

The Reassertion of the United States in the Asia-Pacific Region

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When President Obama visited Australia in November 2011, he was very direct concerning the future American role in the Asia-Pacific region: “As President, therefore, I have made a deliberate and strategic decision—as a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future, by upholding core principles and in close partnership with our allies and friends.”¹

The Asia-Pacific region currently forms the epicenter of world affairs and incorporates the majority of great powers (emerging and confirmed), most nuclear powers, and more than one-third of the world’s population. Although the region is the new global economic driving force, security challenges remain (piracy, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, natural resources, border issues, etc.). Economic interdependence has not negated the risk of conflict; tensions remain with regard to the Korean peninsula, Taiwan, and the maritime border disputes in the South China Sea. As General Martin E. Dempsey summed it, “All of the trends, demographic trends, geopolitical trends, economic trends and military trends are shifting toward the Pacific. So our strategic challenges in the future will largely emanate out of the Pacific region, but also the littorals of the Indian Ocean.”² In the current context of transitioning the balance of power toward Asia, the zone extending from the Gulf of Bengal to the Sea of Japan has become even more of a vital interest for Washington. Although the United States still dominates in the Pacific, it is less so than in the past, a reflection of Asia undergoing profound change. As mentioned in the *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* document, the United States has reached an “inflection point,”³ and although the words “relative decline” or “overstretch” are not pronounced, the “unipolar moment,” as defined by the syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer, is ending. With that thought as a discerning factor, the United States has established new priorities and

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reinforced its diplomatic and military presence in an attempt to ensure *Pax Americana* in the Pacific.

In November 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote an article in *Foreign Policy*, entitled “America’s Pacific Century.” The article was precise and left no doubt regarding the United States’ intentions and objectives. Clinton established six priorities:

- Reinforce bilateral alliances.
- Deepen relations with emerging powers (China among others).
- Reengage with multilateral regional institutions.
- Expand commerce and investments.
- Forge a large military presence.
- Advance democracy and human rights.⁴

Although the relationship with China is addressed at length in the article, two countries receive particular attention—India and Indonesia. In the document *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, published in January 2012, US leaders confirm these policies:

US economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia, creating a mix of evolving challenges and opportunities. Accordingly, while the US military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region.⁵

The document also directs the protection of the “global commons, those areas beyond national jurisdiction that constitute the vital connective tissue of the international system.”⁶ To these ends, on a military level, the traditional alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand had served as the bedrock for this policy, but the updated version goes beyond these core partners; new relationships and capacities are outlined for development. In the wake of this adaptation and adjustment of the security architecture, one nation in particular receives special attention—China. The possibility of a Chinese hegemon in Asia, and more specifically in Southeast Asia, appears to be a major concern for the United States, which previously enjoyed unequalled dominance in the region. This article will examine the geostrategic aspects of the Chinese approach in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly Southeast Asia, followed by an assessment of America’s strategy. As a final point, we will refer to the work of Homer Lea (1876-1912), a neglected American officer and sinologist. It is this author’s view that Lea’s analysis of the British and Japanese deployments in the 19th century, with its focus on strategic geometry, forms the basis for examining America’s repositioning in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

China’s Strategic Aims in Southeast Asia

The economic interdependence between China and the United States forms an important pillar of their relationship. It is not, however, a guarantee of a symbiotic relationship. Other aspects of the relationship pose problems; among these are the contradictory interests of China and America in Southeast Asia.

For China, its projection of power is constrained by geography. In the South, it is restricted by the Strait of Malacca and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries; in the North, by Japan and South Korea (Strait of Korea/Tsushima); and on the East by Taiwan, the “unsinkable aircraft carrier,” as Douglas MacArthur called it. For some Chinese experts such as Yu Yang and Qi Xiaodong, there are three barriers encircling and thwarting China:

- The arc from Japan to South Korea—Diego Garcia, characterized by American (and British) forward operating bases.
- The arc from Guam to Australia.
- The arc from Hawaii-Midway-Aleutian Islands to Alaska.⁷

Consequently, there is a desire for Beijing to either block access or to neutralize American initiatives related to power projection.

