

# U.S. Strategy for Asia and the U.S.-Japan Alliance

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To understand the role of the US-Japan alliance in US strategy for Asia it is important to consider not only the functional role of the alliance at present and in recent years. It is also instructive to consider, for comparative purposes, Northeast Asia as it existed historically before the alliance came to exist. Japan and the US interacted in international affairs for almost exactly a century, from the first arrival of Perry's black ships in the summer of 1853 until the Security Treaty was signed ninety-eight years later at the Golden Gate Club in San Francisco, in September, 1951. Both the world and the bilateral US-Japan relationship were much less stable and prosperous during those early years than came to be true thereafter. And a conscious American strategy of nurturing the alliance, while encouraging a broader role for Japan in both the security and the economic spheres, were major factors in creating that dynamic new postwar world.

## US-Japan Relations before the Alliance

For over half a century following the coming of Perry's black ships, US-Japan relations evolved in a broadly positive vein. American advisors, from William Clark to Henry Willard Dennison, played key roles in development of the Japanese educational system, in technical advances, and in supporting the emergence of a global Japanese diplomacy. American leaders, most notably Theodore Roosevelt, applauded and assisted the rise of Japan as an international actor, playing a key role in resolving the Russo-Japanese War at Portsmouth in 1905.

Yet Japan's principal strategic ally, during the early years of the twentieth century, was Britain, under the Anglo-Japanese Naval Treaty of 1902. The United States was relegated to a more secondary diplomatic role, with no clear institutional framework or domestic fund of support in either nation sustaining the broader trans-Pacific relationship. Following US acquisition of the Philippines and Japanese mandates in the South Pacific, together with the Exclusion Act of 1923, deepening naval rivalries, and sharp differences over China after 1931, bilateral relations spiraled downward, with little political support and limited economic and cultural interdependence to sustain them. A decade of war and occupation followed, culminating in the San Francisco peace treaty and the ambitious San Francisco System geopolitical regime that it created in the Pacific, late in 1951.

While the pre-1951 era of US-Japan relations, like its analog in trans-Atlantic relations, was characterized by occasional and often extended periods of amity, such as the late decades of the nineteenth century, or the Theodore Roosevelt presidency (1901-1909), those relations also experienced periods of great volatility, bitterness, and war. Trade and cross-investment were relatively limited across that first century of US-Japan relations. And military ties, to the extent that they existed, were largely confrontational.

The age of alliance since 1951 has introduced a very different political-economic dynamic. Overall US-Japan relations, like America's parallel relations with its NATO allies, have been *predictable*, *institutionalized*, and *open*, in multiple dimensions, stabilized by mutual trust. The openness and predictability created by alliance encouraged levels of cross-investment and trade interdependence, rising steadily across the 1950s, 1960s, and beyond, that were unprecedented, and that gave birth to immense

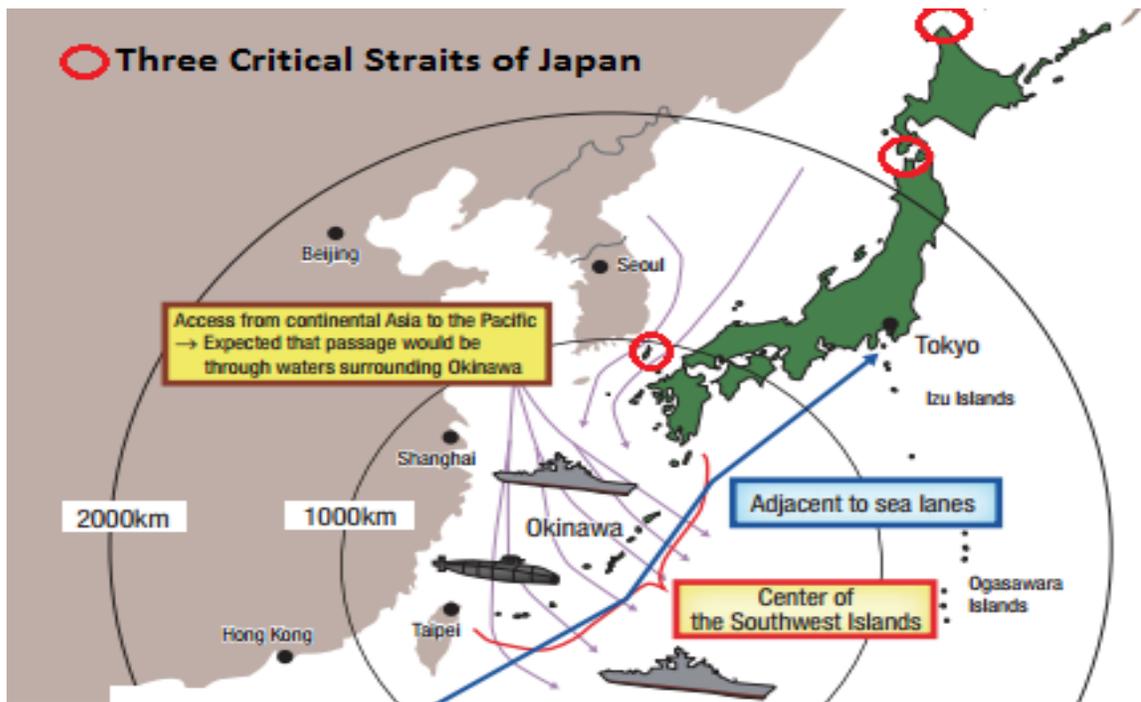
prosperity, particularly in Japan. Seen in retrospect, there is no question that the post-World War II US-Japan alliance, and the broader trans-Pacific coordination that flowed from it, gave birth to a much more stable and durable pattern of trans-Pacific relations than the more volatile balance of power system that had preceded it.

