

The Pivot to Asia: The Persistent Logics of Geopolitics and the Rise of China

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Introduction

In November 2011, senior U.S. leadership signaled a strategic rebalance of diplomatic, military, and economic resources from Iraq and Afghanistan to focus on the Asia Pacific. Yet, the 2011 “pivot” to Asia is not a departure from previous policy laid down since the end of World War II. The logic is simple and consistent: do not allow a single state or coalition of states to dominate Eurasia. This article contains four sections. The first section will examine how the 2011 pivot to Asia has represented a restoration and continuance of the post-Cold War initiatives that reinforces the basic logic. The second section will explore the reasoning behind the geopolitical logics and the long-standing policy of U.S. involvement in the Asia-Pacific. The third section will explore the current logics of geopolitics given the importance of Eurasia and the advent of nuclear weapons. The fourth section will analyze how the present peaceful rise of China has reinforced the long-held geopolitical logics.

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Historic Context of the U.S. in Asia

The United States has possessed a naval presence in the Asia-Pacific since 1832, the U.S. Navy's East Asia Squadron. In addition, by the time of the Spanish-American War, the U.S. Navy had already based Dewey's Asiatic Squadron in the British colony of Hong Kong.² At the conclusion of the Spanish American War, the Treaty of Paris brought new responsibilities for the U.S. by granting a foothold on Guam and sovereignty over the entire Philippines—Asian-Pacific territory roughly 700 miles from China, and 250 miles from Taiwan—a strategic crossroads for regional maritime traffic.³ From Secretary of State John Hay's continuance of the British "Open Door" policy to today, economic interests have long been a driver of U.S. policy goals in China.⁴ Michael McDevitt asserts, "US military presence provides stability, and stability is necessary for economic growth, and economic growth is necessary to generate markets for U.S. goods."⁵ From World War II to present the U.S. military has dominated the littoral waters of Asia, established long-lasting alliances, and sought to maintain regional stability. U.S. engagement involved war fighting and consistent upgrading of capabilities in East Asia. For example, prior to the end of the Cold War and shortly after, from 1985 and 1996, six additional naval vessels arrived in Sasebo, Japan to complement the Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) 7 of the 7th Fleet.⁶

A critical decision point in the post-Cold War environment was the 1995 "Nye Initiative"; the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) report entitled, "United States

² Michael McDevitt "US Security Strategy in East Asia," *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*, November 6, 2002, http://web.mit.edu/ssp/seminars/wed_archives02fall/mcdevitt.htm (Accessed 30 December 2013).

³ Walter Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1943), p. 24.

⁴ Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 25; George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy: Expanded Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 22.

⁵ McDevitt, "US Security Strategy in East Asia."

⁶ "Command History," Amphibious Force Seventh Fleet, *U.S. Navy*, <http://www.ctf76.navy.mil/history.htm> (Accessed 19 August 2014). Deployment details: 1985 - USS *Dubuque* (LPD 8); 1992 - USS *Belleau Wood* (LHA 3) and USS *Germantown* (LSD 42); 1994 - USS *Patriot* (MCM 7); 1995 - USS *Fort McHenry* (LSD 43); and 1996 - USS *Guardian* (MCM 5) [USS *Guardian* ran aground on Tubbataha Reef on 17 January 2013]. ESG 7 is the only permanently forward deployed amphibious strike group in the U.S. Navy. See Commander Daniel Hinton, "CNP Visits Forward Deployed Naval Forces in Sasebo," Fleet Activities Sasebo Public Affairs, *U.S. Navy*, 15 December 2009, http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=50102 (Accessed 19 August 2014).

Security Challenge for the East Asia-Pacific Region.” This report set the strategic course of “forward deployed and forward stationed forces in Asia” in the post-Cold War era.⁷ The Nye Initiative clearly lays out the strategic objective is to block a rival power from dominating the Asia-Pacific region:

United States military presence in the region supports many of our broader objectives and those of our allies. It guarantees the security of sea lanes vital to the flow of Middle East oil, serves to deter armed conflict in the region, and promotes regional cooperation. It also denies political or economic control of the Asia-Pacific region by a rival, hostile power or coalition of powers, preventing any such group from having command over the vast resources, enormous wealth, and advanced technology of the Asia-Pacific region. The United States presence also allows developing countries to allocate resources to economic growth and expands markets for United States exports. By helping to preserve peace, expenditures on our continuing defense presence deter conflicts whose costs would be far greater.⁸

Joseph Nye clearly presents a cost-benefit analysis between the choice of proactively engaging in Asian affairs or allowing a hostile power to dominate the region. The costs of not engaging would be a potential for regional disputes, growing insecurity, and costly military conflicts. The benefits are securing regional peace and security to enhance economic growth. The benefits might be tangible and countable when calculating hundreds of billions of dollars in U.S. exports to the region, but the costs of a war would be incalculable given the loss of life and property. To deter potential costly engagements the Nye Initiative mandated that at least 100,000 military personnel be in forward deployed positions to maintain the United States” post-Cold War fighting capabilities and force posture.⁹

Three years after the Nye Initiative, another DoD report, “The United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region 1998,” further emphasized the reasoning of a forward deployed military presence: “A visible U.S. force presence in

⁷ Joseph S. Nye Jr., “United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region,” *U.S. Department of Defense*, February 1995, *Defense Technical Information Center*, <http://dtic.mil/dtic/index.html> (Accessed 26 December 2013), p. 1.

