatened to revisit Japan's official apology for wartime sexual slavery. A new state secret's law, more repressive than that of any other ostensibly advanced democratic nations, has been adopted. And Abe has made unprecedented moves to control information. The military Shintoist world views of the people he has appointed to lead the NHK, Japan's equivalent of NPR and PBS combined, are reminiscent of those that prevailed in Japan in the 1930s and '40s.

Looking again to U.S. policies, the U.S. has committed to deploying 60% of its air and naval forces in Asia and the Pacific. As Michael Klare put it, “Obama is sending a clear message to Beijing, we are becoming less dependent on imported oil, so we enjoy ‘a stronger hand’ in international relations. You are becoming more reliant on imports, and are in the unfortunate position of having to rely on supply routes that are controlled by the US Navy.”

This is not unlike during the Cold War when the U.S. controlled the Middle East and Persian Gulf jugular veins of the global economy, the region's oil. The U.S. can now control the jugular vein of China's and other East Asian economies.

All of this has deep historic roots. In the 1850s William Seward, later U.S. secretary of state, argued that if the U.S. was to replace Britain as world's leading power, it needed first to control Asia. At the time the southern route – the coaling stations on Pacific islands like Hawaii, Guam and the Philippines – were occupied by European colonial powers, which explains Seward's Folly. The U.S. bought Alaska to gain the northern route to Asia.

It wasn't until the 1890s, when the U.S. had built the naval fleet capable of competing with Britain for naval supremacy and U.S. leaders were desperate to conquer a portion of the China market to keep U.S. factories operating during a great economic depression, that the Spanish-American War provided the occasion to conquer, annex and establish the geopolitical foundation for the U.S. overseas empire: Guam, the Philippines and Hawaii.

With the end of WWII, the Pacific Ocean became an American Lake. And, during the military occupation of Japan, about which most people in the U.S. know very little, the U.S. created a new Japanese government to share its geostrategic ambitions. Many of its leaders were people like Nobusuke Kishi, Prime Minister Abe's grandfather, who played major roles in Japan's wartime government. The U.S. nurtured Kishi, who it had initially charged as a Class A war criminal, helping him rise to become Prime Minister. It was Kishi in 1960, who in the face of massive street demonstrations and brawling Japanese parliamentarians undemocratically hammered through the extension of the U.S.- Japan military alliance. It had been secretly imposed in 1952 as the term and condition for ending the formal U.S. military occupation of Japan.

In the U.S. and international disarmament movements and the world at large, people tend to think last time nuclear weapons were used was the A-bombing of Nagasaki August 1945. Would that this were true. In fact, on more 30 occasions during international crises and wars, the U.S. – often in secret – has threatened and/or prepared to initiate nuclear attacks. During the Cold War most people thought the nuclear threat applied only to the U.S. and the Soviet Union. But, in Asia, such threats and preparations have been made at least ten times against North Korea, four times against Vietnam and four times against China.

In January 2011 Hillary Clinton announced the Pivot in a widely trumpeted article published in Foreign Policy magazine. She began the article saying "As the war in Iraq winds

down and America begins to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the United States stands at a pivot point....One of the most important tasks...over the next decade...will...be to lock in a substantially increased investment – diplomatic, economic, strategic and otherwise – in the Asia-Pacific region.”

This is the South China Sea, portions of which have other names, reflecting the competing claims of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia. The region that China claims falls within what Beijing calls the nine dotted or dash line, which you see here. Compounding the territorial competition, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the South China Sea is also an area of U.S vital interest because of its role in international shipping. This transformed the dispute into one between great powers, reducing the possibility of the nations most involved to negotiate a compromise that serves their common interests.

Here you see the inner island chain and the region contested by Japan and China. If you go to China you will certainly be exposed to a lot of anti-Japanese propaganda, some of it quite legitimate, but also designed to reinforce Chinese nationalism and thus political stability.

Here you see the location of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. They are to the west of Okinawa and not far from Taiwan. The tensions of the last couple of years over these uninhabited rocks was initiated by extreme right-wing forces in Japan, and since then the two nations have broadcast their historical claims, with each nation taking out old historical documents to prove that the islands are theirs. It is an extraordinary human tragedy that we’d face the possibility of human extinction in a contest over these outcroppings.

This is the picture of possible trigger for WWIII. What you see are Japanese and Chinese warships and Taiwanese fishing vessels in extremely dangerous proximity. It’s about impossible to tell which is which. The possibility of an incident occurring, possibly a crash and the sinking of one of these ships are all too real. As a seminar at Harvard a couple of months ago, Ezra Vogel, who served as head of Asia intelligence at the State Department under President Clinton, pointed to this picture and said that in the case of an incident there can be no confidence that military escalation can be capped.