**The Geopolitical Foundations of the US-Japan Alliance**

Before considering how US strategy for Asia has evolved over the nearly seven decades during which the US-Japan alliance has existed, it is instructive to consider the scale and underlying geographical positioning of Japan, and as well as the relationship of those endowments to American strategic objectives. Japan, of course, is a medium-size island nation with high population density and limited natural-resource endowments relative to its powerful and sophisticated manufacturing base. In many ways Japan’s scale and endowments make it a natural ally to a large maritime power, such as Britain in the early twentieth century or the United States today.

In the context of an alliance relationship with a large maritime power, confronting nations on the Eurasian continent, Japan’s location is highly strategic. As indicated in Figure I, it lies astride three critical straits—Tsushima, Soya, and Tsugaru—that control access from the Sea of Japan to the Pacific Ocean. Enclosed within that sea lie Korea, northeast China, and the Russian Far East. Japan also fronts on the southern shores of the Sea of Okhotsk, an enclosed sea that is potentially strategic for Russia to the north. The northeast section of the sea is also proximate to Petropavlovsk, the only ice-free port in Russia with direct access to the Pacific.

**FIGURE I: THREE CRITICAL STRAITS OF JAPAN**



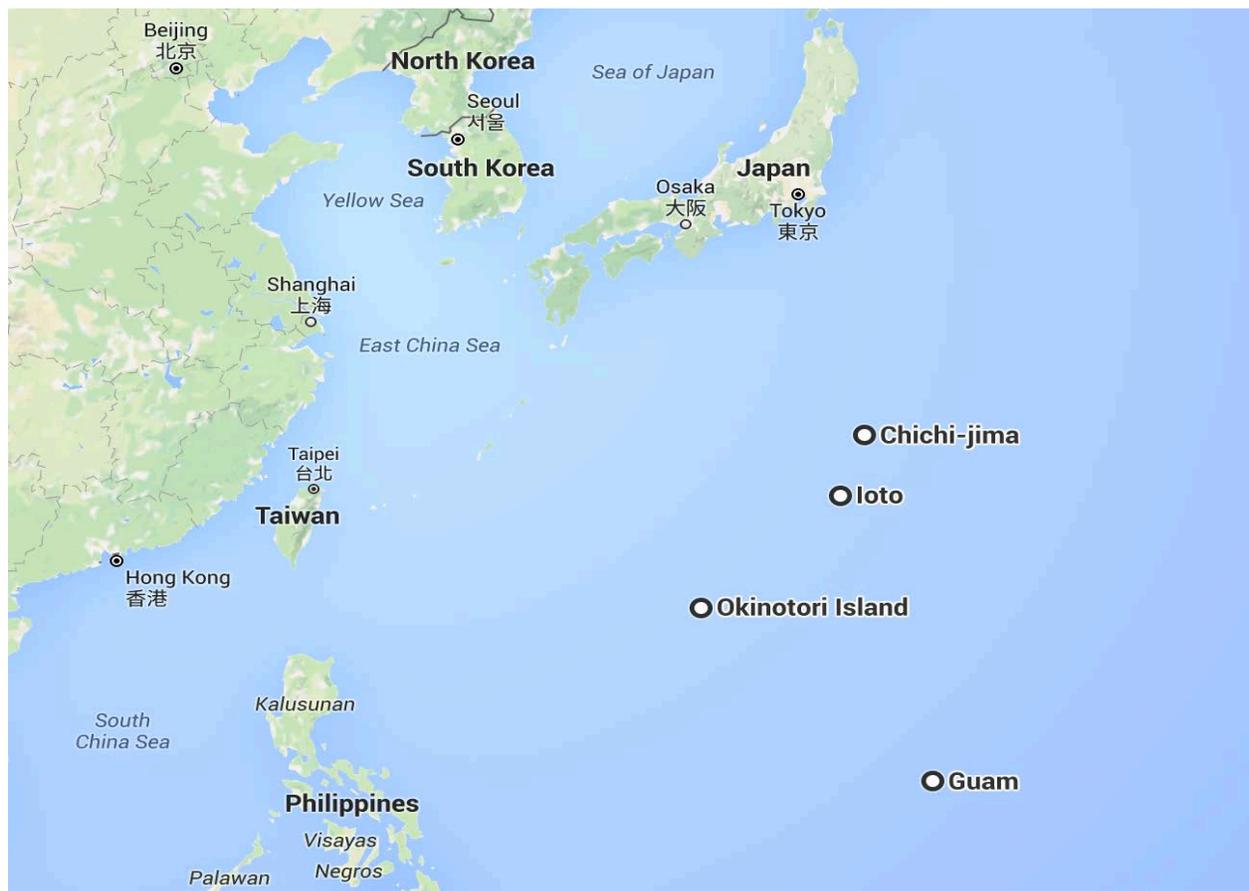
Source: Ministry of Defense, Defense of Japan Annual White Paper 2015

