



In this compelling new monograph by Retired U.S. Army Brigadier General Russ Howard and U.S. Marine Corps Major John Duvall, Jr., the authors leverage their vast experiences and knowledge of the region to explore the Obama Administration's Asia Pivot strategy, announced in 2011, and its impact on Special Operations. The authors begin by defining this vast region. They then look at the U.S. strategic goals, evaluate the threats, and provide an analysis of the progress of where America is today along with the importance and impact on special operations. This monograph is the culmination of two years of analysis of the "pivot to Asia" by the authors. It provides a starting point for all SOF to gain a better understanding of this vast region and the future role SOF could play to counter the threats to our national interests.

Joint Special Operations University
7701 Tampa Point Boulevard
MacDill AFB FL 33621

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ISBN 978-1-933749-99-0

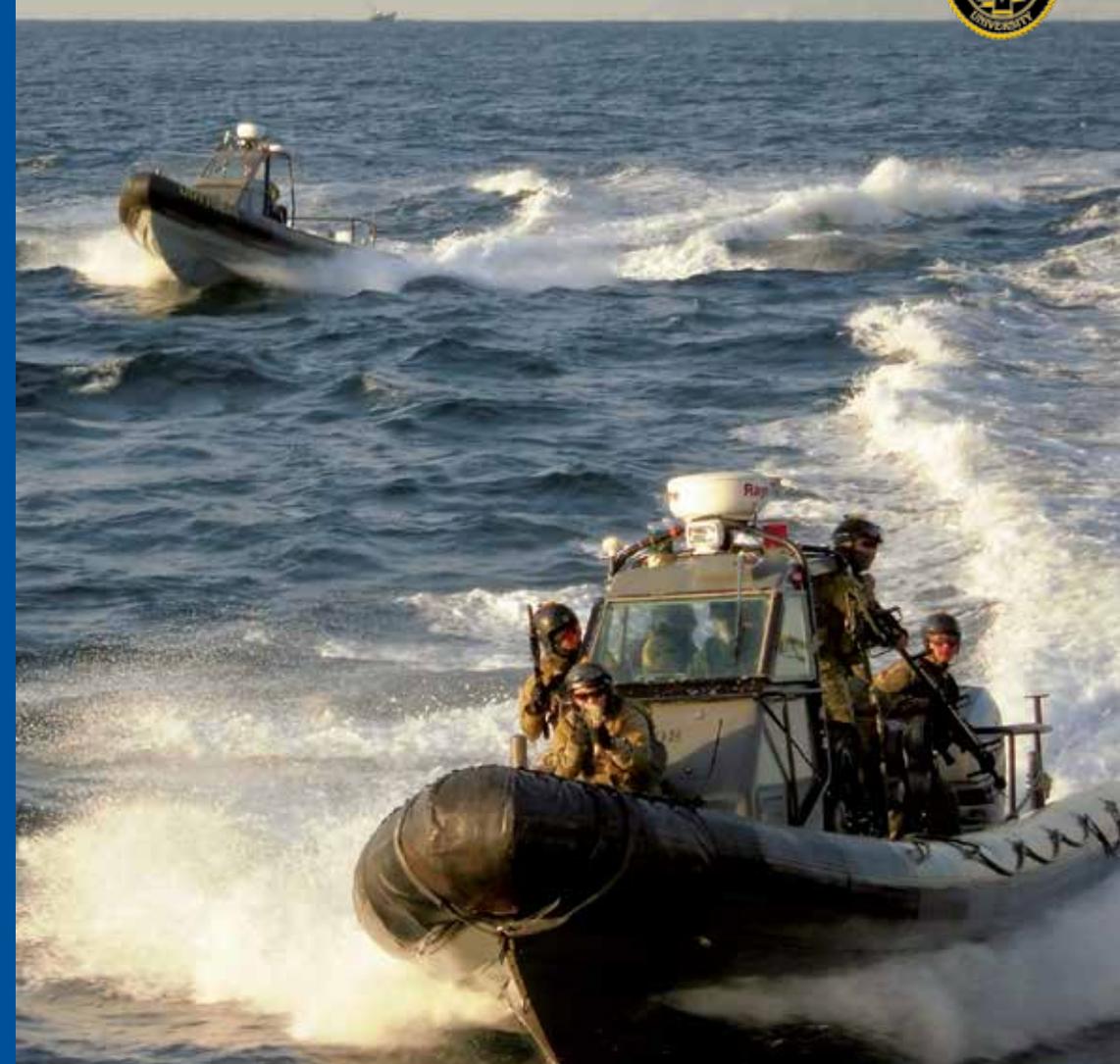
JSOU Report 16-7

The Asia Pivot

Howard and Duvall



JOINT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIVERSITY



The Asia Pivot: Implications for U.S. Special Operations Forces

Russell D. Howard and John P. Duvall, Jr.

JSOU Report 16-7



Joint Special Operations University and the Center for Special Operations Studies and Research

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The Asia Pivot: Implications for U.S. Special Operations Forces

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JSOU Report 16-7

The JSOU Press

MacDill Air Force Base, Florida

2016



Comments about this publication are invited and should be forwarded to the Director of the Center for Special Operations Studies and Research, Joint Special Operations University, 7701 Tampa Point Blvd., MacDill AFB FL 33621.

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This work was cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

Printed in July 2016.

ISBN 978-1-933749-99-0

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On the cover. South Korean sailors assigned to Special Warfare Flotilla and members of U.S. Navy SEAL Team 17 prepare to conduct a visit, board, search, and seizure exercise 22 March 2013 during exercise Key Resolve in Chinhae, South Korea. Key Resolve is a combined U.S.-South Korea training exercise held annually to ensure the operational readiness of air, space, and cyberspace operations in the Korean theater of operations. Source: U.S. Navy photo/Lieutenant Commander Cheol Kang.

Back cover. The 1st Special Forces Group conducts helocast operations near Bellows Air Force Station, Hawaii. Source: U.S. Marine Corps.

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Foreword

In this compelling new monograph by Retired U.S. Army Brigadier General Russ Howard and U.S. Marine Corps Major John Duvall, Jr., the authors leverage their vast experiences and knowledge of the region to explore the Obama Administration’s Asia Pivot strategy, announced in 2011, and its impact on Special Operations. The authors begin by defining this vast region. They then look at the U.S. strategic goals, evaluate the threats, and provide an analysis of the progress of where America is today along with the importance and impact on special operations.

The authors review the impact of the five years since the 2011 announcements, looking at the numerous trips to Asia made by President Obama to reinforce U.S. relationships. Howard and Duvall state the original “intent of the pivot was to direct diplomatic, economic, and military resources toward the Asia-Pacific region in order to reassure both U.S. allies and adversaries of its commitment to remain the predominant power in Asia.” The authors draw from former National Security Advisor Tom Donilon, “who outlines five specific areas to achieve the U.S. goals: 1) strengthening alliances; 2) deepening partnerships with emerging powers; 3) building a stable, productive, and constructive relationship with China; 4) Empowering regional institutions; and 5) helping to build a regional economic architecture.”

Howard and Duvall also address the ongoing disagreement regarding terminology—‘pivot’ vs ‘rebalancing’—but both agree in the importance of focusing on the region. They suggest the threats from China, North Korea, the Islamic State, and foreign fighters will require the skills and special operations core activities of U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) by countering these organizations by placing emphasis on foreign internal defense and counterterrorism.

This monograph is the culmination of two years of analysis of the “pivot to Asia” by the authors. It provides a starting point for all SOF to gain a better understanding of this vast region and the future role SOF could play to counter the threats to our national interests.

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About the Authors

Brigadier General Russ Howard (U.S. Army retired) is an adjunct professor of terrorism studies and a senior research fellow at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey. He is also a senior fellow at the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) and a senior advisor to Singapore's Home Team Academy. General Howard was founding director of the Jebson Center for Counter-Terrorism Studies at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, and head of the Department of Social Sciences at West Point, where he was also founding director of the Combating Terrorism Center.



General Howard's Army positions include chief of staff fellow at the Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, and commander of the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), Fort Lewis, Washington. Other assignments include assistant to the Special Representative to the Secretary General during United Nations Operations in Somalia II, deputy chief of staff for I Corps, and chief of staff and deputy commander for the Combined Joint Task Force, Haiti/Haitian Advisory Group. He previously was commander of 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group (Airborne) at Fort Bragg, and served as administrative assistant to Admiral Stansfield Turner and as a special assistant to the commander of U.S. Southern Command.

As a newly commissioned officer, Howard served as an "A" team commander in the 7th Special Forces Group from 1970 to 1972. He left the active component and served in the U.S. Army Reserve from 1972 to 1980. During this period he served as an overseas manager of American International Underwriters, Melbourne, Australia, and China tour manager for Canadian Pacific Airlines. He was re-called to active duty in 1980 and served initially in Korea as an infantry company commander. Subsequent assignments included classified project officer, U.S. Army 1st Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, and operations officer and company commander, 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group in Okinawa, Japan.

General Howard has a B.S. in industrial management from San Jose State University and a B.A. in Asian studies from the University of Maryland. He also has an M.A. in international management from the Monterey Institute of International Studies and a master of public administration from Harvard University. He was an assistant professor of social sciences at the U.S. Military Academy and a senior service college fellow at The Fletcher School. His previous JSOU Press publications are *Intelligence in Denied Spaces: New Concepts for a Changing Security Environment* (2007), *Educating Special Forces Junior Leaders for a Complex Security Environment* (2009), *Cultural and Linguistic Skills Acquisition for Special Forces: Necessity, Acceleration, and Potential Alternatives* (2011), and *The Nexus of Extremism and Trafficking: Scourge of the World or So Much Hype?* (2013).

Major John P. Duvall, Jr. (U.S. Marine Corps retired) is an M.A. candidate at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey in the Nonproliferation and Terrorism Studies Program, with Spanish language. He is also an adjunct professor for the Marine Corps University's professional military education program, where he teaches courses for the Marine Corps' Expeditionary Warfare School and Command and Staff College distance education programs to both U.S. and international officers attending the Naval Postgraduate School and the Defense Language Institute.



Following OCS, commissioning, and The Basic School, Major Duvall attended the Marine Corps Combat Engineer Officer's Course, after which he was assigned to 1st Combat Engineer Battalion, 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, California, where he served as a platoon commander and in various staff billets. He was then deployed to Kuwait to serve with Coalition Joint Task Force-Kuwait as the ground operations officer in support of operations Desert Spring and Southern Watch. Subsequently, he was assigned to be the operations officer then executive officer for Marine Corps Embassy Security Group, Region 2 (Middle East/South Asia), based at the U.S. Embassy in Nicosia, Cyprus. After spending a year at the Marine Corps' Expeditionary Warfare School in Quantico, Virginia, he was then assigned to 9th Engineer Support Battalion,

3d Marine Logistics Group, III Marine Expeditionary Force, in Okinawa, Japan, where he commanded three different companies and subsequently served as the operations and then executive officer. Major Duvall's last operational assignment was as a lead planner for the War Plans Branch, C5, Plans, Policies, and Assessments, for Multi-National Corps-Iraq.

Major Duvall has a B.A. in philosophy from Auburn University. In addition to attending the Expeditionary Warfare School, he attended the Naval Postgraduate School's National Security Affairs Department. While there, he also graduated from the Naval College of Command and Staff at the Naval War College's satellite campus aboard the Naval Postgraduate School. This is his first publication for JSOU Press.

Introduction

When this project commenced in February 2013, the United States appeared to have a new grand security strategy—the Asia ‘pivot.’ The decision to prioritize U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific region had already been expressly stated in official documents in 2011. This level of interest was reinforced repeatedly during that year, and it was reemphasized in early June 2014, when President Barack Obama visited four Asian countries, including traditional U.S. allies South Korea and the Philippines.¹ In November that year, the President again visited Asia. He first went to Beijing for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference, where he emphasized the importance of trade via the Trans-Pacific Partnership, followed by a visit to Burma to attend the East Asia Summit. He closed out his second trip to the region that year with a visit to Brisbane, Australia, for the G-20 summit, which reinforced President Obama’s stated commitment to rebalance America’s relationship with Asia.²

When conceived in 2011, the U.S. pivot toward Asia made sense, especially after more than a decade of intense focus on the Middle East and Afghanistan. It was welcome news to America’s Asia-Pacific allies and security partners because the region was quickly becoming a very tough neighborhood.³ Disputes between Asian nations seemed to be boiling over, which threatened the stability of a region vital to the U.S. economy. For example, Japan and South Korea—both U.S. allies—were barely communicating, while China was butting heads with its neighbors and the U.S. over a number of issues, including Beijing’s newly established and legally problematic air defense identification zone over the East China Sea.⁴

However, after more than two years’ work on this project, questions have arisen about the future of the Asia pivot, and headlines in several major media outlets have not been reassuring. Two that come to mind are, “The Year the U.S. Pivoted Back to the Middle East,” which ran in the *Financial Times* on 23 December 2013, and “Can Joe Biden Rescue the Asia Pivot?” which appeared on Politico on 2 December 2013.⁵ Other commentaries, such as the Voice of America broadcast on 23 December 2013, titled “U.S. Rebalance to Asia Overshadowed by Tensions with China,” contend that the pivot had at least been “sidetracked.”⁶ On 20 December, the Council of Foreign

Relation's "Expert Roundup" bluntly asked, "What Happened to the Asia Pivot in 2013?"⁷ Even the President's May 2014 trip to Asia left some doubt about the pivot. On the one hand, he tried to reassure U.S. friends and allies in the region, such as South Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines, of his commitment to remain supportive at a time when China could become more assertive or even belligerent on the Pacific Rim. On the other hand, the president encouraged these countries to show restraint toward China, even insisting that Washington is seeking to build solid relations with China and hopes to enlist Beijing's help in finding solutions to various issues.⁸

Interestingly, Washington's renewed focus on the Asia-Pacific region is not so much a paradigm shift as the revival of a traditional U.S. security role in the region.⁹ According to Patrick Mendis of George Mason University, "since the Cold War, the U.S. has underwritten the regional security architecture in the Asia Pacific through bilateral treaties with allies such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand."¹⁰ However, many of these relationships have atrophied during the past decade, due to U.S. priorities in Iraq and Afghanistan. Perhaps because of a reduced U.S. presence in Asia, tensions there have intensified, mostly as a result of Beijing's bellicose behavior in the South China Sea. A case in point is the air defense identification zone China announced on 23 November 2013. The zone is in a disputed area of the East China Sea, where both China and Japan claim three small islands. China requires all aircraft to identify themselves when entering the zone they have claimed, and suggests that its military can take "emergency defensive measures" against any unidentified aircraft in that area.¹¹ Beijing's announcement of this defense identification zone has added to the perception that China might resort to the use of force in its own neighborhood. This has caused our traditional allies to favor a U.S. return to its post-Cold War "balancer" role so China will not do something provocative, such as attempt to overpower its neighbors.¹²

The initial intent of the pivot was to direct diplomatic, economic, and military resources toward the Asia-Pacific region in order to reassure both U.S. allies and adversaries of its commitment to remain the predominant power in Asia. According to former National Security Advisor Tom Donilon, the pivot's specific objectives were to achieve a "stable security environment and a regional order rooted in economic openness, peaceful resolution of disputes, and respect for universal rights and freedoms."¹³ Reaching these goals, said Donilon, would be achieved through action in five specific areas:

- Strengthening alliances;
- Deepening partnerships with emerging powers;
- Building a stable, productive, and constructive relationship with China;
- Empowering regional institutions; and
- Helping to build a regional economic architecture.¹⁴

Most agree that the rationale for the pivot was valid. Many analysts and policymakers are increasingly worried about an arms buildup in the Asia-Pacific region, “which could lead to further nuclearization of the region, as a number of nations crank up military budgets in response to China’s growing military might, as well as threats from North Korea.”¹⁵ These same analysts and policymakers also worry that America’s status as the world’s dominant superpower is in decline, leaving a perceived vacuum that China could use to further strengthen its clout. One commentator posited that China’s bellicose manner was the best argument for the pivot. Writing in the *Bangkok Post*, Alan Dawson contended that Beijing is the top salesman for the pivot, because its adventurous actions make a better argument for the pivot than President Obama does and are in fact superior to the entire propaganda arm of the U.S. Government: “China’s ever-expanding military, its hugely arrogant claim to everything in and under the China Seas, its increasing efforts to split the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) politically over the disputed islands—these are the best selling points that the U.S. pivot could receive.”¹⁶ The pivot initially did seem to be good foreign policy. In a non-threatening manner—at least from an Obama administration perspective—the pivot enabled the U.S. to inform a bellicose North Korea and an increasingly powerful China that it intends to leverage its power in the region to protect U.S. interests and those of its allies.¹⁷

However, not all agreed that ‘Asia pivot’ was a good name for the change in policy, let alone good policy. Indeed, many objected to the name because the U.S. in fact had never left Asia. ‘Non-pivoters’ suggested that the term should be ‘rebalancing,’ which “encompasses two separate processes—the U.S. military is rebalancing its global assets from other regions to Asia, as well as rebalancing within the Asia-Pacific region, reducing the concentration of forces from northeast Asia to a more widely distributed focus throughout the entire region.”¹⁸ Not all analysts agree that the pivot or rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific region is the result of a good geostrategic assessment, or that

the new policy—whatever its name—is good for U.S. policy in the region. For example, Stephen Cohen and Robert Ward of the Brookings Institution contend that President Obama’s Asia pivot reflects a “desire to exchange the long, costly, and increasingly politically unpopular war in Afghanistan, as well as the broader focus on the unstable, violent Middle East, for the relative stability of East Asia,” where America’s air and naval strength dominate and traditional allies such as Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines cooperate.¹⁹ Robert Ross, a Boston College professor and a fellow at the Harvard Center for International Affairs, argues that the pivot unnecessarily antagonizes China at a time when U.S.-China relations are fragile.²⁰

The American Enterprise Institute’s Michael Auslin also believes that the pivot to Asia may be short-sighted for reasons related to China, but for other reasons as well. According to Auslin, President Obama has “riskily bet his foreign policy legacy on transforming a region where tensions among nations seem to be growing, not lessening.” As for China, Auslin notes in a *Wall Street Journal* article titled “Asia Pivot, Take Two” that tension between China and Japan over the disputed Senkaku Islands raises red flags. According to Auslin, “Tokyo has made clear that it expects American backing in its attempts to maintain control over the islands.”²¹ Auslin notes that, while the Obama administration has refused to take a stand on the issue of the islands’ sovereignty, it acknowledges that the U.S.-Japan defense treaty applies to territories under the administrative control of Japan. Therefore, says Auslin, “should China press the issue, Mr. Obama may not have the luxury of staying above the fray.”²² Auslin notes in the article that North Korea is another potential headache for the Obama administration: “After being outmaneuvered and embarrassed by new leader Kim Jong-un over the February 2013 failed missile and nuclear agreement, Mr. Obama has to reassess his North Korea strategy. Does the U.S. want to put more pressure on Pyongyang, or possibly re-enter negotiations?”²³ Meanwhile, Auslin warns that conflict elsewhere will further endanger President Obama’s pivot, if not render it misguided. Hamas rockets falling on Israel, “a nuclear crisis with Iran, or a wider Middle East war, will absorb Mr. Obama’s energies in some form this term, leaving his laudable Asia vision unfulfilled.”²⁴ Indeed, the ghosts of crises past continue to disturb President Obama’s Asia pivot, with “renewed violence in Iraq and the complexities of not losing all gains in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2014 ... perhaps highest on the list of unfinished business.”²⁵

Possibly the greatest threat to the U.S. Asia pivot is the gains made in Iraq and elsewhere by the terrorist group the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Not only is ISIL engaged in a brutal civil war with the Syrian government, it also has crossed the border into Iraq, overtaking important cities like Mosul along the way, overrunning Iraqi army positions, and massacring Iraqi soldiers as they surrender, along with civilians by the thousands, then burying them in mass unmarked graves.²⁶ ISIL has commandeered U.S. military equipment from defeated Iraqi units, robbed banks, and released prisoners, all to help replenish its supplies of money and manpower. Additional funding streams from trafficking in black market oil, captured humans (primarily women and children sold as slaves), stolen weapons, and looted antiquities combine to bring ISIL millions of dollars a week.²⁷

With ISIL's taking of the Haditha Dam in western Iraq and the group's close proximity to the U.S. consulate in Erbil, President Obama ordered airstrikes to help the Iraqi government regain control of the dam, which ISIL could use as a weapon, and to help push ISIL fighters back from Erbil in an effort to protect the U.S. diplomats in the consulate. Despite some negotiation breakthroughs, brewing crises in the Middle East—such as Iran's nuclear ambitions, the continuing Syrian civil war, the collapse of Iraq's new government under Haider al-Abadi due to pressure from ISIL, and Israel's incursions into the Gaza Strip—call into question the wisdom of shifting resources to the Asia-Pacific region.²⁸

Finally, former Congressional Research Service specialist Stanley R. Sloan contends that the pivot policy rhetoric may have seriously eroded U.S. credibility and degraded its capacity to promote its interests in Europe and the Middle East. According to Sloan, the potential political damage resulting from a perceived lack of U.S. commitment and leadership is far more consequential than just a physical shift of military resources. What, asks Sloan, has the U.S. gained by “shining a bright light on Asia?”²⁹

What, indeed, if the shift has emboldened Russian President Putin to exhibit aggressive behavior in Ukraine in an attempt to restore Russia's status in the world? Indeed, President Putin has recently embarked on an Asia pivot strategy of his own by signing the biggest single trade agreement in history with China. The agreement is a \$400 billion, 30-year natural gas deal, which is a clear signal of Russia's economic and strategic pivot toward Asia.³⁰

This work is divided into four sections. In Section I, the authors offer a definition of what constitutes the Asia-Pacific region, explain why the region

is important, and describe what impending threats are facing the region. In Section II, the relationship between the pivot and United States Special Operations Forces (USSOF) and conventional force laydown in the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) area of responsibility (AOR) is discussed. For organizational purposes, former National Security Advisor Tom Donilon's five Asia pivot goals (strengthening alliances; deepening partnerships with emerging powers; building a stable, productive, and constructive relationship with China; empowering regional institutions; and helping to build a regional economic architecture) provide the major subheadings in Section III, which is the main body of this monograph.³¹ Finally, in Section IV, we discuss the USSOF role, recap the key points of the monograph, and suggest a roadmap for the future of the Asia pivot.