⁸ Nye, “United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region,” p. 7.

⁹ Nye, “United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region,” p. 32.

Asia demonstrates firm determination to defend U.S., allied and friendly interest in this critical region,” and “Overseas military presence also provides political leaders and commanders the ability to respond rapidly to crises with a flexible array of options.”¹⁰ The primary goal of the 1998 DoD report was to “ensure our [U.S.] continued access to the region.”¹¹

Prior to military operations in Afghanistan, the United States successfully negotiated with Singapore in March 2001 access to the Changi Port in Singapore, a port large enough to accommodate a U.S. carrier. The U.S. actively procured and located large amounts of military assets in the Asia-Pacific region while military operations were ongoing in Southwest Asia and Central Asia. For example, from late 2002 to 2004, three *Los Angeles*-class fast attack submarines were deployed to Guam; and in August 2002, the U.S. Air Force base started stockpiling conventional air-launched cruise missiles at Andersen Air Force Base on Guam. By 2004 there were already 48 F-15 fighter aircraft based at Kadena Air Force Base in Okinawa, Japan.¹² Between 2002 and 2007, the U.S. Navy contracted General Dynamics Electric Boat Division to refit four *Ohio*-class submarines from ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) into guided missile submarines (SSGN); each SSGN submarine can carry 154 Tomahawk land attack cruise missiles.¹³ Writing in 2004, China expert Robert Ross stated, “the United States is expending considerable immediate resources to prepare for the possibility that a significant challenger might emerge by about the middle of the century.”¹⁴ Additionally, with the decommissioning of the USS *Kitty Hawk* (CV 63) accomplished in late 2008, the U.S. Navy replaced it with the USS *George Washington* (CVN 73). The nuclear-powered carrier became the U.S. Navy’s forward deployed aircraft carrier based in Yokosuka,

¹⁰ “The United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region 1998,” U.S. Department of Defense, www.dod.gov/pubs/easr98/easr98.pdf (Accessed 26 December 2013), pp. 9-10.

¹¹ “The United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region 1998,” U.S. Department of Defense.

¹² Robert S. Ross, “Bipolarity and Balancing in East Asia,” in *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century* eds., T. V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 280-281.

¹³ “U.S. Navy Fact File: Guided Missile Submarines-SSGN,” U.S. Navy, Last updated 6 December 2013, http://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact_display.asp?cid=4100&tid=300&ct=4 (Accessed 10 January 2014). The four current SSGNs: USS *Ohio* (SSGN 726), USS *Michigan* (SSGN 727), USS *Florida* (SSGN 728), USS *Georgia* (SSGN 729).

¹⁴ Ross, “Bipolarity and Balancing in East Asia,” p. 283

Japan.¹⁵ According to a CSIS report published in August 2012, the U.S. military personnel and assets in the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) contained 30 major operating bases support roughly 180 ships, 2,300 aircraft, and 325,000 military and civilian personnel.¹⁶

The 2011 Pivot in Contrast to Previous Policy

Senior U.S. leadership in 2011 sought to direct U.S. military forces, economic resources, and diplomatic resources from Southwest Asia and Central Asia towards the Asia Pacific region. The rebalancing of resources indicates the strategic importance of the Asia-Pacific region to the U.S. Many have argued that U.S. leadership aimed the pivot to Asia at China (PRC), in particular. Interviews and speeches by senior U.S. leadership clearly show that China is the major focus of the pivot. For instance, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's article in *Foreign Policy* in November 2011 took eight full paragraphs to express the importance of the U.S.-China bilateral relationship; in comparison, the article coupled India and Indonesia together in three full paragraphs.¹⁷ Former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asia from 2007 to 2008, Dr. James Shinn, provided the House Committee on Armed Services in July 2013 his appraisal of the pivot to Asia and its intention on shaping PRC policy. He said, "[T]here is a lot of consistency between the rebalancing logic and the Bush administration and, for the that matter, the latter part of the Clinton administration, and because the underlying logic is the same, the simple logic being that we hope that China has a peaceful rise, but that the purpose of forward-deployed forces and our alliance network is to deter China and its allies from any kind of aggressive, military expansion."¹⁸ This quote from Dr. James

¹⁵ USS George Washington Public Affairs, "USS George Washington Departs," *U.S. Navy*, 7 April 2008, Story Number: NNS080407-06, http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=36250 (Accessed 9 January 2014).

¹⁶ Ernest Z. Bower, Victor Cha, Karl F. Inderfurth, Christopher K. Johnson, Gary A. Powell, Stephanie Sanok, "U.S. Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region: An Independent Assessment," *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (August 2012): pp. 48-49 [PDF pp. 52-53]. http://csis.org/files/publication/120814_FINAL_PACOM_optimized.pdf (Accessed 19 August 2014).

¹⁷ Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy*, no. 189 (November 2011): pp. 56-63, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/900933128?accountid=9673> (Accessed 18 December 2013).

¹⁸ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific*

Shinn confirms two ideas: the Obama administration aimed the pivot to Asia at China, and the 2011 pivot is a continuation of previous policy.