Japan’s location is also, as similarly indicated in Figure I, highly strategic with respect to China. Most important, in geostrategic terms, are the Ryukyu Islands, a central part of the so-called first island

chain, that separates China from the Pacific. The main island of Okinawa is less than five hundred miles from Shanghai and the highly populated central coastline of China, and also less than 1500 miles from Hanoi in Vietnam to the south, and the DMZ in Korea to the north. The outer Ryukyus, such as Ishigaki-jima, Shimoji-jima, and Miyako-jima, are even closer to China, with Yonaguni, at the end of the Ryukyu chain, lying less than 140 miles from Taiwan.

Japan's outlying islands further to the southeast, such as Chichi-jima, Iwo-jima, and Okinotori-shima, are likewise strategic, as they give Japan economic and political claim to a substantial portion of the northwest Pacific within range of Japan itself. Okinotori-shima, in particular, is also important in naval terms, due to its location on potential maritime routes, both surface and submarine, between China and Guam, as indicated in Figure II. As Guam serves as an increasingly important focal point of American deployments in the western Pacific, the strategic position of these small Japanese islands is important to the United States as well.

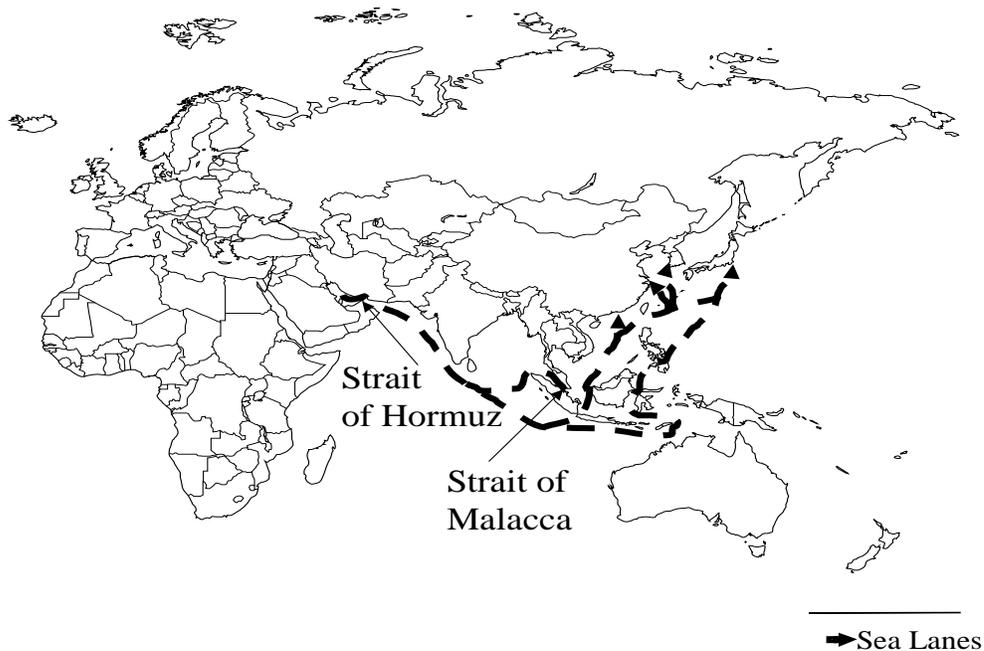
**FIGURE II:**  
**JAPAN'S STRATEGIC NORTHWEST PACIFIC ISLANDS**



Source: Google Maps; accessed on 1 March 2016

Japan also, of course, has important geo-strategic and geo-economic vulnerabilities, which like Japan's geopolitical advantages reinforce the rationale for a bilateral US-Japan alliance. Most obviously, as is clear from Figure I, Japan is uncomfortably close to the Korean peninsula, which has repeatedly been the site of major conflict over the centuries. Its proximity to sprawling China also makes that

country a natural object of concern. And the fact that Japan is largely devoid of hydrocarbons, located far from its shores, in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, naturally makes the energy sea lanes and related choke points at the Straits of Malacca and Hormuz major objects of geostrategic concern.<sup>1</sup>



Source: pg. 34, Kent Calder, The New Continentalism: Energy and Twenty-First Century Eurasian Geopolitics. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

**Foundations: America’s Asia Strategy and the Birth of the Alliance**

Was the felicitous pattern of US-Japan relations that emerged following the San Francisco peace treaty and the conclusion of the US-Japan security treaty, both in September, 1951, simply an accident, or the result of conscious American strategy? There is no question in my mind that it was primarily the latter, aided by constructive responses from Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru and other moderate Japanese leaders. US treaty negotiator John Foster Dulles, soon to be Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Secretary of State, was a gifted geo-strategist—one of the most self-conscious and able in the history of American foreign policy. And Dulles sensed clearly that a stable US-Japan relationship was the vital cornerstone for sustaining a preeminent American role in the Pacific world of the late twentieth century.

