

Policy Analysis

No. 717

January 8, 2013

China, America, and the Pivot to Asia

by Justin Logan

Executive Summary

Despite the United States' focus on the Middle East and the Islamic world for the past decade, the most important international political developments in the coming years are likely to happen in Asia. The Obama administration has promoted a "pivot to Asia," away from the Middle East and toward the Asia-Pacific.

The main factor driving Washington's interest in the region is the growing economic and military power of the People's Republic of China. Accordingly, this analysis focuses heavily on the implications of China's growing power and influence.

This paper has three sections. First, it sketches the two main schools of thought about China's rise and examines the way in which Washington's China policy combines elements of those two theories. The second section critiques both theories of China's rise and argues that U.S. policy combines them in a way that puts a dangerous contradiction at the heart of America's China policy. The final section recommends offloading responsibility for hedging against potential Chinese aggression to like-minded countries in the region and shows that those countries are capable of doing so.

Justin Logan is director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute

CATO
INSTITUTE

Getting Sino-American relations right is the most important challenge for U.S. foreign policymakers.

Introduction

The U.S.-China relationship is the most important relationship in international politics. Looking into the 21st century, it seems possible that America could be eclipsed in economic—and possibly military—terms by China. According to *The Economist* magazine, China is likely to overtake the United States in GDP at market exchange rates in 2018. To give a sense of China's staggering relative growth, its GDP was one eighth America's in 2000 at market exchange rates, and by 2010 it was one half.¹

This growth is particularly relevant considering that Washington participated in an enormously costly and dangerous Cold War with the Soviet Union, which at the height of its relative power possessed roughly 44 percent of U.S. GDP.² That conflict helped complete the transformation of the United States from a federalist republic into a centralized, Bismarckian nation-state.³ Given the potential impact of U.S.-China competition on U.S. security and American domestic politics, getting Sino-American relations right is the most important challenge for U.S. foreign policymakers.

In addition to China, India is undergoing rapid economic development, possesses a favorable demographic profile, and is likely to play an increasingly prominent role in regional and global politics. Japan, despite demographic and fiscal problems, remains an important world power. A number of Southeast Asian countries are growing rapidly. In short, no other region on earth is likely to see its share of global power grow as much as the Asia-Pacific region in the decades ahead. To the extent that the concentration of power in the international system shifts toward East Asia, American strategists should focus on that region.

Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the Beltway foreign policy establishment has been focused primarily on the Islamic world and terrorism. Before 9/11, though, important parts of the establishment were looking at competition with China as the big potential problem.

Vice President Dick Cheney had read John Mearsheimer's pessimistic view of the future of U.S.-China relations, disliking only the passages he deemed "softheaded": the parts where Mearsheimer hoped security competition between the two countries could be moderated.⁴

At the beginning of the George W. Bush administration, it looked like the two states were headed for rough waters. In April 2001 a U.S. spy plane collided with a Chinese fighter near Chinese territory, and the American pilot and crew were held by the Chinese until American diplomats negotiated their release. But the incident stirred nationalism in both countries. In Washington, Robert Kagan and William Kristol complained that "the exact circumstances" under which the two planes had collided didn't matter. Instead, they howled that Bush the Younger had brought on the nation a "profound national humiliation" by expressing regret for the death of the Chinese pilot and reiterated their prior calls for a policy of "active containment of China."⁵ But after the terrorist attacks in September 2001, the Bush administration turned its attention to the Middle East.

Slowly, Washington policy elites have come back around to the position that the most consequential international-political changes are taking place in Asia. On an October 2011 trip to Asia, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta remarked that Washington was at a "turning point" away from the Middle East and toward the Asia-Pacific and that this shift will entail a "strategic rebalancing."⁶ Similarly, a recent article by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton remarked that "the future of geopolitics will be decided in Asia, not in Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States should be right at the center of the action."⁷ Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific Kurt Campbell says that "one of the most important challenges for U.S. foreign policy is to effect a transition from the immediate and vexing challenges of the Middle East to the long-term and deeply consequential issues in Asia."⁸

The most important of those long-term, deeply consequential issues in Asia is the U.S.-China relationship. China lies at the center of U.S. strategy in Asia. This paper does not provide a net assessment of the current military balance between the United States and China, much less a projection of the future military balance. Similarly, it is not a recap of the past few decades or even years of U.S.-China diplomacy. Rather, it evaluates American strategy toward China, showing that the strategy rests on a contradiction that threatens to push Washington and Beijing toward security competition on terms increasingly favorable to China.

A Panda or a Dragon? Two Theories of China's Rise

There are two main ways of thinking about the future of U.S.-China relations, and a basic policy orientation follows from each school of thought. One view, mostly pessimistic, is influenced by the realist school of international relations, whose adherents are sometimes referred to as “dragon slayers.” The other view, mostly optimistic, is influenced by the liberal school of international relations, whose advocates are known colloquially as “panda huggers.”⁹ The general split between the two groups is over whether China's growing military power necessarily threatens American security interests. Given the obvious importance of answering that question correctly, the theories that inform analysts' and policymakers' views on the topic deserve scrutiny.¹⁰

The Comprehensively Positive-Sum World of the Panda Huggers

Two logics underpin the theory of the optimists, both borrowed from the liberal school of international relations.¹¹ First is “liberal institutionalist” logic, which holds that China's political and military behavior can be constrained in a web of international institutions. These would allow it to rise into the existing international order—which

was shaped by the institutions created under American leadership after World War II—and prevent China from transforming the rules that govern the order.¹²

For liberal institutionalists, it is hard to understand why China would have any problems with the status quo. They wonder why, given that China has made huge strides forward in terms of prosperity and even influence under the existing order, it would bother to try changing it.¹³ Liberal institutionalists see international politics as tightly constrained by international institutions and laws, and argue, as Princeton's G. John Ikenberry does, that while “the United States cannot thwart China's rise,”

it can help ensure that China's power is exercised within the rules and institutions that the United States and its partners have crafted over the last century, rules and institutions that can protect the interests of all states in the more crowded world of the future.¹⁴

Optimists argue that China can be constrained because the expansive and cross-cutting network of international institutions promotes positive-sum outcomes and renders the American-dominated order “hard to overturn and easy to join.”¹⁵ If Washington plays its cards correctly, Ikenberry writes, it can “make the liberal order so expansive and institutionalized that China will have no choice but to join and operate within it.”¹⁶

The second liberal logic holds that states' international behavior is induced by the domestic political structures within them.¹⁷ In this view, to the extent that China has foreign policy objectives that conflict with American interests, these exist because of China's undemocratic domestic politics. Accordingly, the argument goes, if China democratized, China could continue to rise while resigning itself to U.S. preponderance.

Advocates of this view place less emphasis on international institutions. For them, the question is whether China's domestic politi-

For liberal institutionalists, it is hard to understand why China would have any problems with the status quo.

Pessimists see security competition and zero-sum conflict between Washington and China as more likely.

cal system can be transformed from one-party rule toward democracy. If it can, there is less reason to fear that China's international ambitions will grow dangerously expansive. This theory is popular in Washington, where policy is based in part on the belief that continued economic growth will help transform China's political system in a democratic direction.

If all goes according to plan, economic growth in China will produce a growing middle class, which should then demand greater political rights. These demands are expected to generate more democratic politics.¹⁸ Then, these increasingly democratic politics are supposed to plug into a crude version of democratic peace theory,¹⁹ in which the domestic institutions of democratic countries prevent them from going to war (or presumably, in this case, even engaging in serious security competition) with other democracies.

What both schools of liberalism agree on is that there is no iron law that growing Chinese power will create a zero-sum security tradeoff between China and the United States and its allies. This represents the central disagreement between the optimists and pessimists.

The Tragic, Zero-Sum World of the Dragon Slayers

The pessimists' theory is informed by the realist school of international relations, which argues that countries tend to push the international system toward a balance of power, regardless of their domestic politics or international institutions. This pushing can be done by "internal balancing," meaning the translation of a nation's own wealth and population into military power, or via "external balancing," meaning the creation of alliances that pool military power against the most powerful state in the system.²⁰

Pessimists see security competition and zero-sum conflict between Washington and China as more likely. They tend to answer the question whether China's rise inherently threatens U.S. security with an emphatic "yes." They reject liberals' belief that a more economically or politically liberal China

would lessen the chances of dangerous security competition with the United States.

John Mearsheimer, the most prominent and most eloquent of the pessimists, is worth quoting at length. According to Mearsheimer, were China's economic growth to continue,

for sound strategic reasons, [China] would surely pursue regional hegemony, just as the United States did in the Western Hemisphere during the nineteenth century. So we would expect China to attempt to dominate Japan and Korea, as well as other regional actors, by building military forces that are so powerful that those other states would not dare challenge it. We would also expect China to develop its own version of the Monroe Doctrine, directed at the United States.

A wealthy China would not be a status quo power but an aggressive state determined to achieve regional hegemony. This is not because a rich China would have wicked motives, but because the best way for any state to maximize its prospects for survival is to be the hegemon in its region of the world. Although it is certainly in China's interest to be the hegemon in Northeast Asia, it is clearly not in America's interest to have that happen.²¹

Mearsheimer writes that China's appetite for increased control over its security environment and Washington's desire to deny it the same makes it likely that the future will bring "intense security competition between China and the United States, with considerable potential for war."²² For this reason, Mearsheimer suggests Washington should—and will—end the policy of economic engagement and begin working to slow China's economic growth.²³

U.S. Foreign Policy in Asia

This paper has presented the two main schools of thought about China in stark

terms in order to clarify the debate. Most China analysts in Washington have more complicated takes on the rise of China and what it means for the United States, and Washington's policy in Asia lacks the elegance and coherence of the academic theories described above. Instead, the right and left halves of the foreign policy establishment agree that U.S. policy toward China should combine elements of both theories.

Drawing on liberal thinking, few political elites in Washington support ending the policy of economic engagement. While many Democratic leaders support sanctioning China for currency manipulation, leveling antidumping charges against its trade policies, or doing unspecified things to level the U.S.-China balance of trade, there are precious few voices in the foreign policy establishment calling for reversing the long-standing policy of economic engagement with China.²⁴ Beltway foreign policy elites tend to argue that making China richer will make it more amenable to U.S. foreign policy goals—or at least will not make it less so.

Moving to the element of U.S. China policy drawn from realism, U.S. policymakers tend to doubt that the mechanism by which trade produces comity is foolproof. Accordingly, they suggest that the United States hedge against the prospect that China may either grow very powerful without transitioning to democracy or the prospect that China may grow very powerful and democratic but fail to resign itself to American military predominance in Asia. The Washington foreign policy community supports a policy of “conengagement”—that is, military containment combined with economic engagement.²⁵ Congagement, for all intents and purposes, has been America's China policy since at least the end of the Cold War.

While there are critics of conengagement in the foreign policy establishment, they rarely offer clear alternatives. For example, Princeton's Aaron Friedberg, who ran the Asia policy shop in the office of Vice President Cheney, denounces the logic of conengagement but fails to propose an alternative.