The Secretary of Defense at the time of the 2011 pivot announcement, Leon Panetta, stated that the U.S. naval forces were “roughly 50/50 percent split between the Pacific and the Atlantic” and the rebalancing towards Asia was going to shift to a “60/40 split.”¹⁹ In addition, Vice Admiral Frank Pandolfe, the Director for Strategic Plans and Policy of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in January 2014 pointed at a “60/40 orientation” for *both* the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force. These percentages alone do not allow observers to assess how the 2011 pivot will alter the Navy and Air Force’s posture and operational improvements. Vice Admiral Pandolfe only provided the fact that four Littoral Combat Ships will be on a rotational basis in Singapore by 2017.²⁰ Recent U.S. Navy upgrades (“hull swaps”) and new aircraft since June 2012 include three warships in Yokosuka, Japan; two upgrades in Sasebo, Japan;²¹ a new squadron of P-8 patrol planes and two

Region and Implications for U.S. National Security, Hearing on H.A.S.C. No. 113–49, 113th Cong., 1st sess., 24 July 2013 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2013), p. 11 [PDF p. 15]. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg82464/pdf/CHRG-113hhrg82464.pdf> (Accessed 20 August 2014).

¹⁹ Leon Panetta, “The US Rebalance Towards the Asia-Pacific,” The 11th IISS Asian Security Summit, *International Institute for Strategic Studies* (IISS), 2012, <http://www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri%20la%20dialogue/archive/sld12-43d9/first-plenary-session-2749/leon-panetta-d67b> (Accessed 18 December 2013). Benjamin H. Friedman of the Cato Institute reported that at the announcement of the rebalancing policy the U.S. Navy already had 55 percent of its ships in the Pacific. See Kirk Spitzer, “USA upgrading in Asia, but “pivot” questioned,” *USA Today*, 17 December 2013, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/12/17/us-japan-asia-security-strategy/4049517/> (Accessed 9 January 2014). According to the U.S. Navy website, the U.S. Navy has 283 deployable battle force ships; therefore, a five percent increase to 60 percent would roughly be an addition of fourteen ships in the region. See “Status of the Navy,” *U.S. Navy*, 9 January 2014, http://www.navy.mil/navydata/nav_legacy.asp?id=146 (Accessed 9 January 2014).

²⁰ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific Region: Examining its Implementation*, Hearing on H.A.S.C. No. 113–74, 113th Cong., 2nd sess., 28 January 2014 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2014), pp.10 & 60 [PDF pp. 14 & 64]. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-113hhrg86964/pdf/CHRG-113hhrg86964.pdf> (Accessed 20 August 2014).

²¹ Lt. Joseph S. Marinucci, “Mine Countermeasure Ship Replacements Depart for Japan,” *U.S. Navy*, 6 June 2014, <http://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/mcm14/Pages/MineCountermeasuresShipReplacementsDepartforJapan.aspx#.UNIIWN4UgQ> (Accessed 19 August 2014). In June 2014 mine countermeasure ships USS *Pioneer* (MCM 9) and USS *Chief* (MCM 14) replaced USS *Avenger* (MCM 1) and USS *Defender* (MCM 2) in Sasebo, Japan. The two latter ships served in the western Pacific since 2009 as part of the forward deployed naval forces.

new squadrons of MV-22 Ospreys in Okinawa, Japan.²² David Helvey, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asia (DoD) shared long-range plans, pointing towards 2020, with the Senate Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs in April 2013 including numerous upgrades in military assets:

We are also prioritizing investments in our budget to develop platforms and capabilities that have a direct applicability and use in the Asia-Pacific region. These investments include programs such as the *Virginia* class nuclear-powered submarine, P-8 maritime patrol aircraft, and the Broad Area Maritime Sensor, air dominance and strike capabilities such as the fifth generation Joint Strike Fighter, a new stealth bomber, and the KC-46 tanker replacement.²³

If August 2012 serves as a benchmark for comparison, the U.S. had personnel in forward deployed positions in Japan (~40,000), Korea (~28,500), and Guam (~5,000) and an additional 40,000 military personnel based in Hawaii. According to Vice Admiral Frank Pandolfe's testimony in January 2014, the U.S. military added 40,000 military personnel to the Asia Pacific since the announcement of the pivot to Asia in November 2011.²⁴ Of these forces, current Secretary of Defense Charles "Chuck" Hagel has mandated that Pacific Command station 22,000 U.S. Marines west of the International Date Line—keeping them in close proximity to regional allies such as the Philippines and Japan.²⁵ In regards to the U.S. Marines directed to Australia, Colonel Merna of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit explained, "In one sense, the Marines are going back to the force levels we had in the region prior to 9/11. So it is simply a restoration rather than a build up or buildout. But the way the force is being configured is very different. We are emphasizing building out a rotational force, notably in Australia, but elsewhere

²² Spitzer, "USA upgrading in Asia, but "pivot" questioned."

²³ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs, *Rebalance to Asia II: Security and Defense; Cooperation and Challenges*, Hearing on S. HRG. 113–138, 113th Cong., 1st sess., 25 April 2013 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2013), p. 11 [PDF p. 15] <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-113shrg86149/pdf/CHRG-113shrg86149.pdf> (Accessed 20 August 2014).