Dulles was notably sensitive to Japan, its potential, its vulnerabilities, and their implications for the broader Pacific world, because he had, as a nephew to US Secretary of State Robert Lansing, participated in, and closely observed, the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference, that formally ended World War I. Dulles strongly believed that the victor’s justice imposed on Germany at Versailles destabilized the domestic German political economy, destroyed its middle class, delegitimized the peace settlement itself, and gave rise to the German *revanchisme* that finally led to World War II. A stable Pacific peace, Dulles believed, needed to be based on the rehabilitation of Japan, together with the establishment of intimate security ties

<sup>1</sup> Kent E. Calder. Pacific Defense. New York: William Morrow, 1996; and Kent E. Calder. The New Continentalism: Energy and Twenty-First Century Eurasian Geopolitics. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.

between a revived, self-confident, and prosperous Japan, on one side of the Pacific, and the United States on the other.<sup>2</sup>

As an American geo-strategist, Dulles was also naturally concerned with the future of Japan's relations to continental Asia. He saw containing Sino-Soviet power as being an over-riding objective, which meant reinforcing anti-Communist regimes around the periphery of the continent, beginning with Chiang Kai-shek's Taiwan. Dulles also saw deepened Japanese relations with Southeast Asia as broadly positive, and supported Japanese efforts, especially vigorous under Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke, to conclude bilateral reparations agreements that would pave the way to deeper ties, while collaborating with broader regional development efforts like the Colombo Plan as well.

Dulles did not, quite conspicuously, press actively for the revival of relations between Japan and its immediate neighbors other than Taiwan, including even the strongly anti-Communist Republic of Korea. Indeed, Dulles failed to even propose clarification of Japan's immediate territorial boundaries—in the Sea of Japan, the East China Sea, or between Japan and the southern Kurile islands. He also did not propose the immediate return of Okinawa to Japan. The San Francisco System created by Dulles thus embodied three central implicit dimensions of US Asia strategy during the 1950s: (1) Intimate bilateral US-Japan security cooperation; (2) Support for the economic recovery of Japan; and (3) Ambiguity in Japan's broader relationships with Asia, especially those in the northeast part of the continent. These three features, in combination, reinforced the paramount objective of assuring that the disastrous Versailles experiment in Europe would not be repeated in Asia. The US-Japan alliance was the cornerstone, but by no means the only element in the overall strategic equation.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Evolution of American Asia Strategy and the Changing Relevance of Japan**

In September, 1951, when the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the US-Japan Security Treaty were signed, six hours apart, in San Francisco, the Korean War was raging. Although an armistice was achieved in June, 1953, a peace treaty never transpired, and relations with China—America's primary antagonist in the conflict—were not normalized until 1979. North Korea has continued with an escalating series of provocations, including, just a few weeks ago, an enhanced nuclear weapon and an advanced missile test.

The Korean peninsula has hence been a continuing concern of American Asia strategy ever since the Korean War. In that connection, Japan—as Korea's neighbor-- is naturally a country of central importance. The relevance of Japan and the US-Japan alliance to Korea strategy has changed substantially, however, over the past half century.

Due to Japan's constitutional constraints and the bitter history of Japan-Korea relations, direct Japanese involvement in contingencies on the Korean peninsula has rarely been considered, although retired Japanese mine-sweeping specialists did play a valiant role in aiding the US Marines in their hectic withdrawal from North Korea's Wonsan Harbor during the Korean War. During the Korean War, however, Japan was important as a staging and recuperation area for US forces engaged in the conflict, and served as a critical logistics base, and source of off-shore procurement. Although there fortunately has been no repeat of the Korean conflict, Japan's prospective role in the logistics and re-supply area for contingencies in Northeast Asia has continued to be important, enhanced by the revised US-Japan Defense Guidelines of the 1990s. They broadened the range of facilities prospectively available in Japan to the US military, and the conditions under which access to them would be available.

Evolving technology has significantly changed and expanded the relevance of Japan in connection with Northeast Asian contingencies, beyond the important reserve-area role that Japan played during the Korean War. As SLBM and ASW technology evolved during the Cold War, for example, the Sea of Okhotsk adjacent to Japan became, together with the Barents Sea, a strategically important sea bastion for

<sup>2</sup> On the broad geopolitical logic behind the San Francisco peace settlement, see Kent E. Calder, Pacific Alliance: Reviving US-Japan Relations. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Kent E. Calder, "Securing Security through Prosperity: The San Francisco System in Comparative Perspective", Pacific Review, Volume 17, no. 1, January, 2004, pp. 135-157.

Soviet submarines. China's PLA likewise grew in scale and sophistication in coastal areas adjacent to the East China Sea. The importance of Japan-based monitoring capabilities, by both Japanese and US forces, in areas ranging from Hokkaido to Okinawa was thereby enhanced. The advance of North Korean and Chinese missile technology, together with increasing deployments, has also made missile detection and missile defense subjects of increasing importance to the US-Japan alliance as well, especially over the past decade.