The priority for China is to break this “geographic containment.” Since maritime traffic in the northern Pacific is largely under the control of Japan and South Korea, Beijing needs to seek other alternatives. Primary among these alternatives is the Chinese authorities’ interest in the North Korean port of Rajin located on the Tumen River and flowing into the Sea of Japan. This port is free of ice the entire year and offers potential access to the northern Pacific and the Arctic Oceans via the Strait of Peouise. This opportunity is, of course, viewed unfavorably by Tokyo and Seoul. Second, and focused further South, on the island of Hainan, is where the Chinese are constructing an important military base that will host submarines and aircraft carriers in the future. Third, China has started to reinforce its infrastructure on the Paracel Islands (taken from Vietnam in 1974). The Paracels are strategically important because they are not far from Hainan and located between Vietnam and the Philippines, thereby providing a position from which to exercise dominance over the South China Sea. Fourth, even further South, China occasionally deploys patrol boats to the Spratly Islands to escort its fishing vessels. Finally, with regard to Taiwan, reunification remains a priority. After the reintegration of Hong-Kong in 1997 and Macao in 1999, the extension of Beijing’s rule over Taiwan, by force if necessary, became the most critical national objective for the People’s Republic. Strategically, if Taiwan was again under Chinese sovereignty, it would reinforce its presence in the First Island Chain and make it easier for the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to project power to the Second Island Chain and provide a greater control of the Strait of Taiwan.

As established in the Chinese white papers on national defense, the region stretching from the Yellow Sea through the East China Sea and the Strait of Taiwan towards the South China Sea, forms the frontline of Chinese defenses. Dominating these seas would give China the opportunity to extend its security perimeter and reinforce its influence over the maritime sea lines of communication (SLOC) linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans.⁸

Despite the soothing words by Chinese officials, China is single-minded in its intention to control what it considers as vital space (*Dingwei*). The growing military strength of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) could deny or complicate US access to forward operational bases, making any military

intervention against China more complex. China also manifests a strong desire to create a power projection capacity capable of intervening in the Pacific and beyond. *China's National Defense in 2008* white paper is very explicit. As a first step, the authorities will develop a modern navy capable of intervening around the First Chain of Islands (Japan-Taiwan and south of the Philippines). By 2020, the objective is to develop a maritime regional power that can reach the Second Chain of Islands. It is hoped the Chinese navy will become a global power by 2040. Consequently, the Chinese maritime capacities are rapidly evolving from a green water navy to a blue water navy.

In the near term, the United States clearly fears the Chinese anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) in the region,⁹ capabilities that would complicate American power projection while controlling the global commons. As Admiral Robert F. Willard, former US Pacific Command Commander, said during a press conference:

The challenge in any nation creating those kind of area denial capabilities and packaging them in a way that appears to deny space, especially international airspace and international maritime space, to others is it will generate a degree of uncertainty and discomfort in the region and, frankly with the United States that has interests there.¹⁰

The admiral went further:

And I think that as we think about ATAD . . . we have to think about the veiled or not so veiled threat that that poses to regional neighbors, given their interests in the maritime and air domains and the fact that those areas are vital to the commerce, the security, and prosperity of the Asia Pacific.¹¹

The United States wants to guarantee the security and control of the global commons, particularly the freedom of navigation, and considers the current Chinese policy in the region as expansionist and possibly endangering free passage of various sea lanes. This is critically important to Washington since the transport of armed forces and goods to and from the Middle East often utilizes these routes. It also endangers *Pax Americana* in the Pacific. If China exercises greater control over the region, it will limit America's room for maneuver.

In response to these concerns, the United States is reinforcing its strategic position in Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific, comparable to a real-life game of chess or "go."

Northeast Asia: Adapting Traditional Alliances to New Realities

The American strategy in the Asia Pacific relies primarily on the traditional hub and spoke system, incorporating Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand. The relationship between Japan and the United States is still determined by the spirit of the *US-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security of 1960*. It establishes in Article 5 that an attack against Japan would constitute an attack against the United States and would require intervention. This is without Japan having the same reciprocal obligation. Article 6

authorizes the United States to station military forces on Japanese territory in an effort to contribute to the security of the nation.