While the arguments for and against the U.S. Asia pivot continue to percolate, the authors believe that the pivot has merit and are writing this monograph from that point of view. Furthermore, the authors believe that Special Operations Forces (SOF) should play a major part in U.S. national security policy, pivot or no pivot, and presents the SOF portion of the monograph from that perspective. To that end, this monograph will serve as a good primer for SOF familiarization of the Pacific AOR.

1. The Asia-Pacific Region

Definition

There is no one clear definition of the Asia-Pacific region. Most definitions include Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, and Oceania. Some include Russia, which is on the northern edge of the Pacific, the nations of Central America, and those of South America that border the western Pacific—Chile, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia. For the purposes of this monograph, the Asia-Pacific region is defined as the area that falls under the USPACOM AOR (see map, Figure 1).³² This area includes 36 countries and covers approximately 52 percent of the entire globe. Unique to the Asia Pacific region is its composition: 83 percent of it is covered by water and more than half of the world's 7.2 billion people live in the Asia-Pacific region on the remaining 17 percent that is covered by land, where they speak more than 3,000 different languages and dialects.³³

Why the Region Is Important

The Asia-Pacific region is very diverse and it is important for economic, political, and security reasons. “Contained in the thirty-six nations in USPA-COM’s area of responsibility are the world’s two largest economies after the U.S. (China and Japan), and five smallest economies. The region also contains the world’s most populous nation (China), the largest democracy (India), the largest Muslim-majority (Indonesia), and the smallest republic (Nauru).”³⁴ Seven of the world’s 10 largest armies are in Asia-Pacific nations, as are the world’s largest and most sophisticated navies and five of the world’s eight declared nuclear powers.³⁵

The Asia-Pacific region’s tenfold increase in gross domestic product over the past three decades is the fastest economic growth of any region in the world. “Even with external shocks, such as the global financial crisis, natural disasters and political transitions, most of Asia’s economies, led by China and India, have demonstrated a high degree of economic resilience relative to the rest of the world.”³⁶

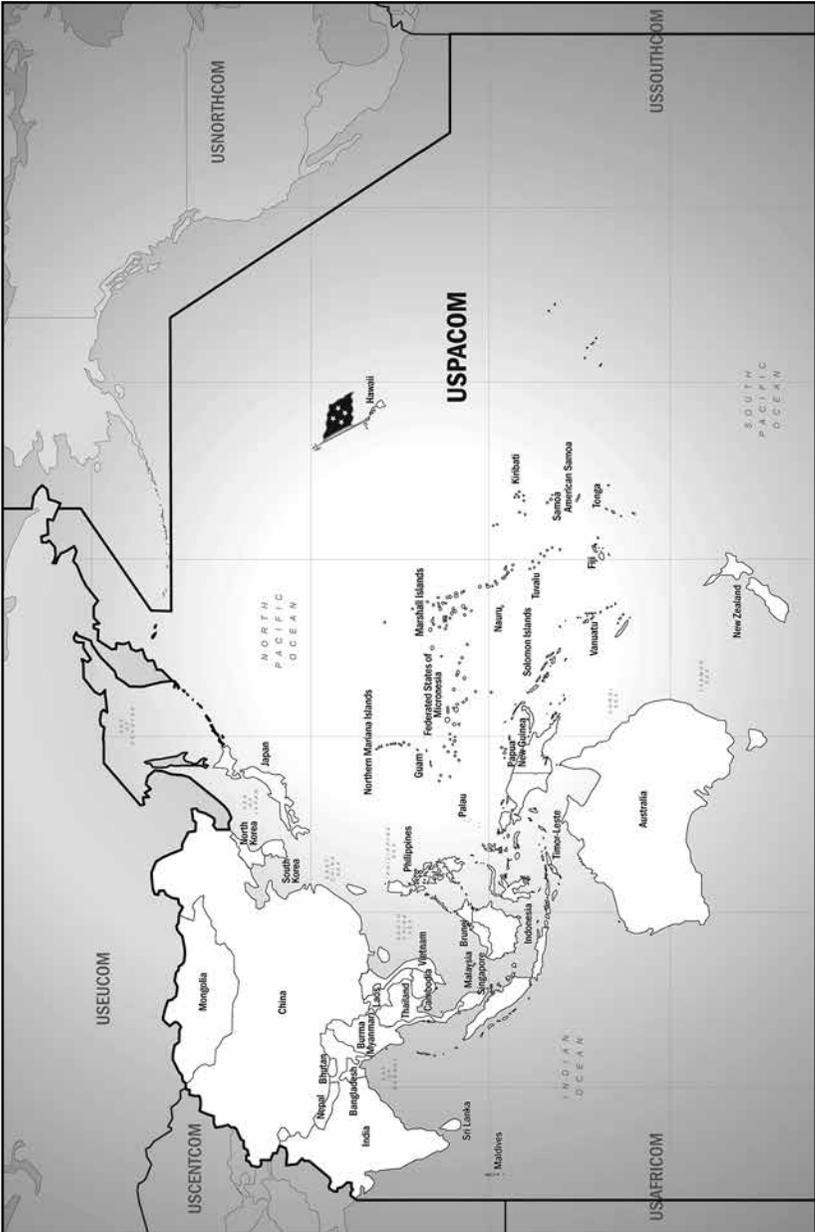


Figure 1. U.S. Pacific Command area of responsibility. Source: USPACOM

What Are the Threats?

The vast diversity of the Asia-Pacific region results in a similar diversity of threats, both conventional and unconventional. The People's Republic of China (PRC) presents threats to U.S. security that span the entire range of military operations, from the strictly conventional to highly sophisticated cyber warfare. The South China Sea is one of the most contentious areas in the world, due to numerous nations' overlapping claims of sovereignty, the amount of trade that passes through it, and the natural resources its seabed contains. North Korea maintains a vast conventional military, as well as nascent nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile programs and a potent cyber-warfare capability. Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines are havens for Islamic nationalist groups, such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), as well as transnational terrorist organizations like Abu Sayyaf. The remainder of this section details these various threats.

China. The first two decades of the 21st century have been and continue to be a period of intense modernization of the People's Liberation Army by the Chinese government, which sees it as an essential element in "preserving and sustaining" what China's leaders call a "period of strategic opportunity."³⁷ According to the U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense, China sees this period as:

an opportunity to focus on fostering a stable external environment to provide the PRC the strategic space to prioritize economic growth and development and to achieve "national rejuvenation" by 2049. At the same time, Chinese leaders express a desire to maintain peace and stability along their country's periphery; expand their diplomatic influence to facilitate access to markets, capital, and resources; and avoid direct confrontation with the United States and other countries. This strategy has led to a growing Chinese presence in regions all over the world, and particularly on its periphery, creating new and expanding economic and diplomatic interests. China's expanding interests have led to friction between some of its regional neighbors, including allies and partners of the United States.³⁸

China's increasing rate of growth in defense spending, coupled with its continued lack of transparency, have created suspicion about the PRC's

motives, not only in the U.S., but in most of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region. In 2013, China's military budget was nearly \$120 billion, a 5.7 percent increase over the previous year. This increase continued a pattern nearly two decades old of increased military investment by the Chinese government. These investments have focused on modernizing key strategic forces, such as "advanced intermediate- and medium-range conventional ballistic missiles" used for "long-range land-attack and anti-ship cruise missiles," all of which are critical to China's anti-access/area-denial operational concept.³⁹

According to Sam LaGrone of the U.S. Naval Institute News, recent U.S. naval war games, which included the new numbers and capabilities of Chinese anti-ship missile technology, have given the U.S. Navy cause to reconsider the size of its surface fleet, as it may not be large enough to face China in a conventional naval conflict. Previous 'force structure assessments' concluded that 88 surface ships would be sufficient to face the Chinese threat, but those numbers are now being reevaluated. According to LaGrone, a surface fleet of more than 100 is now being considered necessary.⁴⁰ Whether the U.S. Navy attempts to address Congress regarding such an increase is

recent U.S. naval war games ... have given the U.S. Navy cause to reconsider the size of its surface fleet, as it may not be large enough to face China in a conventional naval conflict.

yet to be seen. Meanwhile, China also continues to invest in counter-space weapons, numerous offensive cyber capabilities, and fifth-generation fighter aircraft. The first at-sea testing of China's first and only aircraft carrier took place in 2013.

The common denominator in all of these investments is a projection of power, especially into China's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and an increasingly long range.⁴¹

Another area of contention with China is the South China Sea, a small section of the Pacific Ocean approximately 1,423,000 square miles (3,685,000 square km) in area.⁴² It is bordered to the north by mainland China, to the east by Taiwan and the Philippines, to the west by Vietnam, Thailand, and the Malay Peninsula, and to the south by Singapore and Indonesia. The sea is filled with hundreds of uninhabitable islands, atolls, and shoals, some of which are exposed only at low tide. These various and seemingly unimportant spots of land are the subject of various claims of sovereignty by the countries that border the sea. The South China Sea's strategic implications are numerous and varied for the countries that surround it, and for the countries

that conduct trade with the countries of Asia. For example, the Malacca Strait, one of the world's most critical and crowded shipping lanes, connects the South China Sea with the Indian Ocean and feeds about one-third of the world's shipping into the waters of the South China Sea. The strait is also the primary route through which the vast majority of crude oil passes on its way from the petroleum states of the Persian Gulf to China, Japan, and Korea, among others. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, \$5.3 trillion in U.S. trade dollars passed through the South China Sea in 2011, 23 percent of which came to the United States. The seabed allegedly holds 11 billion barrels of oil reserves (a little less than one percent of the world's proven oil reserves) and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas (approximately three percent of the world's proven gas reserves).⁴³

The contentious nature of claims to the South China Sea is primarily due to China's declaration of a 200-mile EEZ, which is outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as if the sea were China's territorial waters.⁴⁴ Thus, China claims sovereignty over all of the islands in the South China Sea and the rights to natural resources (fish, minerals, hydrocarbons, etc.) that go with that sovereignty. Additionally, China is conducting numerous land reclamation projects—essentially constructing islands in the area on which to build outposts and an airstrip. According to retired Navy Admiral Samuel J. Locklear III, USPACOM's previous combatant commander:

Although land reclamation cannot, for example, change a submerged feature into a natural island that generates any legal entitlements to maritime zones, the completion of these projects will give China the ability for greater presence, increase dwell time for military and coast guard assets, and expand the areas covered by surveillance and area-denial systems.⁴⁵

Additionally, in the words of Michael McDevitt:

China's approach in the South China Sea is best described as "peacefully coercive." It carefully avoids direct involvement of its navy, and instead relies upon its Coast Guard and fishing fleet to pursue what is often characterized as a "salami slice" strategy, in taking small, incremental steps that are not likely to provoke a military response

from any of the other claimants, but over time gradually change the status quo regarding disputed claims in its favor.⁴⁶

Due to the overlapping nature of the various EEZs of the countries that border the South China Sea, the U.S. remains neutral on all claims of sovereignty over the islands. In 1995, however, the United States issued its first policy declaration regarding the contentious nature of the South China Sea. The U.S. advocates for a “peaceful, non-coercive diplomatic resolution that preserves regional stability and freedom of navigation” in what has developed into one of the globe’s busiest sea lines of communication and whose seabed contains significant and, importantly, local natural resources ready to feed the rapidly growing economies of Asia.⁴⁷ Today, 20 years later, that policy has not changed.

China argues against this U.S. policy position, and it disputes U.S. advocacy of the UNCLOS allowance for both military and commercial vessels to freely navigate the seas inside a coastal nation’s EEZ. China argues that military activity inside its EEZ is not one of the “peaceful” activities allowed under the UNCLOS, and it essentially claims total sovereignty over its EEZ, which the UNCLOS allows only within a nation’s 12 nautical mile territorial water boundary.⁴⁸ This difference in interpretation and compliance has led to various incidents over the years between the United States and China in the South China Sea. The first was in 2001, when a Chinese J-8 fighter collided with a U.S. EP-3 surveillance aircraft over international waters but inside China’s EEZ, which caused the U.S. EP-3 to make an emergency landing on China’s Hainan Island. The Chinese pilot was killed, and the U.S. crew was held and interrogated for 10 days before being released. China dismantled the EP-3 before eventually returning it to the United States in July 2001. A second incident occurred in March 2009, when the United States Naval Ship *Impeccable*, a U.S. Military Sealift Command surveillance ship, was conducting operations within the Chinese EEZ but outside of Chinese territorial waters. A Chinese naval frigate, two Chinese fishing trawlers, and other Chinese vessels harassed the *Impeccable* for four days by conducting provocative maneuvers considered by most observers to be outside the realm of responsible seamanship, and which threatened the safety of the *Impeccable* and its crew. A third incident occurred in August 2014, when a Chinese J-11 fighter intercepted and shadowed a U.S. P-8 surveillance aircraft (the successor to the EP-3) that was flying over international waters but inside

China's EEZ; the J-11 reportedly came within 20 feet of the U.S. P-8.⁴⁹ If past is prologue, future confrontations in the South China Sea are a near certainty. U.S. military operations in the area are key to maintaining its stability, and stability is in the interest of every country in the region, including China, and every country that conducts trade with countries in the region. The U.S. and China see their respective roles in the South China Sea differently, and that difference must be reconciled if stability in the region is to be assured.

North Korea. North Korea remains one of the most persistently troublesome puzzling foreign policy foes for the U.S. and the region. The leadership in Pyongyang, which is based on the Kim family's 'cult of personality' and has been maintained with nothing less than crushing brutality, has shown astonishing resilience since its inception 67 years ago. This resilience is due in significant part to North Korea's primary backer, China. China provides North Korea with food and energy, assistance that is vital to the North Korean people and on which the regime heavily relies, especially since South Korea terminated its aid program. China is responsible for an astonishing 60 percent of North Korea's overall trade.⁵⁰ China's aid is pragmatic, as it has immense interest in a stable Korean peninsula. For one thing, war between the two Koreas would result in a massive humanitarian crisis on the China-North Korea border. China currently repatriates North Koreans who illegally cross the border, an act many human rights groups condemn, due to North Korea's abhorrent human rights record.⁵¹ The collapse of the Kim regime could result in a similar crisis, thus China continues to support the regime at the United Nations (UN) and during six-party talks.⁵²

Besides its nascent nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile programs, the Kim regime maintains a diverse repertoire of illicit pursuits and aggressive actions that it attempts to use for geopolitical leverage in diplomatic negotiations with its regional neighbors and the United States. These include manufacturing and trafficking in illegal drugs, counterfeiting U.S. currency, cyber warfare and espionage, black market weapons sales, and violent military provocations toward South Korea and other countries inside and outside the region.⁵³ To deal with these issues, the Obama administration has adopted a policy position, according to former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, of "strategic patience in close consultations with our Six-Party allies," which suggests that "the United States could afford to wait for North Korea to make its decision to denuclearize."⁵⁴

However, denuclearization must not be the only desired end state of the U.S. ‘strategic patience’ policy, as North Korea’s threat arsenal is varied and substantial. For example, in November 2014, a massive cyber attack hit Sony Pictures Entertainment, a top Hollywood film production studio. A group calling itself the Guardians of Peace claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it objected to a forthcoming Sony Pictures film called *The Interview*, a satire depicting the assassination of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, and threatened to attack theaters that showed the film when it opened on Christmas Day. The cyber attack also resulted in the release of thousands of private emails between Sony executives and certain high-profile celebrities, some of which were quite embarrassing. Additionally, the attackers released several films on the Internet before they opened in theaters, which took a big cut out of Sony’s multimillion dollar investment in those films. Based on an initial cyber-forensic analysis of the attack, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has alleged it originated in North Korea. One piece of evidence cited is that the attack bears a striking resemblance to a March 2013 attack against South Korean banks and media companies, as well as other malware attacks known to have been executed by the North Korean government.⁵⁵ Some cybersecurity experts argue that North Korea does not have the capability to conduct such a sophisticated attack, and that the real perpetrators are conducting the cyber version of a “false flag” operation.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, the Obama administration seems convinced that North Korea is the perpetrator—at least that is what it is saying publicly. At a press conference held on 19 December 2014, President Obama stated, “We will respond [to North Korea] proportionately, and we will respond in a place and time and manner we choose.”⁵⁷ The following day, a senior administration official said that the administration was looking at re-designating North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism, which carries a significant international stigma. The *Wall Street Journal* noted that:

[state sponsor of terrorism] designation by the U.S. ... triggers economic and trade sanctions, though any such measures would be largely symbolic, given the historically low levels of trade between the U.S. and North Korea. The terror designation ... carries additional implications for international financing and credit, such as through the World Bank and other institutions.⁵⁸

It is assumed that the president will take additional classified actions to address this attack, and North Korea's cyber-warfare threat in general.

If this attack was indeed executed by North Korea, then the U.S. should take immediate notice, as it would indicate a level of maturity and prowess in cyber warfare previously unexpected from North Korea, at least without some assistance from a country like

China or Russia. Although the attack did result in significant economic damage to Sony and its shareholders, the U.S. is fortunate that it was against a large corporation and did not

the U.S. pivot toward Asia must ensure that it will address all warfare domains, from the traditional physical domains ... to the nontraditional domains like cyberspace.

result in the loss of life, and that it was not an attack on a piece of priority infrastructure, like an electric grid or a water treatment facility for a large urban center. As such, if leveraged properly, the attack should provide the U.S. Government and other private entities a valuable case study in all the elements of cybersecurity. Summing up, it would seem that North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities, which are still in their infancy and for which the U.S. is prepared, are not the only significant threat the 'hermit kingdom' can presently muster. Thus, the U.S. pivot toward Asia must ensure that it will address all warfare domains, from the traditional physical domains associated with conventional warfare to the nontraditional domains like cyberspace, when planning for potential North Korean threats.

Terrorism and Insurgency. Terrorist and insurgency groups have a serious impact in several areas of the Asia-Pacific region. Although their goals can vary widely, the vast majority of these groups are Islamist fundamentalists. Some are ethno-separatists fighting secular governments in the region in an attempt to form their own Islamic states in Muslim-majority areas. Others have the ambitious goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate in the region. Others are global jihadist groups with known or suspected ties to al-Qaeda. These various groups primarily operate in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines.⁵⁹

The two dominant terrorist organizations in the region are Jemaah Islamiyah and Abu Sayyaf. Jemaah Islamiyah was formed slowly over time by a core group of Southeast Asian Islamist radicals with various goals, "from establishing an Islamic regime in Indonesia, to establishing an Islamic

caliphate over Muslim regions of Southeast Asia and northern Australia, to waging jihad against the West.⁶⁰ Their first known attack was the horrific nightclub bombing in Bali, Indonesia, in October 2002, which killed more than 200 people and injured well over 200 more. After the Bali bombing, the U.S. and the UN designated Jemaah Islamiyah a foreign terrorist organization, and the group's activities have been significantly curtailed due to governments in the region hunting down and arresting or killing its members. Analysts warn that, despite this weakening, Jemaah Islamiyah still maintains a latent capacity to conduct terrorist attacks and needs to be monitored in case it reconstitutes itself into a more potent group.⁶¹

Abu Sayyaf is a violent Islamist group with links to al-Qaeda that operates out of the southern island of Mindanao in the Philippines, and the islands of Basilan, Jolo, and the rest of the Sulu archipelago. It was formed in 1991 when it split from the MILF—the Philippine insurgent group—and is now listed as a foreign terrorist organization by the United States. Abu Sayyaf is known to carry on drug trafficking and indiscriminate bombings, and to kidnap and hold hostages, particularly Westerners, for ransom.