What Friedberg suggests as an alternative—what he terms “better balancing”—is in fact little more than different marketing of conengagement. To be sure, Friedberg offers vague suggestions for “encourag[ing] political reform in China,” “fund[ing] the research of serious analysts who take a range of underrepresented (and often unpopular) alternative views” of China, and an admonition that Americans should “consume less and save more” in an effort to close the trade deficit. But Friedberg does not advocate ending either economic engagement or the efforts at military containment.²⁶

Friedberg's work argues that both realist balance of power concerns and China's illiberal politics will cause security competition between Beijing and Washington. Of course, if both logics are correct, even a more liberal China would constitute a strategic challenge to Washington, making democratization mostly beside the point. Curiously, however, Friedberg writes that Washington could and should allow a democratic China to become the dominant military power in East Asia.²⁷

The other component of Washington's bipartisan China policy is reassuring America's allies—the states on the other side of the spokes in Washington's “hub and spokes” system of alliances in the region—about Washington's commitment to provide their security. Instead of forcing states like Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and India to carry the bulk of the burden of balancing against China while adopting a wait-and-see approach toward China's rise, the Beltway establishment favors reassuring these allies that Washington's commitment is unshakeable. In a recent address to Australian parliament, President Obama referred respectively to an “unbreakable alliance” with Australia, a “commitment to the security of the Republic of Korea” that will “never waver,” and a “larger and long-term role in the region” for the United States, which he described as “a Pacific power, and we are here to stay.”²⁸ During the recent skirmish between the Philippines and China over Scarborough Shoal, Secretary Clinton reiterated the U.S. commitment to defend the Philippines, which the foreign secre-

Congagement, for all intents and purposes, has been America's China policy since at least the end of the Cold War.

The Beltway foreign policy establishment favors a China policy with three major components: economic engagement, military containment, and preventing U.S. allies from taking more control over their defense policies.

tary of the Philippines swiftly interpreted as a commitment to defend the disputed waters in question.²⁹

Beyond the treaties with Australia, South Korea, and the Philippines, Washington has formal treaty commitments to Japan, Thailand, and New Zealand, and a murky and ambiguous commitment to Taiwan.³⁰ By posing itself as the hub of this hub-and-spokes system of bilateral alliances throughout Asia, Washington has taken the burden of containing China onto its own shoulders and ignored the prospect that countries in the region would do more if Washington did less. Georgetown's Victor Cha, who worked on Asia in the National Security Council of George W. Bush, points out that the hub-and-spokes system of alliances in Asia was designed on the basis of what he calls a "powerplay" rationale, in which the United States created a number of asymmetric, bilateral alliances in order, in each case, to "exert maximum control over [its] smaller ally's actions." Further, Cha writes, Washington sought to "amplify U.S. control and minimize any collusion among its alliance partners."³¹

To summarize, the majority of the Beltway foreign policy establishment favors a China policy with three major components: economic engagement; military containment; and using U.S. deployments, diplomatic reassurance about American security guarantees, and Washington's own military spending to prevent U.S. allies from taking more control over their defense policies.

The Problems with the Two Views (and with How U.S. Policy Combines Them)

This section critiques each school of thought about China as well as U.S. policy toward the country. Optimists tend to assume away the sorts of zero-sum tradeoffs inherent in military questions. Pessimists lack a story describing how, exactly, Washington could smother Beijing economically.

U.S. foreign policy in Asia is plagued by three problems: First, Washington's policy centers on a contradiction: making China more powerful while seeking to make it act as though it is weak. The "containment" and "engagement" aspects of the policy counter-vail one another. Second, the policy of "reassuring" our allies forces the United States to carry a disproportionate share of the growing burden of containing China. Finally, although Washington agrees with the pessimists that China's growing military power is a problem, no one has specified precisely how even a very militarily powerful China would directly threaten U.S. national security.

What's Wrong with the Optimists

Optimists place too much faith in international institutions, too much faith in the idea that economic growth in China will necessarily lead to democratization there, and too much faith in the idea that a democratic China necessarily would be at peace with American military domination of Asia.

As a general proposition, optimists tend to elide the zero-sum tradeoffs inherent to military issues, ignoring for the most part the question of U.S. military policy in Asia. This leaves one of the most important questions about the future of American foreign policy in Asia outside their analysis. As Columbia's Richard Betts writes in a stinging critique,

John Ikenberry . . . says nothing about what U.S. military policy should be in [East Asia], dismisses the whole dimension of analysis with the facile assumption that mutual nuclear deterrence precludes major war, and asserts with breathtaking confidence that "war-driven change has been abolished as a historical process."³²

Powerful states tend not to rely on other states or international institutions to provide security for them. Even states with benign motives today may pose threats tomorrow, and international institutions matter only in so far as they can enforce the rules

they write. The United States regularly defies international institutions when it believes they do not serve U.S. interests, whether the topic is attacking Kosovo or Iraq, avoiding actions to try to prevent climate change, resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict, or any number of other issues. Should China continue to grow more powerful, international institutions are likely to have a similar effect on Beijing as they have had on Washington: not much. States prefer to rely on their own capabilities and to exert control over their security environment. Also, as their power grows, states tend to expand their definition of their interests and use their power to pursue them.

American policymakers ignore or downplay these realities, implying instead that China is a free rider on U.S. promotion of globalization and international trade. Secretary of State Clinton almost made it sound as though the Chinese should send Washington a thank you note: “Like so many other countries before it, China has prospered as part of the open and rules-based system that the United States helped to build and works to sustain.”³³ But just as the United States today chooses to sustain the open and rules-based system, so too can it exclude China from that system or violate its own rules if it so chooses. What American analysts see as Chinese free riding, many Chinese view as dangerous vulnerability to the whims of U.S. policymakers. Recent months have indicated that growing Chinese power has generated hardening Chinese territorial demands, and a greater desire to pursue them.

During that time, China has reiterated its claims to nearly all of the South China Sea, in at least partial contravention of both the status quo and maritime law. It has established a new military garrison on Yongxing, one of the islands there, it has engaged in a naval standoff with the Philippines at Scarborough Shoal, and China’s efforts to fend off criticism precluded even a joint statement at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ Regional Forum, the first time in the organization’s history it has failed to do so.³⁴

The security problems China faces in-

clude the safety of its shipping lanes, used both for China’s imports, including energy supplies, and its exports, which fuel much of its economic growth. Currently, China’s sea lanes are subject to interdiction by the United States. The Chinese government has continually expressed anxiety about the vulnerability of China’s seaborne commerce and its seaborne supplies of energy in particular. China’s reliance on seaborne oil is growing, and there appears to be little China can do about that fact. Roughly 40 percent of China’s oil comes by sea, and China at present does not control the routes through which that oil passes.³⁵ This is the rationale accepted by most China analysts in explaining China’s naval buildup: it wishes to gain greater control over its sea lines of communication in order to help secure the transit of its commerce, including energy supplies.³⁶ But the optimists have a hard time explaining why China and the United States are pushing and shoving over control of China’s near seas and offer little policy advice on this issue.

The lesson of Japan’s experience under the U.S.-led oil embargo of 1941 has not been lost on the Chinese, who do not wish to leave the security of their energy supplies at the whim of a foreign power. Even beyond energy, the value of China’s imports and exports constitute more than half its GDP, and the vast majority of those enter and leave the country by sea.³⁷ Americans may think it farfetched that Chinese are anxious about being at the mercy of a potential American blockade, but they would not think it so farfetched if the situation were reversed. Indeed, even Washington, despite its uncontested naval dominance, has continually expressed anxiety about its own energy security.³⁸ Ensuring access to energy supplies has been an obsession of the world’s major powers for decades.

Recently, a debate has begun among China watchers in the United States about whether China’s military modernization program is fueled by plausible military objectives or rather by “naval nationalism”—that is, the desire to wield a powerful navy for do-

Should China continue to grow more powerful, international institutions are likely to have a similar effect on Beijing as they have had on Washington: not much.

Pessimists fail to discuss how the United States could go about smothering China's economic growth.

mestic and international prestige.³⁹ Robert Ross argues that as a continental power China should be focused on its ground forces, and its effort to develop a blue-water navy is a strategically irrational product of nationalism. In this debate, though, even those arguing that nationalism is fueling Beijing's naval modernization program seem only to apply the prestige argument to a prospective power-projection navy centered on an aircraft carrier, not to other naval advances.⁴⁰

But given the substantial top line growth in Chinese military outlays, China can afford substantial naval modernization without leaving dangerous vulnerabilities by land. Also, if China wishes to prepare itself for a blue-water navy even decades down the road, it must start somewhere. China's enormous reliance on the global economy—and its expectations that that reliance will continue—have likely played the most important role in pushing China out to sea.⁴¹

Liberals also hope that economic growth will produce a more politically liberal China, which would make its peace with U.S. naval dominance in East Asia. But many countries undergoing rapid political liberalization become virulently nationalistic during that transition, and become increasingly war prone as a consequence.⁴² There is considerable evidence that nationalism is affecting both mass and elite politics in China, including among otherwise liberal intellectuals.⁴³ The United States is a liberal country, yet American nationalism has powerfully influenced its foreign policy.⁴⁴ There is little reason to believe that even a powerful, liberal China would be free from similar influence.

The past decade of diplomacy between Beijing and Washington has highlighted the fact that the pessimists are onto something when it comes to China. Although Washington regularly declares that it is not containing China and that it favors Chinese economic growth, its actions make clear that it does not welcome China's growing military power. The chief of staff of the Air Force and the chief of naval operations justified the highly touted new U.S. "operational concept"

Air-Sea Battle by stating that

some rising powers that appear to be seeking regional hegemony hope to employ access denial strategies to isolate other regional actors from American military intervention, enabling them to more effectively intimidate and coerce neighboring states.⁴⁵

The least implausible candidate for mounting this sort of access denial strategy is China.

For their part, the Chinese, until recently, have been soft-pedaling their growing power. China's leaders, who are given to using slogans to describe policy orientations, rolled out the term "peaceful rise" in the early 2000s to refer to China's aims, only to quickly reverse course and replace it with "peaceful development," in part because even the use of the word "rise" was deemed too provocative to the United States.⁴⁶ Anecdotal evidence also indicates that Chinese pessimists are growing in political influence and speaking out frequently.⁴⁷

In short, there is little indication that China is willing to put its trust in either the United States or prevailing international institutions. It is unclear whether a liberal China would prevent security competition. And as Chinese power has grown, so have its ambitions and capabilities with which it can pursue those ambitions.

What's Wrong with the Pessimists

The main problem with pessimism is that pessimists fail to discuss how, exactly, the United States could go about smothering China's economic growth. They do not tell a persuasive story that explains how the political obstacles to doing so could be surmounted, nor do they convince that the extraordinary economic damage to the United States would be worth the potential benefits.