The security and policy issues between Washington and Tokyo today revolve around three main issues:

- Common strategic objectives.
- The role, missions, and capacities of the two nations.
- The repositioning of American forces.

With regard to the first issue, both nations work together to guarantee the security of Japan, reinforce stability in the region, encourage a peaceful solution to the North Korean question, continue a constructive relationship with China, and maintain the Strait of Taiwan as a mutual vital interest. That said, Washington also encourages Japan to take greater responsibility for its own national defense and that of the region. There is also an embryonic alliance between Japan, Australia, and the United States via the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue. With regard to the second issue, the nations' militaries have revitalized and strengthened their military cooperation and interoperability in a number of domains: intelligence, logistics, joint operations, and missile defense. Regarding the presence of American forces on Japanese soil, the agreement concluded in 2006 confirms the withdrawal of 8,000 Marines from Okinawa to Guam by 2014 (US costs are estimated to exceed \$10 billion, 60 percent of which may be paid by the Japanese government). In 2009, however, the new government of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) sought to renegotiate the agreement due to existing tension concerning the construction of a new American Marine base in Okinawa. Tokyo and Washington still have differing positions on this issue, but in April 2012, the two agreed to delink the relocation of the 8,600 Marines to Guam¹² and the construction of a new facility in Okinawa (Futenma).¹³ The loss of Okinawa would have major consequences for America as it would lose strategic depth with regard to Taiwan and the East China Sea.

The relationship between South Korea and the United States is based on the *Republic of Korea (ROK)/United States Mutual Security Agreement of 1954* that at times has been tense, but has been excellent in recent years. Practical adaptations are ongoing, as Seoul is looking for a more independent strategy, and has been encouraged in this endeavor by the United States, which wishes to see Seoul take on a greater regional responsibility. The future of the relationship was redefined in September 2010 in the *Strategic Alliance 2015* plan. In 2005, the South Korean government presented the *Defense Reform 2020* plan that envisages reforming the South Korean army into a highly mobile, technologically advanced, and autonomous force no longer dependent on the US military. From Seoul's perspective, it is important not to be viewed as the "junior partner," to affirm its national interests, and to develop a strategic approach for the region. Consequently, in 2015, the United States will transfer operational command during wartime to the South Koreans, while redeploying some 28,000 forces elsewhere inside the country. In the coming years, 9,000 forces will leave the Yongsan base and be deployed to Pyeongtaek (60 kilometers from Seoul) and 10,000 forces stationed near the demilitarized zone

(DMZ) will be relocated south of Seoul. The two governments have also agreed that the US forces stationed in the country will serve as a rapid-reaction force for Northeast Asia, fulfilling a more global role.¹⁴

Following these changes with Japan and South Korea, the island of Guam has become the strategic hub for US forces in the Pacific.¹⁵ Three nuclear-powered submarines are based at the naval base of Apra. B-2s and B-52s have been stationed at Andersen Air Force Base. Once the modernization and upgrade of Andersen is completed, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), KC-135s, and fighter jets will be permanently based there. Admiral T. B. Fargo, former head of US Pacific Command, declared in June 2003: “We think Guam is absolutely strategic, in our view, with respect to the Pacific. It has the ability to maintain our ships and certainly provide logistic support. And its key location in the near vicinity of the East Asia littoral makes it a very attractive location.”¹⁶ From Guam it is three hours by air and three days by sea to reach the Japan-Taiwan-Philippines axis.¹⁷

Southeast Asia: To Engage ASEAN

Ignored during the Bush administration, ASEAN has become a priority under the Obama presidency. As Kurt Campbell, Assistant Secretary of State for Asian Affairs said, “We are diversifying our strategic and military approach. We will keep a strong commitment in northeast Asia, but we will focus more of our attention in Southeast Asia.”¹⁸ In the past, the United States, maintained privileged, bilateral relations with ASEAN members, but currently ASEAN is seen by the Obama administration more as one unified actor and treated as such. Since 2009, annual summits have been organized between America and ASEAN, and a resident American ambassador has been appointed. The United States even participated in the East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2011 after acceding to the *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia*. This renewed engagement and interest in ASEAN is partially motivated by a greater desire for a multilateral approach from the current administration, but is also based on Realpolitik consideration for reinforcing the US military presence so as to better control the global commons and the maritime *Rimland*. Still, bilateral relations with the Philippines, Singapore, and Indonesia remain critical to America’s engagement of Southeast Asia.