Abu Sayyaf's most notable kidnapping occurred in May 2001, when several members of the group entered a Philippine resort and kidnapped 20 people, including three Americans. The group demanded a ransom, and when it was not paid, Guillermo Sobero, one of the three American hostages, was beheaded. The other two Americans were Martin and Gracia Burnham, a Christian missionary couple whom Abu Sayyaf held hostage on Basilan. Approximately a year later, in June 2002, the Philippine military launched a raid in an attempt to rescue the couple. During the firefight that ensued, Martin Burnham and a Filipino nurse were killed. Martin's wife Gracia Burnham was shot in the leg, but she survived and was rescued.⁶² Abu Sayyaf still operates in the Philippines, but the Philippine military, with U.S. help, has been able to degrade its capability significantly. But, as with Jemaah Islamiyah, Abu Sayyaf maintains its ability to strike and could cause significant disruption in the region.

The region suffers not only at the hands of Islamist terrorists; it also must deal with ongoing Islamist insurgencies, primarily in the Philippines. For decades, the Philippine government has been fighting a well-rooted Muslim insurgency on its southern islands of Mindanao, Basilan, and the Sulu archipelago, often with help from the U.S. military. Two insurgent groups are

operating in the southern Philippines: the MILF and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

In 1971, Moro separatists formed the MNLF with the goal of establishing an independent Moro nation in the southern Philippine islands. The MNLF is essentially an ethno-separatist Islamist insurgency. The MILF was formed in 1991 as a splinter faction of the MNLF. The MILF is the country's largest insurgent group, and it is also an Islamist insurgency aiming to form a separate Islamic nation in the southern Philippines. The MNLF and the MILF are essentially fighting for the same ground, the difference being that the MILF has a more radically Islamist viewpoint.

The MILF's efforts seemed to have paid off, as the group signed a peace agreement with the Philippine government in March 2014. The Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro creates a new administrative area called Bangsamoro, which replaces the previous Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. This agreement gives the MILF a greater level of political autonomy, particularly over tax revenues. This agreement could cause problems, as it conflicts in some ways with the Philippine government's 1997 agreement with the MNLF.⁶³ The government hopes that providing the Muslim population in the southern islands a certain level of political autonomy will enfranchise those who previously felt slighted by the Christian-dominated government in Manila, and will thus bring any remaining insurgents into the political fold. The next 18 to 24 months will be critical to the agreement's success or failure. The more extreme members of the MILF might feel this agreement does not suit them, and if the past is any indicator, it is a very real possibility that new insurgent groups seeking to express their discontent will emerge in this fractious country.⁶⁴

2. U.S. Military and the Pivot

Approximately 360,000 U.S. military and civilian personnel are assigned to the Asia-Pacific region under USPACOM; approximately 10 percent of them are civilians who work for the U.S. Department of Defense. The primary military forces assigned to the region include the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet, which consists of approximately 200 ships manned by 140,000 personnel; these include five of the 11 aircraft carrier strike groups the Navy maintains and just under 600 aircraft. The U.S. Marine Corps' Pacific forces include two Marine Expeditionary Forces (I MEF and III MEF), which consist of approximately 640 aircraft and 86,000 personnel. The U.S. Air Force has more than 300 aircraft and approximately 29,000 personnel assigned to the region, whereas the U.S. Army has more than 60,000 personnel in Korea, Japan, and other locations within USPACOM's AOR. There are more than 1,200 Special Operations personnel operating in the USPACOM AOR, and, finally, the U.S. Coast Guard frequently supports U.S. military forces in the region.⁶⁵ As of this writing, it is not completely clear what changes in force numbers the Asia pivot policy will bring, but the goal is to have 60 percent of U.S. naval and air forces deployed in the Asia-Pacific AOR.⁶⁶ However, the U.S. military is discovering that the logistics involved in shifting personnel to meet the pivot's objectives are expensive. According to Paul McCleary of *Defense News*, the "shifting of troops and material across the globe, and then finding them homes, shelter, and storage space, is complex and won't come cheap."⁶⁷

Army

The pivot has had more of a logistical and administrative impact on the Army than on the other services. The Army has approximately 60,000 uniformed and civilian personnel assigned to the USPACOM AOR located in Korea, Japan, Hawaii, and Alaska, and at Joint Base Lewis-McCord outside of Tacoma, Washington, home to the headquarters of the U.S. Army's I Corps, which historically has been operationally aligned with the Asia-Pacific region. Since the Obama administration announced its Asia pivot strategy in late 2011, the Army has been looking for a way to re-task its Asia-Pacific theater forces to increase their operational relevance in a region historically

dominated by the Navy and Marine Corps. As such, U.S. Army Pacific Command has devised a new theater engagement plan called Pacific Pathways. According to Wyatt Olson of *Stars and Stripes*, “Under Pacific Pathways, the Army will develop small units [of about 700 soldiers] that will be forward-deployed for quick response to humanitarian emergencies or regional threats. The plan is also a way for the Army to create a semi-permanent presence in parts of the Pacific where it’s not politically or financially feasible to establish bases.”⁶⁸ As described by General Vincent Brooks, Commanding General of U.S. Army Pacific Command, who developed Pacific Pathways:

the FY14 Proof of Principle includes a Stryker equipped Task Force with Aviation assets; it employs some of the Army’s most ready units; and it provides the US Pacific Command Commander a prepared force in the likelihood of a contingency. FY14 Pacific Pathways lessons learned will be applied to the subsequent 5-year plan that includes 29 Exercises (14 Joint, 15 Army Bilats) in 12 Indo-Asia-Pacific countries (to include 5 treaty allies). Pacific Pathways directly reflects the Army’s Regional Alignment of Forces and allows US Army Pacific to employ scalable and tailorable packages throughout the region in exercises and engagements where Soldiers increase their cultural awareness, working with multiple foreign partners while continuing to develop individual and collective training skills. Pacific Pathways is a visible demonstration of the United States’ commitment to the Indo-Asia-Pacific region’s security—US Soldiers working alongside partner nations and joint forces, a part of the military expression of the strategic rebalance.⁶⁹

But this ambitious plan has its critics. One of them is Aaron Marx, a former Marine Corps pilot and retired Lieutenant Colonel. While still on active duty, Marx was selected to be a federal executive fellow at the Brookings Institution. While there he wrote “The Wrong Path in the Pacific,” a scathing opinion piece on the Army’s Pacific Pathways program. Marx makes the argument that the Army is not complementing Navy and Marine Corps capabilities, as General Brooks often argues, and is instead needlessly replicating an existing capability that has been in place for decades. During that time, the Navy and Marine Corps have cultivated personal relationships with the militaries of the Asia-Pacific region through training exercises and actual operations, and thus they have acquired expertise in the primary

mode of assistance many countries in the region have needed: humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. They also have developed and inculcated the operational doctrine needed to build a foundation for such operations within the Navy and Marine Corps team. Marx emphasizes these points by bluntly stating that “the Navy and Marine Corps team does not need the assistance with theater engagement, bilateral training, emerging crises or natural disaster response that Pacific Pathways seeks to provide. The Navy and Marine Corps team just needs the ships and budgetary support to continue doing what it already does and has done since 1775.”⁷⁰

Despite what many might cynically consider nothing but an inside-the-Beltway battle for defense dollars, General Brooks believes the units assigned to the Army Pacific Command are ready to play a valuable operational role in the Asia pivot. According to General Brooks, “We can no longer afford to build [combat] units and put them on a shelf to be used only in the event of war.”⁷¹ However, the majority of these units are either deployed or based east of the International Date Line, in Hawaii, or in Washington State, and therefore are constrained by what military planners call the ‘tyranny of distance’ so characteristic of the region. As such, they must spend considerable time and resources—scarce commodities during a crisis of any kind—just getting to their destination due to the sizable distances that must be traversed. Pacific Pathways is designed to mitigate any time and resources lost to the tyranny of distance while also testing the Army’s ability to be flexible and expeditionary—traits it will need if it wants to get a permanent operational seat at the Asia-Pacific table.

We can no longer afford to build [combat] units and put them on a shelf to be used only in the event of war.

Marines

The U.S. Marine Corps’ operational history in the Pacific is significant and substantial. It is also diverse, ranging from combat operations in the Philippines and China during the late 1800s, to its island-hopping campaign against the Japanese during World War II, to today’s humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations, which are conducted by Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU). Thus, the Obama administration’s pivot toward the Asia-Pacific region is a natural fit for a Marine Corps that has been active

in the region for over a century. However, that does not mean the current Marine Corps force is the correct size or optimally located to carry out the rebalancing.

For nearly a decade, the Marine Corps, for both political and operational reasons, has been realigning its forces throughout the Asia-Pacific region. It has focused in particular on the approximately 19,000 personnel forward-deployed in the Pacific west of the International Date Line. Approximately 18,000 of them are on the Japanese island of Okinawa, where Marines have been stationed since winning the Battle of Okinawa in 1945.⁷² The reasoning behind the Marines' continued presence on the island has evolved in accordance with U.S. defense strategy and force posture, regional conflicts, and other various geopolitical factors. Okinawa has long hosted the Marine Corps' forward-deployed operational headquarters, III MEF; during certain HADR operations, the USPACOM commander can task the commanding general of III MEF with leadership of Joint Task Force (JTF) 505, which was developed specifically to execute these missions.

According to the Defense Department, JTF 505 is able “to integrate and coordinate with foreign military units and nongovernmental relief organizations supporting the disaster efforts”; the “duration and extent of ... [their] support will depend on the needs” of the host nation.⁷³ III MEF is in command of the Marine Corps' operational rapid response force, 3d Marine Expeditionary Brigade, which is a scalable, task-organized Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) consisting of a command element, a ground combat element, an air combat element, and a logistical/support element, all of which are ready to deploy to support any crisis along the range of military operations. The 3d Marine Expeditionary Brigade can go from being operationally tasked by USPACOM to execution within six hours, and can self-sustain its operations for 30 days. III MEF also commands a tactical rapid response force in the 31st MEU, a fully equipped MAGTF of approximately 2,200 personnel who are perpetually embarked on a two-ship U.S. Navy Amphibious Ready Group. Like most MEUs, the 31st is commanded by a Marine colonel and contains the following:

1. a command element
2. a reinforced infantry battalion at its core, supported by a small reconnaissance unit, mechanized Amphibious Assault Vehicles, Light Armored Reconnaissance vehicles, and combat engineers

3. a composite squadron of various aircraft
 - a. 8 x AV-8B Harriers for close air support
 - b. 2 x KC-130J Hercules for transport and tanker support
 - c. 10 x MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor for assault support
 - d. 3 x UH-1Y Hueys for command/control and close air support
 - e. 4 x AH-1W Cobras for close air support
 - f. 4 x CH-53E for assault support and heavy lift to include sling-loads
4. a combat logistics battalion providing the full range of logistical support

All three subordinate commands are headed by a lieutenant colonel. The 31st MEU conducts periodic deployments in support of USPACOM's theater security cooperation, military-to-military engagement/training, crisis-response responsibilities, and various other missions, where the forces have the ability to go from being tasked to executing the mission within six hours. When the 31st MEU deploys, it has the ability to fully sustain itself for 15 days.⁷⁴

Okinawa provides III MEF with excellent basing infrastructure, training areas, and a geographic locale from which it can, for example, project power on the Korean peninsula or respond to a humanitarian crisis in the Philippines.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, occupying this location has carried a political price over the years. Okinawans have demonstrated regularly at the gates of U.S. military bases to protest their presence on the island and demand their closure. These protests have ranged in size from just a few people to several thousand protesters, and historically they have been peaceful.⁷⁶ However, a tipping point was reached in September 1995, when three U.S. servicemen, two Marines and one sailor, were accused of kidnapping, beating, and raping a 12-year-old Japanese girl. The three men were eventually turned over to Japanese authorities, but the seven weeks it took for that to occur infuriated the Japanese public, which was under the impression that the U.S. military was trying to protect the alleged rapists and that justice was not being served.⁷⁷ All three men were subsequently convicted and sentenced for up to seven years in a Japanese prison. Upon their release, all three were dishonorably discharged from the military. As a result of this tragic incident, the U.S. and Japanese governments negotiated an agreement to reduce

the amount of Okinawan territory the U.S. controlled by 20 percent. This agreement led to the establishment in 1996 of the U.S.-Japan Special Action Committee on Okinawa, an organization created to implement the base-reduction agreement.⁷⁸

There currently are approximately 18,000 Marines on Okinawa, as well as tens of thousands of military dependents, spread over nine bases and one airfield. Over the years, the Marine Corps Air Station at Futenma has been the most contentious. Since the airfield was constructed in 1945, the surrounding land has been fully developed with civilian infrastructure. This makes flight operations potentially hazardous for the civilian population and Marine aircrews alike, as there is little room for an aircraft having an emergency to make an off-field landing. There was one such incident in 2004, when a Marine CH-53D helicopter experienced an inflight emergency. In attempting to make an emergency landing at Futenma, it struck an Okinawan university administration building and crash-landed at the base of the building. Several large pieces of the helicopter separated from the main airframe and fell to the ground in residential areas. Luckily, no civilians were injured or killed, and the helicopter crew survived the incident with minor injuries.⁷⁹

However, the crash prompted the U.S. Government, in conjunction with the Japanese and local Okinawan governments, to take a serious look at relocating Futenma. Thus, in 2006, Washington and Tokyo reached an agreement under the Defense Policy Review Initiative to build a new airbase in the sparsely populated seaside village of Henoko, located on the eastern Okinawan coast north of the main U.S. bases, already home to an isolated U.S. base named Camp Schwab. According to the relocation plan, once air operations were moved to Schwab, Futenma and several other Marine bases would be closed and some 8,000 Marines and their families would be transferred from Okinawa to Guam.⁸⁰ Paul McCleary of *Defense News* explained: “The plan is to shift roughly 4,800 Marines [from Okinawa] to Guam, 2,700 to Hawaii and 2,500 to Australia, with others coming back to the US mainland.”⁸¹ However, because the new airfield was to be built by reclaiming land in Oura Bay off the coast of Henoko, the project ran into several delays due to environmental and political concerns. The Japanese government gave its approval for work to begin on the airfield in August 2014, over the objections of the local Okinawan government and the civilian anti-U.S. basing movement.⁸² If history is any indicator, it will be years if not decades before

the airfield is finished and the Marine Corps executes its relocation plan. Moreover, the U.S. and the government of Guam have yet to decide on sites for basing and training, and it will take years to construct the infrastructure needed on the island to accommodate the additional U.S. military members and their dependents who eventually will be moved there.⁸³

Meanwhile, an agreement reached in November 2011 between Washington and Canberra has allowed Marine Corps units to rotate annually into Darwin, Australia, during the months of April to October, beginning in 2012, as part of the Marine Corps' well-established Unit Deployment Program (UDP). From November to March, during the Southern Hemisphere's summer monsoon season, which significantly affects Darwin, the UDP force will instead deploy to Okinawa. The size of the first rotation in April 2012 was approximately 200 Marines; each additional rotation increased in size and capacity. The size of Marine Rotational Force-Darwin is expected to be 2,500 by 2016.⁸⁴ This Darwin UDP unit, which is a scalable, land-based MAGTF, has been named Marine Rotational Force-Darwin. Based at Australia's Robertson Barracks outside the city, its mission is to increase U.S. theater security cooperation and military-to-military engagement in the region, and to assist U.S. partners in the region by building military capacity. The force also will have the capability to respond to a wide range of potential regional crises, if needed.⁸⁵

Air Force

The U.S. Air Force is also looking to deploy to Australia. According to John Reed at *Foreign Policy*, the Air Force already has begun deploying air units to Australia, as well as to India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. These deployments are designed to help the Air Force "develop a network of [allied nation] bases in the region" that they can use to "build ties to allies that operate American equipment and know how to work with the U.S. military."⁸⁶ According to General Herbert "Hawk" Carlisle, former head of U.S. Air Force operations for USPACOM, "One of the main tenets of our strategy is to expand engagement and interoperability and integration ... with our friends' and partners' militaries ... We exercise together; we train together; we build their capability; and we also get familiar with them and the environment." Carlisle believes such extensive integration and training "will pay tremendous dividends" in the future, since the Air Force does not

want or intend to build extensive U.S. owned and operated basing infrastructure in the Pacific.⁸⁷ “In a lot of ways, we’ll increasingly move south and west with the rotational presence—Darwin, Tindal [in Australia], Changi East in Singapore, Korat in Thailand, Trivandrum in India,” Carlisle said.⁸⁸ According to Carlisle, the Air Force will deploy additional V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft throughout the Pacific to help transport SOF.⁸⁹

The Air Force already occupies and maintains six major air bases in the Pacific west of the International Date Line: Misawa and Yokota in mainland Japan, Kadena in Okinawa, Kunsan and Osan in Korea, and Andersen in Guam.⁹⁰ They host several permanently stationed units, leaving little room for rotational forces. Three operational-level Air Force units provide support to the USPACOM AOR. The 5th Air Force, established in 1941, occupies the three bases in Japan, with its headquarters at Yokota Air Base. There are 15,000 airmen spread across the three Japanese bases; their primary mission is to defend Japan and partner with the Japanese Self Defense Force in responding to contingencies in the region. It maintains a varied assortment of aircraft, including F-15 and F-16 fighters, E-3 AWACS for airborne command and control, KC-135 tankers, HH-60G Pave Hawk for search-and-rescue operations, and smaller aircraft for executive transport, among others.⁹¹

The 7th Air Force is located at two air bases on the Korean peninsula; its mission is to support the Republic of Korea’s armed forces. The 8th Fighter Wing at Kunsan contains two squadrons of F-16 fighters, while the 51st Fighter Wing at Osan Air Base contains one squadron of F-16 fighters and one of A-10s for close air support.⁹² The 734th Air Mobility Squadron, which is located at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, primarily a way-station for aircraft crossing the Pacific, provides a variety of ground-based support and basing for the newly instituted, ongoing 4- to 6-month rotations for various B-52, B-1, and B-2 bomber detachments.⁹³

As the Air Force shifts its capacity away from Afghanistan to the Asia-Pacific region, it will move additional B-1 bombers, MQ-9 Reapers, U-2 reconnaissance aircraft, and Global Hawk Unmanned Aerial Vehicles into the region, some permanently and some on a rotational basis.⁹⁴ According to Eric Fanning, former chief of staff to Secretary of Defense Ash Carter and recently appointed Secretary of the Army, “air power is particularly suited to meet the challenges posed by [the] Asia Pacific’s vast distances and current threats.” Referring to the rebalance in the Asia-Pacific theater, Fanning noted that the Air Force is “dedicated to building and sustaining long-term

relationships in the region that help build capacity among our allies, friends and partners.” He explained that “maintaining the rebalance to the Pacific requires a stable level of presence in the Pacific, despite anticipated force reductions.” Fanning also noted that the budget constraints faced by the Air Force and the Defense Department in general make cooperating with allies sensible, since each force will gain efficiencies, and therefore effectiveness, in the process.⁹⁵

Navy

At present, the U.S. Navy has about 285 grey-bottom (i.e., combat) ships evenly divided among the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. This number will begin to decline as some older vessels are retired and not replaced. As a result of the Asia pivot, the percentage of the number of ships will change, with 60 percent assigned to the USPACOM AOR by 2020.⁹⁶ This 60 percent figure includes some of the Navy’s most sophisticated ships and aircraft. For example, four Littoral Combat Ships, which can operate in shallower waters than other vessels, will be stationed in Singapore. The list also includes the EA-18G plane, which can jam enemy air defenses and fly faster than the speed of sound. One Virginia-class submarine—the Navy’s most advanced—is also on the list, as are Fire Scout Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and other electronic surveillance aircraft that will be transferred from Afghanistan.⁹⁷ Of the Navy’s 11 aircraft carriers, five are already assigned to the Pacific, and six of its most sophisticated ballistic-missile defense-capable destroyers will be transferred from Rota, Spain, to Asia. Four of the destroyers will remain in Rota to provide ballistic-missile defense in Europe.⁹⁸ The Navy also maintains 11 civilian cargo vessels in Guam, which are loaded with military equipment for all branches of the U.S. military as part of Maritime Prepositioning Ships Squadron-3, which in turn is part of Military Sealift Command, whose mission is to provide an immediate sealift of vital equipment and supplies to support designated operations.⁹⁹

Within the past 18 months, the Pentagon replaced three warships based out of Yokosuka, Japan, with newer and more modernized versions of the same class. The Navy expects to replace one more next year.¹⁰⁰ A squadron of P-8s, the Navy’s new submarine hunter aircraft that is meant to replace the aging P-3, is now operating out of Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, not far from the East China Sea and China’s self-declared air defense identification

zone. The P-8s are state-of-the-art reconnaissance aircraft built on a modified and extended Boeing 737 airframe. They have a longer range than the P-3s, giving them greater time on station. They also carry the Harpoon anti-ship missile torpedoes and other weapons. While they are designed to hunt submarines and surface warships, when on patrol over the ocean they are also a formidable surveillance and intelligence-gathering platform.¹⁰¹ Finally, the air wing aboard the Nimitz-class carrier USS *Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76)—permanently based out of Yokosuka, Japan, as of October 2015—carries the F/A-18F Super Hornet.¹⁰² Super Hornets are superior to their predecessor in load, speed, and range, and they have the ability to carry out a variety of missions.¹⁰³ Rear Admiral Mark C. Montgomery, a former commander of the USS *George Washington* aircraft carrier strike group and current director of operations for USPACOM, believes the U.S. strategic rebalancing has resulted in an increased number of surface combatants, cruisers, and destroyers that support the strike group, allowing for a greater combatant presence in the Pacific. Montgomery believes this expanded U.S. military presence in the Asia-Pacific region will have a calming effect on any regional tensions and budding territorial disputes.¹⁰⁴

However, the Navy is lacking in one vital mission area: amphibious shipping. According to retired Admiral Samuel Locklear III, former commander of USPACOM, he did not have the capability in his AOR to conduct a contested amphibious landing, a core mission of the Navy and Marines Corps. Four amphibious ready groups reside in the USPACOM AOR: three in San Diego and one in Sasebo, Japan. The admiral has requested, via the Pentagon, additional amphibious lift capability, but in today's global operational environment, amphibious ready groups are a low-density, high-demand requirement needed to address international crises across the range of military operations and across the globe. During his remarks to Congress in March 2014, Admiral Locklear stated, "I'm not the only combatant commander that desires amphibious shipping or the Marines that are on them. So there is a global competition among us as the world situation kind of moves around. The global demand signal today is ... greater than what we can resource." The admiral believes that now and in the future, the geographic lay down of USPACOM's AOR needs adequate amphibious lift in order to accomplish its

various missions: “In the Pacific, though, it is my view that as the Marines come back ... we should optimize the capability of the Marines ... particularly in the area west of the [international] dateline. And to do that we have to have adequate amphibious lift.”¹⁰⁵ Amphibious shipping in the USPACOM AOR will be critical if the pivot is to succeed.