While it is theoretically sound—indeed, logically necessary—for pessimists to support trying to throttle China economically, it is strikingly difficult to envision how Washington would do this in practice. Neither Mearsheimer nor anyone else, to the author's

knowledge, has described in detail what sorts of policies the United States would pursue to this end at a reasonable cost. In 2001 Mearsheimer left it at proposing that Washington “do what it can to slow the rise of China,” and by 2010 this became a proposal/prediction that Washington should/would “act toward China similar to the way it behaved toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War.”⁴⁸

But Washington and Moscow did not move abruptly from tight economic interdependence to efforts at mutual strangulation. For a variety of reasons, Moscow sought Soviet autarky and Washington indulged it. Moreover, even if the United States somehow ceased the policy of economic engagement, it seems unlikely that the rest of the world would follow suit, resulting in significant economic dislocation in the United States and to a lesser extent in China but ultimately producing trade diversion rather than trade cessation.

Beyond the question how America could and would move toward a straightforward containment policy, there is a larger question: What sort of danger would even a powerful China pose that would make it worthwhile to forego such a substantial amount of economic benefit? Even if China became, say, twice as wealthy as the United States and militarily more powerful than America, it is still separated from the United States by thousands of miles of water.

There is a “free to roam” logic embedded in the pessimists’ case, but rarely is it spelled out to make the case for containment. The United States has been free to roam for decades, and rarely during that time has it started a war that profited it politically or economically.⁴⁹ Recent research evaluating in detail the prospects for Chinese territorial expansion concludes that Chinese expansionism is unlikely because the expected benefits are limited, the costs are high, and the prospect of success is uncertain.⁵⁰ If the pessimists disagree with this argument, they should spell out in detail precisely what they fear and how to stop it at an acceptable cost.

As yet, no detailed case has been offered to this effect.

What’s Wrong with U.S. China Policy

The first problem with American strategy is that its “conengagement” approach is built on contradictory policies. Conengagement is frequently defended with puzzling formulations such as “Washington must engage China in order to balance against it, and balance against it in order to engage it,”⁵¹ but this is incoherent. The two aspects of conengagement do not complement each other—they work at cross purposes.

Washington policy analysts and pundits like to market conengagement as a “hedging” strategy,⁵² but this analogy is unfounded. Hedging refers to a decision to make a conservative investment with low but likely returns in order to help cover potential losses from a risky investment with high but less likely returns. In the analogy with China policy, the large, risky bet would be trading with China, which narrows the relative power gap between the two countries, in the hopes that China will be transformed and will not compete with the United States militarily.⁵³ The hedging analogy falls apart because the longer the risky bet goes on, the more Washington will need to pour ever-increasing resources into the conservative bet—the military instruments needed for containment—in order to cover the potential losses should engagement fail to pay off. Conengagement is not a hedging strategy.

The Truth about U.S. Military Strategy in Asia

Although American political leaders regularly deny it, the U.S. military is working to contain China in the Asia-Pacific region. American military planners have developed a posture in Asia that is designed with the obvious purpose of putting China’s seaborne commerce at risk. As long-time Asia correspondent Richard Halloran wrote in the official journal of the U.S. Air Force Association, Washington

Recent research concludes that Chinese expansionism is unlikely because the expected benefits are limited, the costs are high, and the prospect of success is uncertain.

Although American political leaders regularly deny it, the U.S. military is working to contain China in the Asia-Pacific region.

has begun positioning forces which could threaten China's supply lines through the South China Sea. The oil and raw materials transported through those shipping lanes are crucial to a surging Chinese economy—an economy paying for Beijing's swiftly expanding military power.⁵⁴

Halloran then cites the work of an active-duty Air Force major explicitly likening China's predicament to that of Japan in the 1930s and 40s, arguing that Washington should "exploit a critical vulnerability—China's dependence on sea lines of communication."⁵⁵ Former Pacific Command commander Dennis Blair and China analyst Kenneth Lieberthal write that "the United States has employed and will likely in the future continue to use naval blockades when necessary," including specific reference to China, but then wave off the idea that other nations should be concerned: "U.S. naval hegemony, however, need not be unsettling to other countries."⁵⁶ The slightest effort to look at things from Beijing's perspective shows that Washington's military posture in the Asia-Pacific is likely to amplify China's fears about U.S. intentions.

Despite these easy-to-see realities, American political elites deny that their decision to concentrate the U.S. Navy in China's backyard has anything to do with China. En route to Singapore in June, Defense Secretary Panetta stated that Washington's deployment of the majority of U.S. naval assets to the Asia-Pacific region "is not about containment of China." Rather, according to Panetta,

This is about bringing China into that relationship to try to deal with some common challenges that we all face: the challenge of humanitarian assistance and needs; the challenge of dealing with weapons of mass destruction that are proliferating throughout the world; and dealing with narco-trafficking, and dealing with piracy; and dealing with issues that relate to trade and how

do we improve trade and how do we improve lines of communication.⁵⁷

Dealing with humanitarian assistance and needs, stifling nuclear proliferation, suppressing narco-traffickers, and dispatching pirates do not require more than half the U.S. Navy. If China made this sort of argument to defend deploying more than half its naval assets to the Western hemisphere, American leaders would not give the argument a moment's consideration. If the success of America's Asia policy relies on Chinese elites believing this story, the policy is in trouble.⁵⁸

The balance of power in the Western Pacific is still tipped decidedly in America's favor, but less so than it was 30 years ago. In recent years, China's military spending has increased significantly relative to the increases in the United States. Even though Washington's smaller percent increases of a much larger budget have been larger than China's larger percent increases of the smaller budget, the trends indicate that China is beginning to narrow the relative power gap.

Although some protest that Washington's military spending is still growing in relative terms compared to China's, this argument is incorrect.⁵⁹ In order to draw that conclusion, one would have to use market exchange rates instead of purchasing power parity conversions for the portions of the Chinese defense budget that are procured indigenously, like labor, which produces erroneous estimates. (Defense economics requires use of a combination of purchasing power parity and market exchange rates to draw apples-to-apples comparisons with Chinese military spending because of differing currency valuations.)⁶⁰ In short, if anything resembling present trends continues, China will continue to close the gap in both relative economic power and relative military power.

Moreover, a dollar per dollar comparison does not say everything about the military balance between the two countries. As Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney pointed out in a speech to the Heritage Foun-

dation in 2009, the U.S.-China military balance looks more unfavorable when one stops to consider that

our military is required to maintain a global presence; theirs is not. It is a far more demanding task to keep worldwide commitments than simply to build a force that can accomplish regional objectives.⁶¹

Of course, one inference that could be drawn from this analysis is that the United States has put itself at a disadvantage vis-à-vis China by tasking its military with all the things Romney wants to do: “respond to humanitarian crises, protect world shipping and energy lanes, deter terrorism, prevent genocide, and lead peace-keeping missions.” While China does spend military dollars on missions other than deterring or defeating the United States in its near seas, in comparison with Washington, Beijing has restrained its military objectives, which has allowed it to narrow the gap in the Western Pacific while Washington pursues an unfocused military strategy across the entire globe.

Nothing is stopping Washington from copying the conservative strategy Beijing has pursued and winning for itself the same advantages that the strategy wins China. Instead of suggesting missions America could profitably shed, Romney suggests an additional \$2 trillion in defense spending over the next decade, much of it financed by debt held by China.⁶² This approach amounts to trying to balance against China with funds borrowed, in part, from China. This is hardly a model of strategic coherence.

Moreover, at the same time Washington is trying to contain Chinese power, its policy of economic engagement is helping China to narrow the relative power gap. Unless one assumes that China is a historical and theoretical aberration—that it is entirely at peace with foreign military domination of its region—China is going to seek a larger politico-military role as it grows wealthier, and that growing wealth will make it harder to contain. It

becomes even more difficult to imagine that China would passively accept U.S. military dominance in Asia when former high-ranking U.S. officials admit that

stripped of diplomatic niceties, the ultimate aim of American strategy is to hasten a revolution, albeit a peaceful one, that will sweep away China’s one-party authoritarian state.⁶³

It would be bizarre if the people at the helm of China’s one-party authoritarian state felt comfortable leaving China’s security in Washington’s hands.

At bottom, conengagement relies on either an extraordinary faith in the idea that economic engagement and pleas for reform will transform China’s political system or a belief that even as China narrows the gap in power we can outspend it by enough to deter it from developing larger ambitions.

In the first case, conengagement advocates should explain why they believe both that a) economic growth will necessarily lead to democratization and b) democratization will necessarily lead either to a China that is at peace with American military hegemony in Asia or a China whose security interests will become compatible with Washington’s. In the second scenario, they need to come up with an account of U.S. political and economic realities that provide for a foreign policy of global hegemony paid for by massive cuts to other federal outlays.

Infantilizing America’s Allies and Partners

The other problem with American strategy is that the policy of continually reassuring America’s allies has ensured that a disproportionate share of the cost of hedging against China ultimately will need to be borne by the American taxpayer. Instead of urging states in China’s region to defend themselves, Washington constantly reassures these states that America is committed to act as the balancer of first resort. This generates free riding, where states underprovide their own security,

Continually reassuring America’s allies has ensured that a disproportionate share of the cost of hedging against China ultimately will need to be borne by the American taxpayer.

Sixty years after the Korean War, the United States should not prop up an alliance system that was designed to minimize collusion among its alliance partners.

because they believe Washington will do it for them, thereby increasing the costs to the United States.⁶⁴ As Mearsheimer points out, geography and distribution of power are crucial factors that determine when states should balance against a potential threat themselves or pass the buck to other states.⁶⁵ East Asia's geography and distribution of power should allow Washington to pass the buck for balancing against China to states in the region with far more to lose.

Existing U.S. policy creates a de facto agreement between Washington and its Asian allies in which we agree to defend them and they agree to let us.⁶⁶ As one report supportive of this arrangement describes it, the deal is that allies "provide bases and ports for the U.S. military and contribute generously to supporting their presence," and "in return, America provides deterrence and defense."⁶⁷ But the combination of China's growing wealth, our allies' feeble defense expenditures, and the threat of continued slow growth in the United States threatens to turn U.S. foreign policy toward insolvency over time.⁶⁸

America's Asian allies do not carry a share of the burden of constraining China's ambition proportional to the relative stakes for them. While repeatedly stating their concerns about China's power and behavior, America's allies' military spending as a share of alliance spending has continually dropped. Japan spends only 1 percent of its GDP on defense and recently announced it would be decreasing defense spending by almost 2 percent.⁶⁹ Taiwan and South Korea spend less than 3 percent, despite their much closer proximity to both China and North Korea. While it is true that Japan, with a large economy, gets a lot out of that 1 percent, including a powerful navy, absent a formal U.S. security commitment, Japan would likely be doing more.⁷⁰

Acting as the Asian balancer-of-first-resort was dubious during the Cold War, and it makes even less sense today. When Washington volunteers for a disproportionate share of the heavy lifting, it is understandable that other states would be willing to have America

bear their burden. But 60 years after the Korean War, the United States should not prop up an alliance system that was designed, as Cha notes, to minimize collusion among its alliance partners. Collusion among our allies would be a welcome development today, and it would become more likely if Washington were more standoffish.