Although the United States had to close the military bases of Clark and Subic Bay in the Philippines following the Senate of the Philippines refusal to ratify a new agreement, the two nations are still linked by the *Mutual Defense Treaty Between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America* (30 August 1951), with the Philippines dependent on US aid for their security. Even if American forces had to leave in the nineties, military bonds remained strong. In 1998, the two states concluded the *Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Government of the United States Regarding the Treatment of United States Armed Forces Visiting the Philippines*, which allowed bilateral military exercises.¹⁹ Manila also benefits from two other programs, International Military Education and Training

(IMET) and Excess Defense Articles (EDA). In 2002, the two capitals concluded the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA), which stipulates that American forces can use bases and facilities on Philippine territory for various missions (primarily counterterrorism missions). Since then, between 100 and 500 forces, mostly Special Operations Forces, rotate through a base in the city of Zamboanga, and form the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTFP).²⁰ The United States is also pursuing access to facilities in the city of General Santos. In the meantime, the presence of US forces has been justified by the fight against radical Islamism (Abu Sayyaf). The long-range objective of the two nations is to better control certain seas and straits (Seas of Sulu and Sulawesi, the Strait of Makassar). The fact that the two governments are currently discussing the possibility of stationing littoral combat ships in the Philippines serves to strengthen this strategy.

Another regional nation, Thailand, has enjoyed a special status with America as a major non-NATO ally since 2003. The alliance between the two nations is very solid and highlighted by the annual Cobra Gold exercise. Cobra Gold is the United States' longest-standing military exercise in the Pacific and brings together militaries from Thailand, the United States, Singapore, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, and Japan to participate in interoperability and multinational coordination and training exercises. These exercises are vital to maintaining regional partnership, prosperity, and security in the Asia-Pacific region.

Despite the lack of an official alliance between Singapore and the United States, the country is a major American supporter in Southeast Asia. In 2005, the two nations concluded the *U.S.-Singapore Strategic Framework Agreement for a Closer Cooperation Partnership in Defense and Security* (SFA) to formalize cooperation in various fields: counterterrorism, nuclear proliferation, maritime security, and bilateral and multilateral exercises. Singapore hosts the US Navy Logistics Group West Pacific and the US Air Force 497th Combat Training Squadron. The new port at Changi is capable of supporting American aircraft carriers. The United States will deploy its littoral combat ships to Singapore in the near future. This enhanced military cooperation between the two nations affords the United States an opportunity to monitor maritime traffic in the Indonesian straits, while stationing vessels at the margins of the SLOC that convey most of the Chinese energy imports.

Although the relationship between Washington and Jakarta was uneasy in the nineties primarily due to the situation in East Timor, the military of both nations continued informal relations. The relationship continued despite tensions resultant of actions by the US Congress, among which was the Leahy amendment that forbid the transfer of military arms and halted the training of the Indonesian military. After 9/11, and because the United States gradually felt that their loss of influence over Indonesia provided China with an avenue to advance its own interests, things started to change. The Bush administration realized that imposing sanctions on Indonesia was counterproductive and could possibly push Indonesia into China's sphere of influence. IMET and Cooperation

Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) resumed, the arms embargo was lifted in 2005, and Foreign Military Financing was reestablished. During her visit in February 2009, Secretary Clinton declared the partnership would “provide a framework for advancing [US and Indonesian] common interests on the range of regional and global issues, covering environmental protection and climate change, trade and investment, democracy promotion, health, education, regional security and counter-terrorism.”²¹ The visit of President Obama in 2010 confirmed the geostrategic importance of Indonesia, not only because of its pivotal role in Southeast Asia, but also because it happens to be the nation with the largest Muslim population in the world.