²⁴ *Rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific Region*, pp.13 & 69 [PDF pp. 17 & 73].

²⁵ Robbin F. Laird, "The US Marine Corps in the Pivot to the Pacific," *The Diplomat*, May 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/05/the-us-marine-corps-in-the-pivot-to-the-pacific/> (Accessed 11 January 2014).

as well.”²⁶ Besides new basing arrangements, the DoD is also considering educational improvements. According to David Helvey, additional personnel operating in the region has prompted the DoD to increase funding for “partner languages” so that the rebalance will solidify alliance relationships.²⁷

The Logic of Geopolitics

What drives the U.S. to be concerned about the political and military developments on the Eurasian landmass? To answer this question, we must investigate how strategic thinkers have thought about the geopolitics of Eurasia as they have incorporated the leading technologies of the day. John Evelyn stated in 1674 that sea power was preeminent, “Whoever commands the ocean commands the trade of the world, and whoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and whoever is master of that commands the world itself.” Thus, John Evelyn set the basis of the British Empire’s supremacy of the oceans and its many far-flung colonies.²⁸

However, when Halford J. Mackinder read his article, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” at the Royal Geographical Society in January 1904, he challenged the long-held belief that sea power was ultimate in favor of steam technologies.²⁹ Mackinder presented a conception of how the Russian empire could exploit the geographical advantages of central Eurasia by extending a massive rail network to gather the natural resources of the Eurasian mainland and allow Russia to rival the greatest sea power. He viewed the central portion of the Eurasian landmass that was inaccessible to naval ships as “the pivot region of the world’s politics.”³⁰ Thus, British vessels would not be able to

²⁶ “The Osprey Comes to the Pacific: The Case of the 31st MEU,” (2013) *Second Line of Defense*, 10 May 2013, <http://www.sldinfo.com/The-osprey-comes-to-the-pacific-the-case-of-the-31st-meu/> (Accessed 11 January 2014).

²⁷ *Rebalance to Asia II*, p. 11 [PDF p. 15]

²⁸ Gerry Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 155.

²⁹ Halford J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” and “Discussion,” *The Geographic Journal* 23, no. 4 (April 1904): pp. 421-444.

³⁰ Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” p. 434.

control and shape the affairs of the massive land-locked state. Mackinder thought that if a state could control and exploit this vast continent of resources it would be unstoppable and would clearly upset the balance of power.³¹

Thirty-nine years later, in 1943, Mackinder wrote an article for *Foreign Affairs* where he would use the term “Heartland” to refer to the above “pivot region” of Eurasia that contains Siberia and wide swaths of modern day Russian territory. In the 1943 article, Mackinder would set a precedent for how future policymakers and scholars would think about the Soviet Union and the Cold War:

All things considered, the conclusion is unavoidable that if the Soviet Union emerges from this war as conqueror of Germany, she must rank as the greatest land Power on the globe. Moreover, she will be the Power in the strategically strongest defensive position. The Heartland is the greatest natural fortress on earth. For the first time in history it is manned by a garrison sufficient both in number and quality.³²

Nicholas Spykman joined the geopolitics debate in 1942, and his writings largely agreed with Mackinder’s views on geopolitics. Spykman wrote, “Geography is the most fundamental factor in foreign policy of states because it is the most permanent. Ministers come and ministers go, even dictators die, but mountain ranges stand unperturbed.”³³ However, in 1944, Spykman challenged Mackinder’s famous pronouncement “who controls eastern Europe rules the Heartland; who rules the Heartland rules the Whole Island; and who rules the World Island rules the World.” In contrast, Spykman had a new dictum, “who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world.”³⁴ The rimland is not the coast of Eurasia, but is more a wide expanse of land that wraps around the western, southern, and eastern boundaries of the Eurasian center (see Map 1). In this regard, most of Europe is considered “rimland” since it possesses numerous access points to the sea. Thus, the threat of a single Eurasian power gaining all the resources and wealth of the Eurasian “Heartland” would inevitably be able to extend its power to the rimland

³¹ Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” pp. 436-437.

³² Halford J. Mackinder, “The Round World and the Winning of the Peace,” *Foreign Affairs* 21, no. 4 (July 1943): p. 601.

³³ Nicholas John Spykman, *America’s Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), p. 41.

³⁴ Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944), p. 43.

regions and control the resources of the world. Spykman would justify his view of the importance of the rimland: "Already the United States has gone to war twice within 30 years and the threat to our security each time has been the possibility that the rimland regions of the Eurasian landmass would be dominated by a single power."³⁵

Map 1: Spykman's Rimland and Heartland Map



Photo Source: "Geostrategic Domination of the Rimland" Sikh Archives, <http://www.sikharchives.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/rimland.jpg> (Accessed 22 August 2014). Author cropped and altered original photo.