It is important to point out that American policymakers encouraging their partners and allies to free ride is not new. Free riding is always a danger in alliances, particularly when the stronger partner has for decades sought to infantilize and control its weaker allies. In their 1966 article "An Economic Theory of Alliances," Mancur Olson Jr. and Richard Zeckhauser explained the disproportionate contributions of non-U.S. NATO members with a model showing that in the provision of collective goods (like security) in organizations (like alliances), large, wealthy nations will tend to bear a "disproportionately large share of the common burden."⁷¹

The implication of the Olson-Zeckhauser model, which has held up well over time, is that the way to force America's allies to spend more would be to make clear that the United States views Asian states' security as a private, not a collective, good, and that consequently its provision was rightly the responsibility of those states. Instead, by constantly rushing to "reassure" U.S. allies of the firmness of America's military commitment every time there is a diplomatic or security flare-up in Asia, Washington risks creating a dynamic similar to the one it created in NATO: demilitarizing U.S. allies to the point where they appear unable or unwilling to defend themselves without help from America. When senior officials like Secretary Clinton state that America's alliances "need to be embedded in the DNA of American foreign policy," they encourage this tendency to free-ride.⁷²

American foreign policymakers seem unaware that this behavior counteracts their regular admonition of their allies—both in Asia and NATO—that they should do more for their own defense. The choice for a country of America's exceptional size and power is not

between pliant allies who contribute more or less. The choice is between allies who contribute more and desire more influence, or allies who contribute less and are content with less influence. Historically, Washington's desire to maximize its influence has outweighed its desire that allies contribute more.⁷³

At times, it appears that the free riding is a feature, rather than a bug, for U.S. policymakers. One rationale for preventing U.S. allies from doing more was offered by Princeton's Anne-Marie Slaughter, who was the director of policy planning in the Hillary Clinton State Department. Slaughter declared in 2008 that the "reins of global domination" should stay in American hands, because U.S. allies like the Japanese are "neither psychologically ready nor suitable for historical reasons" to play larger roles in providing for their own security.⁷⁴

Moral Hazard in U.S. Commitments

Much of official Washington supports the hub-and-spokes alliance system, but they rarely consider the conditions under which they would actually consider fighting a war with China. If recent history is any indication, U.S. analysts outside the Pentagon have given few considerations to actually fighting China.⁷⁵ Accordingly, U.S. allies should probably think long and hard about the validity of U.S. commitments.

It is likely that at least some U.S. allies and partners are putting too much faith in the U.S. commitment to their security. History is littered with alliances that, as historian Geoffrey Blainey has written, "on the outbreak of war, had no more force than a flapping sheet of paper."⁷⁶ Analyses of alliance failures have produced evidence that anywhere from 13 to over 30 percent of alliances collapsed at the outbreak of war.⁷⁷

To take one example, Taiwan's military spending is entirely inadequate to the potential military task it faces, suggesting that it either believes it has some commitment of U.S. support in the event of Chinese bullying or coercion, or that it is pointless to resist Chinese advances.⁷⁸ When confronted with arguments that America's commitment to

Taiwan is a wasting asset, Taiwanese foreign policy thinkers protest that "if Taiwan were to fall, the United States would suffer a geostrategic disaster," possibly including "a Chinese nuclear attack on the U.S. homeland."⁷⁹ Instead of inculcating a sense of threat among the Taiwanese population that could allow for greater exertions in terms of defense, Taiwanese intellectuals focus instead on pleading for Americans to interpret the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act broadly enough to include an American commitment to defend Taiwan.⁸⁰

The Taiwanese appear to believe either that the U.S. commitment is ironclad or that they have no hope of fending off China's advances forever. One recent survey revealed that a significant plurality of 12-17 year olds stated that they would not be willing to fight or have a family member fight to defend Taiwan from China. A former Taiwanese defense minister remarked at the finding by admitting that "it goes without saying that the number of Taiwanese willing to fight has come down significantly in recent years. I'm even surprised that the number of pro-defense people [in the survey] is so high"⁸¹

Meanwhile, there have been quiet indications that Washington may not fight China over Taiwan. For example, in a video posted on the website of *Foreign Policy* magazine in 2007, an American scholar mentioned a conversation he had had with Hillary Clinton, then a presidential candidate and now U.S. secretary of state. In that conversation, Clinton remarked that it is absurd to think that the American people would support a war with China over Taiwan. Although the video was quickly edited to remove the discussion of this remark, it calls into question the strength of the U.S. commitment to Taiwan.⁸² Even formal treaty allies like Japan and South Korea ought to reevaluate exactly which circumstances they believe would cause Washington to fight a war with China on their behalf.

There is a moral hazard problem here. Partners who believe in America's commitment are both shirking their own defense responsibilities and behaving more provocatively and less accommodatingly than they would be if

It is likely that at least some U.S. allies and partners are putting too much faith in the U.S. commitment to their security.

In the modern era, Washington's alliances exist primarily to defend the allies and the credibility of other alliances, not the United States.

they were more uncertain of America's commitment—or certain that they did not have a commitment from Washington. China analysts like Lyle Goldstein of the U.S. Naval War College even worry about a “Georgia scenario” in the South China Sea, where a state in the region takes too seriously Washington's assurances and takes on a bigger fight than it can handle itself, only to find out that Washington had no intention of going to war in its defense over that particular issue.⁸³ Weak but bold allies and clients make this problem more likely.

And What Would a Much More Powerful China Do?

The broader problem with U.S. China policy is that it takes as a given that a more powerful and activist China would be bad for U.S. national security, but no one has detailed precisely how. The American Enterprise Institute's Dan Blumenthal and his coauthors write that China is a threat to the United States because its “ambitions threaten America's Asian allies, raise questions about the credibility of U.S. alliance pledges, and imperil the U.S. military strategy that underpins its global primacy.”⁸⁴ It is telling how prominently alliances figure in this formulation, but Blumenthal's logic is backward. The United States should form alliances with countries when it needs to fight a common enemy. It shouldn't litter the globe with alliance commitments during peacetime, and then threaten war for the sake of those alliances. In the modern era, Washington's alliances exist primarily to defend the allies and the credibility of other alliances, not the United States.

At the bottom of realist theories of international relations, such as Mearsheimer's, is the prospect of being conquered or otherwise losing political sovereignty. Just as it is terrifically difficult to envision the United States conquering China today, it is similarly difficult to imagine China conquering the United States, given the Pacific Ocean and the massive American nuclear arsenal. Even Chinese naval dominance over a good chunk of the Pacific seems like a fantasy for the foreseeable future. Currently the PLA is struggling to

acquire the ability to control its near seas. Its highly touted first aircraft carrier is, in the apt phrasing of one analyst, “a piece of junk,”⁸⁵ and China is decades from having a bona fide blue-water navy, let alone one that could challenge the United States.

Of course, a number of smaller problems are more likely. A much more powerful China could attempt to use its navy to exclude the United States from engaging in commerce with states in Asia. If it could overwhelm neighboring states, China could hold hostage the sea lanes in Asia to extract concessions from other states in the region. But it bears asking how likely those scenarios are, especially considering the sizable costs China would incur to achieve such results.

Problematically, U.S. officials seem to think that Chinese policymakers should entrust their security to Washington. For example, former deputy assistant secretary of defense Michael Schiffer has stated that Washington welcomes a “strong, responsible, and prosperous China” that will take on a “constructive” role in regional and global institutions.⁸⁶ In this formulation, however, “responsible” and “constructive” are doing a lot of work. Based on its defense allocations, diplomacy, and force posture, Washington would like to see, at most, Beijing stepping up as a junior partner to help America pursue its policy goals. There is little evidence that Washington includes Chinese prerogatives in its definition of “responsible” policies or “constructive” roles. As discussed above, the United States has sought to control the policy even of its allies.

Pessimists like Mearsheimer tell a convincing story about why China would seek a larger military to increase its security—it does not feel that it can rely indefinitely on the beneficence of U.S. policymakers. In contrast with Mearsheimer, hawkish Washington policymakers act mystified by the idea that China would seek a more capable military. As former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld famously mused, “Since no nation threatens China, one must wonder: Why this growing investment [in its military]? Why these continuing large and expanding arms pur-

chases? Why these continuing robust deployments?”⁸⁷ A moment’s consideration ought to make it perfectly clear.

Changes to U.S. China Policy

A prudent American policy would urge Japan, South Korea, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Australia, and other nations in Asia with concerns about China’s ambition to provide for their own defense. American policymakers should adopt an offshore balancing strategy, but the operative word here is “offshore.”⁸⁸ A more standoffish U.S. policy would not mean that Washington would simply wash its hands of developments in Asia. Should China engage in open aggression, such as territorial conquest, this policy may need to change. But this sort of Chinese *machtspolitik* is very unlikely, even in the event of Washington scaling down its presence in places like Japan and South Korea.

China is increasing its capability to coerce Taiwan and its ability to secure its sea lines of communication, and is in general sowing fears that it may develop the ability to execute anti-access/area denial campaigns to prevent the U.S. Navy from being able to dominate East Asian waters.⁸⁹ Importantly, though, geography and technology mean that other countries in Asia would not necessarily need to spend a dollar for a dollar to ensure their security in the face of Chinese economic and military growth. To the contrary, the fact that China’s potential challengers are divided between maritime powers like Japan and Taiwan and land powers like India, South (and potentially North)⁹⁰ Korea, and Vietnam means that China would need to field powerful ground forces in numerous areas as well as a powerful navy in order to establish anything like a Monroe Doctrine in Asia.⁹¹

Moreover, Asian states would not necessarily need to field militaries that could defeat China outright. Instead, they could focus merely on raising the potential costs to China such that Beijing would be deterred from aggression. While mainstream discourse on

the subject would lead observers to believe that China is poised to run the table in Asia, even hawkish scholars like James Holmes of the U.S. Naval War College concede that there is a reasonable chance that Japan could defeat China in a naval conflict today—even if fighting all by itself. With greater effort on Japan’s part, this could remain true.⁹² Nothing about the current military balance makes it impossible to push greater responsibility for preventing Chinese expansionism onto states in Asia.

To that end, Washington should stop reassuring its Asian allies and partners at every diplomatic flare-up in Asia. It should not seek to cultivate anti-China paranoia, but it should sow doubts about exactly where the American military would be committed. Such measures should include private conversations with longtime allies like Japan and South Korea as well as countries that have grown close to Washington more recently, like India and Vietnam. Washington should encourage closer coordination between these countries without the United States even being present, let alone leading the discussions. Such measures would raise questions about America’s commitment to the region, which would help minimize free riding.

The biggest challenge would be forcing U.S. allies to take a larger share of the burden without conveying to China that Washington had grown indifferent to the future of Asia. One way to finesse this would be if Washington made clear to China that while Washington is not encouraging South Korean or Japanese nuclear proliferation, a more distant United States coupled with Chinese provocations toward Taiwan or other neighbors could conceivably produce such proliferation, an outcome the China strongly wants to avoid.