A dramatic change of course was also taking place in bilateral relations between the United States and other ASEAN countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, not to mention Myanmar. In 1994, Washington and Kuala Lumpur concluded an assistance agreement, the *Cross Servicing and Acquisition Agreement*, which was renewed in 2005 for another ten years. American ships call at Malaysian ports, bilateral military exercises are conducted on an annual basis, and American Special Operations Forces practice at the Jungle Warfare Training School. Interestingly, the United States is currently engaged in a process of rapprochement with Vietnam. Since diplomatic relations resumed in 1995, a prudent and progressive collaboration in the military arena gradually emerged: IMET; sharing of intelligence in the fight against terrorism; port calls; and military cooperation in the medical field are but a few examples. America is also interested in accessing the Vietnamese port of Cam Ranh Bay. In addition to Vietnam, the United States improved relations with Cambodia and Laos, even though these are limited to training and other military exchanges. A fairly new evolution is the relationship with Myanmar, solidified by the visit of Secretary Clinton to Naypyidaw at the end of 2011. It appears that the United States is clearly on the move with regard to ASEAN mainland states in an attempt to nullify their traditional ties with China.

Ultimately, these new policies and strategies are aimed at control of the Asian Rimland; it is there that the real struggle between Beijing and Washington for dominance in the region will take place. ASEAN nations belong to a category of states capable of permuting from one sphere of influence to another. ASEAN nations form a buffer zone defined by the author David Mathisen as “small independent zones lying between two larger, usually rival states (or bloc of states).”²² Consequently, these states are in a position similar to the depiction of Afghanistan by the Afghani leader Amir Abdur Rahman of “a swan on a lake, with bears on one shore and wolves on the opposite shore, ready to snatch it up should she swim too close.”²³

South Pacific and India

Australia is the cornerstone of US security policy in the South Pacific. Even though the United States already had access to Australian bases and facilities, the agreement concluded in November 2011 regarding the permanent stationing of US Marines at Darwin served to reaffirm it. In the first phase,

250 military personnel will occupy the base in 2012. In a second phase, 2,500 Marines will be stationed at the base in 2015. This location provides the United States better control over the main SLOC around Indonesia and the Philippines (Lombok, Sunda, Makassar, Timor Sea, and Andura Sea), along with direct access to the Indian Ocean. In the region, there is a rapprochement between America and New Zealand (*Declaration of Wellington in 2010*) and between the United States and the Pacific Islands. China's economic and diplomatic breakthrough has forced the United States to reengage the region bilaterally and through regional interactions (Pacific Island Forum, Secretariat of the Pacific Community).²⁴ Indeed, these microstates have gained strategic significance with regard to the control of various SLOCs (Guam-Australia-New Zealand), adding to their value in regional and international organizations. Finally, India is considered by the United States "to be one of the defining partnerships in the Asia-Pacific."²⁵ The two nations have begun a strategic dialogue on the Asia-Pacific region, along with an embryonic trilateral relationship between Japan, India, and the United States. America has also supported India's "Look East" policy,²⁶ highlighted by the annual Malabar military exercises. New Delhi and Washington share common interests in the region: the danger of maritime piracy, the emergence of China, and the protection of the SLOCs.

Homer Lea and the Policy of Triangles

American policy in the Pacific continues to be based on Alfred Thayer Mahan's precepts: forward operation bases, positioning assets around choke-points and SLOCs, deploying a navy presence on all seas, and maintaining the capability to intervene at key geostrategic points. If Mahan's basic tenets are still valid, the influence of the early adventurer and author Homer Lea could be significant. In his books *The Valor of Ignorance* and *The Day of the Saxon*, Lea states frontiers are mobile lines. For a maritime power, the maritime frontier is, as observed by the British, "the one of its enemies." Should this view be used to interpret recent American strategy in the Asia Pacific, it would appear there is a desire from the Pentagon to ensure America's national interests. This translates into a triple line of defense:

- Japan-South Korea-Taiwan-Thailand-Singapore.
- Japan-Guam-Philippines-Australia.
- Alaska/Aleutian Islands-Hawaii-Samoa.