The power of nationalism in Japan and China is intense, and now the Abe government has President Obama’s support as wind behind his sails. So it is all too easy to imagine a situation in

which there is an incident. One country responds by launching drones. The other shoots a down a drone further inflaming national pride, then war planes engage in dog fights, resulting in further escalation, and possibly a U.S.-Chinese military confrontation.

How dangerous is this? Remember that in 1962, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy told his brother that if he didn't threaten Russia with nuclear attack Congress would likely impeach him. The pressures of nationalism in Japan and China today are probably more powerful than those that drove the Kennedys five decades ago or that Bush and Cheney exploited after 9-11.

And, of course, the danger of nuclear war continues to grow out of continuing North and South Korean tensions. The two nations frequently exchange artillery fire.

Central to the Pivot is the U.S. campaign to reinforce its alliances and to add additional military bases to encircle China, something China experiences as a Great Wall in reverse. The alliances with Japan and South Korea, now termed "global alliances," are central to this strategy.

While deeply integrated into U.S. war planning, the Abe government is also hedging against the possibility that in a future crisis with China the United States might not be there to back it up. So, in ways that reinforce and parallel U.S. encirclement of China, Japan is also building military and economic cooperation with many ASEAN nations and India.

The U.S. military alliance with South Korea is also now described as a global military alliance.

When President Obama was in Manila, he signed an agreement which functionally creates a new U.S. military base there in violation of the Philippine Constitution. In fact, U.S. forces returned to the Philippines under the equally unconstitutional Visiting Forces

Guam, termed the "tip of the U.S. spear" is a classic case of "cowboys and Indians all over again." More than a quarter of the small island nation has long been occupied by U.S. military bases, and against the day when the people of Okinawa finally free themselves from U.S. military occupation, the Pentagon is planning to massively expand its naval and air bases in Guam in ways that will further jeopardize the survival of the Chamorro people and their civilization.



Elsewhere, the U.S. has close military cooperation with Singapore and increasingly with Vietnam, where U.S. warships have returned to Cam Ranh Bay and the two nations engage in joint military exercises. Military to military relations have been renewed with Indonesia, Myanmar and New Zealand. And when President Obama visited Australia an agreement was reached to build yet another U.S. base there for 2,500 more Marines whose primary mission will be to reinforce U.S. power in the Indian Ocean and the critically important Malacca Strait.

Recall that the first state visit of the Obama Administration was that of Prime Minister Singh of India, during which President Obama described the U.S.-Indian relationship as a “defining relationship” for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Add to that the likely continued presence of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, and China is completely encircled, except from the north. And this – along with NATO’s expansion - helps to explain the deepening ties between Beijing and Moscow.

People in US and an increasing number of other countries are working to decrease military spending, but it is the competition with China, along with pressures from the military-industrial complex, that is driving much of the staggering levels of U.S. military spending

One example is the \$ 1.5 trillion to be spent for the nuclear-capable F-35 fighter/bomber

A new military doctrine, Air-sea battle, has been developed for possible war against China. It doesn’t envision U.S. troops on the ground and body bags coming home. Instead it is designed to threaten the destruction of much of China from the sea, air, space and likely cyberspace.

Added to this is the campaign to negotiate a Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement, often described as NAFTA on steroids. In addition to giving multinational corporations enormous power to circumvent governmental regulations designed to serve and protect people, TPP is designed to further integrate Asia-Pacific societies, not only their economies, into that of the U.S. The goal being to limit their engagements with China.

The U.S. is also engaged in negotiating a U.S.-E.U. free trade agreement. As Sergei Rogov of the U.S.A. and Canada Institute in Moscow explains, if successful, these agreements will place the U.S. at the head of enormous and inter-connected economic blocks, greatly increasing

U.S. “leverage” over China and ensuring U.S. “leadership in a polycentric system of international relations.”

All of this is not being quietly accepted across Asia and the Pacific. There is powerful and broad Okinawan, Korean and Filipino popular resistance. And remember that Obama did not return from his recent visit to Tokyo with an agreement on TPP. There is powerful opposition to TPP in many countries.

There is a wide array of alternatives to U.S. Asia-Pacific policies. I believe that were we to return to Common Security, the paradigm that served to end the Cold War, we could greatly reduce the dangers of war in Asia and the Pacific and begin building peace systems for the longer term. Common Security does not provide us everything we need, but it promises a much more peaceful paradigm.

In conclusion there are two points that I want to stress: First, the situation in East Asia has powerful and dangerous parallels to 1914 in Europe. Second, we all need to become much more literate about the histories and political dynamics in Asia and the Pacific, as well as about how the Pivot is being implemented, if we are to exercise people’s power to prevent a catastrophic- potentially nuclear – great power war.

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