The Current Role of USSOF in the USPACOM AOR

Information regarding the current role of USSOF in Asia is hard to come by. This is likely due to the heavy SOF demand in the Middle East/North Africa and Central/South Asia. But, despite this drain on USSOF, the U.S. military has approximately 1,200 special operations personnel assigned to the USPACOM AOR under the sub-unified command, Special Operations Command, Pacific (SOCPAC).¹⁰⁶ SOCPAC is composed of three subordinate commands that are aligned by service component: the Army’s 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group located at Torii Station, Okinawa, Japan; the Air Force’s 353rd Special Forces Group at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan; and Naval Special Warfare Unit One, at U.S. Naval Base Guam.¹⁰⁷ SOCPAC’s mission and that of its component units are “to deploy throughout the Pacific, supporting USPACOM’s Theater Security Cooperation Program, deliberate plans, and real world contingencies.” Every year, SOCPAC units “conduct small unit exchanges, joint and combined training events, and operational deployments throughout the Pacific, fostering interoperability with host nation partners and facilitating strategic and operational objectives.” Smaller elements engage in “ongoing counterdrug and humanitarian demining operations, training host nation forces” throughout the USPACOM area of responsibility.¹⁰⁸

When ordered, SOCPAC can deploy as a JTF in support of USPACOM operations. For example, in early 2002, SOCPAC was ordered to stand up JTF 510, act as its command element, and deploy to the Southern Philippines in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. While there, JTF 510 conducted counterterrorism operations, capacity building, information operations, and intelligence gathering in support of the Philippine government and its armed forces. The command element of JTF 510 redeployed back to Hawaii in September 2002, but it left behind a smaller unit called Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) to continue operations with the Armed Forces of the Philippines in their fight against Islamist terrorist groups like

Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah. JSOTF-P was dissolved in the fall of 2014, with only a small group left behind to work with the Philippine military headquarters instead of ground tactical units.¹⁰⁹

Exercises

Today, SOCPAC units operate throughout the USPACOM AOR, helping partner nations build their conventional military capabilities, counterterrorism and asymmetric capabilities, expand their units' cultural knowledge, prepare for future threats, and build governmental capacity and resilience in order to face such threats. SOCPAC is able to do this through USPACOM's robust theater cooperation plan, which involves numerous annual exercises in various countries. For example, the U.S. and the Philippines armed forces hold an annual exercise in the Philippines called Balikatan. In 2015, Balikatan included three distinct parts: a combined arms live fire exercise, a command post exercise (CPX, or staff planning exercise), and various HADR and civil-military operations (CMO) in support of the Philippine population. A combined total of more than 11,000 U.S. and Philippine troops participated in the 10-day exercise, including USSOF. Despite Chinese assertions that the bilateral military exercises that make up Balikatan are aimed at China and its territorial expansion via island reclamation projects in waters claimed by both the Philippines and China, U.S. officials have consistently denied that the exercises are directed toward China in any way and repeated their assertions that the Philippines and China should resolve their territorial disputes peacefully via the tenets of international law.¹¹⁰

In South Korea, the U.S. holds several exercises every year in conjunction with the country's armed forces. Every year during August/September, U.S. Combined Forces Command and the South Korean Armed Forces get together for an exercise called Ulchi-Freedom Guardian (UFG, formerly known as Ulchi-Focus Lens). UFG is a CPX that uses a massive computer simulation designed to exercise the U.S. and South Korean military staffs in scenarios that test various elements of the operational campaign plan for the defense of South Korea against an invasion by North Korea. While UFG is primarily a staff planning exercise, Foal Eagle is the largest annual field training exercise held by U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC) and the South Korean military that brings together ground, naval, air, marine, and special operations forces. U.S. and South Korean SOF have a close relationship that

manifests as the 39th Special Forces Detachment, 1st Special Forces Regiment, a unique SOF unit that works embedded with the South Korean SOF units. According to T. D. Flack of *Stars and Stripes*, 39th Special Forces Detachment, 1st Special Forces Regiment “teach[es] tactics, techniques and procedures” during peacetime and “act[s] as ‘coalition support team leaders’” during wartime.¹¹¹ Conducted annually in March, this defensive field training exercise is designed to demonstrate to both our South Korean allies and North Korea the U.S. resolve to defend South Korea from an attack by the North. The Key Resolve exercise, held annually at approximately the same time of year, is a CPX similar to UFG, in that it uses a computer simulation to exercise the staffs of both the U.S. CFC and the South Korean military in the conduct of the campaign plan to defend South Korea from a North Korean invasion. U.S. and South Korean SOF are both key elements in the conduct of all these training exercises.¹¹²

Another important exercise is Cobra Gold, hosted annually in February by the United States’ oldest ally in the region, Thailand.¹¹³ It is also one of the largest and most important annual training exercises in the world for the U.S. military. Similar to Balikatan, Cobra Gold contains three distinct parts: a combined arms live fire exercise, a CPX, and various CMO and HADR operations in support of the Thai population. In 2015, 26 countries participated in Cobra Gold, including for the second consecutive year, China’s People’s Liberation Army. As in 2014, the People’s Army was restricted to noncombat roles, thus it participated only in the HADR and CMO exercises.

Cobra Gold 2015 was mired in controversy due to the military coup in Thailand on 22 May 2014, and the subsequent establishment of a military junta government. Then on 26 January 2015, Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Russel, whom the current military government had invited to visit Thailand, criticized the Thai military junta. According to Erik Slavin of *Stars and Stripes*, “Russel bluntly discussed the coup and prosecution of Thailand’s democratically elected government, which the military and political opponents viewed as corrupt, during [a] ... speech at Chulalongkorn University and in a subsequent television interview.” The Thai government took the comment as an insult, and it could cause lasting damage to future U.S.-Thai bilateral relations.¹¹⁴ Due to the coup and the subsequent actions of the Thai junta, the U.S. military stated that it would refocus and “scale down” its participation in Cobra Gold 2015.¹¹⁵ The U.S. ultimately declined to participate in combat and live-fire exercises, but it did participate in the

various HADR and CMO events, including those with the Chinese. Then, in April 2015, the U.S. embassy in Bangkok and USPACOM issued a joint statement indefinitely postponing a planning meeting in Hawaii for Cobra Gold 2016, citing Thailand's ongoing political situation. However, the Thai government is moving forward with its planning as if Cobra Gold 2016 will be conducted.¹¹⁶

3. Strengthening Alliances

In the Asia-Pacific region, the United States has formal treaty alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand. The Asia pivot may require that treaty documents be reviewed to ensure they still reflect the political and security goals of the participating nations. The treaties should also be nimble and adaptable enough to deter provocation from the full spectrum of state and non-state threats, and to meet other challenges of the future international security environment.¹¹⁷ China's recent warning against military alliances in the Asia-Pacific region seems to have fallen on deaf ears in Washington. In fact, the U.S. is considering a new "security architecture" in the region with its treaty allies and other partners. According to the *Philippine Star*, "the new security arrangement is being forged as regional tensions rise over China's increasingly aggressive moves to stake its territorial claim over waters around it, including nearly the entire South China Sea."¹¹⁸ The new security architecture is part of the pivot and is an extension of the traditional 'hub-and-spoke' security system the U.S. has led in the Asia-Pacific region since the Cold War, the U.S. being the hub at the center of the 'spokes' that include its present treaty partners, as well as Taiwan and South Vietnam. These relationships are bilateral, with the U.S. the dominant partner. Today's variant of this 'hub-and-spoke' security system includes traditional treaty partners the Philippines, Australia, Japan, and Thailand, and possibly two new 'spokes,' Singapore and Malaysia.

The following discusses the pivot vis-à-vis SOF and traditional U.S. treaty partners, followed by potential new partners, allies, and other states in the region. Opinions about the pivot differ among the 32 nations in the Asia-Pacific region: some are in favor, others are not, and some are ambivalent. While a detailed discussion of the attitudes of all states is not viable in this paper, this section will provide a basic understanding of each nation's position and an appreciation of just how complex a major shift toward the region might be.

Australia. Australia has worked hard in recent decades to develop foreign relations with Asia and the Pacific region. Since 1951, Canberra also has developed a close relationship with Washington, based on a military alliance and defense cooperation that includes SOF, as outlined in the Australia,

New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS). At present there are growing concerns in Australia over the changing dynamic in Southeast and North Asia. These concerns are shared by longtime Australian allies Japan and South Korea, which question the credibility and longevity of U.S. security guarantees in North Asia; China's aggressive stance toward Japan and, by implication, its ally the U.S.; and the new activism and autonomy of the next generation of growth economies, which Australia considers to be India, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the current deterioration in relations between Australia and Indonesia over Australia's spying on Indonesian trade deliberations with the U.S. threatens regional stability, the strengthening of regional trade organizations with China, and Australia's pursuit of broader trade liberalization as an element of its foreign policy goals.¹²⁰ Australia understands the need for and challenge of improving relations with Indonesia and perceives any Indonesian pull away from the U.S.—Canberra's most influential advocate in Jakarta—as an even larger barrier to overcome, as Australia's ability to accomplish the majority of its foreign policy goals depends on its bilateral relationship with the U.S.¹²¹ As a result, Australians critical of the U.S. Asia pivot are concerned about any bilateral political issues that might interfere with U.S. commitments to the region.

Nevertheless, Australia is not unlike other countries in Southeast Asia, as it welcomes the renewed U.S. interest as a counterbalance to China's dominance in the region. As Hugh White, a professor of strategic studies at Australian National University in Canberra, puts it, "Australia is in a very complicated position in this. None of us want to live in an Asia dominated by China, but none of us want to have an adversarial relationship with China."¹²² Such a view could provide an opening for additional USSOF and conventional military engagement throughout the region in an effort to demonstrate to Canberra and other U.S. allies that Washington is serious about its pivot strategy, and to ease Beijing's concerns about U.S. encirclement. Furthermore, Beijing's opposition to President Obama's November 2011 announcement about bringing U.S. Marines to Darwin was labeled by some senior Australian officials as predictable rhetoric, indicating that the "relationship between the United States and Australia predates any American concern with them. China accepts that Australia does things with the U.S."¹²³ Moreover, while the U.S.-Australian military partnership is no doubt expanding under the Asia pivot, Pentagon officials have emphasized that the

U.S. military is interested only in operating in Australia as a guest and not in developing its own bases ‘down under.’¹²⁴

While the concept of the U.S. military operating as a guest in foreign nations appears less hostile and much more cooperative than developing its own large-scale military installations abroad, critics of the pivot argue that the ‘lily pad’ approach (i.e., small, austere, strategically placed bases located in areas of known instability, which belong to U.S. allies and from which the U.S. has obtained permission from the host nation to conduct military operations) is “partly a matter of economics—it’s much cheaper to piggyback off an allied country’s facilities—or, in some cases, a country that may be none too willing, but not in a position to say no.”¹²⁵ Critics believe that the U.S. is using this approach because of financial strains, due to a combination of the cost and the budgetary deadlocks in Congress.¹²⁶ With the U.S. military reducing its global footprint in this way, allied countries can share the burden. However, critics argue that Australia should “not be forced to choose between its principal military ally and its largest trading partner” as the U.S. broadens its presence in the Asia-Pacific region.¹²⁷ Despite its strong historic defense ties with the U.S., Australia’s interdependent but asymmetrical trade with China must not be ignored, as “even Japan and Korea cannot constitute a replacement for China as an Australian resources customer.”¹²⁸

With the U.S. military reducing its global footprint in this way, allied countries can share the burden.

constitute a replacement for China as an Australian resources customer.”¹²⁸

Japan. The U.S.-Japan security alliance was forged in the aftermath of World War II and remains an anchor of the U.S. security role in Asia. Revised in 1960, the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security grants the United States the right to military bases on the Japanese archipelago, which includes Okinawa, in exchange for a U.S. guarantee to defend Japan in the event of an attack. The alliance’s resilience was tested after the devastating March 2011 earthquake and consequent tsunami that struck Tohoku.¹²⁹ The nation’s two defense establishments conducted rescue operations in tandem under Operation Tomodachi, the largest bilateral mission in the history of the alliance. “U.S. forces aided the Self Defense Force in clearing Sendai’s airport, assisted in search-and-rescue teams, and prepared Japan’s defense readiness ... The U.S. operation engendered an incredible amount of goodwill, especially in the affected regions of Japan.”¹³⁰

Operation Tomodachi has translated into enthusiasm for the U.S. Asia pivot; coincidentally, Japan is going through a pivot of its own. It is moving away from policies appropriate for a passive, defeated nation that is restricted by its constitution from having an expeditionary defense force, and toward those of a more aggressive nation that is sensitive to China's encroachment on islands viewed by Tokyo as Japanese territory.¹³¹

China's assertive behavior is the primary reason for Japan's security pivot. For example, in September 2010, a Chinese fishing boat rammed a Japanese patrol boat in the waters off of the Senkaku Islands that lie south of Okinawa in the East China Sea. This was the first incident in what would become an increasingly volatile dispute between Japan and China over who owns the islands (known as the Diayou Islands in China). The saber-rattling between Japan and China continues, and it has escalated to the point where there are very real fears that a misstep by either side could lead to a war.¹³²

Explaining the more aggressive policy shift, Japanese Prime Minister Abe told the Japanese daily *Yomiuri Shimbun*, "I have given instructions to take resolute measures against attempts to enter our territorial waters and make a landing. If they do land, then of course we will forcibly expel them."¹³³ Abe further explained that it has been more than 60 years since Japan's constitution was ratified and its contents have become obsolete. "The spirit of writing our own constitution is what will take us to the next era," he said. If Abe is successful in rewriting the constitution, it would be the first change since the document was drafted by American occupying forces in 1946.¹³⁴

One expected result of the constitutional change will be a new defense plan that reflects Japan's growing concerns over China's increasing military assertiveness and territorial demands. Under the new defense plan, Japan will spend about \$240 billion over the next five years on new equipment and related costs. Increased spending will include funding for surveillance drones, fighter jets, naval destroyers, and long-range surveillance planes to patrol the East China Sea and other waters surrounding Japan in order to challenge China's military assertiveness.¹³⁵ Nearly half of Japan's ground forces will be reconfigured for rapid deployment.¹³⁶ As journalist Kurt Spitzer explains:

a special Marine Corps-like unit will be organized to guard Japan's southwest islands, which sprawl across a vast area of ocean south of Japan's main islands. For the first time, Japan will buy V-22 Osprey

tilt-rotor aircraft, amphibious assault vehicles and other equipment designed primarily for amphibious warfare.¹³⁷

This reorganization, in conjunction with USSOF assets already in place throughout Japan, provides an excellent opportunity for USSOF to expand its engagement with a stalwart U.S. ally in the region.

New Zealand. Progress toward its Asia pivot has allowed renewed security cooperation between the U.S. and New Zealand. In late June 2012, the U.S. and New Zealand signed a defense agreement in Washington that, according to New Zealand's defense minister, Jonathan Coleman, "recognizes the significant security cooperation that exists between New Zealand and the U.S. within the context of our independent foreign policy, and seeks to build upon that cooperation in the years ahead."¹³⁸ The declaration provides a framework for cooperation, focusing on the exchange of information and strategic perspectives, and on increased understanding of defense policies. At the signing, the two parties agreed that the partnership would cover maritime security cooperation, HADR, and peacekeeping support operations.¹³⁹ The renewed security cooperation comes amid New Zealand's longtime ban on nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered warships entering its ports, which in 1986 led the U.S. to suspend its security obligations to New Zealand under the ANZUS Treaty.¹⁴⁰

The Asia pivot is receiving moderate criticism from John Bruni, a director at SAGE International, who argues that the pivot is putting longtime regional allies of the U.S., like New Zealand, in a difficult position. Bruni points out that "most of Asia trades heavily with China despite remaining skeptical about its political machinations."¹⁴¹ New Zealand falls into this category, as it benefits from strong commercial ties to China, while simultaneously being concerned about China's human rights record and growing naval capabilities.¹⁴² As for the security and defense cooperation the pivot would call for, Bruni believes that U.S.-New Zealand cooperation is limited due to the size of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF). He explains that "while highly professional, there are obvious limits to what New Zealand can do to support U.S. operations, beyond lending their special forces personnel, intelligence assets and possibly an aircraft or warship."¹⁴³

Despite these criticisms, the NZDF SOF units have a history of training with the U.S. and the Australian SOF units during the biennial exercise,

Talisman Sabre, most recently in July 2015.¹⁴⁴ As the pivot matures, one should expect the number of this type of SOF exercise to increase. Robert Ayson, director of the Center for Strategic Studies, and David Capie, a senior lecturer at the School of History, Philosophy, Political Science, and International Relations at the Victoria University of Wellington, agree with this assessment. Ayson and Capie argue that defense cooperation between the U.S. and New Zealand has been picking up since President Obama's announcement of the Asia pivot in 2011. For example, in April 2012, "US Marines and army personnel took part in a major exercise in the middle of New Zealand's North Island."¹⁴⁵ NZDF soldiers are also training with U.S. Marines in California, and New Zealand participated in the combat-focused Rim of the Pacific maritime exercises near Hawaii.¹⁴⁶ Recent policy developments and high-level dialogue between the two nations reflect the rapidly strengthening security relationship that had been handicapped since 1986.