Theoretically, if one state controlled all of the economic, political, and military resources of Eurasia, that state would dominate the world. In addition, this single state

³⁵ Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, pp. 43-44.

would have the demographic resources and economic resources to be completely autarkic. The expansive nature of Germany in World War II provided a picture of such an autarkic regime. An autarkic state would have no need for the industrial goods of the United States; thus, the U.S. export economy would collapse and the U.S. would lose the latent power needed to produce a strong military.³⁶ Without a strong military, the U.S. would have no way of fending off invasion of the homeland. Melvyn Leffler writes, "For U.S. officials, the most decisive and lasting legacy of the wartime experience was that potential adversaries must never again be allowed to gain control of the resources of Eurasia."³⁷ U.S. policymakers had witnessed how Germany accumulated natural resources and heavy industrial capacities as it took over France, Belgium, and Hungary. These newly acquired resources aided the Germans in fighting Great Britain and the Soviet Union.³⁸

Post-World War II Acceptance of the Logic

Spykman's thoughts on Eurasian hegemony made sense in light of the tragic losses of two world wars. At the end of World War II, a group of Ivy League professors working at the Brookings Institution constructed an information memorandum on U.S. post-war strategic guidance. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) deemed the memo so important they had it classified. The JCS memo clearly stated the logics of Spykman's rimland geopolitics: "In eastern Asia as in Europe, American security policy must be to oppose any aspirant for continental hegemony."³⁹ Furthermore, this JCS information memo supported a continued presence in pre-Cold War Asia by encouraging policy makers to establish security zones around the rimland of Asia to ensure that the United States could be within striking distance of Asia. In the same way that Great Britain served as a forward base of operations for attacking continental Europe in World War

³⁶ Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 10.

³⁷ Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, p. 23.

³⁸ Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, p. 23.

³⁹ Frederick S. Dunn, Edward M. Earle, William T. R. Fox, Grayson L. Kirk, David N. Rowe, Harold Sprout, and Arnold Wolfers, "Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum for Information No. 382: A Security Policy for Post-War America," 29 March 1945, Naval Historical Center, Strategic Plans Division, Series 14, Box 194, AI-2, p. 12.

II, the Philippines would serve as a strategic position for the United States in Asia. The JCS information memo authors explained the purpose of forward deployed forces:

While at first glance the Philippines might seem to be a strategic liability, explicit American responsibility for their safety makes it easier the adoption of a military and naval policy which will keep any future fighting many thousand miles from the American mainland. With the Philippines established as a bastion of the continent of Asia, the position of the United States with respect to the former Japanese mandated territories becomes clear. Although not necessarily by formal annexation, American control of these islands for military purposes must be unconditionally assured.⁴⁰

The quote above is more evidence of how Spykman's geopolitical thinking established the paradigm for how policy makers and military leaders focused on the Eurasian "rimland" as the key strategic ground to control.⁴¹

Consequently, Cold War policy makers viewed the Soviet Union's anti-Liberal economic system as a geopolitical threat. The Cold War policy makers also believed that the Soviet Union had the potential to become a Eurasian hegemon; as a result, it would control the heartland and rimland's immense amount of raw materials and industrial assets. In addition, the Soviet Union would hold a different economic ordering that would not grant equal access for trade and economic development. Memorandum and testimony by Secretary of State Dean Acheson in 1949 affirmed this rimland logic when he stated, "The loss of Western Europe or of important parts of Asia or the Middle East would be a transfer of potential from West to East, which, depending on the area, might have the gravest consequences in the long run."⁴² Acheson's January 1950 "strategic perimeter" speech and other public officials excluded mention of South Korea, but they were referring to a potential strategy if confronting the Soviets and Soviet allies in a global war. Acheson regarded South Korea as an important piece of territory. In fact, prior to the Korean War, the Truman administration made multiple efforts to secure aid

⁴⁰ Dunn et al, "Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum for Information No. 382: A Security Policy for Post-War America," p. 14.

⁴¹ Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, pp. 38-44.

⁴² Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, p. 12.

from Congress for South Korean President Syngman Rhee's regime.⁴³ Indeed, a fight over the rimland is what ensued throughout the Cold War; as Terry Deibel states, "In fact, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union for control of the rimland was until 1990 the struggle of modern world politics."⁴⁴ The Cold War's proxy wars, covert actions, and political crises stretched across the Eurasian rimland from East to West.

Current-Day Geopolitical Analysis of Eurasia

Recent statistical estimates from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) provide us a snapshot of how important the Eurasian landmass is today. Accounting for all of the Eurasian states' economies, militaries, and populations, one can see that Eurasia is truly important. In statistical terms, Eurasia contains 70 percent of the Earth's population and 48 percent of the Earth's arable land. In economic terms, Eurasia contains 64 percent of the Earth's wealth production when considering total gross domestic product in 2012. In military terms, 73 percent of global defense spending is located in Eurasia, amounting to 2.3 percent of the total gross domestic product of the landmass. The Eurasian states combined spend an estimated \$1.3 trillion on defense spending, which is nearly double the defense spending of the United States. For Eurasian, Global, U.S., China, and Japan figures see Table 1: Estimated 2012 Global Comparison Statistics below.⁴⁵

⁴³ Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, p. 367.

⁴⁴ Terry L. Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy: Logic for American Statecraft* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 49.

⁴⁵ "World Fact Book," *The Central Intelligence Agency*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> (Accessed 27 December 2013). The author compiled all of the individual states of Eurasia to form a Eurasian total and compared with the individual global statistics. The CIA's "World Fact Book" website did not provide defense spending estimates for three states: North Korea (DPRK), Serbia, and Montenegro.