Lea insisted on the need to rely on forward operation bases in the form of a triangle. "Strategic geometry" was the key principle on which much of his work was based, a strategy that translates quite well into what is currently taking place in the Asia-Pacific region. His argument is that there is a need to take into account:

- The number of triangles the bases will form.
- The frequency with which the main base is at the intersection of these triangles.
- The presence or not of enemy bases inside this network.

- The increase of maritime power leading to an increase in the number of bases.²⁷

By forming numerous triangles with Guam as the potential center or node, the United States is actually executing the argument presented by Lea.²⁸ Some examples are the “Guam-Japan-South Korea,” “Guam-Darwin-Pearl Harbor,” “Guam-Taiwan-Japan” triangles (see Figure 1).

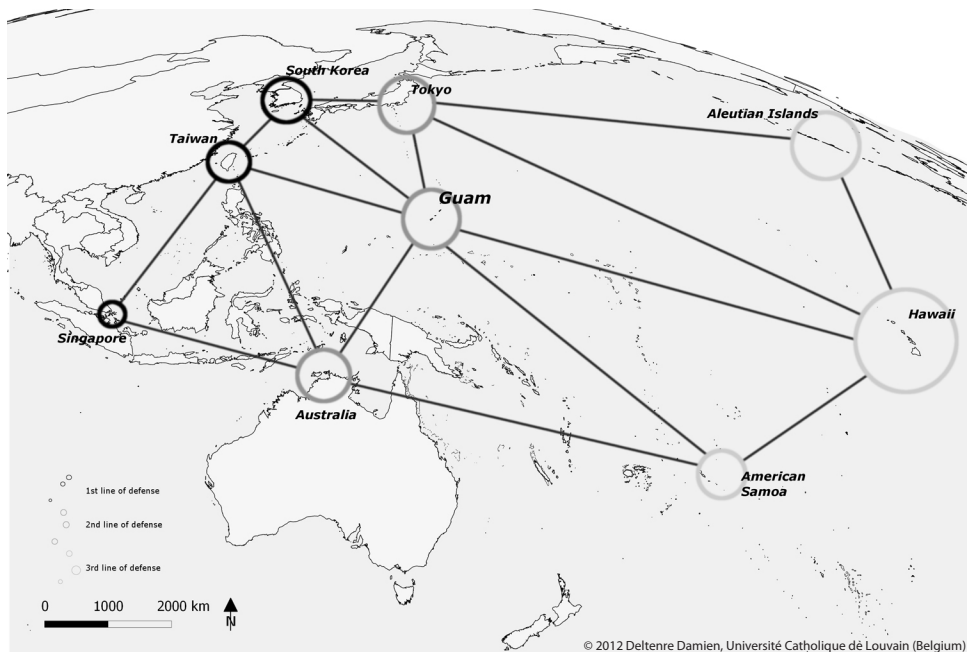


Figure 1. The Triangles in the Pacific Ocean

Through alliances and formal arrangements in Northeast and Southeast Asia, America seeks to diversify its presence and gain better control of its operational areas, as well as greater leverage over the SLOCs. This strategy is complementary to Julian Corbett’s philosophy that states:

The best way for an oceangoing fleet to attain maximum geographic coverage while remaining ready to concentrate for battle was through a sort of ‘elastic cohesion.’ That is, the fleet should spread out as widely as possible to monitor broad sea areas. But fleet units should remain close enough together that they could swiftly ‘condense’ at the vital point to engage a navy that offered battle. This rubber-band approach to concentration was a function of sensor and command-and-control technology, which enabled navies to monitor their surroundings and coordinate their movements.²⁹

In the Indian Ocean, the Diego Garcia atoll could fulfill the same purpose as Guam in the Pacific (see Figure 2).