Philippines. The Mutual Defense Treaty between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America was signed on 30 August 1951, in Washington. It confirms that either party will come to the defense of the other if attacked by an external power.¹⁴⁷ For several years, the U.S. maintained large military bases in the Philippines that were integral to U.S. regional security plans and operations.¹⁴⁸ However, in 1991, the Philippine senate rejected a new basing agreement, effectively ending the major U.S. military presence in the Philippines. Today, more than 20 years after the U.S. military bases were shut down because of anti-American sentiment, there is some enthusiasm for bringing U.S. military personnel back. Washington and Manila have agreed via the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, signed by President Obama during a state visit in April 2014, to increase the U.S. military presence in the region as a counterweight to a bellicose and domineering China.¹⁴⁹ This is not the first time Manila has changed its mind about allowing a U.S. military presence back into the Philippines. Under a 2002 agreement between Washington and Manila, several hundred U.S. counterterrorism troops deployed to the country to train Philippine soldiers for counterinsurgency operations to help contain al-Qaeda-affiliated insurgents on the island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines.¹⁵⁰ That operation has since transitioned to a much smaller USSOF advisory force.¹⁵¹

Moreover, in much the same way that a disaster helped reaffirm U.S. popularity in Japan, the October 2013 typhoon that devastated the Philippines

has had much to do with newfound positive opinions about the U.S. and its military. The typhoon provided a ready test case for the importance of a U.S. presence in the region. America's response to the typhoon, which racked the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries, is the latest example of the U.S. winning both goodwill and political points with an Asia-Pacific country while responding to a natural disaster. During both the Japanese and Philippine disasters, "the U.S. military's positioning of forces in the region allowed it to provide robust assistance more quickly and effectively than any other nation."¹⁵² America's ability to respond to crises when other countries—particularly China—were unwilling or unable to do so earned the U.S. additional credibility in the region. "The United States, for all of our problems, still has a lot of good working relationships and good will in that area of the world," said Auslin. "The tragedy here is unfortunately an opportunity for us to show what we can do."¹⁵³

In fact, the mostly military U.S.-led response to the devastation wrought by the October 2013 typhoon was impressive. About 50 U.S. ships and aircraft were deployed to the disaster zone, including 10 C-130 transport planes, 12 V-22 Ospreys, and 14 Seahawk helicopters, which were deployed from an aircraft carrier to airdrop supplies. The relief efforts underscored expanding U.S.-Philippine military cooperation, which could grow even stronger in the wake of the catastrophe as the United States pursues its pivot toward Asia. When U.S. ships "deliver food, water and medicine, they are also delivering good will that could ease the way for the United States to strengthen its often controversial military presence in one of Southeast Asia's most strategic countries."¹⁵⁴ The U.S. was a major beneficiary of a very bad situation. "It is not that the United States used assistance to promote rebalancing, but that rebalancing enabled the U.S. to respond so decisively," said Asia security expert Carl Thayer.¹⁵⁵

South Korea. The U.S.-Republic of Korea Mutual Defense Treaty was signed in October 1953, two months after the end of the Korean War. The treaty is one of the most important and enduring U.S. alliances, and it has guaranteed South Korea's national security not only by deterring further North Korean attacks, but also by providing a continental base for U.S. forces to face China and Russia, and to provide a frontline defense for Japan.¹⁵⁶ "The alliance has also augmented South Korea's military forces and provided a nuclear umbrella, thus enabling the South Koreans to pursue economic progress

with relatively low military budgets.”¹⁵⁷ Part of that economic progress has included building its own robust arms industry, which supports its military forces with tanks, missiles, howitzers, and more.¹⁵⁸

In 1978, the CFC was established in Seoul to oversee a wartime response by U.S. and South Korean forces to any North Korean aggression. The CFC has been commanded by a U.S. general since its inception. While South Korea presently retains peacetime control of its approximately 639,000 service members, control in the event of war would transfer to a U.S. four-star general, who would command the CFC. South Korean defense ministry officials report that South Korea has asked the United States to reexamine a plan, which already has been delayed, to give Seoul wartime control of its military

The threat from North Korea has been the glue that held the alliance together.

forces in 2015. The transfer was originally planned for 2012 but was delayed three years ago. The threat from North Korea has been the glue that held the alliance together, says Donald P. Gregg, chairman

of the Korea Society and former U.S. ambassador to South Korea.¹⁵⁹

Indeed, according to discussions at a 2013 Wilson Center conference titled South Korea and the U.S. Pivot to Asia, “relations between Seoul and Washington are perhaps now stronger than they ever have been since the signing of the bilateral military alliance 60 years ago.”¹⁶⁰ Conference attendees agreed that the U.S. and South Korea are facing new challenges that will require them to deepen existing ties amid growing tensions in the Asia-Pacific region. These challenges include a surge in China’s political power and economic might, and increasing hostility from North Korea. In the face of these challenges, conference attendees concluded, “the alliance between South Korea and the United States is expected to strengthen further as the region undergoes sweeping changes.”¹⁶¹ Such changes leave room for substantial growth and operation creativity in U.S. and South Korean SOF integration.

Thailand. As the first U.S. ally in Asia, Thailand and the United States share a unique relationship. Initial contact between the two nations occurred in 1818, when Thailand was still known as Siam.¹⁶² Since then, the two nations have developed a strong relationship based on common economic and security interests. Thailand is a significant U.S. trade and investment partner, exporting items such as rice, sugar, rubber, shrimp, and tin, as well as electronics,

computers and parts, and medical equipment through its manufacturing and high-technology industries.¹⁶³ At the same time, Thailand is a key strategic partner for the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific region, providing sustained military-to-military cooperation and granting U.S. access to Thai military facilities.¹⁶⁴ For example, the Joint United States Military Advisory Group is the U.S. security assistance organization in Thailand that supports a number of missions, including the joint combined bilateral exercise program, which averages 40 exercises annually.¹⁶⁵ Cobra Gold 2014, the Asia-Pacific's largest joint exercise with the U.S., kicked off in Thailand on 11 February 2014, with participants from the U.S., Thailand, Singapore, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, and Malaysia. The aim of Cobra Gold is to "advance regional security and provide effective response to regional crises through a multinational force from nations that share common goals and security commitments in the Asia-Pacific region."¹⁶⁶

A September 2006 coup in Thailand, which the Thai military led against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, has left the country in a state of political instability. It set off "power struggles among established power centers, which spilled over into unprecedented street violence in 2010 and large demonstrations in late 2013."¹⁶⁷ The main leader of the protests, Suthep Thaugsuban, is calling for a major revamping of the government, including replacing the notoriously corrupt police with "security volunteers," rewriting the constitution to ban populist policies, and replacing parliament with a "people's council."¹⁶⁸ Relations between Bangkok and Washington do not appear to be affected by the political instability troubling Thailand, although "Bangkok's reliability as a partner, and its ability to be a regional leader, are uncertain."¹⁶⁹

Those critical of President Obama's Asia pivot argue that his November 2012 visit to Thailand, during which he expressed "unequivocal support for the government led by Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra," belies certain U.S. attitudes toward the Thaksin family's leadership.¹⁷⁰ Skeptics of the Asia pivot thus interpret Washington's recent change toward Thailand's leadership as a necessary move to keep Bangkok from seeking support elsewhere—namely, China. With Beijing supporting Thaksin's government, Thailand would be inclined to support China in regional trade and territorial issues, such as "China's policy of treating the South China Sea dispute as a bilateral issue with each of the claimant countries."¹⁷¹ As Thailand does not have a stake in the South China Sea dispute, it has nothing to lose by supporting China.

Proponents of a larger U.S. role in the Asia-Pacific region see increased involvement with Thailand as a strategic partnership. In recent years, Thailand has pushed to establish itself as a regional leader by “assisting in the development of poorer countries, both within and outside the immediate region through its ‘Forward Engagement’ foreign policy.”¹⁷² Through the U.S.-ASEAN Partnership for Good Governance, Equitable and Sustainable Development, and Security, the U.S. Asia pivot puts the U.S. in a good position to back Thailand’s stance as a regional leader in Southeast Asia. This five-year project, which began in 2013, is supported by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. State Department. Its goal is to strengthen institutions and develop “regional policies to advance ASEAN’s vision for political-security and social-cultural integration.”¹⁷³ Yet opponents continue to argue that increased engagement with the region as a whole will detract from the stronger bilateral relations the U.S. enjoys with its traditional allies, such as Thailand, because of a greater need to adopt a more diplomatic position suitable for the entire Asia-Pacific.

Deepening Partnerships with Emerging Powers

One major objective of the Asia pivot is to strengthen bilateral arrangements with the region’s emerging powers, including China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Brunei, Mongolia, and the Pacific island countries. It is “all part of a broader effort to ensure a more comprehensive approach to American strategy and engagement in the region. Increased interactions with India and Indonesia are particularly notable, given the rapidly rising regional influence of the two nations.”¹⁷⁴

India. In this monograph, a rising China is cited as a reason for the Obama administration’s pivot toward Asia. Robert M. Hathaway, director of the Asia Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, believes the rising China excuse is a “vast oversimplification.”¹⁷⁵ However, says Hathaway, “many in India, where the People’s Republic of China is widely viewed as the country’s greatest long-term threat, will applaud Washington’s new emphasis on Asia.” Nonetheless, he adds, India has no desire to get in the middle of a U.S.-China confrontation and will not be “cast as a junior partner to the United States in a cold war with China.”¹⁷⁶

India’s ambiguity reflects different views in Washington and New Delhi on the nature and the locus of the Chinese challenge. Indian strategists worry

that Washington wants India to help thwart Chinese ambitions in the South China Sea or elsewhere in East Asia, while simultaneously ignoring China's activities in Pakistan that threaten India's security interests. Two examples of this come to mind: Beijing's support for construction in the Gwadar Port, Pakistan, and Chinese support for Pakistan's nuclear activities in particular. Alleged Chinese inroads in Burma, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are also of concern to New Delhi.¹⁷⁷

Indians are concerned about the U.S. pivot toward Asia for another reason. In the near term, New Delhi is not convinced that the Afghans are ready to assume full responsibility for their country's security, now that the U.S. has ended combat operations in Afghanistan. Many in India believe the U.S. should stay the course in Afghanistan, and not—as some put it—leave India holding the bag.¹⁷⁸

Indonesia. As Southeast Asia's largest country and a founding member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Indonesia is in a critical position for renewed U.S. interest in the Asia-Pacific region. Despite a historically cooperative relationship between the U.S. and Indonesia, the George W. Bush administration's lack of overt engagement in the region, due to a preoccupation with the Middle East, created the perception that Southeast Asia was of waning significance to Washington.¹⁷⁹ This perception was enhanced by China's increased involvement in the region, as its attention "was clearly illustrated by the unfailing attendance of top Chinese leaders at ASEAN-driven regional meetings."¹⁸⁰ With the perceived waning of U.S. interest and China's increased presence in the region, Dewi Fortuna Anwar, a professor at the Research Center for Politics at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, believes this setting "gave East Asian countries a rare window of opportunity to develop a new set of relationships among themselves, particularly for managing China's rise in a more inclusive way."¹⁸¹

However, this shift left ASEAN member nations and other countries in the region vulnerable to China's influence as the only dominant regional power. Despite this potential vulnerability, Indonesia has increased bilateral relations with China, including signing a strategic partnership agreement in 2005, which opened the way for more trade, investment, and maritime cooperation.¹⁸² Bilateral cooperation with China may be strategically motivated, as Anwar explains: "Indonesia, like other members of ASEAN, strongly believes that the best way to ensure that China's policy toward the region

is friendly is by convincing Beijing that it has a direct strategic interest in Southeast Asian security and prosperity.”¹⁸³

Within this framework, Indonesia’s primary objectives are to promote stability and ensure autonomy in Southeast Asia, freeing the region from great power influence.¹⁸⁴ To this end, Indonesia has sought to minimize the development of regional institutions in which “China’s power would outweigh that of other members.”¹⁸⁵ To balance China’s influence further, Jakarta has advocated extending membership in the East Asia Summit to Australia, India, New Zealand, Russia, and the United States. However, because of Indonesia’s concerns about China’s potential to alter the region’s stability, Jakarta fears that renewed U.S. interest in the region is a result of China’s rise instead of a genuine interest in the value of the country and the region.¹⁸⁶

For the most part, Indonesia welcomes increased relations with the United States. Since the beginning of the Obama administration, Indonesia has sought to deepen the relationship, culminating in a Comprehensive Partnership Agreement signed in November 2010, which resulted in cooperation on issues of health, science, technology, and entrepreneurship.¹⁸⁷ Yet, according to Anwar, critics of the U.S. Asia pivot are concerned “that Washington has placed too much emphasis on the military dimensions of this strategy.”¹⁸⁸ Even Indonesia’s foreign minister initially stated that the proposed rotational basing of 2,500 U.S. Marines in Darwin, Australia, could raise regional tensions.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, U.S. troops in Darwin are in close proximity to Indonesia’s troubled province of Papua, “where the giant U.S. mining company PT Freeport Indonesia operates.”¹⁹⁰ Pundits in Indonesia fear these forces could be used to “intervene on behalf of the often security-beleaguered PT Freeport Indonesia.”¹⁹¹

As mentioned previously, Indonesia welcomes renewed U.S. interest in the Asia-Pacific region. Arguably, this is due to Chinese “naval advances and its designation of its South China Sea territorial claims as a ‘core’ interest” that directly threatens Indonesia.¹⁹² Indonesia has chosen to counter China’s position in the South China Sea disputes through ASEAN and to maintain stability through multilateral diplomacy, where the U.S. could play a central role. To solve these disputes diplomatically, Indonesia must also concern itself with the interests of its fellow ASEAN members. As Ann Marie Murphy, associate professor at Seton Hall University, explains, “Vietnam and the Philippines, which have borne the brunt of recent Chinese naval assertiveness, have called for greater ASEAN backing and also sought

outside support, particularly from the U.S.”¹⁹³ The U.S. Asia pivot could prove advantageous for Indonesia’s balancing act in maintaining cohesion among ASEAN members.

Malaysia. According to Malaysia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, the country’s foreign policy is based on non-interference, respect for “the internal affairs of other nations,” and promoting universal peace while safeguarding its own national interests.¹⁹⁴ As such, Kuala Lumpur seeks to maintain regional security and stability by promoting friendly regional and international ties to other countries and international organizations. Much of what Malaysia emphasizes in its foreign policy can be achieved through increased relations via the U.S. Asia pivot.

First, with trade between the U.S. and Malaysia already near \$40.3 billion as of 2013, Malaysia’s support and involvement in the U.S.-created Trans-Pacific Partnership could foster even more significant trade relationships.¹⁹⁵ An added benefit of Malaysian involvement in the Trans-Pacific Partnership is that it could attract more interest from the U.S. commercial sector, which is eager to reach out and create its own ties in the region. Second, deepening ties with the U.S. carries significant security benefits as China becomes ever more belligerent in its claim to islands in the East and South China seas.¹⁹⁶ With peace and stability in the region a high priority for Malaysia, the June 2013 meeting between Malaysian Defense Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein and then U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel not only underscored the importance of enhanced security cooperation as a confidence-building measure, but also as an opportunity to grow through exercises, training, and interoperability.¹⁹⁷ Finally, the April 2014 meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, hosted in Honolulu by Secretary Hagel, highlighted how further cooperation can be enhanced in the region during unforeseen disasters such as the missing Malaysian airliner MH370 and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.¹⁹⁸ The goal of this meeting, according to Hagel, was for Southeast Asian nations “to feel even more clarity about the U.S. commitment to the area, our coordination, our communications, the areas where we can cooperate more.”¹⁹⁹

Singapore. Much like the rest of the Southeast Asian neighborhood, Singapore’s foreign policy is based on maintaining political and economic stability in the region.²⁰⁰ To this end, Singapore, along with other countries in the region, welcomes heightened relations with the United States. Nicholas

Fang, executive director of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs, says Singapore finds the U.S. military presence reassuring.²⁰¹ The U.S. Navy began rotating its four littoral combat ships as of April 2013, stationing them at the Changi naval base in the east of Singapore.²⁰²

However, doubts about the U.S. commitment to its Asia pivot remain. Barry Desker, dean of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University, argues, “You’re not going to have a significant shift of U.S. forces to this part of the world,” because of continued turmoil in the Middle East and Secretary of State John Kerry’s efforts to restart the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.²⁰³ Additionally, some skeptics in Asia and the U.S. view President Obama’s Asia pivot as a marketing job to distract from “a post-financial crisis America in terminal decline—and a China that was unstoppably ascendant.”²⁰⁴ Finally, those doubtful about President Obama’s Asia pivot believe that the policy needs to move away from an emphasis on a growing military presence and increased security cooperation, and to focus instead on its primary objective of being a diplomatic, economic, and cultural strategy.²⁰⁵ As such, any role for USSOF in cultivating relations with Singapore will be minimal at best in the near future.

Vietnam. U.S.-Vietnam relations began to normalize in 1995 during the Clinton administration. Since then, relations have deepened and diversified over security and human rights issues, trade agreements, and military cooperation. The U.S. Asia pivot has come at a critical moment for Vietnam, as tensions over the South China Sea dispute have intensified. The dispute

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is causing Vietnam and other regional allies to form stronger ties with the U.S. for military and diplomatic backing against China, which, in 2010, became more assertive in its territorial claims.²⁰⁶ In fact, in 2012, then U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta visited Cam Ranh Bay, a vital naval base for the U.S.

during the Vietnam War, to mark Washington’s deepening partnership with Hanoi and to counter China’s growing influence and military assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific region.²⁰⁷

Although China has attempted repeatedly to forge stronger ties with Vietnam, leaders in Hanoi interpret China’s growing influence in the region as a cause to question Beijing’s strategic position.²⁰⁸ This makes Vietnam a

key opportunity for the U.S. Asia pivot, as Hanoi looks away from China to deepen its security and diplomatic partnerships. During Secretary Panetta's visit to Vietnam in 2012, the two nations outlined the parameters of the general agreement, which was signed in 2011. It included increased military-to-military cooperation in five key areas: high-level dialogues, maritime security, search-and-rescue operations, peacekeeping operations, and HADR.²⁰⁹ However, as Richard Weitz, senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, points out about the U.S. Asia pivot, "the geographic focus of this effort has been in Southeast Asia, which complements the large, fixed U.S. bases in Northeast Asia and also provides for superior access to vital shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea."²¹⁰ Weitz hints at the underlying criticism of the Obama administration's Asia-Pacific national security strategy as being largely focused on military cooperation.²¹¹

Deepening ties with Vietnam is not solely based on military cooperation, however. Weitz points out that, between 2002 and 2010, Washington and Hanoi developed stronger economic ties, with trade between the two nations growing "more than six-fold, to \$18.6 billion."²¹² Yet with maritime disputes at the core of the Southeast Asian nations' concerns about China, increased defense cooperation with the U.S. is the most attractive aspect of Washington's Asia pivot for Hanoi. Furthermore, deepening relations between the U.S. and Vietnam, and with other ASEAN member states for that matter, could take time and should be done cautiously, as ASEAN nations "also have extensive and mutually beneficial economic ties with China, which they do not want to jeopardize by directly confronting Beijing over its maritime claims."²¹³ Although Vietnam sees the U.S. as a counter to Chinese dominance in the region, Hanoi does not want to confront Beijing openly, nor does it want to be a participant in a U.S.-Chinese military confrontation. Thus, Hanoi maneuvers accordingly to make Washington appear to be the driving force behind the rebalancing.²¹⁴

Counter to Weitz's opinion, Carlyle Thayer, emeritus professor at the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy, argues that Vietnam is not increasing relations with Washington to oppose Beijing. Because of Hanoi's commitment to maintaining its independence, "Vietnam has learned from history that too much reliance on a major power can have negative consequences."²¹⁵ Rather, Thayer contends, Vietnam is pivoting between China and the U.S. "to develop comprehensive ties with each and make each bilateral relationship important in its own right."²¹⁶ Thayer

supports his point by comparing the level of defense cooperation Vietnam exercises with both the U.S. and China; both countries exchange high-level visits, maintain strategic dialogue, and are allowed one naval port visit per year in Vietnam.²¹⁷

While it is clear from both sides of the pivot argument that the U.S. and Vietnam are strengthening military ties, critics maintain that the U.S. is lagging in economic investment in Vietnam. Because China is a “feared ancient rival,” Hanoi would rather not take Beijing’s money, as it considers China “the Big Brother of the North.”²¹⁸ However, the immediacy of Hanoi’s needs is making it difficult to resist. China’s rise is shaping regional trade relationships and alliances, making Washington’s Asia pivot seem “almost after the fact.”²¹⁹

Other Nations in the USPACOM Area of Operations

Bangladesh. Bangladesh is important to U.S. national security interests for three reasons. First, it is the third largest Muslim state in the world and “stands out for its moderate secular values and success in fending off political use of religion.”²²⁰ Second, because its relations with Pakistan and Afghanistan are ‘in tatters,’ the U.S. needs to forge deeper strategic relationships with the ‘marginal states’ in the region, including Bangladesh. “Such states,” writes Doug Lieb in the *Harvard International Review*, “are often overlooked in a structural realist world view that privileges the study of large countries.”²²¹ Third, Bangladesh is a maritime country with significant potential for securing Indian Ocean sea lines of communication.²²² As such, in 2012, USPACOM deployed SOF assist teams to Bangladesh to take part in counterterrorism cooperation operations to assist Bangladesh in building capacity to help mitigate their internal counterterror and counterinsurgency challenges.²²³ According to then USPACOM Commander Admiral Robert Willard, Bangladesh has become an exceptionally effective partner in the ongoing battle against Islamist terror by cooperating, for example, with India and the U.S. to help counter violent activity by organizations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba.²²⁴ Moreover, according to Admiral Willard, “the Bangladesh army is primarily responsible for and has achieved major advancements in the protection of its citizens during the annual cyclone season and the inevitable flooding and related disasters with which Bangladesh repeatedly contends.”²²⁵ However, Bangladesh has non-traditional security vulnerabilities

too, such as cyclones and earthquakes, which require weather forecasting technologies and assistance with disaster relief and climate change issues. According to Nilanthi Samaranyake, a strategic studies analyst at CNA, a nonprofit research and analysis organization located in Arlington, Virginia, these vulnerabilities underscore “the prospects for advancing U.S. security ties with Bangladesh,” and with other South Asia maritime states such as Sri Lanka and the Maldives.²²⁶

Bhutan. The United States and Bhutan have never had much of a relationship. Bhutan was never colonized and thus has existed in self-imposed isolation for much of its history. Television was banned until 1999, and until recently, tourism was rare. During the early 20th century, the United Kingdom handled Bhutan’s external relations. India took Britain’s role after World War II, until Bhutan gained full control over its foreign affairs in 2007. Today, the U.S. has little trade with Bhutan. The American diplomatic post in New Delhi handles whatever Bhutan-related issues arise. According to the U.S. State Department, only ‘several’ Bhutanese travel to the U.S. through government-sponsored programs every year, and a paltry ‘few’ Bhutanese military officers have attended courses at the U.S. Defense Department’s Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Hawaii. While Bhutan joined the United Nations in 1971, it does not have diplomatic relations with any of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, including the United States and China.²²⁷ Due to Bhutan’s relative geographic and diplomatic isolation, as well as its small military, SOF engagement by the U.S. should be a low priority.