Table 1: Estimated 2012 Global Comparison Statistics

	GDP (purchasing power parity)	Population	Land Area (sq. km)	Arable Land (sq. km)	Defense Spending* (USD)
World Totals	\$84,970,000,000,000	7,095,217,980	148,940,000	15,534,442	\$1,784,370,000,000
Eurasia	\$54,831,974,000,000	5,004,199,681	54,955,156	7,496,318	\$1,309,634,806,000
% of World	64.53%	70.53%	36.90%	48.26%	73.39%
US	\$15,940,000,000,000	316,668,567	9,826,675	1,600,765	\$733,240,000,000
% of World	18.76%	4.46%	6.60%	10.30%	41.09%
China	\$12,610,000,000,000	1,349,585,838	9,596,961	1,115,167	\$327,860,000,000
% of World	14.84%	19.02%	6.44%	7.18%	18.37%
Japan	\$4,704,000,000,000	127,253,075	377,915	42,553	\$47,040,000,000
% of World	5.54%	1.79%	0.25%	0.27%	2.64%

Source: "World Fact Book," *The Central Intelligence Agency*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> (Accessed 27 December 2013).

*The author notes that the defense spending estimates do not add up completely (i.e. the estimated Eurasian defense spending total plus the U.S. defense spending total is greater than the estimated World defense spending total).

China's estimated defense spending (\$327.8 billion) comprises nearly one quarter of the estimated total of Eurasian defense spending. In comparison, China's potential rivals in the region spend much less: India (\$85.6 billion); Japan (\$47 billion); Russia (\$78.8 billion); and South Korea (\$44.2 billion). China's neighbors in the region that spend over \$1 billion on defense would include Afghanistan (\$3.4 billion); Kazakhstan (\$2.5 billion); Malaysia (\$10.2 billion); Pakistan (\$16.2 billion); Philippines (\$3.8 billion); Thailand (\$11.9 billion); and Vietnam (\$8.1 billion).⁴⁶ CIA defense spending estimates are not available for North Korea, but one could estimate that the heavily fortified state

⁴⁶ "World Fact Book," *The Central Intelligence Agency*.

that boasts a “military first” policy and an ambitious nuclear program requires multiple billions of dollars.

While theoretically one state could seek to control all of Eurasia, the likelihood is very small. Yet, the logic of geopolitics persists into modern day policy as it pertains to the 2011 pivot to Asia. Retired Admiral Gary Roughead, told the House Committee on Armed Services, “[I]f we look at it, rebalancing is not the strategic objective. The strategic objective for us in Asia is to maintain that stability and to not allow one country to dominate in Asia.”⁴⁷

Recent scholarship has both complemented and challenged the logics of a Eurasian hegemon arising and seriously affecting the vital interests of the United States. Robert Art, in 2003, offers some very important insights that complement Spykman and the Brookings Institution scholars. Art declares that Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia (three rimland regions) are all vital regions for the U.S. to possess key allies and to station forward deployments. In addition, Art contends that a great power war in Eurasia would inevitably drag the United States in to a conflict, or bring about three negative consequences: 1) threaten the U.S. economy’s foreign trade; 2) promote nuclear, biological, and chemical proliferation; and 3) bring about “political changes that could severely diminish American influence.”⁴⁸ Great power wars are detrimental to the status quo. Therefore, as the lone super-power the United States seeks to pursue security strategies that will deter aggression, and lower the incentives for proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Robert Art is able to draw a sharp distinction in modern-day geopolitics because Spykman and the Brookings Institution scholars had not yet witnessed the great technological shift—the nuclear revolution in military affairs. Nuclear deterrence is a geopolitical game changer, because even if a Eurasian aggressor state was able to conquer large swaths of territory, incorporate all of the technological and industrial resources possible, and control all of the newly acquired populations it would not affect the security of the United States. The security of the United States does not rest on strategic islands such as Great Britain or the Philippines, because nuclear weapons launched from the continental United States or U.S. submarines, or dropped from inter-

⁴⁷ *Rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific Region and Implications for U.S. National Security*, p. 9 [PDF p. 13].

⁴⁸ Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 7-8.

continental bombers have the potential to destroy the aggressor state or its invasion forces.⁴⁹ As Art writes: “America’s security against hostile state actors lies primarily with its nuclear deterrent, and conquest of territory does not add significantly to a hostile state’s nuclear threat, nor does it subtract significantly from America’s nuclear deterrent.”⁵⁰ To state it another way, regardless of how strong a potential Eurasian hegemon could grow, the United States could use its nuclear forces to deter conflict or fend off an invasion.

Therefore, the nuclear revolution in military affairs, a technological advancement, altered the geopolitical logics of Mackinder and Spykman. Geography remains an important factor in international relations, but technological progress in weapon systems, communication, transportation, and even the speed of capital transfers have changed the properties of distance. Technological breakthroughs can make long-held strategic logics such as islands, forward operating bases, or strategic high ground irrelevant. Spykman knew that geopolitics had its limits and was cognizant of the fact that technological advancement could change the geographic factors.⁵¹ Writing in 1942, Spykman saw the development of long-range bombers as a growing threat to non-contiguous states.⁵²

The nuclear revolution in military affairs changed the previous logics of Eurasian geopolitics, but the 2011 pivot to Asia illustrates the persistence of Spykman and Brookings Institution’s logics of geopolitics. The United States does not have to fear a Eurasian hegemon controlling great amounts of territory or industrial assets. Whether a powerful Eurasian state controls the heartland or the rimland does not matter to U.S. security. As Christensen and Snyder argue, “Nuclear weapons will also have to be factored in to any assessment of multipolar balancing in the future, both because their global reach undermines traditional checkerboard balancing logic and because the nuclear deterrence stalemate is likely to benefit the defender of the status quo.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Stephen Van Evera, “A Farewell to Geopolitics,” in *To Lead the World: American Strategy After the Bush Doctrine*, eds., Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 12-14.