### **Bases and Forward Deployment: A Continuing American Strategic Concern**

As noted earlier, in a world where the Korean peninsula is unstable and where China and Russia are potential adversaries, Japan has natural strategic importance for the United States. Not surprisingly, during the Allied Occupation that followed World War II, the US established extensive basing facilities in Japan. And given the instabilities of Northeast Asia during the 1950s, as well as symbiotic US-Japan defense requirements, it was quite natural that those bases would continue under the Security Treaty, for mutual benefit. Their cost-benefit utility to the United States has been greatly enhanced since the 1970s, it should be noted, by generous Japanese host-nation support (HNS), which covers the bulk of local costs that American forces incur in Japan.<sup>4</sup>

From a US strategic perspective, American bases in Japan have been consistently important since the early Cold War days for several reasons. First of all, they provide ready rear-area support for potential contingencies on the Korean peninsula. Secondly, they offer communications, transport, and logistic facilities, such as Kadena Air Base, that are of much broader global importance. Thirdly, they provide a deployment locale in the western Pacific, where US forces can be inexpensively and conveniently based, and then sent flexibly to far-flung locations of importance to American interests, such as the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan. The US aircraft carrier deployed at Yokosuka, the George Washington, and the Third Marine Expeditionary Corps (III MEF), based in Okinawa, are especially important in this ready-reserve capacity, which has increasingly related to Central Asian and Middle East contingencies, as we shall see.

### **Rising Importance of the Middle East and US Asia Strategy**

When the US-Japan security treaty was concluded in 1951, Korea was in the midst of a bloody conflict, China was under UN embargo, and Southeast Asia remained largely under European colonial rule. The Philippines and Thailand were independent, but Malaysia and Singapore were British colonies, while Indochina was under French occupation. Japan and the United States were alone as major powers in the Pacific; the Korean War and containment of China were the major contingencies, apart from Communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia, that demanded serious security attention.

Security challenges confronting the United States and Japan have multiplied since the early 1950s, as suggested above. And they have emerged in an increasingly trans-national and regionally integrated context. Most importantly, the Middle East has emerged as a region of profound importance to both US Asia strategy and the security of Japan, due particularly to the concentration of energy resources in that region, and their rising importance to Japan.

Beginning in the early 1950s, the Middle East began to gain strategic importance--to both the United States and Japan, although for different reasons in the two cases. For Washington, the birth of Israel in 1948, and the emergence of Saudi oil fields during the Korean War as major sources of off-shore fuel procurement for the US military gave the Middle East region new strategic importance.<sup>5</sup> For Japan, explosive economic growth following the Suez crisis of 1956, and the inadequacy of traditional Southeast Asian energy sources in supplying surging Japanese demand, led to a rising focus on the Middle East, symbolized by the establishment of upstream Japanese oil development operations by Arabian Oil

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<sup>4</sup> On the details, see Kent E. Calder. Embattled Garrisons: Comparative Base Politics and American Globalism. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007

<sup>5</sup> Michael A. Palmer. Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America's Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf. New York: Free Press, 1992.

Corporation in the neutral zone between Kuwait and Saudi Arabia during 1958. Thus, by the end of the 1950s decade, the energy sea lanes from Yokohama to the Persian Gulf were becoming important for Japan, which imported 99 percent of its oil, while the Middle East region as a whole was becoming an area of priority strategic attention for the United States.

Over the ensuing half century, the strategic importance of the Middle East, and especially the Persian Gulf, increased substantially for both Japan and the United States, as Japan's energy imports from the Gulf rapidly expanded, and diversified from oil into liquefied natural gas (LNG) as well. By the early 1990s Japan was importing 70 percent of its oil supplies, and around a quarter of its LNG from the Gulf, and those ratios increased to 85 percent and 30 percent respectively by 2015. For most of the past decade Japan has, despite the moderate growth of its economy, been the largest importer of oil from the Persian Gulf, outpacing a more rapidly growing China with a more diversified import profile.<sup>6</sup>

For Japan, the Gulf and the energy sea lanes have been the concerns of primary importance in the Middle East, due to the heavy Japanese reliance on imported hydrocarbons. American strategic interests have been broader, also giving priority to the security of Israel, and stability in the Levant. Yet both countries share a broad interest in both Middle Eastern regional stability, and also in the security of the energy sea lanes through the East and South China Seas, through the Strait of Malacca and across the Indian Ocean, to the Strait of Hormuz. These common concerns, and complementary capabilities, make the Gulf area a theater where US Asia strategy and the role of the US-Japan alliance could well intersect in future, as I will suggest later in this paper.

### **Shadows: The Vietnam War and China's Rise**

The Middle East is not the only area outside Northeast Asia that has become integral to US Asia strategy in recent years, as the world becomes increasingly interdependent. As a part of Asia itself, Southeast Asia has naturally been important, especially since the late 1950s, when the United States succeeded France as the principal anti-Communist force in Indochina. From 1965 until 1973, in particular, US forces were engaged in intense combat with Vietcong insurgent ground forces in Vietnam itself, while simultaneously waging an extensive air campaign against North Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos, and at times Cambodia as well. Japan was not directly involved militarily, but as in the Korean War served as an important rear-support area, while providing substantial economic assistance to South Vietnam as well.