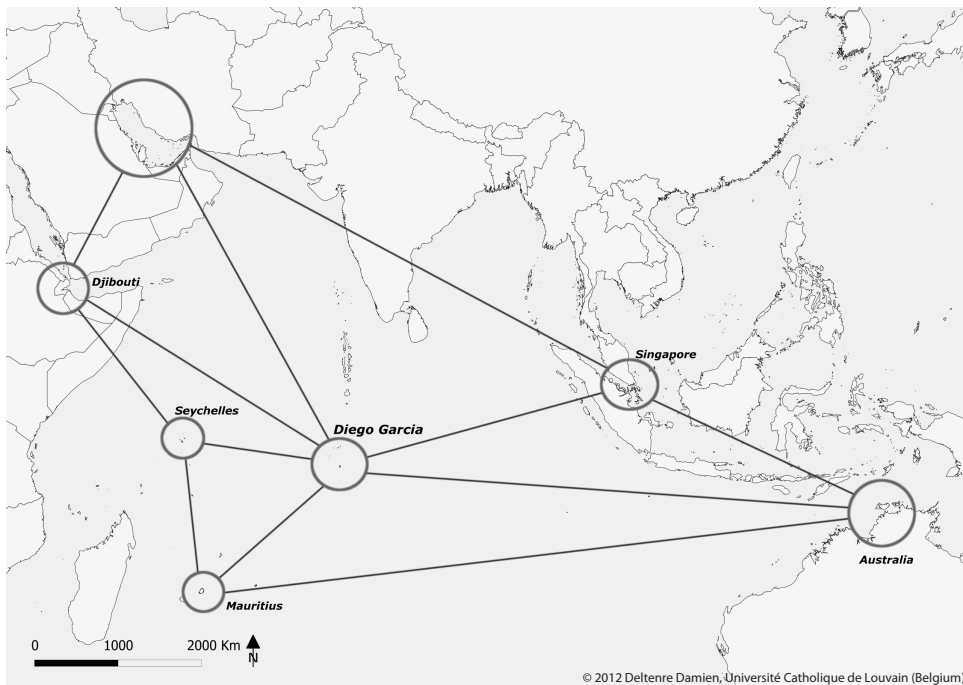


Figure 2. The triangles in the Indian Ocean.

In October 2002, America stationed in Djibouti the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) to fight terrorism and monitor sea lanes. A few years later, the United States established Joint Task Force (JTF) 151 (January 2008) to fight piracy.³⁰ This is a spin-off from the Navy CJTF-150 that was created in 2002 to combat terrorism. The United States also has the 5th Fleet (with headquarters in Bahrain) with smaller units and organizations throughout the Gulf States. Like a number of other nations, the United States is interested in the island of Socotra (Yemen). Washington has also reinforced its presence in Kenya (Manda Bay and Lamu). Lea thought, in order to dominate the Indian Ocean, there was a necessity to control the Diego Garcia-Seychelles-Mauritius triangle,³¹ strategically located between Asia and Africa. Although Diego Garcia is the only location with American bases located on its proper, there is continuing cooperation between the Seychelles and the United States in the fight against piracy. The Seychelles hosts a number of US drones used for monitoring piracy activities in the Indian Ocean. Even in light of these ongoing American initiatives, China and India continue their influence over the Seychelles and Mauritius.

When examining the hub and spoke strategy, one can see the United States has chosen a network-centric approach, relying on allies to take greater regional responsibilities and to assume the associated costs and risks in their zone of influence. Consequently, America exhorts intra-allied cooperation

and encourages bilateral or trilateral dialogues: “Australia-Japan-US,” “Japan-India-US,” “Australia-South-Korea,” “Australia-Japan” or “India-Japan.”

It is reasonable to expect the strategic triangle network approach will continue to facilitate the deployment of American forces in the region and enhance their interoperability and joint operational effectiveness. As outlined in the *Joint Operational Access Concept* (JOAC):

The more capability and capacity that a military can amass at the forward base, the more it can mitigate the effects of distance. Moreover, permanent or long-term forward bases can assure partners and deter adversaries. The ability to establish new expeditionary bases, or to improve those already in existences, also can serve as deterrent options.³²

The purpose of such bases is not only to guarantee force and power projection capabilities, but also deny the adversary the ability to project its forces. Proposed reductions in the Department of Defense’s budget highlight the importance of the evolving Air Sea Battle Concept,³³ with the Air Force and Navy receiving fewer reductions than the Army (from 565,000 to 490,000) or Marines (from 202,100 to 182,100). Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was very explicit:

Looking ahead, though, in the competition for tight defense dollars within and between the services, the Army also must confront the reality that the most plausible, high-end scenarios for the US military are primarily naval and air engagements—whether in Asia, the Persian Gulf, or elsewhere. The strategic rationale for swift-moving expeditionary forces, be they Army or Marines, airborne infantry or special operations, is self-evident given the likelihood of counterterrorism, rapid reaction, disaster response, or stability or security force assistance missions. But in my opinion, any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should “have his head examined,” as General MacArthur so delicately put it.³⁴

The JOAC also emphasizes that “operating on multiple lines in multiple domains simultaneously can help joint forces to seize that initiative by overloading an enemy’s ability to cope. Moreover, it increases friendly employment options while forcing the enemy to defend multiple avenues of approach, especially if the joint force is not dependent on major infrastructure nodes but has the ability to operate effectively in austere environments. Operating on multiple lines also improves a joint force’s ability to exploit unforeseen opportunities and to overcome setbacks. Finally, the dispersal of joint forces also will mitigate the risk posed by enemy weapons of mass destruction.”³⁵ These bases, because of their state-of-the-art area-denial and anti-access capabilities, will enhance force protection in the region. Additionally, although basing rights may be a challenge, a policy of rotating forces on a temporary basis should assuage many concerns. Ultimately, the strategy of the triangles will become operationally viable through the practical application of the JOAC.

Conclusion

Although new power centers are appearing and relationships are shifting, the United States remains a Pacific power, relying not only on its own assets and resources but also on bilateral and regional agreements to defend its interests, while maintaining a position of strategic flexibility and guaranteeing power projection through forward-deployed bases or “lily pads.” Currently, there are plans to enhance its capabilities through “Afloat Forward Staging Bases”³⁶ that will facilitate surges if required in any possible confrontation between China and the United States. The three American lines of defense and the triangles assure US forward-deployed forces flexibility, military options, and a lesser degree of vulnerability from A2/AD threats. The agreements with traditional allies have been updated and modernized, and, at the same time, new partnerships have been concluded. As a result of various official declarations and codified agreements, America’s objectives in the region remain to offset China’s rising political, military and economic power and to better monitor the SLOCs and naval chokepoints. Because of America’s recent ambivalence toward the region, Washington needs, more than ever, to encourage its allies to take the lead in a number of security issues and assume a greater degree of the burdens. There appears to be a tendency to resort to what the political scientist Christopher Layne called “burden shifting”—“getting other states to do more for their security so the United States can do less.”³⁷ The United States is, in a manner of speaking, reactivating the Nixon Doctrine (also known as the Guam Doctrine) of the seventies by focusing on a number of pivotal states.

In the end, the new geostrategic and economic realities have forced America to rethink its approach and presence in the Asia-Pacific region by not only pursuing its own interests but also those of its allies. To this end, the strategic triangles of Homer Lea form the basis of America’s new geostrategic outlook for the Asia-Pacific region.

NOTES

1. Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament, Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, November 17, 2011.

2. Transcript of Q&A with Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey on the defense strategic guidance released on January 5, 2012.

3. U.S. Department of Defense, *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, January 2012), 1.

4. Washington launched the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade zone between the United States and nine other countries: Australia, Brunei, Chili, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam (APEC).

5. U.S. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership*, 2.

6. *Ibid.*, 3.

7. Yoshiara, Toshi, “Chinese Missile Strategy and the U.S. Naval Presence in Japan: The Operational View from Beijing,” *Naval War College Review* 63, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 43.

8. Yoshiara, Toshi and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China’s Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010).

9. For example, the DF-21D, *Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile*.

10. Admiral Robert Willard, Commander, US Pacific Command, "Asia-Pacific U.S. Military Overview," at the Foreign Press Center in Washington, DC, January 27, 2012.
11. Ibid.
12. 4,700 will be relocated to Guam; others will be rotational.
13. Chico Harlan and Craig Whitlock, "US likely to scale down plans for bases in Japan and Guam," *The Washington Post*, February 9, 2012; Martin Fackler, "US and Japan in Talks to Expedite Exit of 8,000 Marines on Okinawa," *The New York Times*, February 8, 2012.
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15. The military buildup, although questioned by Congress, would cost about \$23 billion.
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