Brunei. President Obama cancelled a major trip to Brunei, and to Malaysia and the Philippines, in October 2013 because of the U.S. Government shutdown that month, raising questions about his commitment to the Asia pivot. He also cancelled his plans the following week to attend the APEC summit in Indonesia and the ASEAN summit in Brunei, where world leaders gathered to discuss economic and security issues.²²⁸

Brunei has much to gain from closer cooperation with the U.S. and other major powers. The country is predisposed to geopolitical insecurity because it is composed of two divided enclaves that are completely surrounded by its much more powerful neighbor, Malaysia. This is further exacerbated by historically contested maritime interests in the South China Sea, a conflict that Robert Kaplan argues, in a special report for the 15 August 2011 issue of *Foreign Policy*, is likely to prevail well into the future. “Because of its small

size (about the size of Delaware), Brunei is disproportionately vulnerable to the ongoing Asian military modernization and contested island problems, which threatens the current regional balance of power; of particular concern is Chinese military assertiveness.”²²⁹

Brunei is also faced with several non-traditional security threats, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2013, which demonstrated Brunei’s and other ASEAN members’ susceptibility to catastrophic natural disasters. “Trans-national crime, most prominently in the areas of piracy, drug trafficking, and cyber-crime, and environmental security threats such as forest fires and illegal logging also contribute to national insecurity.”²³⁰ To counter these threats, Brunei has preferred to use soft diplomacy rather than coercive military action, but it is likely in the years ahead that Brunei will strengthen its national security by improving both diplomatic and military capabilities. Diplomatically, dispute resolution within the ASEAN community will likely occur. Brunei’s national security enhancements will include the further deepening of its bilateral military ties with major and regional powers, and investing in ‘net-centric’ military modernization.

Burma.²³¹ The post–World War II history of Burma has been marked by ethnic conflict that has resulted in one of the world’s longest running civil wars. During this time, the UN and other international organizations have reported consistent and systematic human rights violations. However, with the military junta’s gradual relinquishing of control in 2011 and the release of a number of prominent political prisoners, including human rights activist Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma has taken considerable steps to improve its human rights record. The European Union and the U.S. have recognized this improvement in recent years, which has led to the easing of trade and economic sanctions. However, Burma’s government still faces accusations of human rights violations for its treatment of the largely Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority, including its poor response to religious clashes that have been described by numerous human rights organizations as a policy of ethnic cleansing.

In view of its isolation from the West, China and India have maintained close relations with Burma with several of their companies operating in the country. In 2008, India suspended military aid to Burma, citing human rights abuses by the ruling military junta, but it preserved its commercial ties, thereby providing the same abusive regime with a revenue stream.

Burma's 2010 election reforms have led to a thawing in its foreign relations with Western countries. Most notably, the U.S. relaxed restrictions on foreign aid to the country in November 2011 and announced the resumption of diplomatic relations on 13 January 2012.

A series of high-profile visits between the U.S. and Burma has signaled discussions about its role in the Asia pivot.²³² According to *Irrawaddy* contributor William Boot, improved U.S.-Burma relations are integral to countering China's expansion in the Indian Ocean. In addition to its existing economic interests in Burma, China has plans "to further strengthen its infrastructure to the Indian Ocean with a new railway route from its southwestern Yunnan Province through Burma to the coast at Kyaukphyu, where its oil transshipment port is based."²³³ At the same time, the U.S. has proposed its own infrastructure projects in Burma, such as bidding for the contract to expand Yangon's international airport and constructing new roads, in particular through "the main commercial corridor between Yangon and Mandalay."²³⁴ Moreover, although the level of China's presence in the country is not likely to change, Burma's warming relations with Western countries is providing a strong commercial competitor in the form of multinational corporations.

David Steinberg, writing for the *Asia Times*, cautions that a U.S. pivot toward Burma that is perceived as too imposing, influential, or condescending could result in a move away from the positive warming of relations to a more neutral stance.²³⁵ Steinberg recalls China's extensive presence that "failed to take into account [Burma] sensitivities, which clearly indicated a mushrooming resentment against the obvious tilt toward, and influence of, China."²³⁶ Steinberg predicts that, in the face of warming relations with the West and continued aid and commercial interest from its regional partners, Burma is positioning itself to gain assistance from multiple actors and a return to a familiar policy: "a balance among all external interests that could subvert its autonomy."²³⁷

Opponents to warming relations between the U.S. and Burma cite more than the country's human rights record alone, which suggests that the Obama administration should move with caution, despite Burma's recent shift toward democracy and respect for human rights. According to Bibhu Prasad Routray, a visiting fellow at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Burma has failed to address a number of issues, such as slow progress on

constitutional reform, the regime's record in ending ethnic conflicts, and its under-preparedness in acting as an unbiased arbiter in religious clashes.²³⁸

Cambodia. Cambodia is one of the Asian countries in which the U.S. is competing for influence. Attempts to strengthen bilateral relations between the U.S. and Cambodia have been made in the areas of promoting security, democracy, human rights, economic development, and combating corruption. The country still has border disputes with Vietnam over some offshore islands, and with Thailand over undefined maritime boundaries and land adjacent to the Preah Vihear Temple. Ironically, China is America's major competition for favor in Cambodia, but it has not always been that way. "In 1984 when the current prime minister Hun Sen was the country's foreign minister, the ministry published a book titled *Chinese Rulers' Crimes Against Kampuchea*."²³⁹ The book elaborated Beijing's role in propping up the notorious Khmer Rouge regime, which was responsible for murdering 1.7 million people. However, thanks to China's smart diplomacy and generous aid (\$2.1 billion since 1992), as well as growing private investment and trade, it has now emerged as the most influential presence in Cambodia.²⁴⁰ Cambodia recently has been touted—at least by Beijing—as one of China's most reliable states. However, that reliability may be starting to change as "stirrings of political change" now grip Cambodia.²⁴¹

In 2008, according to the *Washington Post*, the U.S. Government, concerned that Cambodia could become a refuge for al-Qaeda sympathizers,

Cambodia recently has been touted—at least by Beijing—as one of China's most reliable states.

agreed to help the country create a special counterterrorism unit. This decision was based on a 2003 incident in which the leader of an Indonesian-based al-Qaeda affiliate was found to have spent several months hiding in Cambodia. During the same timeframe, four other members of the

same al-Qaeda affiliate were arrested and charged with planning to bomb the U.S. and British diplomatic missions in Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital.²⁴² In 2012, the Pentagon deployed USSOF advisers to train a Cambodian counterterrorism battalion in an effort to continue its military outreach and engagement policy throughout the USPACOM region.²⁴³ The *Washington Post* reported:

the training has persisted despite concerns about the human rights record of Cambodia's authoritarian ruler, former Khmer Rouge commander Hun Sen, who in the past has relied on his military to execute and intimidate political opponents ... U.S. military leaders said they are eager to bolster relationships with countries across Asia, even those with checkered human rights records, but are careful to do so in a way that encourages reforms and does not ignore abuses.²⁴⁴

To emphasize this point, then U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, during a 2012 visit to Cambodia, stressed the importance of Cambodia's leaders respecting human rights, the rule of law, and a more complete political system.²⁴⁵ Cambodia's human rights record is a major concern in terms of increasing cooperation with the United States. Indeed, although President Obama's visit to Cambodia in November 2012 marks the first time a U.S. president has visited the country since the Vietnam War, the two countries' leaders held private meetings regarding U.S. concerns about human rights in Cambodia.²⁴⁶

The U.S. faces significant difficulties in its pivot toward Cambodia because of the Phnom Penh-Beijing axis, as demonstrated by Cambodia's continued alliance with Beijing's positions in regional forums (e.g., ASEAN), which "plays a crucial role in the two countries' strengthening bilateral ties."²⁴⁷ Moreover, China has been a historic supporter of the Hun Sen government and has provided significant foreign aid to the country, making it even more difficult for the U.S. to convince Cambodia of the benefits of a U.S. Asia pivot. According to Roberto Tofani in *World Politics Review*:

Since recognizing the coup government led by Hun Sen in 1997, Beijing has supported the former Khmer Rouge cadre with diplomatic and financial aid. In 2004 China emerged as Cambodia's No. 1 foreign investor. Since then, bilateral trade between Cambodia and China has increased dramatically: In 2011 it reached \$2.5 billion, up 73.5 percent from a year earlier, with both sides aiming to double the figure by 2017. On the investment side, during the first six months of 2012, Cambodia's garment and textile industry and rice-milling sector attracted a combined \$141 million from China, according to a report by the Council for the Development of Cambodia.²⁴⁸

There also is doubt in the region about Washington's economic capability to follow up with its commitment to strengthen and modernize its security alliances in the Asia-Pacific region because of continued U.S. obligations in the Middle East. However, Curtis Chin, former U.S. ambassador to the Asian Development Bank, argues that more could be done in Cambodia and other Asia-Pacific nations than just increasing security cooperation. Chin recommends that the U.S. Asia pivot take on a cultural and educational element, the benefit being that this could be done "with and without formal U.S. government support, to help Cambodians to 'fulfill their dreams' in running their own business and in helping American entrepreneurs and businesses succeed in Cambodia."²⁴⁹

Fiji. Fiji's relations with the U.S. and with regional leaders Australia and New Zealand soured after the December 2006 military coup, led by Josaia Bainimarama against Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase over allegations of corruption in the government. As a result, the U.S. withdrew much of its direct aid to Fiji, and it presently "contributes through its membership in multilateral agencies and USAID funding of regional environmental projects."²⁵⁰ Given that Section 7008 of the U.S. Foreign Operations Appropriations Act states that, when a country undergoes a military coup, "the United States government is required by law to take action and review its assistance programs directed to that country to determine which remain relevant to U.S. policy, and which should be suspended," the U.S. is restricted in providing critical defense and security aid to Fiji.²⁵¹ Specifically, the U.S. cannot provide "aid related to military financing, International Military Education and Training Grants, peacekeeping operations, and military aid that falls under Section 1206 of the 2006 Defense Authorization Law."²⁵² Diplomatic tensions surged after events in 2009, when Bainimarama failed to deliver on a promise to hold elections and return to democracy.²⁵³

Not only is the U.S. crippled on a key aspect of the Asia pivot due to its policy stance toward Fiji's interim government, but Suva's rejection by its regional allies in Canberra and Wellington have caused the country to turn elsewhere for support and assistance. According to Elke Larsen, a research assistant with the Pacific Partners Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Fiji has broken "its isolation by seeking new powerful friends to help replace the loss of traditional support. Fiji undertook a 'look north' policy with China becoming an important aid donor, Russia

strengthening its ties through visiting officials, and, most recently, the opening of Fiji's new embassy in South Korea in July 2012.²⁵⁴ Finally, security cooperation with Fiji could be a critical weakness in bringing this small island nation into the Asia pivot fold; the military is a respected institution in Fiji and relatively large for the size of the country, thus it touches the lives of most of the nation's families.²⁵⁵

Kiribati. Kiribati's foreign relations have developed significantly in international forums through its advocacy of global climate change efforts. Indeed, an article published in *The Guardian* on 16 April 2013, said that Phil Glendenning, president of the Refugee Council of Australia, advised Canberra "that it should prepare to create a new migration category for those fleeing the effects of climate change."²⁵⁶ Climate change and rising sea levels pose a serious threat to the continued existence of small, low-lying Pacific island nations, including Kiribati.

U.S. relations with Kiribati began in 1979 with the signing of a treaty of friendship after Kiribati gained independence from the United Kingdom. U.S.-Kiribati relations are founded on cooperation on many issues, such as regional security, sustainable development, and climate change.²⁵⁷ In 2008, the U.S. and Kiribati signed a cooperative maritime law enforcement agreement that allows Kiribati law enforcement personnel to embark on select U.S. Coast Guard and Navy vessels to patrol its territory.²⁵⁸

Laos. Critics of President Obama's Asia pivot caution against engaging further with Laos without acknowledging the country's less than stellar human rights record. Joshua Kurlantzick, a senior fellow for Southeast Asia with the Council on Foreign Relations, warns that establishing deeper security and military ties with a country that has been accused of human rights violations and religious and political persecution could reinforce a military that is already dominating politics.²⁵⁹ Furthermore, Kurlantzick argues that there is "little reason to believe that these militaries will cease their abuses of human rights, or that they would support broader U.S. interests over what's required to keep themselves firmly entrenched in power."²⁶⁰ Kurlantzick closes by pointing out that several smaller Southeast Asian countries aside from Laos, such as Burma, Cambodia, and Thailand, already receive significant aid from China. Although it's difficult to gauge how big a donor China is to Laos, one of the most closed societies in the world, China provides extensive training

to Lao soldiers and could be the country's largest donor, which is a strong indicator of which side Laos might favor.²⁶¹

Full diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Laos were restored in 1992; in July 2012, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's historic visit to Laos ended a 57-year hiatus from such high-level diplomatic visits and introduced the Obama administration's Asia pivot to the country.²⁶² In addition to heightened dialogue with the U.S., Laos is on its way to increasing its presence in the international community through the World Trade Organization, of which it became a full member on 2 February 2013; it applied for membership in 1997.²⁶³ Nevertheless, Stuart Grudgings, writing for Reuters, comments that, "since 2011, China has consolidated its position as the largest trade partner with most Asian countries and its direct investments in the region are surging, albeit from a much lower base than Europe, Japan and the United States."²⁶⁴ Grudgings identifies Laos, among other smaller countries in the region, as a "client state" of China because it has been drawn into China's economic orbit and supports that country's stance in regional disputes.²⁶⁵ As a result, the U.S. is fighting an uphill battle, where any gap in foreign engagement could reinforce Southeast Asian nations' "bandwagoning with China," reports Carl Thayer, emeritus professor at the Australian Defense Force Academy in Canberra.²⁶⁶

The Maldives. The Maldives is important because of the country's strategic location near major sea lanes. Nearly three-fourths of the world's seaborne petroleum trade passes through Indian Ocean choke points close to the Maldives.²⁶⁷ China is the leading importer of petroleum via these sea lanes, and Chinese strategists consider the Maldives a critical staging area to protect important sea lines of communication and to counter its military rivals. It thus should not be surprising that the U.S. has engaged the Maldives government in a status of forces agreement that would give the U.S. limited basing rights in the island nation.²⁶⁸ Due to the geostrategic location of the Maldives within the Indian Ocean, various roles for USSOF can easily be imagined lest resource and manpower constraints divert SOF to other areas within the USPACOM AOR.

The Marshall Islands. On 24 April 2014, the Marshall Islands filed a lawsuit in the International Court of Justice against the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea.²⁶⁹ The suit demands that these nuclear weapons states meet their disarmament

obligations and accuses them of “flagrant violations” of international law.²⁷⁰ There is a long history of U.S.-led nuclear weapons testing in the Marshall Islands, from 1946 to 1958, which is a major point of contention in the two nations’ relations.²⁷¹ The U.S. has paid citizens of the Marshall Islands more than \$2 billion in compensation for damages attributed to nuclear weapons testing, including private injury, property loss, and class action claims alone.²⁷²

Despite this compensation for nuclear weapons testing, the U.S. maintains “full authority and responsibility for security and defense of the Marshall Islands, and the Government of the Marshall Islands is obligated to refrain from taking actions that would be incompatible with these security and defense responsibilities.”²⁷³ This authority came with the implementation of the Compact of Free Association, which went into force in 1986.²⁷⁴ As the Marshall Islands comprise low-lying islands in the Pacific, they are vulnerable to transnational threats, natural disasters, and the effects of climate change.²⁷⁵

The U.S. maintains the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site in the Marshall Islands, which is located on the Kwajalein Atoll and is referred to as the U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll.²⁷⁶ With a lease for 11 of the atoll’s 100 islands, the U.S. conducts ballistic missile and missile interceptor testing there, as well as space operations support.²⁷⁷

Micronesia. Like the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) became a sovereign nation in 1986 under the Compact of Free Association with the United States. FSM’s primary source of revenue is the United States, which has agreed to provide over \$130 million each year in direct assistance until 2023.²⁷⁸ The U.S. State Department notes on its website that “the Governments of FSM and the United States maintain deep ties and a cooperative relationship,” which includes 25 U.S. federal agencies operating programs in the FSM.²⁷⁹ Under the Compact of Free Association, the United States “has full authority and responsibility for the defense and security of the FSM.”²⁸⁰ In addition, citizens of the FSM join the U.S. military at almost double the per capita rate of Americans.²⁸¹

However, the U.S. is not the only nation interested in the FSM. China has been investing hundreds of millions of dollars in its diplomatic relationship with the FSM since 2000.²⁸² Already anticipating the expiration of the U.S.-FSM Compact in 2023, China has deposited some of its money into a

trust fund to support the FSM after that year, “when it is likely to face severe budgetary deficits as the Compact with the U.S. comes to an end.”²⁸³ China is interested in expanding its fishing interests in the FSM’s territorial waters, as well as investing in development of the state of Yap, which would push along the FSM’s own plans to strengthen its tourism industry. If China’s proposals and investment plans succeed, the FSM would no longer need a comprehensive assistance package after 2023, such as the one it receives from the U.S. as a Freely Associated State. China’s interest will pose a security risk to the U.S. if the Compact is not renewed in 2023, as the U.S. would “lose its full international defense authority for the islands and their territorial waters.”²⁸⁴ What’s more, the FSM will still need foreign military assistance for its national security, raising the question of whether that will come from the U.S.

Mongolia. Despite healthy cooperation between the U.S. and Mongolia, Professor Jeffrey Reeves of the University of Hawaii’s East-West Center argues that the Asia pivot will have little impact on future U.S.-Mongolian relations. It is true that Mongolia’s military has benefited from its association with the U.S., particularly as a coalition partner in Afghanistan, but to the Mongolian public and policymakers, “the U.S. is a distant foreign power with little influence over Mongolia’s domestic security and a nominal actor in Mongolia’s domestic economy.”²⁸⁵ While the U.S. has put a lot of effort into its relationship with Mongolia by supporting rule of law programs and direct development assistance, other countries, notably China, Russia, and Japan,

public opinion in Mongolia ranks cooperation and communication with China as much more important than relations with the United States.

have much larger trading relationships and economic impact in Mongolia than the U.S.²⁸⁶ Reeves says that public opinion in Mongolia ranks cooperation and communication with China as much more important than

relations with the United States. “Consequently, any predilection Mongolia might have for cooperation with the U.S. is more than offset by the benefits it receives from its ties with China.”²⁸⁷

Nauru. The U.S. State Department indicates on its website that diplomatic relations with Nauru have been cordial since they were established in 1976, although the U.S. provides no development assistance to the country.²⁸⁸ The

state department also notes that trade between the two nations is limited because of Nauru's "small size, remoteness, and economic problems."²⁸⁹ Nauru is the smallest nation in the Asia-Pacific region, with a once-burgeoning phosphate mining outfit that made the islanders very wealthy; at one point citizens of Nauru had the highest per capita income in the world.²⁹⁰ However, the exhaustion of Nauru's only natural resource, combined with years of environmental damage from the strip mining used to extract it, left the small island nation devoid of its primary revenue stream and most of its habitable environment.²⁹¹

Nauru currently relies financially on payments for fishing rights in its territorial waters, rent from the reopening of Australian detention centers for refugees, and development assistance, primarily from Australia.²⁹² With no regular military forces, Nauru's defense needs are met through an informal agreement that places the nation's security responsibilities on Australia.²⁹³

Nepal. Nepal remains one of the world's poorest countries, ranking 157 out of 187. More than 30 percent of its people live on less than U.S. \$14 per month, while the overall poverty rate remains at 25 percent. In the country's mid-western and far western regions, rates are 45 percent and 46 percent, respectively. Some 80 percent of the population lives in rural areas and depends on subsistence farming. Each day, about 1,600 people migrate to the capital to look for jobs, an indication of growing rural poverty and unemployment.²⁹⁴ The U.S., which has a strategic partnership with India, is keen to boost its presence in Nepal as part of its wider Asia pivot.