Relatedly, Washington should undertake a review of its basing arrangements in the region. In particular, it should put the bases in South Korea at the top of the list for potential closure. It also should use the endless protests from various Japanese political factions as justification for beginning to remove the Marines stationed in Japan.⁹³

Washington should sow doubts about exactly where the American military would be committed.

Some scholars argue that America’s Asian allies are too weak to balance against China effectively.

Potential Objections to the Alternative Strategy

There are three main objections to the approach described above. One argument says that while U.S. allies in the region would try to balance Chinese power themselves, they simply could not keep up; the growth in Chinese economic and military power is too much for them to match. Another argument is that if the United States were to create distance between itself and its allies, they would not balance against Chinese power but would instead “bandwagon” with China.⁹⁴ The third argument admits that Asian countries can and would balance against Chinese power, but that in doing so they would create dangerous arms races that threaten to result in war. I deal with these objections below, showing that Asian countries could place significant obstacles in the way of Chinese hegemony in the region, that they likely would do so, and that the risk of war under that scenario is not grave.

Objection One: Other Countries Cannot Effectively Balance against China

Some scholars argue that America’s Asian allies are too weak to balance against China effectively. For example, Mearsheimer claims that even a balancing coalition including Japan, Russia, India, South Korea, and Vietnam would be unable to contain Chinese military power.⁹⁵ Since military power ultimately rests on economic power and demographics, dealing with this argument involves examining the economic, demographic, and military realities in Asia.

Economic Indicators

While accurately predicting economic output is notoriously difficult, basic assumptions about future economic trends are required to formulate policy. Economic forecasts for Asia vary wildly, but there is general agreement that Asia—and particularly China and India—will continue to grow in economic clout in the coming decades. Table 1 shows the projections of one recent report from Goldman Sachs:

**Table 1
GDP Estimates (constant \$2010 billions)**

	2010	2030	% Growth
China	5,633	31,731	563
United States	14,614	22,920	157
India	1,594	7,972	500
Japan	4,773	5,852	123
Russia	1,689	4,730	280
Indonesia	692	2,446	353
South Korea	1,014	2,112	208
Australia	1,191	1,802	151
Thailand	302	904	299
Malaysia	235	889	378
Philippines	186	793	426

Source: Timothy Moe, Caesar Maasry, and Richard Tang, “EM Equity in Two Decades: A Changing Landscape,” Goldman Sachs Global Economics Paper no. 204, September 8, 2010, p. 13.

These estimates indicate that although China is likely to make up approximately 23 percent of world GDP in 2030, the other countries in Asia will constitute 22 percent of world GDP, with the United States comprising 17 percent. This should allow a significant amount of burden shifting, given the geography of Asia and China's own demographic, economic, and domestic political problems.

Economic growth in the countries of Asia will provide merely the foundations on which these nations can build national power. But economic growth is determined by gains in productivity (which are extraordinarily difficult to predict) as well as demographics (much easier to predict). In order for states to use that growth to play a larger role in international security, they are likely to develop more powerful militaries. The following sections evaluate demographics and military power.

Demographic Trends

Demographics play an important role in international politics in two main ways. First, countries need significant numbers of young people to serve in militaries. Old men do not win wars. Secondly, the shape of the age distribution affects how much money is available for military spending. If, for example, a country is overwhelmingly young and productive, that means the state will have an easier time paying the nation's pensioners, as well as offering large numbers of young people to fight the nation's wars.

Today, most developed countries have seen advances in medical technology combine with shifting cultural mores to produce increased life expectancy and fewer babies—the productive workers of tomorrow.⁹⁶ This combination of aging and lower birth rates has posed important problems for fiscal programs instituted under earlier, different demographic distributions. Additionally, military-aged men are shrinking as a proportion of overall population in several countries in Asia, which bears on those states' ability to generate military power without enervating their economies.

Countries have dealt with these problems in different ways. Some have attempted to provide financial incentives for families to have children, and others have allowed for increased immigration to import workers in order to prop up welfare states.

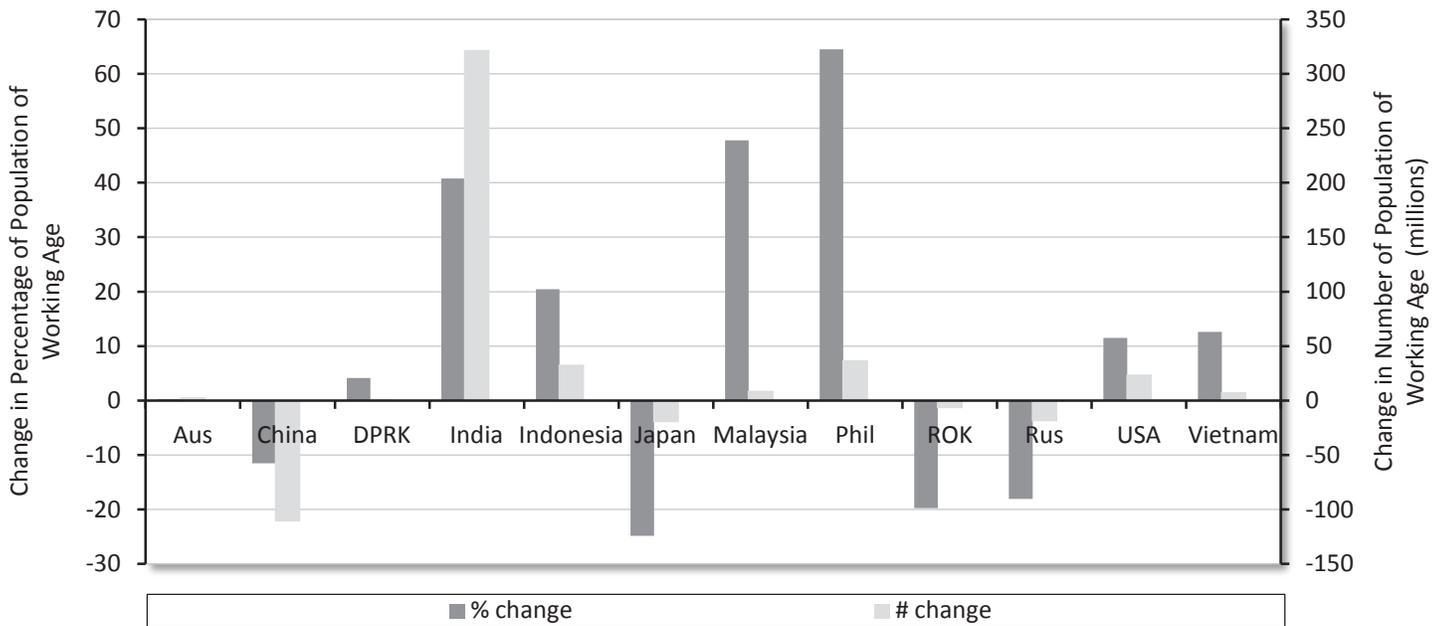
Individual nations in Asia face different demographic challenges. Russia, for example, confronts remarkably low life expectancy, net decrease in population, and a generally bleak demographic picture overall. As Nicholas Eberstadt points out, Russia's population has shrunk by more than 7 million people since 1992, and the life expectancy of a Russian boy born today is lower than it was in the 1950s.⁹⁷ This creates potential problems both in terms of future economic growth as well as military readiness.

In contrast, countries like Japan and South Korea have populations that are living exceptionally long by world standards, with smaller percentages of their overall populations comprised of working-age citizens.⁹⁸ Japan, particularly, faces a challenging combination of aging and depopulation. By 2040, 14 percent of the Japanese population is projected to be 80 years of age or older, with every 5-year (i.e., 10–14, 15–19, etc.) age cohort under 65 shrinking dramatically as compared with the same age group in 2010. Japan is likely to have 40 percent fewer citizens under 15 and almost a 30 percent drop in working age population by 2040, placing significant stress on its economy and its pension and health systems.⁹⁹ South Korea faces the similar prospect of depopulation—although less rapid than Japan's—combined with aging. By 2050, the entire working age population of South Korea will barely be larger than its over-60 population.¹⁰⁰

Even China and India, which at present appear fairly similar to each other demographically, will change positions in profound ways over the coming decades. These countries in fact face very different projections in terms of where their bulges lie on the age distribution. Figure 1 indicates the shifting percentages and numbers of working age populations from 2010 through 2040:

By 2040 China's working-age population will shrink by over 110 million.

Figure 1
Working Age Population Change, 2010–2040



Source: UN Population Division, World Population Prospects, 2010 Revision (medium variant).

In China, the net effect of Beijing’s “one-child” policy, combined with increasing life expectancy in the country, has been the creation of a population bubble that is currently middle-aged but by 2040 will decrease the working age population by over 110 million, or 11 percent of its overall population.¹⁰¹ China’s aging has produced, among other things, a ballooning elder-care industry that appears likely to consume increasing shares of Chinese economic output in the coming decades.¹⁰² Further, many Chinese families’ preference to have its “one” child be a boy has created significant potential for social strife in that there are tens of millions of young men with little prospect of marriage.¹⁰³ This phenomenon has led Beijing to allow significant immigration of young women from states like Vietnam, the Philippines, and North Korea.¹⁰⁴

China’s age bubble and the problems that have resulted from the one-child policy could pose significant constraints on Chinese economic and foreign policies in the decades ahead. A growing elderly population

that is living continually longer will strain both the elderly’s savings and potentially government funds to pay their pensions and health care. Small cohorts at the bottom of the age distribution foretell a shortage of workers to pay into those programs and threaten future economic growth, as well as a sharper tradeoff between the marginal Chinese citizen’s employment in the economy or in the People’s Liberation Army. The gender imbalance among children today could threaten social instability in the future. These are only a few of the demographic problems that could appear in China in the coming decades.

India has its highest concentration of population in a younger cohort, which should allow it more room for maneuver in its policy choices. It is also more balanced by gender. In 2040 roughly 68 percent of India’s population will be made up of working-age men and women, an increase of over 300 million when compared to today.¹⁰⁵ This means that the gap between India and China in terms of working-age populations

will be roughly 400 million in India's favor by 2040. By 2030 there will be roughly 100 million young men with at least a high school education in India, compared to only 75 million such people in China.¹⁰⁶ These demographic realities should allow India to play a greater role in the Asia-Pacific in terms of security.