As the Vietnam War wound down, there were major changes in US Asia strategy, in the form of Richard Nixon's "Vietnamization" policy, with substantial implications for the functional role of Japan in American strategic thinking. China assumed greater importance during the early 1970s, with Henry Kissinger reaching out explicitly to Beijing in an effort to balance the Soviet Union, and simultaneously to ease the American withdrawal from Vietnam. The inevitable casualty in Kissinger's re-definition of American Asia strategy was the formal US relationship with Taiwan, which naturally created apprehensions in Japan as well. Throughout the decade of the 1970s, American Asia strategy, together with conceptualization of Japan's role within that context, were in substantial flux, producing some important changes in the profile of the alliance.<sup>7</sup>

Although the Nixon Administration did take individual policy steps, such as Kissinger's secret diplomacy with China, downsizing of commitments to South Vietnam, and abrupt efforts to reconfigure the global trade and financial regimes, that offended Japan and undermined its interests, it did offset these moves with some efforts at reassurance. Most importantly, it deployed one of America's eleven aircraft carriers, the Midway, to be home-ported in Yokosuka—the first time this had been done outside the United States. Nixon also agreed to the return of Okinawa to Japan, and to major reconfigurations of US bases in Japan, to reduce their environmental and political impact. Nixon also hoped to undertake the first formal state visit of an American President to Japan, realizing an objective that had eluded Eisenhower in

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<sup>6</sup> Kent E. Calder. The United States, Japan, and the Gulf Region. Tokyo: The Sasakawa Peace Foundation, August, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Kent E. Calder. Pacific Alliance. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

1960, although that visit was not realized due to Nixon's 1974 resignation in connection with the Watergate scandal.

The fall of Saigon in April, 1975 forced a major reconsideration of American Asia strategy, rendering Northeast Asia once again more central. China, which had tested nuclear weapons in 1964, and which was beginning to emerge from the Cultural Revolution, was an increasing force to be reckoned with. North Korea was emboldened by Saigon's defeat. And America's long-time allies in Tokyo and Seoul needed reassurance.

Within this new geopolitical context following the fall of Saigon, Japan loomed particularly large for the United States. One quietly expressed but broadly shared concern was that Japan, unsettled by a declining US presence in Asia, as well as the rising capabilities of China and the Soviet Union, might move in a more "Gaullist" direction that potentially could include nuclear weapons. Tokyo, after all, had signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty in 1970, but had not, until 1976, actually ratified.<sup>8</sup>

US Asia strategy in the mid-1970s thus necessarily included a defensive dimension—the shoring up of existing alliances, to reinforce their credibility and prevent their political erosion. With respect to Japan, this involved the new homeporting of the Midway, as indicated earlier, and efforts to reduce opposition to US bases in mainland Japan through large-scale redeployment to Okinawa. In late 1974, President Gerald Ford made the first state visit of an American President to Japan. And President Jimmy Carter agreed to a Japanese proposal to locate a nuclear-reprocessing facility at Rokkasho in Japan—an agreement ratified in the strategically important "1-2-3 agreement" of 1978, which gave credibility, through the closed fuel cycle, to Japan's shadow nuclear option.

Another important dimension of US Asia strategy, directed toward re-assuring the important ally that Japan had become, was constraining potential competitors elsewhere in the region. South Korea, in particular, was also apparently exploring nuclear options that both Japan and the United States regarded as unsettling.<sup>9</sup> On White House instruction, US Ambassador to Korea Philip Habib reportedly put strong pressure on President Park Chung Hee, leading Korea to abandon its covert nuclear program, and to Japan's reaffirmation of its own non-nuclear stance.

### **The Indian Ocean, US Asia Strategy, and the US-Japan Alliance**

Among the most striking transformations of the past half century in US Asia strategy has been the changing evaluation of the Indian Ocean, and the rising American capabilities to assure its defense. As late as the 1950s, US warships spent little time in Indian Ocean waters, considered to be a preserve of the British, and lacked systematic capabilities for continuous communication with the Pentagon.<sup>10</sup> The US perceived only limited security interests in South Asia, Africa, or even most of the Middle East.

Over the 1960s, as we have noted, Japan gained substantial geo-economic interests in the energy sea lanes between the Gulf and Yokohama, although American strategic interests temporarily lagged behind. In the wake of the Vietnam War, however, acute strategists such as Navy Secretary Paul Nitze recognized the prospective future importance of the region as a staging area in the event of Middle East contingencies. Nitze himself far-sighted pressed for the establishment of a major US air and naval base at Diego Garcia, a small atoll 2700 miles southeast of the Persian Gulf that was part of the British Indian Ocean Territory. Nitze's proposal was strongly opposed in Congress by Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, later Ambassador to Japan, on the grounds that the US should avoid expanded foreign entanglements in the wake of Vietnam, but Nitze carried the day.

The new base at Diego Garcia proved to be a crucial support facility, flexibly aiding US power projection in the Gulf conflicts of the 1990s and beyond. Under the jurisdiction of the US Pacific Command (PACOM), whose area of operating responsibility extends to the east coast of Africa, Diego

<sup>88</sup> Isaac Shapiro, "The Risen Sun: Japanese Gaullism?", *Foreign Policy*, no. 41, Winter, 1980-1981, pp. 62-81.