Palau. Palau became a sovereign nation in 1994, after undergoing an eight-year period of transition to independence under the Compact of Free Association with the United States, which it signed in 1986. Under the Compact, the U.S. is responsible for the island nation's defense and security for 50 years, although the U.S. has not stationed any military forces there.²⁹⁵ The U.S. and Palau cooperate on a number of issues, such as regional security, sustainable development, climate change, fisheries protection, and the environment.²⁹⁶ Palau relies heavily on U.S. assistance, but the nation also has a small tourism industry, with many visitors coming from Taiwan. As a result, Taiwanese aid also contributes to Palau's economy.²⁹⁷

Papua New Guinea. Diplomatic relations were established between the United States and Papua New Guinea (PNG) in 1975. The U.S. State

Department noted the importance of this bilateral relationship because of PNG's critical role as the most populous Pacific island state in maintaining "peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region."²⁹⁸ The state department also noted military-to-military cooperation between the U.S. and PNG, which focuses on joint humanitarian exercises and training for PNG military personnel through small-scale joint training exercises.²⁹⁹ In addition to security cooperation, the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations issued a report in April 2014 on funding President Obama's pivot toward the Asia-Pacific region, in which it specifically states that "development partnerships are a critical pillar of U.S. economic statecraft and foreign policy. U.S. development partnerships support the markets, infrastructure, and rule of law necessary to attract and sustain U.S. businesses, all while fortifying bilateral relationships important to other U.S. interests and values."³⁰⁰ This report specifically identifies a new USAID mission that was developed in Papua New Guinea. However, the new mission was developed under a USAID budget that has been called severely underfunded and that fails to reflect the importance of the region in accordance with the stated goals of the pivot policy:³⁰¹

The FY2015 budget request for U.S. development funding to the region is merely a return to FY2010 levels, even while USAID staff numbers have increased 65 percent and new missions have been established in Burma and Papua New Guinea.³⁰²

The report also attempts to address the major criticism of President Obama's rebalancing policy toward the Asia-Pacific region, which involves the nonmilitary pillars of the Asia pivot. Any role for USSOF in PNG should wait until the nonmilitary elements of the Asia pivot have first been instituted and resourced. Provided these elements of the pivot result in relative success and the foundations of bilateral trust are laid, only then should USSOF engagement be considered.

Samoa. In 1971, the U.S. established diplomatic relations with the newly founded Independent State of Samoa, which gained its independence from New Zealand that same year.³⁰³ Having no military, Samoa has informal defense ties with New Zealand, "which is required to consider any Samoan request for assistance under the 1962 Treaty of Friendship."³⁰⁴ However, the U.S. and Samoa cooperate on regional security issues and international law enforcement, having signed a mutual law enforcement agreement in June

2012.³⁰⁵ Through this agreement, Samoan maritime officials are permitted to use U.S. Coast Guard and Navy vessels to conduct maritime policing throughout Samoan waters.³⁰⁶

The U.S. has a longstanding and active Peace Corps mission in Samoa, as well as two Fulbright programs and grants “to civil society and private sector organizations to address issues of economic development, women’s empowerment, health, climate change, and education.”³⁰⁷ Relations between the U.S. and Samoa are good; in fact, during Pacific Partnership 2013, the U.S. Navy participated in a friendly Samoan longboat race against the Don Bosco Longboat Rowing Team as a part of a cultural exchange.³⁰⁸ The Pacific Partnership focuses on increasing maritime security through common goals of participant nations, which, aside from the U.S. and Samoa, includes Australia, Canada, France, Japan, Malaysia, and New Zealand.

Solomon Islands. Diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the Solomon Islands were established after the Solomon Islands gained independence in 1978 from the United Kingdom.³⁰⁹ The two nations are committed to cooperating on “improving regional stability, promoting democracy and human rights, responding to climate change, increasing trade, and promoting sustainable economic development.”³¹⁰ USAID assistance in the Solomon Islands includes supporting programs concerned with the impact of global climate change, as well as disaster relief efforts and education. In addition to assistance programs, the U.S. and Solomon Islands cooperate on security; the U.S. Coast Guard trains Solomon Islands border protection officers, while the U.S. military provides military education and other training courses to Solomon Islands national security officials.³¹¹

The Solomon Islands is still recovering from an internal conflict between the Isatabus and migrant Malaitans over accusations that the Isatabu Freedom Movement was taking land and jobs from the Malaitans. Although the fighting began in 1998, tensions between rival militia groups caused the conflict to last throughout the next decade. In July 2003, after a botched peace deal signed in late 2000 failed to curb the violence, an Australian-led peace-keeping force titled the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) arrived in the Solomon Islands.³¹² The military phase of RAMSI’s mission ended in 2013. RAMSI’s current focus is on building capacity within the Royal Solomon Islands Police.³¹³

Sri Lanka. After years of conflict with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Sri Lanka achieved what few other countries can claim—it defeated a violent terrorist group and ended decades of fear. Unfortunately, questions about Sri Lanka’s human rights record inhibit closer security cooperation between Sri Lanka and the United States. The Obama administration went ahead with a resolution against Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council held in Geneva in March 2014 because it contended that the Sri Lankan government failed to fulfill its international human rights obligations, which it promised to do after the defeat of the LTTE organization in 2009.³¹⁴ Jaliya Wickramasuriya, Sri Lanka’s former ambassador to the United States from 2008 to 2014, believes that U.S. concerns about his country’s human rights record are unfounded. Ambassador Wickramasuriya believes there are many avenues for cooperation between the U.S. and Sri Lanka, “including in the strategic and defense area where Sri Lanka can offer its experience in defeating terrorism.”³¹⁵ According to Ambassador Wickramasuriya:

it has been only three and a half years, but already much has been accomplished. Nearly all 1.5 million landmines laid by the LTTE have been removed, and 300,000 internally displaced people resettled. Sri Lanka is also satisfying a comprehensive process of reconciliation based on recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC). Amnesty has been granted to over 12,000 former LTTE combatants and child soldiers who are being reintegrated into society. 225 ex-combatants face legal proceedings for criminal charges, and a court of inquiry has been convened to explore allegations of wrongdoing against the Sri Lankan Armed Forces.³¹⁶

The ambassador answers critics in the U.S. who favor investigating alleged Sri Lankan human rights violations by citing his country’s success in defeating a major terrorist organization. “We ... pride ourselves for having defeated a terrorist group that the Federal Bureau of Investigation called the world’s deadliest. And we pride ourselves in freeing our people and helping them to overcome the hardship caused by years of strife.”³¹⁷ In terms of the Asia pivot, Sri Lanka’s success against a formidable terrorist foe could be an example—perhaps even a template—for U.S. efforts against a number of

terrorist groups, thus USSOF engagement with Sri Lankan forces should be considered a priority.

Timor-Leste. Because of the Asia pivot's security focus, even little Timor-Leste is seeing increased military engagement with the U.S. In late February 2014, the U.S. Navy and Timor-Leste Defense Force conducted their second Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise, which is part of an "annual bilateral exercise series between the U.S. Navy and the naval forces of Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand."³¹⁸ During CARAT, U.S. Navy sailors and their Timor-Leste counterparts trained across multiple disciplines, including damage control, military medicine, small boat operations, and navigation.³¹⁹ In addition to CARAT, the U.S. and Timor-Leste interact through annual port calls by the U.S. Navy, visits by high-level U.S. Navy leaders to Timor-Leste, and ongoing civic action projects by U.S. Navy Seabees (part of the U.S. Navy Construction Battalion).³²⁰

In recent news, Timor-Leste and Australia are feuding over a treaty preventing Timor-Leste from collecting taxes on the natural gas pipeline that extends from the Bayu-Undan gas-condensate fields in the Timor Sea to the Darwin liquefied natural gas plant operated by ConocoPhillips.³²¹ Taking the dispute all the way to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Timor-Leste alleges that Australia "bugged its cabinet offices to obtain commercial advantage in negotiations for the maritime deal, which was struck

Skeptics of President Obama's Asia pivot are deeply concerned over renewed U.S. ties to Indonesia, which were cut in 1999 due to Indonesian abuses in Timor-Leste.

when the country was still recovering from violence sparked by its 1999 vote for independence from Indonesia."³²² Such maritime disputes between regional forces, both big and small, could complicate the Asia pivot as the U.S. tries to balance its relations with regional leaders, such as Australia, with the newer relationships developing with smaller players, such as Timor-Leste.

Skeptics of President Obama's Asia pivot are deeply concerned over renewed U.S. ties to Indonesia, which were cut in 1999 due to Indonesian abuses in Timor-Leste.³²³ With the \$500 million sale of eight Apache helicopters to Indonesia announced in August 2013, human rights groups are

concerned about the U.S. aircraft being used to suppress people in Timor-Leste and West Papua.³²⁴

Tonga. Like its relations with many of the low-lying Pacific island nations, the U.S. cooperates with Tonga on a wide range of issues, including human trafficking, combating the effects of climate change, maritime security, and fostering regional cooperation and development.³²⁵ The U.S. and Tonga have a history of security cooperation; Tonga deployed soldiers to Iraq from 2004 to 2008, and another contingent in Afghanistan in 2010 as a part of the International Security Assistance Force.³²⁶

Since 2010, the U.S. and Tonga have conducted Operation Coral Reef, a weeklong training exercise that involves the militaries of Australia, New Zealand, Tonga, and the U.S. to validate the U.S. Army Pacific Contingency Command Post capabilities. The countries also continue to participate in humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and combat skills training.³²⁷

Tuvalu. In 1979, Tuvalu signed a treaty of friendship with the U.S., “which recognized Tuvalu’s possession of four islets formerly claimed by the United States.”³²⁸ The U.S. and Tuvalu cooperate on combating climate change, reinforcing maritime security, and enhancing economic development programs.³²⁹ Climate change is a critical issue for Tuvalu, as data from the National Research Council “predicts that global sea levels could rise by as much as 55 inches by 2100 ... which ... could threaten the country’s very existence.”³³⁰

Vanuatu. U.S.-Vanuatu relations were established in 1986 and consist of shared goals, such as strengthening democracy, enhancing security, and promoting development.³³¹ The U.S. primarily provides aid to Vanuatu through international and regional organizations. The Peace Corps and USAID are also involved in Vanuatu, assisting communities in health and education, adapting to climate change, and supporting disaster relief efforts.³³²

In April 2011, the U.S. military presence in Vanuatu reached its highest level since WWII. Over 1,000 military personnel from France, Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. (the majority from the U.S.) gathered in Vanuatu to take part in a humanitarian exercise as a part of the Pacific Partners mission.³³³

Building a Stable, Productive, and Constructive Relationship with China

China's growing military budget, capabilities, and assertive behavior, particularly in the South China Sea, have been a source of concern to the U.S. and many Asia-Pacific nations. Some pundits and academics believe China could pose serious security challenges to U.S. national interests and those of its allies and friends. Those who are concerned about China's 'rise' are frustrated by Beijing's lack of transparency about the nature of its military modernization, capabilities, and intentions.³³⁴ Other academics don't agree, claiming that China's rise is typical and normal for an emerging power with growing regional and international interests. They admit that China's lack of transparency about specific defense issues matters, but suggest that it shouldn't distract observers from seeing the bigger picture concerning China's military development.

Observers such as Robert Ross of Boston College and Andrew Erickson of the U.S. Naval War College, who are not overly concerned about China's increased military posture, assert that the People's Liberation Army will continue to develop the resources and capabilities it needs to protect its contested periphery, particularly in the Near Seas (the Yellow, East, and South China seas).³³⁵ "This development has the potential to seriously challenge the interests of the U.S., its allies, and other partners in the region, as well as access to and security of a vital portion of the global commons—waters and airspace that all nations rely on for prosperity, yet which none own."³³⁶

Military experts in Beijing contend that China has no problem with Washington seeking involvement in the region's prosperity, but that it is concerned the U.S. Asia pivot might be aimed at China and thus could disturb the 'Chinese dream' of national rejuvenation. More to the point, a Chinese defense ministry report released on 13 April 2013, notes that the pivot has already destabilized the Asia-Pacific region.³³⁷ According to the 40-page report, titled "Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces," there is more than a little angst in China about the pivot. Without naming specific states, the report notes that "some countries are strengthening their Asia-Pacific military alliances, expanding military presence in the region, and frequently making the situation there more tense." In accomplishing the pivot, the report contends:

the U.S. will deploy 60 percent of its naval fleet in the Pacific by 2020. Singapore will be home to four new U.S. littoral warships, intended for combat close to shore. Indonesia is seeking to buy a broad array of American hardware and wants to take part in joint maneuvers. The Philippines is trying to host more U.S. troops on a rotating basis, and Australia has agreed to allow up to 2,500 U.S. marines to be based in its north-central city of Darwin.³³⁸

And those are just some of the military moves expected under the Asia pivot policy. When asked at a news conference on the report's release whether Washington's military expansion was raising tensions in Beijing, China's defense ministry spokesman Colonel Yang Yujun said, "Certain efforts made to highlight the military agenda, enhance military deployment and also strengthen alliances are not in line with the calling of the times." Such moves "are not conducive to supporting peace and stability in the region," he added.³³⁹

Empowering Regional Institutions

A major objective of the Obama administration's Asia pivot is to fully engage the region's multilateral institutions. It will be a "way of supplementing, but not supplanting, America's important bilateral ties."³⁴⁰ ASEAN and the APEC forum are the two principal regional organizations that will be affected by the pivot, or at least that is the intent. For example, the U.S. "has opened a new U.S. mission to ASEAN in Jakarta and signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation with ASEAN."³⁴¹ As for APEC, the U.S. considers it the Asia-Pacific region's premier economic institution. It has aided U.S. export expansion and helped create and support high-quality jobs throughout the United States.³⁴²

ASEAN and the Asia Pivot. The Obama administration's Asia pivot has generally been welcomed by ASEAN member countries. "After a period of relative decline that coincided with China's rapid ascendance in regional affairs, the U.S. pivot to Asia seems to have redressed this imbalance."³⁴³ ASEAN members are nervous about Beijing's growing influence, its rapidly increasing military power, and its use of bullying tactics to advance maritime territorial claims to other countries' rightful 200 nautical mile EEZ in the South China Sea.³⁴⁴

For the most part, Indonesia has welcomed the Obama administration's decision to rebalance U.S. policy toward Asia. Indonesia, which was highly critical of the Bush administration and the war in Iraq, has engaged with the United States more closely since President Obama's election. President Obama is widely popular in Indonesia because he spent some of his early years in Jakarta. Furthermore, his administration's policies of multilateralism and rebalancing toward Asia have reinforced this popularity and raised U.S. stock considerably in Southeast Asia's largest country and the world's most populous Muslim nation.³⁴⁵

From Jakarta's perspective, the importance Washington attaches to Indonesia is not simply as a counterbalance to China's rise but also is based on Jakarta's perceived self-importance and worldview. Under President Yudhoyono, Indonesia has made strides to enhance its international footprint, particularly in key bilateral relationships. For example, President Yudhoyono proposed in November 2008 that Jakarta and Washington sign a comprehensive partnership to broaden and deepen relations between the two countries, which was quickly endorsed by the Obama administration. The Comprehensive Partnership Agreement was signed during President Obama's first visit to Indonesia in November 2010, "which may have marked the highest point in bilateral relations" between the two countries.³⁴⁶

While some Indonesians welcome the U.S. rebalancing toward Asia, others have raised concerns that the Obama administration has emphasized the military component of the pivot's strategy too much. The rotational basing of 2,500 U.S. Marines in Darwin, Australia, is particularly troubling to some. According to an *International Business Times* article from 2013:

at the national level, Indonesians have also reacted negatively to the presence of U.S. troops. Darwin is located just a short distance from Indonesia's troubled province Papua, where the giant U.S. mining company PT Freeport Indonesia operates. Besides reflecting Indonesia's hostility to foreign military bases close to its national borders, many political pundits in Jakarta have expressed concerns that the U.S. forces in Darwin could be used to intervene on behalf of the often security-beleaguered PT Freeport Indonesia. Although such a scenario is highly unlikely, many in Indonesia still remember the United States' support for regional rebels in the late 1950s, when

Washington used the protection of U.S. oil companies in Sumatra as a pretext for intervention.³⁴⁷

Answering the critics, President Obama has reassured Indonesian President Yudhoyono that the Darwin deployment is mostly intended to improve disaster relief readiness.³⁴⁸

APEC and the Asia Pivot. Established in 1989, the APEC organization has 21 member states, which include the world's largest economies—the United States, China, Japan, Russia, Canada, Australia, and others. Its purpose is to promote economic cooperation, raise living standards, promote sustainable economic growth, and cultivate free trade across the entire Asia-Pacific region. In November 2014, APEC held a summit in Beijing that President Obama attended, bringing with him several items to discuss. What the long-range impact of this visit will be is anyone's guess. This visit came after the U.S. midterm elections, where President Obama, his party, and his agenda were seriously rebuked. As such, "in both Beijing and Washington, Obama is widely viewed as both a lame duck and a hobbled world leader, unable to match his rhetoric with actions."³⁴⁹ Despite this perceived lame duck status, President Obama was able to obtain some bilateral agreements with China at APEC. According to Hu Shuli of the *South China Morning Post*, both the U.S. and China agreed to:

reduce tariff barriers for hi-tech products; there was a breakthrough in their 17-year negotiations on an IT agreement; and they committed to reducing greenhouse gases over the next 15 to 20 years. They also said they would extend business, tourist and student visas, while agreeing to increase mutual trust between their armed forces.³⁵⁰

One agreement on which President Obama hoped to make progress at the APEC summit but did not was the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the free-trade initiative that notably excludes China. The Trans-Pacific Partnership would open and thus increase opportunities for a vast array of American businesses by providing unfettered access to some of the world's fastest growing markets in the Asia-Pacific region.³⁵¹ China sees this as the U.S. meddling within its EEZ, a feeling accentuated by China's heavy reliance on seaborne trade through waters the U.S. Navy controls, an arrangement with which Beijing has never been comfortable. As such, China has been looking westward to develop modern-day 'silk road' trading routes that will result in land-based economic

and security ties with the energy-rich Central Asian states, Russia, and other countries in order to limit U.S. influence in Chinese economic affairs.

One creative example of this overland trade route development is the Gwadar Port in Pakistan. Gwadar is a deep-water port located on Pakistan's Baluchistan coast, which lies just outside the Strait of Hormuz, a major maritime choke point patrolled by the U.S. Navy. Although the port is owned by the Pakistani government, a Chinese firm managed the multibillion-dollar construction project and, in February 2013, the Pakistani government handed control of the port over to the China Overseas Port Holding Company. During the handover ceremony, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari said the Gwadar project was of strategic importance for China, since almost 60 percent of China's crude oil comes from the Gulf countries, a figure that will likely increase in the coming decades.³⁵² Once combined with an expanded overland route via the Karakoram Highway, which will stretch from Gwadar through Pakistan and into China, Gulf tankers will be able to offload their crude at Gwadar, where it will be loaded onto trucks or railcars headed to China.³⁵³ This overland route will allow seaborne tankers headed to China from the Gulf to avoid sailing through the Strait of Malacca, a maritime choke point that China knows is subject to U.S. Navy patrols and thus to potential U.S. interference.

Overall, this vision of a new regional 'silk road' trading system underscores Beijing's seaborne vulnerabilities and its attempt to mitigate them by expanding these overland trade ties with Eurasia, especially for the energy imports needed to power its unprecedented economic growth. Moreover, these overland routes are designed to limit U.S. ability to influence China's important energy trade with the Middle East.³⁵⁴ The result is a competition for influence, economic or otherwise, throughout the region by the world's two largest economies.

4. USSOF's Role—or Non-Role—in the Pivot

Journalist Fareed Zakaria, in an opinion piece that appeared in the *Washington Post* on 16 April 2015, hit on something germane to this paper: “The Obama administration’s foreign policy energies are fully engaged in the Middle East—negotiating the Iran deal, sending Special Operations forces into Iraq, supporting Saudi airstrikes in Yemen, working with the Syrian rebels. Whatever happened to the pivot to Asia?”³⁵⁵ Indeed, as of this writing, the 1st Special Forces Group commander and his staff—whose mission focus and AOR are Asia—are the core command element for Special Forces in Iraq. Thus, as Fareed’s comment—“sending Special Operations forces [back] into Iraq”—suggests, it seems that the Asia pivot does not apply to SOF, particularly Special Forces.