Scholars have begun to wonder about the implications of aging for the future of world politics. Mark Haas, for example, has drawn on the literature discussing a democratic peace, wondering whether global demographic trends do not hold the prospect of a geriatric peace. In short, his argument is that aging among the great powers will create a number of constraints. It will depress overall economic output (absent significant productivity growth) and put severe pressure on national budgets to pay for the swelling numbers of elderly at the expense of military budgets, and within military budgets force states to allocate a greater share of expenditures to personnel as opposed to weapons development and procurement. The implication of this argument is that for states that are aging, war becomes less feasible.¹⁰⁷

Obviously, having a larger population is better for military power, holding all other factors equal. All other factors are rarely equal, however. Japan's, China's, and South Korea's increasing proportion of elderly population and shrinking youth shares create economic tradeoffs (pensions vs. arms) as well as fewer young people to work and serve in militaries. As a RAND Corporation report recently noted, demographic realities make clear that if America seeks to keep its alliance system intact in the coming decades, it will need to "become an even more dominant partner" in the alliances than it is today. When viewed in light of China's growing power, this implies both a larger overall cost, and a larger share of that larger cost accruing to Washington.¹⁰⁸

This outcome is not inevitable. America's allies and clients could and likely would begin making different decisions about their defense postures, intra-Asian alliance rela-

tionships, and government spending priorities if the United States made clear today that it did not intend to subsidize their defense indefinitely. Conversely, the longer Washington persists in infantilizing its Asian allies and clients, the more likely the RAND scenario above becomes.

Countries like Japan, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam all can and should be expected to play a larger role. While Japan faces significant economic and demographic challenges over the coming decades, they possess advanced military technology; favorable geography; and, in extremis, the option of pursuing a "porcupine" strategy with a nuclear deterrent at its core.¹⁰⁹ Japan's lack of land warfare capability and severe fiscal and demographic constraints should lessen fears that Japan would use such a posture as a shield for an offensive strategy. In addition, Japan may wish to work in concert with other, more demographically vital states in order to marry Japanese technology with manpower from these other states.

Objection Two: Other Countries Will Not Effectively Balance against China

The second potential objection to a more standoffish U.S. policy on Asian security is that regardless of their capabilities, current U.S. allies would not increase their own efforts to balance against Chinese power, but instead would appease China, leaving their security at the mercy of the Chinese leadership. This is one side of a longstanding debate in the academy over whether states tend to balance against or bandwagon with power.¹¹⁰

States tend to balance against potential rivals, although not always efficiently enough to prevent wars. The reason they do so is to ensure their control over their own destinies, or, in extreme cases, their survival as political units. While these views are sometimes hard for Americans to understand—America's survival as an autonomous political unit has not been threatened in at least 200 years—they are easier to understand abroad.

States tend to balance against potential rivals, although not always efficiently enough to prevent wars.

When geography and military technology favor defense, balancing becomes relatively cheaper and more doable.

Were the United States to create distance between itself and its Asian allies and clients, several things would likely happen. First, those states would probably increase their own efforts to balance against China's growing power. Indeed, in the 1970s when the Soviet Union was increasing its military buildup in East Asia and Japan worried that the United States was not keeping pace, Tokyo began boosting its own military efforts.¹¹¹

In recent months, news reports have indicated growing anxiety about Chinese behavior, and those countries' diplomacy has reflected that concern. Examples include the recent joint statement issued by the Philippines and Japan marking a new "strategic partnership" and expressing "common strategic interests" such as "ensuring the safety of sea lines of communication."¹¹² More recently, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda declared that Japan's security environment had grown "increasingly murky due to China's stepped-up activities in local waters and its rapid military expansion."¹¹³ A recent review of Australia's defense posture sounded similarly wary notes.¹¹⁴

The head of the Indian navy remarked that in the face of Chinese provocations there, "the South China Sea is an area of significant concern" for India.¹¹⁵ India, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Japan have all expressed their intentions to step up military efforts, with thinly veiled references to China as the justification.¹¹⁶ These are only the most recent indications that other countries in the region would hardly shrug at Chinese power in the absence of U.S. security guarantees. They see China as potentially threatening. Instead, Washington's constant repetition of its commitment to its allies' security allows these countries to avoid the necessary domestic debates about their security environments and what to do about them.¹¹⁷

In particular, states like Japan and India should be expected to play central roles. Notably, even China hawks like Aaron Friedberg admit that it is unclear how greater distance between Washington and Tokyo, for example, would produce anything other than a

more assertive Japan and possibly a Japan-led Asian coalition to constrain China.¹¹⁸ As Lyle Goldstein notes, "China is rising in a thicket of strong-willed and suspicious competitors in Asia."¹¹⁹

For wealthy and technologically advanced Asian states with ballooning retired populations and shrinking workforces, such as Japan, a reduced American commitment would create powerful pressures to pursue nuclear weapons programs. To be sure, the recent Fukushima nuclear disaster would make the politics of a nuclear deterrent even touchier in Japan. But the powerful logic of substituting capital for labor and securing its territory with the ultimate deterrent would likely weigh heavily on the minds of Japanese—and possibly South Korean and Taiwanese—policymakers.

Importantly, however, the time it would take Japan, for example, to go nuclear, is almost certainly longer than the conventional wisdom, which has generally hovered around six months.¹²⁰ There is little indication that Japan has prepared for such a rapid timeframe. Not only would Japan need to produce weapons-grade fissile material, but a significant amount more work would need to be done in developing delivery systems. A number of sizeable technical hurdles would put Japan's timeframe in the realm of years, not months, to become a bona fide nuclear-weapons state.¹²¹ If Washington were to insist that Japan carry a heavier share of the burden for providing for its own defense, Tokyo may look into how it would overcome these hurdles.¹²²

The relative costs of balancing and aggression affect states' decisions to do either. When geography and military technology favor offense, aggression becomes more appealing. When those factors favor defense, balancing becomes relatively cheaper and more doable.¹²³ In this case, the mostly maritime geography of Asia and the military technology in question means that balancing would be relatively cheap and aggression would be relatively difficult.¹²⁴ Hitler won easy victories on the European continent at the beginning of the Second World War, but just as geography, technology, and doctrine that produced those

victories, those same factors spelled disaster for Hitler on the eastern front. In the Asia-Pacific, large bodies of water separating many of the potential antagonists (and mountains in the case of India), combined with the difficulty of projecting power across those obstacles, favor defense.

Objection Three: Other Countries Can and Would Balance against China, but That Would be More Costly to America than the Current Approach

A final objection to restraint in the Asia-Pacific allows that America's Asian allies could and likely would choose to balance against China, but argues that their doing so would cause dangerous arms racing in the region and a greater chance of war, neither of which would happen if America continues to shelter its allies. Such naval conflict could disrupt trade in East Asia and with it the global economy, and therefore it is better to have America pay a disproportionate share of the cost but control the response to growing Chinese power and keep a lid on security competition.

It is certainly conceivable that some sort of naval skirmish could happen, but with or without forward-deployed U.S. forces, the costs of escalation would be very high for the prospective combatants. More importantly, this argument gets the relationship between trade and war backward. Trade and globalization have made it easier to avoid problematic reliance on any single country. As the most comprehensive recent study of the economic effects of war on neutral countries concluded, it is much easier than usually assumed for neutral parties to avoid high costs from wars. Because scholars and policymakers frequently confuse interdependence for vulnerability, they fail to see that in today's globalized marketplace, the costs to combatants are dramatically higher than they are to neutral states.¹²⁵ What this means for U.S. China policy is that a war between China and a neighbor, absent the United States, would be very costly for China and not nearly so costly for America.

In addition to the arms racing/instabil-

ity argument, supporters of the status quo claim that maintaining America's forward presence and commitments to its allies and clients is important for America's credibility. Brandeis's Robert Art states that the U.S.-Japan alliance must be maintained because it is the most important alliance in Asia, and if the alliance began to dissolve it would call into question Washington's commitment to other allies in the region.¹²⁶ But if the U.S.-Japan alliance is the most important of them all, the concern with its potential dissolution cannot be the implications for other, lesser alliances.

The final worry about countries defending themselves is that the allure of a nuclear deterrent would be extremely powerful for a country like Japan, and proliferation in Asia would damage the global nonproliferation regime.¹²⁷ However, the impact of proliferation on a country like Japan or South Korea would likely be more limited than is commonly asserted. Proliferation to countries like Pakistan and North Korea has been more limited than predicted, so those predicting the end of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty should Japan acquire a deterrent ought to explain why Japan is different from North Korea. Analysts have predicted nuclear cascades, waves, dominoes, and tipping points for decades, but those things have yet to materialize.¹²⁸

And any prospective Japanese nuclear deterrent could serve only as a deterrent, since Japan lacks any meaningful ground warfare capability and faces severe demographic pressures that would make even a nuclear-armed Japan terrifically unlikely to attempt to replay the 1930s.¹²⁹ Nuclear weapons would not help Japan attempt to conquer Manchuria or even a chunk of Korea. Japan cannot invade its neighbors today, and a nuclear deterrent would not help it do so tomorrow.

Naval arms races themselves do not cause wars, and security competition or even limited skirmishes in China's near seas do not promise economic catastrophe for the United States. Preparing to fight China in order to protect American alliances, or the credibility of our alliances, is foolish. If Washington poli-

**To sum up:
in today's
globalized
marketplace,
the costs to
combatants are
dramatically
higher than they
are to neutral
states.**

Washington should stop infantilizing its allies and instead demand that they defend themselves. America ought to pivot home.

cymakers decide that the survival of this or that ally is absolutely vital to America's own security, they should make that case clearly and openly. Finally, there is some prospect of nuclear proliferation to America's friends in Asia, but this does not pose as great a threat of instability or war as is commonly assumed. Adversaries like North Korea went nuclear without catastrophic consequences. This is because nuclear weapons are very useful to ensure a state's survival, but do little to aid in power projection or force favorable resolution of maritime disputes. The fact that the states frequently mentioned as possible proliferators have little ability to project power abroad makes the prospect of a given state attempting to use its nuclear arsenal to enable aggression even more unlikely.

Conclusion

Optimists, pessimists, and the Beltway foreign policy establishment all have flawed views on the rise of China and U.S. China policy. Optimists elide the zero-sum nature of military questions, hang too much on faith that political liberalization will happen, and will resign China to American military dominance, and similarly place too much faith in the power of international institutions. Pessimists have not shown how Washington could squash Chinese economic growth at an acceptable cost, and do not demonstrate directly how even a much more powerful China would threaten the national security of the United States. The Beltway policy establishment supports an inherently contradictory approach, conengagement, that borrows problems from both schools of thought and creates a new problem: free riding.

Acting as the balancer of first resort in Asia is costly, and it threatens to become more costly as economic engagement makes China relatively wealthier. Washington should stop infantilizing its allies and instead demand that they defend themselves. Japan, South Korea, India, Vietnam, the Philippines and other nations can cooperate to prevent the worst

potential forms of Chinese aggression without America doing it for them. The longer Washington takes to initiate this policy shift, the harder it will become.

America ought to pivot home. The new U.S. administration should revisit formal and informal U.S. security commitments in Asia with a clear eye trained on what it would actually be willing to fight a war with China over, and just how likely those scenarios are. American policymakers should work to lessen and ultimately remove the forward-deployed U.S. military presence in the region, helping establish more powerful national militaries in like-minded states. The new administration should encourage Asian nations to work together on security issues without the United States leading the way.

If the United States persists in its policy of conengagement, it likely will see its allies unable to play a larger role, and a larger share of America's national income dedicated to containing China on their behalf. The time to put the "offshore" back into offshore balancing is now. The alternative is persisting in a dangerous Sino-U.S. security competition, on terms increasingly favorable to Beijing.