<sup>9</sup> See Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, Basic Books, 2013

<sup>10</sup> Kent E. Calder, *Embattled Garrisons: Comparative Base Politics and American Globalism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007

also became a locus for potential cooperation between the United States and its Pacific allies. Due to the economic importance of the energy sea lanes between Northeast Asia and the Gulf, Indian Ocean-based military facilities and capabilities have unusual shared importance for the US, Japan, Korea, Australia, and potentially India as well.

### **US Asia Strategy and China's Transformation**

China's economy has expanded steadily since the early 1980s, often in double digits, and Chinese defense spending has risen with it. Nominal Chinese defense spending, at less than a quarter of American levels<sup>11</sup>, still remains low relative to the US, but it dwarfs that elsewhere, and is growing rapidly. Many observers also feel that without purchasing-power parity evaluations such Chinese spending is grossly understated by conventional measures.

Whatever the precise level of Chinese defense spending, the mild American reaction to the rise of a potential peer competitor does seem paradoxical when viewed against the backdrop of America's longstanding paranoia about the Soviet Union and its successors. Washington's relatively benign response to China's rise is, however, quite explicable in historical terms. Deng Xiaoping visited Washington soon after Beijing's normalization of relations with the United States in 1979, and quickly gained credence as a market-oriented reformer and a Cold War ally against Moscow. That consciousness of Beijing as an ally against a more malevolent Russia continued until the Tiananmen massacre of 1989, and in diluted form, within the Bush administration, until the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991. After a rough period of adjustment during the early Clinton years, the US and China resumed positive ties that continued, with few interruptions, through the administration of George W. Bush, and into the late Obama years.<sup>12</sup> Only in the past few years, following China's ADIZ air defense zone claims, and its assertive efforts in the South and East China Seas, has US Asia strategy become markedly more critical of China. And that skepticism is moderated by the recognition that the US, as a global power, needs China's cooperation on a broad range of questions that obviate the merits of confrontation on any one.

Recent evidence suggests that China's own grand strategy has changed markedly since the advent of the Xi Jinping administration—from a relatively modest set of regional concerns, to a much more ambitious global agenda. This is viewed increasingly in Washington as attempting to marginalize the United States and circumscribe its global leadership role. The new “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) approach—of forging ambitious geo-economic links both across Eurasia by land and around Eurasia by sea—seems to be a highly proactive one, that involves coopting American allies in both Europe and Asia to China's advantage. Many Americans are thus coming to view OBOR in an increasingly skeptical light, although American Asia strategy has yet to respond to it systematically.

Despite some rising skepticism about Chinese strategy, and its implications for the United States, the sense of challenge from China cannot compare with sentiments during the Cold War toward the Soviet Union, or even toward Putin's Russia today. This is partly due to widespread doubts in the United States about the sustainability of Chinese economic growth, intensified by extreme volatility in Chinese financial markets, and the huge recent outflows of capital from China, formal and informal, which reportedly totaled \$1 trillion in 2015. The heavy dependence of US multinationals on China as a source of supply (Walmart alone imports close to \$30 billion annually of goods from China), and the importance of the China market to exporters like Apple, Boeing, and Caterpillar, likewise also dilute anti-China sentiment. The sheer scale of recent trade imbalances, together with evidence of systematic cyber-theft, and infringement of democratic freedoms, do, however, create a persistent undertone of antipathy. That could easily devolve into more serious conflict were the political winds in either or both countries to shift.

<sup>11</sup> IISS calculates 2015 US defense spending as being \$597.5 billion, that in China as \$145.8 billion, and that in Japan as \$41.0 billion. See International Institute for Strategic Studies. The Military Balance, 2016 edition. London: IISS, 2016, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> On the evolution of US-China relations over the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, see James Mann. About Face: A History of America's Curious Relations with China from Nixon to Clinton. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999.

Such political shifts, together with changing circumstances on the ground, could lead to a shift in US Asia strategy as well, although such a shift has not been clearly discernable as yet.

### **Emerging U.S. Strategic Concerns**

As noted throughout this paper, US strategic concerns with respect to Japan and the US-Japan alliance have evolved substantially from the days of the Korean War, when Japan's principal importance, from a US standpoint, was as a staging area and source of off-shore procurements. As the Japanese economy has grown and become more technically sophisticated, Japanese host nation support for US facilities in Japan has become indispensable. Meanwhile, Japanese foreign assistance has also become important to strategic US allies like the Philippines, and strategic non-aligned nations with whom Japan maintains friendly ties, such as Vietnam and Indonesia as well. Since the 1980s the collaborative activities of Japanese and US firms, in defense production as well as research and development, have likewise intensified.