Interestingly, with all the hoopla about the Asia pivot formula, USSOF have been pretty much left out of the equation. Several recent articles do not mention Army Special Forces at all. For example, in their comprehensive article, titled “The Role of the Army in Asia,” retired Army Colonel and SOF advocate Al Wilner and coauthor Thomas Bickford do not so much as mention Special Forces.³⁵⁶ The same is true of Sydney J. Freedberg’s article in *Breaking Defense*, “Senate Armed Services Committee Pushes for Bigger Army Role in Pacific vs. China.”³⁵⁷ A recent *Wall Street Journal* article, “The New Way the U.S. Projects Power Around the World: Commandos,” mentions SOF’s role in Asia only to note they were “winding down what they consider a successful campaign, begun soon after the September 11 hijackings, to help Filipino forces stymie the al-Qaeda-aligned Abu Sayyaf Group.”³⁵⁸

With the potential threats addressed in this monograph, in particular China and North Korea but also the Islamic State and foreign fighters returning from Iraq and Syria, it would seem to call for SOF operations in the Asia-Pacific AOR to be ramping up, not winding down. The Asia-Pacific region is becoming an ever more dangerous place, possibly more dangerous than suggested by the threat analysis conducted just months ago for Section I of this monograph. Several recent events prove the point.

China. In recent months, China is believed to have hacked the computer networks of several U.S. interests, while simultaneously expanding its military influence in the Asia-Pacific region and threatening America's traditional allies, particularly the Philippines. As of this writing, the U.S. government is scrambling to figure out the impact of more than 22 million government personnel records having been hacked, allegedly by the Chinese.³⁵⁹ Meanwhile, without mentioning the U.S. by name, a recently published Chinese white paper comments on a "meddlesome power" interfering with China's sovereignty by challenging its claim to much of the South China Sea.³⁶⁰

Obviously not mentioned in the white paper is China's harassment of U.S. aircraft over international waters, as harassing the U.S. and its allies seems to be 'business as usual' for China.³⁶¹ Early in 2015, a Chinese coast guard vessel rammed three Philippine fishing boats off the Scarborough Shoals, an area contested by the Philippines and China and recently occupied by the Chinese.³⁶² Of special interest to this monograph is Beijing's increased investment in its special operations forces, which are growing in number and expertise. This development is extremely concerning to China's neighbors.³⁶³

North Korea. While rumors circulate of domestic political unrest and social upheaval in North Korea, the rogue regime's saber-rattling continues unabated as it issues threats that run from the absurd to the downright scary. In 2014, North Korea berated President Obama for allowing the release of the political satire-comedy, *The Interview*, which depicted North Korean leader "Kim Jong-un as a vain, buffoonish despot."³⁶⁴ Alternating between threats and weeping, North Korea claimed that their leader has been misunderstood.³⁶⁵ North Korea's foreign minister offered a more serious response in a speech at a UN conference in March 2015. He stated his country would use a preemptive strike if necessary to stop "an ever-increasing nuclear threat" from the United States. While he did not elaborate on the specifics of that threat, the minister did once again lambast the U.S. and South Korea for holding military exercises. However, this was the first time in recent memory that nuclear retaliation to the military exercises was mentioned.³⁶⁶

More concerning are the reports of a possible collapse within North Korea. Former ambassador to South Korea Christopher R. Hill, and many others, assert that the question is no longer if but when North Korea will collapse, citing civil unrest in North Korea as a precursor to catastrophe.³⁶⁷ The following excerpt from a *Japan Times* article is instructive:

The North's behavior almost certainly reflects mounting turmoil among the elite. For more than a year, the regime has been carrying out a purge of high-level officials, beginning with the execution of Kim's uncle, Jang Song Taek, in 2013. Subsequent executions of Jang's entourage and advisers, the recall of Jang's associates from posts abroad, and the attempted kidnapping in France of the son of one of his assistants attest to the level of alarm in Kim's inner circle. The elevation of Kim's inexperienced 27-year-old sister, Kim Yo Jong, to a senior post, is another indication of growing anxiety.³⁶⁸

A collapse in North Korea would create several challenges for the U.S. and its Asian partners. Estimates are that it would take more than 600,000 military and police personnel from South Korea, the United States, and other nations to establish order, and the cost to 'rehabilitate' the country would be trillions of dollars. However, the biggest challenges would be to eliminate potential pockets of resistance—the Kim family and military elites may not resign willingly—and to find and secure North Korea's weapons of mass destruction.³⁶⁹

The Islamic State and Foreign Fighters. The Islamic State is known to be making overtures to counterpart organizations in Asia.³⁷⁰ The threat of Islamic extremists deploying terrorist tactics across Southeast Asia is making an unwelcome comeback in Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, and even Singapore. However, Gavin Greenwood, a regional security analyst with Hong Kong-based Allan & Associates, is not that concerned. Not yet. According to Greenwood, "[ISIL's] main impact on the region is to serve as an inspiration for Islamic radicals rather than a movement that poses a direct threat to any Southeast Asian countries."³⁷¹ Singapore's prime minister is not so sure; at the Shangri-La Dialogue held in Singapore on 29 May 2015, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said that "Southeast Asia is a key recruitment center for [ISIL]." He explained that more than 500 Indonesians and dozens of Malaysians have traveled to Syria and Iraq to help ISIL. "[ISIL] has so many Indonesian and Malaysian fighters that they form a unit by themselves—the Katibah Nusantara-Malay Archipelago Combat Unit." Former U.S. Special Operations Command Commander General Joseph Votel concurred, noting there had been an "'incredible eruption' in foreign fighters flowing into the Middle East from all over the world in support of the Islamic State group and its affiliates, increasing connections between transnational

criminal organizations and violent extremist groups, and ISIL-inspired flare-ups in Africa and Asia.³⁷² Approximately 500 to 1,000 foreign fighters have traveled from Asia to Iraq and Syria to help the ISIL effort—no one really knows how many.³⁷³ Perhaps the most up-to-date estimates of Asian foreign fighters appeared recently in *The Strategist*, an Australian publication:

The number of Southeast Asian foreign fighters operating overseas is troubling. The Indonesian Government has stated that approximately 60 of its citizens are active in Iraq and Syria (although *unofficial estimates* put this figure closer to 200).³⁷⁴ The Malaysian Government disclosed that more than 100 Malaysians may be operating overseas alongside [ISIL]. And the Philippines Government estimates that more than 200 Filipinos may have joined [ISIL], with over 100 known to be actively fighting alongside ISIS militants. Even Singapore has confirmed that a handful of its citizens are engaged with extremist groups, with Interior Minister Teo Chee Hean stating in July that at least two Singaporeans are known to be fighting in Syria—one has been detained by authorities after attempting to travel to the Middle East to “engage in armed jihad.”³⁷⁵

The concern among Asian leaders is that the present generation of foreign fighters will emulate those who started extremist organizations such as Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah when they returned from the Soviet-Afghan War, as they could become the nucleus for new Islamist extremist organizations. Singapore is not the only Asian nation concerned about ISIL and returning foreign fighters. In August 2014, Malaysian police foiled plans for a spate of bombings planned by Islamic extremists who were inspired by ISIL: “The 19 suspected militants arrested from April to June were formulating plans to bomb pubs, discos and a Malaysian brewery of Danish beer producer Carlsberg, said Ayob Khan Mydin, deputy chief of the Malaysian police counterterrorism division.”³⁷⁶ Meanwhile, the Indonesian government has launched a counter-ISIL campaign on the eastern island of Sulawesi, which is conducted by special forces units who are assisting local police.³⁷⁷

Finally, a returning foreign fighter was arrested in Australia on 24 July 2015. Australian Federal Police said in a statement on 25 July that Adam Brookman, 39, was on warrant relating to his alleged involvement in the conflict in Syria. “He is the first Australian involved with the Islamic State known to have returned home since the Sunni fighters swept into western

Iraq in June last year and declared the establishment of a caliphate, Monash University terrorism expert Greg Barton said.³⁷⁸ The London-based International Center for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence estimates that between 100 and 250 Australians have joined Sunni militants in Iraq and Syria. Some have returned, but Brookman, who is a Muslim convert, is the only returning foreign fighter charged and arrested. The rest have not been charged because of lack of proof.³⁷⁹

Why This Matters

Threats beyond the four discussed above—both manmade and natural—are emanating from Asia and directed at the U.S. and nations friendly to American interests. However, for the purposes of this monograph, these four make the point that USSOF bear responsibility for and have the capabilities to address all of them, except taking on Chinese hackers. Special operations activities include the following:

direct action, special reconnaissance, countering weapons of mass destruction, counterterrorism, unconventional warfare (UW), foreign internal defense, security force assistance, hostage rescue and recovery, counterinsurgency, foreign humanitarian assistance, military information support operations, and civil affairs operations and such other activities as specified by the President or the Secretary of Defense.³⁸⁰

Each of these activities could be a stand-alone mission to counter one or more of the four threats, or an action that combines one or more core missions, or a force multiplier mission conducted with conventional forces or allies.

SOF's most important mission responsibility and capability vis-à-vis China would be foreign internal defense (FID), which would train the armed forces of those countries currently or potentially threatened by China. Resource constraints and geopolitical dynamics will result in a prioritization of USSOF engagement to those countries most in need, like the Philippines and Vietnam, and the acceptance of risk in those less so, like Indonesia and the Malay Peninsula to include Singapore, and Thailand. Examples of FID implementing operations include joint combined exercises for training, joint exercises, military training teams, and train-and-equip missions. If China

becomes more aggressive in the region, violates any nation's sovereignty, or becomes more geographically expansive, SOF unconventional warfare, direct action, military information support operations, and theater search-and-rescue and strategic reconnaissance missions would keep SOF busy supporting conventional forces.

As for North Korea, if it were ever foolish enough to invade South Korea, all of the core activities appropriate for a response to a more assertive China would apply to North Korea. However, the more likely scenario is the collapse of North Korea, in which case SOF's predominant missions would be humanitarian assistance, civil affairs, and military information support operations. If the collapse were not complete, direct action and counterterrorism would be added to the SOF mission set. According to retired Special Forces Colonel David Maxwell, a former Special Forces commander in Asia and now a professor at Georgetown University, "The regime in Pyongyang could collapse without necessarily its army corps and brigades collapsing, so we might have to mount a relief operation at the same time that we'd be conducting combat ops."³⁸¹ Loose nukes in North Korea could be a major problem whether or not a collapse were complete. Locating and securing North Korean nuclear materials and/or weapons would be a nightmare for those responding to a collapse. "Locating these materials will be extremely

Loose nukes in North Korea could be a major problem whether or not a collapse were complete.

difficult, as outsiders (and most insiders) have an imprecise idea of how many, and little to no idea of where, nuclear materials and actual devices may be."³⁸² Because timeliness—finding and fixing the nuclear locations quickly—would be important, this mission could be distinct from other aspects of the effort and would most likely fall to SOF who should have the capability to infiltrate possible sights quickly.³⁸³

USSOF counterterrorist activities will be important in responding to an expanding ISIL presence in Asia. Twelve years of sustained counterterrorism operations in multiple locations around the world have honed SOF acumen, particularly those conducted in conjunction with direct action activities. However, even more important will be indirect action against an expanding ISIL, which will entail FID missions that involve partnering with and training other Asian militaries and specialized police organizations, but particularly their special operations forces, to counter ISIL operations in the Asian theater, which are well within the USSOF activities portfolio.

New individual and group foreign fighter activities could be ‘nipped in the bud’ by security forces that receive better training.

What to Do

The Obama administration’s security policy correctly asserts that the U.S. needs partners with whom to address terrorism and other international threats.³⁸⁴ Empowering those partners is an important task for USSOF, particularly Special Forces. In contrast to the past dozen years, when SOF have been engaged in necessary direct action against terrorists in the Middle East and South Asia, SOF will now be more wisely employed in capacity-building and empowering the military capabilities of Asian states. FID and counter-terrorism training will be important. Therefore, helping U.S. partners build their capacity to defend against conventional external threats, such as what may emanate from China, or in South Korea’s case from the north, will be important.³⁸⁵ Helping partners build the capacity to address current and future terrorist threats and the problem of returning foreign fighters will also be important SOF responsibilities in the Asia-Pacific AOR.

Building partner capacity will be a challenge because SOF operator resources are insufficient for the Asia-Pacific regions and other theaters of operation.³⁸⁶ In *Building Partner Capacity*, Dr. Harry R. Yarger describes the lack of SOF capacity not just in Asia-Pacific terms, but as being “clearly insufficient for the demands of the 21st Century.”³⁸⁷ While SOF forces can be increased to some degree, says Yarger, “SOF operator capacity will be challenged again and again and will remain short of the overall need.”³⁸⁸ Yarger wrote:

The [SOF] force strength issue creates a strategic Catch-22 in force allocation for decision-makers: prioritization of SOF manpower in one mission area—functional or geographic—creates shortage issues elsewhere. The experiences in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the greater global effort against terrorism illustrate this quandary and its consequences.³⁸⁹

Yarger explains that SOF gained important combat experience during the past 12 years, but “overall SOF capacity was lost because indirect capabilities were applied to direct action needs.”³⁹⁰ In other words, the building partner

capacity skills that are important for present and future needs were allowed to atrophy during the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.

Indeed, the so-called global war on terrorism moved SOF from the periphery to the center of U.S. military strategy—from a supporting actor to a starring role.³⁹¹ According to Steven Metz, director of research at the U.S. Army War College, the change of roles came with costs. “The intense involvement in global counterterrorism undercut SOF’s longstanding balance between direct and indirect capabilities. Tracking down terrorists and high-value targets, rather than training and advising partner militaries, became the core mission.”³⁹² The hope was that drawing down troops in Iraq and Afghanistan would correct the imbalance between SOF indirect and direct missions, slightly favoring the indirect, which is the more likely requirement, particularly in Asia.

Some recent changes in the 3rd Special Forces Group’s area of responsibility are encouraging. The 3rd Group’s AOR was Africa, but in 2010, because of the global war on terrorism, it was changed to Pakistan and Afghanistan; however, it recently reverted back to Africa. As a recent *Army Times* article explains, “The Army’s 3rd Special Forces Group is going back to its roots.” This fall, the 3rd Group, from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, began shifting its area of operations back to Africa. The group expects to complete its transition out of the Middle East and Central Asia by “next summer as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down.”³⁹³ This is also good news for the 10th Special Forces Group, which has been doing double duty covering Europe, its traditional AOR, and Africa at the same time. Now the 10th Group can focus on Russian adventurism and a host of other terrorism and returning foreign fighter issues that are currently plaguing Europe.

That is the good news. The bad news is that SOF, particularly Special Forces, are staying in and returning to Iraq in numbers disproportionate to those of their conventional colleagues in Afghanistan. Almost as soon as the American military withdrawal in Iraq was complete, Special Forces soldiers returned there to conduct counterterror operations and attempt to protect a pro-Iran Shiite regime in Baghdad against a Sunni-based insurgency, while at the same time supporting a Sunni-led movement against the Iran-backed dictatorship in Syria.³⁹⁴

5. Conclusion

Researching and writing this monograph, *The Asia Pivot: Implications for U.S. Special Operations Forces*, has been a two-year undertaking. Countless hours have been spent reviewing hundreds of sources to make sense out of an Obama administration foreign policy that has yet to be fully developed. This unfinished policy has caused leading analysts such as Fareed Zakaria to ask, “Whatever Happened to Obama’s Pivot to Asia?”³⁹⁵ There are many reasons the pivot policy has not been actualized. For one, threats and actions by the Islamic State have required the U.S. to return military assets—particularly SOF assets—to the Middle East, which otherwise would likely have been allocated to Asia. A more aggressive Moscow has General Joe Dunford, U.S. Marine Corps, the current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and General Mark Milley, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, naming Russia—not China or North Korea—the number-one threat to the United States.³⁹⁶ Some might say the Asia pivot has been overcome by unforeseen events; others might say failed Middle East policies and major power politics have delayed the pivot unnecessarily.

This monograph reports on the state of the pivot as it stands today. It reflects the pivot’s importance in U.S. security policy for the Asia-Pacific region, but laments the fact that American power, particularly SOF assets, has atrophied to the point that regions of the globe must be prioritized in terms of their importance.

Considering the state of the pivot, some might consider this monograph a work in progress, which is partially correct. However, studying the pivot for two years has yielded important findings about the Asia-Pacific region, including its importance to U.S. and international affairs and the attitudes of the 32 countries watched over by USPACOM. Section I of this monograph described the Asia-Pacific region’s importance in political, security, and economic terms. It specifically addressed the security situation relative to China, North Korea, and increased terrorist and insurgent activity, all of which represent potential or impending threats.

Section II looked at the U.S. military services in the Asia-Pacific AOR, noting what changes have been made in the movement of personnel and equipment to support the pivot. Coauthor John Duvall is primarily

responsible for this section, as he has recent operational experience in the theater. He reports that some U.S. air and sea military equipment has been moved from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and that Marines now rotate units in and out of Australia. However, large organizational changes have not occurred—at least not yet. As for SOF, other than some CV-22 Osprey aircraft, not much new equipment has been moving into the theater. In some ways, the SOF personnel situation is worse than before the pivot was conceived, as the 1st Special Forces Group Headquarters is now sequestered in Iraq for the conceivable future, leaving the USPACOM AOR without one of its most important command and control assets.

Section II concludes with an examination of the applicability of SOF's traditional core activities in an increasingly hostile Asia-Pacific region.³⁹⁷ These core activities are matched against requirements to address four potential threats: China, North Korea, terrorism (the most egregious threat coming from the Islamic State), and foreign fighters returning from Iraq and Syria. Our analysis suggests that all SOF core competencies are desirable, given the range of threats in the region, but capacity may be a problem. The question is, given the number and complexity of the threats in the Asia-Pacific AOR, will SOF capacity be enough? Moreover, does the Asia pivot, in whatever form it finally takes, allow adjustments that reflect changing capacity requirements?

Section III addressed the Asia pivot in the Obama administration's terms, using five objectives framed by former National Security Adviser Thomas E. Donilon to guide the discussion and analysis. The section included an analysis of the acceptance—or non-acceptance—of the pivot policy by all of the 32 Asia-Pacific countries that fall under the USPACOM AOR. Using Donilon's objectives, nations with which the U.S. has treaties were listed first, followed by nations of significant interest to the U.S., ending with the remaining countries in the region. Most of these nations agree that the pivot would be good policy if implemented, but some, such as Indonesia, have voiced skepticism about the pivot being an excuse for U.S. adventurism in the region. The section is rounded out with a discussion on empowering regional institutions, specifically ASEAN and APEC, and a segment on China from the perspective of cooperation instead of confrontation. Some might view this as hedging our bets, as much of our analysis views China as a potential threat. However, China predictably tends to act in its own interest, so encouraging China to view its interests as sympathetic to those of the U.S., particularly in terms of terrorists and foreign fighters, is worth the effort.

After two years of researching the Asia pivot, the authors conclude that the policy is still a good idea. However, we lament the need for any type of pivot, in Asia or elsewhere. Comments made by retired Colonel Maxwell are integral to our conclusions.³⁹⁸ He stated, “If the U.S. is a global power as Washington, D.C., advertises, it should not have to ‘pivot’ anywhere.” We concur with Maxwell that the U.S. has global interests and thus should be able to act globally in concert with its allies—or, if necessary, unilaterally. Maxwell contends that the pivot concept suggests a zero sum game in national security matters, which indicates that some regions are more important than others. Advancing the notion of a pivot telegraphs U.S. intentions and undercuts America’s legitimacy around the world by signaling that it has ‘favorites.’ This raises the question of how the Asia pivot is perceived by U.S. NATO allies, fledgling governments in Iraq and Afghanistan, counter-narcoterrorism allies in Colombia, and so on.

As a practical and political matter, the pivot may be in jeopardy. Strong advocates, such as Assistant Secretary of Defense Kurt Campbell and secretaries Clinton and Panetta, are no longer with the administration.³⁹⁹ Who then are the new advocates? Are there any? And, finally, with the upcoming presidential election, who might champion a revitalized Asia pivot? Time will tell.↑

Appendix A: Acronym List

ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty
AOR	area of responsibility
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CARAT	Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training
CFC	Combined Forces Command
CMO	civil-military operations
CPX	command post exercise
EEZ	(China's) Exclusive Economic Zone
FID	foreign internal defense
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
HADR	humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
JSOTF-P	Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines
JTF	Joint Task Force
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MAGTF	Marine Air-Ground Task Force
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
NZDF	New Zealand Defence Force

PNG	Papua New Guinea
PRC	People's Republic of China
RAMSI	Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
SOCPAC	Special Operations Command, Pacific
SOF	Special Operations Forces
UDP	Unit Deployment Program
UFG	Ulchi-Freedom Guardian
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USPACOM	U.S. Pacific Command
USSOF	U.S. Special Operations Forces

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