Notes

The author thanks Benjamin Friedman, Gene Healy, Chris Preble, and John Schuessler for criticism of earlier drafts. Remaining deficiencies are the author's responsibility alone.

1. "How to Get a Date," *Economist*, December 31, 2011, p. 61.
2. Angus Maddison, "Statistics on World Population, GDP, and GDP per Capita, 1-2008 AD," University of Groningen, http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/Historical_Statistics/horizontal-file_02-2010.xls. According to Maddison, the height of Soviet relative economic power was 1975, when it possessed approximately 44.4 percent of U.S. GDP.
3. Bruce D. Porter, *War and the Rise of the State* (New York: Free Press, 1994), pp. 286-291.
4. Steve Coll, *Private Empire: ExxonMobil and American Power* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), p. 245.
5. Kagan and Kristol, "A National Humiliation,"

- Weekly Standard*, April 16–23, 2001, pp. 11–16.
6. Quoted in Adam Entous, “U.S. Won’t Cut Forces in Asia,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 25, 2011.
 7. Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century,” *Foreign Policy* (November 2011): 56–63.
 8. Quoted in Greg Sheridan, “U.S. Keeps an Eagle Eye on Asia,” *The Australian*, August 15, 2011.
 9. In 2005, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick was photographed in Chengdu literally hugging a baby panda, which caused a stir among China-watchers in Washington. See Edward Cody, “U.S. Envoy Engages in Panda Diplomacy,” *Washington Post*, January 26, 2006.
 10. To some readers, the idea of examining international-relations theory in an article on U.S. foreign policy may seem odd or misplaced. However, although the word and the idea of “theory” have fallen into disrepute in Washington, theory is unavoidable. It is not possible to make forward-looking policy choices without theory. While policymakers’ opinions on various issues are no doubt influenced by many factors, among those factors are their theories about how the world works. These theories could be explicit or implicit, general or specific, sound or unsound, but policymakers’ expectations about what sorts of results certain policies will or will not produce determine their policy preferences. These expectations about outcomes, in turn, are the products of policymakers’ theories. “Peace through strength” and “if goods do not cross borders, armies will” are both simplistic theories about how international politics works. Despite its bad rap inside the Beltway, theory matters a lot.
 11. Recently, a realist optimist school has emerged, arguing that if Washington were to abandon Taiwan, geography, distance, and nuclear deterrence should preclude conflict between the United States and China. See Charles Glaser, “Will China’s Rise Lead to War? Why Realism Does Not Mean Pessimism,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (March/April 2011): 80–91.
 12. On liberal institutionalist logic, see G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
 13. G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).
 14. G. John Ikenberry, “The Rise of China and the Future of the West,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 1 (January/February 2008): 37.
 15. *Ibid*, p. 24.
 16. Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, pp. 348–49.
 17. International relations scholars refer to this thinking as “second-image” analysis. For a discussion of the second image as a cause of war, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959 [1954]), pp. 80–158.
 18. Readers may note the similarity of this thinking to modernization theory, which came into vogue around the time of the Vietnam War. For an early formulation of this view, see Seymour Martin Lipset, “Some Social Requisites of Democracy,” *American Political Science Review* 53, no. 1 (March 1959): 69105.
 19. In fairness to theorists of the democratic peace, it should be reiterated that this is a significantly dumbed down application of their theory. On the democratic peace itself, see Bruce Russett and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).
 20. On internal and external balancing, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 168; and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), pp. 156–57.
 21. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, pp. 401–402.
 22. John J. Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to U.S. Power in Asia,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 382.
 23. *Ibid*, p. 390.
 24. GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney also blasted America’s “trade surrender” to China and promised that on the first day of his presidency he would designate China a currency manipulator. See Mitt Romney, “How I’ll Respond to China’s Rising Power,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 16, 2012.
 25. See Zalmay M. Khalilzad et al., “The United States and a Rising China: Strategic and Military Implications,” RAND Corporation Monograph MR-1082 (1999), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/2007/MR1082.pdf. For criticism, see Justin Logan, “Broken China Policy,” *American Conservative*, June 5, 2006, pp. 20–22.
 26. Aaron Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), Chapter 11. For similar arguments, see Robert

- Kagan and Dan Blumenthal, "Strategic Reassurance that Isn't," *Washington Post*, November 10, 2009; and Dan Blumenthal, "On China: It's the Regime, Stupid," *ForeignPolicy.com*, October 19, 2011, http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/19/on_china_its_the_regime_stupid.
27. See Aaron L. Friedberg, "Hegemony with Chinese Characteristics," *National Interest* 114 (July/August 2011): 18–27.
28. "Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament," November 17, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>.
29. Floyd Whaley, "U.S. Reaffirms Defense of Philippines in Standoff with China," *New York Times*, May 1, 2012.
30. The 1979 Taiwan Relations Act declares that "efforts to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes," would be "a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States," but falls short of a formal commitment to defend the island. For discussion, see Justin Logan and Ted Galen Carpenter, "Taiwan's Defense Budget: How Taipei's Free Riding Risks War," *Cato Institute Policy Analysis* no. 600, September 13, 2007, p. 2.
31. Victor D. Cha, "Powerplay: Origins of the U.S. Alliance System in Asia," *International Security* 34, no. 3 (Winter 2009/2010): 158–196.
32. Richard K. Betts, "The United States and Asia," in Ashley J. Tellis, Mercy Kuo, and Andre Marble, eds., *Strategic Asia 2008–2009: Challenges and Choices* (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2008), p. 51. See also Betts, "Institutional Imperialism," *National Interest* 113 (May/June 2011): 85–96, esp. 94.
33. Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," p. 59. See also James Dobbins, et al., "Conflict with China: Prospects, Consequences, and Strategies for Deterrence," RAND Corporation Occasional Paper no. 344, April 16, 2012, p. 10.
34. Scott Stearns, "New Chinese Base Raises Tensions in S. China Sea," *VOA News*, July 27, 2012; Chico Harlan, "In Asia, a Wave of Escalating Territorial Disputes," *Washington Post*, August 11, 2012; and Scott Stearns, "China Slams Western Involvement in S. China Sea Issue," *VOA News*, August 15, 2012.
35. Andrew S. Erickson and Gabriel B. Collins, "China's Oil Security Pipe Dream: The Reality, and Strategic Consequences, of Seaborne Imports," *Naval War College Review* 63, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 89–111.
36. An important exception is Robert S. Ross, "China's Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the U.S. Response," *International Security* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 46–81.
37. World Trade Organization, "China Country Profile," April 2012, <http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFView.aspx?Language=E&Country=CN>.
38. Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, "Energy Alarmism: The Myths that Make Americans Worry about Oil," *Cato Institute Policy Analysis* no. 589, April 5, 2007; see also Gholz and Press, "Protecting 'The Prize': Oil in American Grand Strategy," *Security Studies* 19, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 453–85.
39. Ross; Michael A. Glosny, Philip C. Saunders, and Robert S. Ross, "Correspondence: Debating China's Naval Nationalism," *International Security* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 161–175.
40. Ross.
41. See discussion in Glosny, Saunders, and Ross.
42. Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).
43. Jessica Chen Weiss, "Whither China? Revisiting Nationalism and the Dangers of Democratization" Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Seattle, Washington, September 3, 2011.
44. Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
45. Gen. Norton A. Schwartz and Adm. Jonathan W. Greenert, "Air-Sea Battle: Promoting Stability in an Era of Uncertainty," *American Interest*, February 20, 2012, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=1212>.
46. Robert L. Suettinger, "The Rise and Descent of 'Peaceful Rise,'" *China Leadership Monitor* no. 12, October 30, 2004, http://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/clm12_rs.pdf; and Bonnie S. Glaser and Evan S. Medeiros, "The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policymaking in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of 'Peaceful Rise,'" *China Quarterly* 190 (June 2007): 291–310.
47. For example, see Shen Dingli, "Don't Shun the Idea of Setting Up Overseas Military Bases," *China.org.cn*, January 28, 2010, http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2010-01/28/content_19324522.htm; and Yan Xuetong, "How China Can Defeat America,"

- New York Times*, November 20, 2011. The attitude of a number of leading dailies in China such as the (nationalistic) *Chinese Global Times* is strident and defensive. A recent editorial commented on the prospect of the Philippines allowing U.S. military basing on its territory by suggesting that China needed to “single out a few cases” of regional provocations and “apply due punishment,” noting that the Philippines would make a “suitable target” for sanctions or other response. “Make Philippines Pay for Balancing Act,” *Global Times*, January 29, 2012.
48. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, p. 402, and Mearsheimer, “Gathering Storm,” p. 390.
49. Of course, China could begin launching counterproductive wars that do not threaten U.S. interests just as Washington has launched counterproductive wars that do not threaten Chinese interests, but that would not be terribly concerning for American security.
50. M. Taylor Fravel, “International Relations Theory and China’s Rise: Assessing China’s Potential for Territorial Expansion,” *International Studies Review* 12, no. 4 (December 2010): 505–32.
51. Dan Blumenthal et al., “Asian Alliances in the 21st Century,” Project 2049 Institute, August 2011, p. 5, http://project2049.net/documents/Asian_Alliances_21st_Century.pdf.
52. See, for example, Evan S. Medeiros, “Strategic Hedging and the Future of Asia-Pacific Stability,” *Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2005–2006): 145–67; and Fareed Zakaria, “A ‘Hedge’ Strategy toward China,” *Washington Post*, November 15, 2010.
53. In fact, simply declining to trade with China would not be enough. Washington would have to assemble a containing coalition that would strangle Chinese trade. All of the dynamics that complicate coalition behavior would be extraordinarily difficult to overcome here, given the economic costs of doing so.
54. Richard Halloran, “Pacific Push,” *Air Force Magazine* (January 2011): 46–50.
55. Major Lawrence Spinetta, USAF, “‘The Malacca Dilemma: Countering China’s ‘String of Pearls’ with Land-Based Airpower,” MA Thesis, School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama (June 2006), <https://research.au.af.mil/papers/ay2006/saas/spinetta.pdf>.
56. Dennis Blair and Kenneth Lieberthal, “Smooth Sailing: The World’s Shipping Lanes Are Safe,” *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 3 (May/June 2007): 12.
57. Remarks by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta en route to Singapore, June 1, 2012, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=5047>.
58. For evidence that Chinese elites reject Panetta’s rationale, see the contribution of Wang Jisi in “Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust,” John L. Thornton China Center Monograph no. 4 (March 2012).
59. For one example, see Michael Beckley, “China’s Century? Why America’s Edge Will Endure,” *International Security* 36, no. 3 (Winter 2011/2012): 41–78, esp. pp. 73–74.
60. For discussion of purchasing power parity versus market exchange rates in defense economics, see International Institute of Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2010* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 13, 393.
61. Mitt Romney, “The Care of Freedom,” speech to the Heritage Foundation, June 1, 2009, <http://blog.heritage.org/2009/06/01/text-of-romneys-speech-the-care-of-freedom/>.
62. Kate Brannen, “Experts Say Romney’s Defense Plan Doesn’t Add Up,” *Defense News*, June 17, 2012.
63. Friedberg, *Contest for Supremacy*, p. 184.
64. On free riding in alliances, see Mancur Olson, Jr. and Richard Zeckhauser, “An Economic Theory of Alliances,” *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 48, no. 3 (August 1966): 266–79.
65. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, pp. 271–72.
66. I borrow this formulation from Benjamin Friedman.
67. Blumenthal et al., pp. 7–8.
68. Samuel Huntington termed this imbalance between foreign commitments and national power the “Lippmann Gap,” named for journalist Walter Lippmann. See Huntington, “Coping with the Lippmann Gap,” *Foreign Affairs* 66, no. 3 (“America and the World” Special Issue, 1987): 453–77.
69. Paul Kallender-Umezu, “Japan’s Defense Budget Request Down 1.7 Percent,” *Defense News*, September 10, 2012.
70. Jennifer M. Lind, “Pacifism or Passing the Buck? Testing Theories of Japanese Security Policy,” *International Security* 29 no. 1 (Summer 2004): 92–121. Llewellyn Hughes suggests that absent such an ironclad American commitment, Japan would consider more seriously the option of pursuing a nuclear arsenal. Hughes, “Why Japan Will