With the advent of the Abe administration in late 2012 and new arm export principles in early 2014, followed by new legislation supportive of collective self-defense during 2015, Japan's capacity to cooperate with US strategic aspirations in Asia is clearly expanding. The question is how this relates to American strategic designs. The Obama administration declared a "pivot", later re-defined as a "rebalancing" toward Asia. This did involve substantial new commitments to Asia, including an announcement that 60 percent of US Navy assets would be deployed in the Pacific by 2020.<sup>13</sup>

The rebalancing announcements were relatively vague, however, in their initial application to Northeast Asia. Most public definitions spoke of "maintaining" capacities in the Northeast, with "augmentation" coming mainly in Southeast and South Asia, relating to the energy sea lanes and counter-terrorism. The one significant new deployment of US forces announced was of 2500 Marines to be rotated through a new facility in Darwin, Australia.<sup>14</sup>

The deepening North Korean nuclear and missile threat of the last few years, however, has provoked renewed priority to strengthened US capabilities in Japan and Korea. The US has, for example, announced an intention to deploy a second sophisticated surveillance radar in Japan to track North Korean missiles, together with ground-based interceptors. With collective self-defense now formally legitimate in Japan, and with the North Korean missile threat rising, US-Japan missile defense cooperation will likely be a priority topic for the two countries in coming years, just as THAAD cooperation is becoming a serious issue in US-Korea defense negotiations as well.

Defense of the energy sea lanes between Japan and the Persian Gulf, including the strategically important East and South China Seas, takes on a new dimension with the introduction of collective self-defense, and this could well have a place in emerging US strategy. Japan and the United States share a strong interest in the stability of nations in the "arc of crisis" surrounding Saudi Arabia, including important nations such as Oman and Egypt where conflict is not occurring but where stability is precarious. Oman would seem a particularly strategic candidate for deepened bilateral support, given its location on the Strait of Hormuz, its membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council, and its stable relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. Oman could be an ideal location for deepened Japanese security involvement, especially given Japan's strong mine-sweeping capabilities and Oman's location.<sup>15</sup>

The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review, and other recent explications of US strategy, stress a rebalancing of American capabilities, not only geographically, but also for a broader spectrum of conflict.<sup>16</sup> This is said to mandate the strengthening of capacities in such areas as robotics, cyber-security,

<sup>13</sup> US Department of Defense. Quadrennial Defense Review 2014. Washington, D.C.: US Department of Defense, 2014, : <http://archive.defense.gov>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> On this topic, see Kent E. Calder. The US, Japan, and the Gulf Region. Tokyo: The Sasakawa Peace Foundation, August, 2015

<sup>16</sup> US Department of Defense. Quadrennial Defense Review 2014, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, March 2014.

and directed-energy weapons. The Pentagon is said to be looking particularly for innovative ideas outside defense, that help develop disruptive technologies in the security realm, much as advances in optoelectronics and guidance systems led to cruise missiles and other stand-off weaponry that proved so effective in the Gulf War a quarter century ago. This could be an area where US strategy meshes closely with the capabilities of the US-Japan alliance in future years.

### **In Conclusion**

Asia was a concern for US grand strategy long before the US-Japan Security Treaty was signed in September, 1951. America played a key role in opening Asia to the broader world, with Perry's voyages to Japan in 1853-54; with the subsequent opening of Korea; and with John Hay's advocacy of the Open Door in 1900. For the first half century after Perry's black ships arrived, US-Japan relations were generally good, with the US providing important technical assistance to Japan's development. As the US and Japan established their own concrete geopolitical interests and ideological priorities in Asia after 1900, however, they came into deepening confrontation, leading ultimately to the Pacific War. The lack of communication channels and institutions to stabilize their ties were no doubt one key reason for the volatility that emerged in the trans-Pacific relationship.

With the conclusion of the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the related US-Japan Security Treaty in 1951, US Asia strategy and the US-Japan alliance came to be closely related. Japan was important as a rear-area support base and source of off-shore procurements for US forces in the Korean conflict. Following the war, an increasingly prosperous Japan also became a source of assistance to the non-Communist nations of Southeast Asia in their development. Both through its assistance to Southeast Asia and its restraint in reviving traditional economic ties with China, Japan supported America's priority strategic goal in Asia of China-containment, while providing an alternate developmental model as well. During the Vietnam War, Japan continued to support American efforts to contain Communism in the Asian region, with substantial economic aid to South Vietnam, and rear-area support to the United States as well.

Following the fall of Saigon, Japan came to relate to American strategic concerns in new and different ways. Nuclear non-proliferation within the region became an American priority, and the two countries reached an accommodation, following US recognition of Japan's nuclear reprocessing program, together with Washington's successful efforts to stop South Korea's covert nuclear development activities. North Korea's subsequent testing of nuclear weapons and steady development of delivery systems have generated concern throughout the region, and have made coherent response a priority objective for the US-Japan alliance, as for South Korea as well.

During the 1980s and 1990s the Persian Gulf became a major strategic concern of American policy. Although it did not dispatch forces to the Gulf of its own, Japan supported that US objective through massive, \$13 billion financial support for the Allied effort in the Gulf War of 1991, while also tacitly accepting the dispatch of Japan-based US forces, for which Japan provided major host-nation support, to participate in the conflict. Those forces included a Japan-based aircraft carrier, as well as major units of the Third MEF Marine Corps Expeditionary Corps.

In recent years, US strategy has rebalanced from the Middle East to Asia geographically, and simultaneously rebalanced toward a broader spectrum of conflict, including counter-terrorism and cyber-security among its priority concerns. North Korea and China have remained ongoing concerns, but technology has become an area of increasing emphasis. This has created an important new avenue for US-Japan cooperation consistent with major US strategic priorities, even as the introduction of collective self-defense, and the legitimization of defense exports, have created new areas for political-military cooperation as well.