⁵⁰ Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*, p. 57.

⁵¹ Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, p. 58.

⁵² Spykman, *America’s Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power*, p. 20.

⁵³ Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity,” *International Organization* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1990): p. 168.

However, even with a preponderance of power in both the nuclear and conventional realm the U.S. is still concerned about rising challengers. Bernard Brodie argued that great powers were often concerned with distant and future security threats; moreover, the great powers feel a compulsion “to do something effective about a threat that remains as yet indirect or remote.”⁵⁴ For many analysts and scholars, a rising China represents the distant challenger that could upend U.S. dominance.

Geopolitical Logics Applied to a Rising China

During World War II and shortly after, many scholars were predicting that China had the potential to become a great Eurasian power. These scholars were echoing one of Mackinder’s statements from 1904: “Were the Chinese, for instance, organized by the Japanese, to overthrow the Russian Empire and conquer its territory, they might constitute the yellow peril to the world’s freedom just because they would add an oceanic frontage to the resources of the great continent, an advantage as yet denied to the Russian tenant of the pivot region.”⁵⁵ Walter Lippmann predicted the rise of a great Chinese state in 1944: “China, freed of the menace of Japan and of the tutelage of the Western powers, will achieve her internal political unity and her industrial development. When she does achieve them, China will be a great power capable of organizing her own regional security among the smaller states of Indo-China, Burma, Thailand, and Malaya.”⁵⁶ Lippmann predicted that a day would come when a shift would occur in U.S.-China relations where the U.S. would no longer be “special champions of China,” but potentially could contend with a rising power that would constitute a third strategic system.⁵⁷ One of the Brookings Institution scholars, William T. R. Fox, wrote in 1944, “with political and social integration achieved, China will become a most important regional power, but her military might is clearly not of the same order as that of Russia, Britain, or America.”⁵⁸ Now that China has achieved a unitary state, righted its economy since 1978, and set about to create “pockets of

⁵⁴ Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973), p. 344.

⁵⁵ Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” p. 437.

⁵⁶ Walter Lippmann, *U.S. War Aims* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1944), p. 93.

⁵⁷ Lippmann, *U.S. War Aims*, p. 158.

⁵⁸ William T. R. Fox, *The Super-Powers: The United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union--Their Responsibility for Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944), pp. 19-20.

excellence" within its military, China has garnered greater attention as a rising power the above scholars envisioned.⁵⁹

The rise of China as a potential challenger to the regional status quo heightens security concerns. Asia's middle and small powers are paying attention to China's ascendance in economic and military power, and they are calling for the U.S. to balance against it. For example, one Malaysian official stated: "America's presence is certainly needed, at least to balance other power with contrasting ideology in this region... the power balance is needed... to ensure that other powers that have far-reaching ambitions in Southeast Asia will not find it easy to act against countries in the region."⁶⁰ Yet, an important question to ask is whether the rise of China has truly upset the balance of power in East Asia? To answer this question we must examine the growth of Chinese power in economic and military terms.

Since 1978, China has grown tremendously in economic power. As former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific, Kurt Campbell said in 2011, "Rarely has a country grown in such dramatic fashion strategically as China has, probably even more dramatic than the arrival of the United States in the 1890s and the 1920s."⁶¹ China's neighbors have also recognized the growing influence of China's economic might. China's western neighbors in Central Asia profit from their respective oil and natural gas exports that help keep China's economic engine running. In addition, in terms of production, everyone recognizes that China is currently the "factory of the world." From high-end to low-end goods, Chinese factory workers make it all. Yet, the Chinese economic picture is not all positive when considering a few of the by-products of economic success. Scholars need to consider how this economic recovery project has saddled numerous state banks with large sums of debt, created a large and growing disparity between the rich and the poor, and caused extensive environmental problems.⁶²

⁵⁹ Art, *A Grand Strategy for America*, p. 14.

⁶⁰ Stephen M. Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (January 2009): p. 113.

⁶¹ "The Obama Administration's Pivot to Asia," *The Foreign Policy Initiative*, 13 December 2011, www.foreignpolicyi.org/files/uploads/images/AsiaPivot.pdf (Accessed 20 December 2013).