- Not Go Nuclear (Yet): International and Domestic Constraints on the Nuclearization of Japan,” *International Security* 31, no. 4 (Spring 2007): 67–96.
71. Olson and Zeckhauser. John Oneal followed up on the theory and retested it in 1990, coming to similar conclusions. See John R. Oneal, “The Theory of Collective Action and Burden Sharing in NATO,” *International Organization* 44, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 379–402.
72. Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Remarks on the Obama Administration’s National Security Strategy,” May 27, 2010, transcript at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/05/142312.htm>.
73. Christopher Layne, “America as European Hegemon,” *National Interest* (Summer 2003): 17–29; Peter Liberman, “Ties That Bind: Will Germany and Japan Rely Too Much on the United States?” *Security Studies* 10, no. 2 (Winter 2000/2001): 93–138.
74. Anne-Marie Slaughter, “Be Wary of Asian Triumphalism,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 22–23.
75. On active discussions about fighting China within the Pentagon, see Andrew Burt and Christopher J. Castelli, “Despite Improved Ties, China Weighs Heavily in Pentagon War Planning: Team Links AirSea Battle to China,” *Inside the Pentagon*, June 9, 2011.
76. Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, Third Edition (New York: Free Press, 1988 [1973]), p. 229.
77. Liberman, p. 113.
78. One recent study from the RAND Corporation suggested that in the event of a war, China could potentially ground the entire Taiwan air force before it could get off the ground by cutting all of the runways at Taiwan’s fighter bases. See David A. Shlapak, et al., *A Question of Balance: Political Context and Military Aspects of the China-Taiwan Dispute* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009). On Taiwan’s military efforts, see Logan and Carpenter.”
79. Shyu-tu Lee, “Misreading China’s Intentions,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (July/August 2011): 179–80.
80. Logan and Carpenter.
81. Peter Enav, “Taiwanese Youth Losing Taste for China Fight,” *Associated Press*, December 1, 2011.
82. For a discussion, see Justin Logan, “What Does Hillary Think about Taiwan?” *Cato@Liberty*, August 3, 2007, <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/what-does-hillary-think-about-taiwan/>.
83. Lyle Goldstein, “The South China Sea’s Georgia Scenario,” *ForeignPolicy.com*, July 11, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/07/11/the_south_china_seas_georgia_scenario?page=full.
84. Blumenthal et al., p. 4.
85. David Axe, “Relax: China’s First Aircraft Carrier Is a Piece of Junk,” *Danger Room*, June 1, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/06/relax-chinas-first-aircraft-carrier-is-a-piece-of-junk/>.
86. Remarks of Michael Schiffer at the Center for the National Interest, July 27, 2011.
87. Donald Rumsfeld, “Address to the Shangri-La Dialogue,” Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore, June 4, 2005, <http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-archive/shangri-la-dialogue-2005/2005-speeches/first-plenary-session-the-hon-donald-rumsfeld/>.
88. On offshore balancing, see Christopher Layne, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America’s Future Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 22, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 86–24.
89. For a detailed study of Taiwan scenarios, see Shlapak et al. On China’s growing capacity to mount anti-access/area denial campaigns, see Vitaliy O. Pradun, “From Bottle Rockets to Lightning Bolts: China’s Missile Revolution and PLA Strategy against U.S. Military Intervention,” *U.S. Naval War College Review* 64, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 8–38.
90. The force requirements of a North Korean collapse, for example, are staggering and would likely attract profound Chinese interest, if not direct intervention. See Bruce W. Bennett and Jennifer Lind, “The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements,” *International Security* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 84–119.
91. Ross.
92. James R. Holmes, “The Sino-Japanese Naval War of 2012,” *ForeignPolicy.com*, August 20, 2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/08/20/the_sino_japanese_naval_war_of_2012?page=full.
93. For instance, the U.S. military presence in Okinawa is detested by Okinawans, but prized by most other Japanese. A NIMBY-style political struggle has ensued, with the Okinawa constituency continually organizing in opposition to the bases there.
94. A variant of this argument would be that countries would like to ally with one another against China, but the collective action problems with alliances would split the coalition.

95. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*, p. 400. Another variation of this argument holds that America can more easily balance against China itself than could a regional alliance of lesser states. Put differently, it is easier for one massively powerful country to hedge against China than it is for a number of weaker countries to pull together to overcome the coordination problems inherent in trying to do so themselves.
96. Mark L. Haas, "A Geriatric Peace? The Future of U.S. Power in a World of Aging Populations," *International Security* 32, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 112–147.
97. Nicholas Eberstadt, "Asia-Pacific Demographics in 2010–2040: Implications for Strategic Balance," in Ashley J. Tellis, Andrew Marble, and Travis Tanner, eds., *Strategic Asia 2010: Asia's Rising Power and America's Continued Purpose* (Seattle, WA: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2010), pp. 250–52.
98. Demographers define "working-age" as the group of a nation's citizens between 15 and 64.
99. *Ibid.*, pp. 255–58.
100. Jack A. Goldstone, "The New Population Bomb: The Four Megatrends that Will Change the World," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 1 (January/February 2010): 34.
101. UN Population Database, "World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision," http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/unpp/Panel_profiles.htm.
102. Zhanliang Feng et al., "An Industry in the Making: The Emergence of Institutional Elder Care in Urban China," *Journal of the American Geriatric Society* 59, no. 4 (April 2011): 738–44.
103. Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea den Boer, "China's Security, China's Demographics: Aging, Masculinization, and Fertility Policy," *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 14, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 185–200.
104. Delia Davin, "Marriage Migration in China and East Asia," *Journal of Contemporary China* 16, no. 50 (February 2007): 94.
105. UN Population Database, "World Population Prospects."
106. Nicholas Eberstadt, "India's Demographic Outlook: Implications and Trends," *NBR Policy Q & A*, December 2011.
107. Haas.
108. Martin C. Libicki, Howard J. Shatz, and Julie E. Taylor, *Global Demographic Change and Its Implications for Military Power* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), p. 114.
109. For discussion of a "porcupine" strategy in the context of Taiwan, see Ivan Eland, "The China-Taiwan Military Balance: Implications for the United States," *Cato Institute Foreign Policy Briefing* no. 74, November 5, 2003.
110. Balancing describes states responding to growing power of another state or states by arming themselves to defend against the other state(s). Bandwagoning describes allying with the most powerful state in the hopes of benefiting from its influence. For discussion of balancing and bandwagoning, see Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 125–28; and Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (Summer 1994): 72–107.
111. Lind, pp. 108–15.
112. "Japan-Philippines Joint Statement on the Comprehensive Promotion of the 'Strategic Partnership' between Neighboring Countries Connected by Special Bonds of Friendship," September 27, 2011, http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/noda/state%20ment/201109/27philippines_e.html.
113. Chester Dawson, "Japan PM Warns on Defense," *Wall Street Journal*, October 17, 2011.
114. Enda Curran, "Australia Report Urges Northward Shift," *Wall Street Journal*, January 30, 2012.
115. Admiral Nirmal Verma quoted in "South China Sea an Area of 'Significant Concern': Navy Chief," *Times of India*, November 17, 2011.
116. "India's President Wants Improved Maritime Security," *Agence-France Press*, December 20, 2011; "Philippines Seeks U.S. F-16s amid China Concerns," *Agence-France Press*, December 21, 2011; Hiroshi Hiyama, "F-35 Wins Japan Fighter Competition," *Agence-France Press*, December 20, 2011; and Gary Li, "Vietnam's Asymmetrical Strategy: Location Offers Advantages over China," *Defense News*, February 5, 2012.
117. Posen, "The Case for Restraint," *The American Interest* (November/December 2007). See also Glosny, Saunders, and Ross, p. 173. For discussion of the disconnect between Asian states' rhetoric and defense postures, see Justin Logan, "Asia's Free Riders," *ForeignPolicy.com*, November 9, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/11/09/asias_free_riders?page=full.
118. Friedberg, *Contest for Supremacy*, pp. 174, 178. See also Glaser, p. 86.

119. Lyle J. Goldstein, "Resetting the U.S.-China Security Relationship," *Survival* 53, no. 2 (April-May 2011): 91.
120. On the murky origins of the "six months" conventional wisdom, see Jeffrey Lewis, "How Long for Japan to Build a Deterrent?" ArmsControlWonk.com, December 28, 2006, <http://lewis.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/1339/japans-nuclear-status>.
121. See, for example, the discussion in Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, "Thinking about the Unthinkable: Tokyo's Nuclear Option," *Naval War College Review* 62, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 59-78.
122. Obviously, signs that Japan was contemplating developing a nuclear deterrent likely would be observable by China and could cause significant alarm in Beijing. While this development would be potentially destabilizing, projecting present trends forward also holds the prospect of destabilization. Washington would do well to point out to all parties that nuclear weapons are quite useful for deterrence but do little to assist in power projection.
123. Charles L. Glaser and Chaim Kauffman, "What Is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure It?" *International Security* 22, no. 4 (Spring 1998): 44-82.
124. One possible exception in this context, where offense may have an advantage, is in space and cyberspace.
125. Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, "The Effects of Wars on Neutral Countries: Why It Doesn't Pay to Preserve the Peace," *Security Studies* 10, no. 4 (Summer 2001): 1-55.
126. Robert J. Art, "The United States and the Rise of China: Implications for the Long Haul," in Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng, eds., *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 279.
127. Art, for example, suggests (p. 293) that a nuclear Japan could "mortally wound" the NPT or the nuclear nonproliferation regime generally.
128. John Mueller, *Atomic Obsession: Nuclear Alarmism from Hiroshima to al Qaeda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), Chapter 7.
129. On Japan's inability to project power on land (or indeed even to fight on land at home), see Lind, pp. 96-97.