⁶² For further exploration of the Chinese economy see, Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2007). For further exploration of Chinese environmental

China is a power capable of contending with any state in Asia. In terms of nuclear capabilities, China possesses secure second-strike capabilities, which in theory should produce mutual security between the China and the U.S.⁶³ China's relatively small arsenal of ICBMs deters the U.S. from launching a preventive attack and allows China to invest in other military projects such as anti-access and area denial, advanced fighters, and a nascent blue water navy.⁶⁴ Another important distinction is the type of military power. China at present is a very strong land power. The U.S. on the contrary is a very strong maritime and air power in East and Southeast Asia. China's increase in maritime power projection is largely limited to the defense of its coastline and projection of power over Taiwan, but their ambitions are growing with the recent commissioning of the *Liaoning* aircraft carrier.⁶⁵

The dichotomy that is present between the maritime and air based U.S. capabilities and the land based Chinese capabilities should yield stability between the two powers. The U.S. possesses such a dominant lead in maritime capabilities when it comes to aircraft carriers, submarines, and surface ships that out match Chinese naval capabilities. As Geoffrey Blainey concluded, "a clear preponderance of power tended to promote peace."⁶⁶ The preponderance of power that the U.S. has displayed in the Asia-Pacific seeks to convince the Chinese that a war would be very costly. Writing in 2006, Kurt Campbell asserts that the U.S. needed to increase its war fighting capabilities in the Asian-Pacific:

The United States must maintain a forward deployed military presence in the region that is both reassuring to friends and a reminder to China that we remain the ultimate guarantor of regional peace and stability. Capital ships, stealthy submarines, expeditionary Marine forces, and overwhelming air power will likely offer the most effective military

issues see, Elizabeth C. Economy, "The Great Leap Backward: The Cost of China's Environmental Crisis," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2007), pp. 38-59.

⁶³ Robert Jervis, "Was the Cold War a Security Dilemma?" *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2001): p. 54.

⁶⁴ Avery Goldstein, "Parsing China's Rise: International Circumstances and National Attributes," in *China's Ascent: Power, Security, and the Future of International Politics*, eds., Robert S. Ross and Zhu Feng (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2008): pp. 66-67; See also *Rebalance to Asia II*, pp. 23-24 [PDF pp. 27-28].

⁶⁵ Ross, "Bipolarity and Balancing in East Asia," pp. 294-295.

⁶⁶ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1988), p. 113.

instruments for managing a range of Asian scenarios involving core U.S. interests.⁶⁷

The 2011 pivot to Asia is move towards what Kurt Campbell called for the U.S. to do in 2006: display a preponderance of assets to convince the Chinese leadership that the U.S. is prepared for conflict. In Congressional testimony, Admiral Roughead spoke at length about the advancements made in Unmanned Undersea Vehicles (UUVs), but he was insistent that to increase U.S. credibility in the region the U.S. must have numerous vessels seen in the littoral waters of Asia.⁶⁸ Visible presence signals commitment and aids general deterrence.⁶⁹

At the end of the Cold War, we no longer see the threat of a Eurasian hegemon that is expanding its reach militarily the likes of Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union. Nor do we see any state that is trying to overthrow the present international economic system or offering an alternative system. Indeed, China's military is modernizing, but the modernization only represents modest "pockets of excellence." In economic terms, China is a successful member of the World Trade Organization, an active participant in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Thus, it would not be in China's interests to extract itself from the world market because its economy thrives on producing exports and is highly dependent on the inflow of foreign investment. An important lesson of the recent world recession was that China had not successfully "decoupled" from the global economy as predicted in 2007. Thus, the Chinese economy could not depend on its domestic consumption for robust growth. Moreover, Chinese leaders recognize the immense amount of technological transfer that has made China a much more developed and prosperous state.

However, there are real tensions in the Asia-Pacific region. One can still see evidence of historical legacies of hatred and distrust lingering in the background while economic growth and trans-national investment are sound and growing. Chinese

⁶⁷ Kurt M. Campbell and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Hard Power: The New Politics of National Security* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), p. 208.

⁶⁸ *Rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific Region and Implications for U.S. National Security*, pp. 18 & 32 [PDF pp. 22 & 34].

⁶⁹ Barry M. Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1978), p. 53.

leaders often revisit the wounds and humiliation of World War II to stoke nationalist passions against Japan. In addition, China experienced numerous diplomatic failures in 2009 and 2010, and its repeated assertive actions in the South China Sea and East China Sea sparked numerous protests in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Japan.⁷⁰ The timing of the 2011 pivot to Asia was in large part to reassure the allies in the region that the U.S. will remain to be the “honest broker” and “mediator” of the region to ensure political stability and economic growth.⁷¹

Conclusion

For nearly seven decades, the U.S. has been highly engaged in the Asia Pacific and is a testimony of the persistent logics of Spykman’s geopolitical thinking. The Brookings Institution scholars after World War II and the Nye Initiative after the Cold War constructed strategic policy that has kept the United States deeply engaged in Asia-Pacific affairs. The Brookings Institution scholars’ rimland logics would deeply influence the decisions of future presidents to go to war in Korea and Vietnam. The Nye Initiative and subsequent DoD reports called for substantial forward deployed positions in South Korea, Japan, and Guam.

Throughout the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, consistent and regular upgrades in U.S. naval capabilities maintained a strong naval and air force presence in the region. Thus, the stage was set for success in a region that is growing economically and has been largely peaceful since 1979. The 2011 pivot to Asia has signaled a small increase in naval and marine capabilities, but was not a significant departure from the status quo of regular and incremental upgrades in armaments and assets dedicated to the region. Thus, the 2011 pivot to Asia represents the persistence of the post-World War II geopolitical logics.

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