

Deterring without Dominance: Discouraging Chinese Adventurism under Austerity

Even as events in Iraq, Syria, and Ukraine have captured the attention of U.S. foreign policy elites, the United States faces key questions about its military position in Asia. In the face of growing Chinese power, can the United States continue to provide a credible deterrent in Asia without either bankrupting itself or pursuing risky strategies that raise new questions about crisis stability? While other security issues remain important, none will have a more fundamental effect on the U.S. military budget or the way the United States does business overseas.

Basic precepts of U.S. foreign and security policy are under debate. Notable commentators have recently argued that U.S. forward defenses in Asia are no longer viable and that the United States should transition to a less engaged strategy of “offshore balancing.” Others have countered that the right combination of new technologies and offensive systems might yet restore U.S. dominance. While we welcome the new debate, neither of the most prominent alternative approaches is advisable. The United States requires a new strategy, one that does more to assure U.S. partners than offshore balancing but that is also affordable and does not rely on a vulnerable hair-trigger offensive posture.

Fortunately, the United States could realize such a strategy, though it would require significant diplomatic efforts as well as a variety of military adjustments.

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What we label an “active denial strategy” would maintain a forward presence but be oriented toward denying an opponent the benefits of military aggression, rather than trying to ensure a decisive defeat. The strategy would have three primary features: first, a resilient force posture and the exploitation of strategic depth; second, a focus on combat against offensive maneuver forces instead of strikes against home territories; and third, leveraging the capabilities of allies and partners.

Active denial aligns well with the status quo nature of U.S. interests.

This active denial strategy aligns well with the status quo nature of U.S. interests and provides a cost-effective deterrent that would reduce rather than increase the incentives for pre-emption during crises. What follows is an outline of the challenges facing U.S. diplomats and commanders in Asia, the state of the debate on U.S. military strategy today, and an alternative to current options that offers a better combination of attributes.

Eroding U.S. Dominance

In the mid-1990s, the United States enjoyed dominance vis-à-vis China in nearly all military domains (i.e., air, maritime, space, cyber, and nuclear). Since then, sustained economic growth has enabled China to rapidly modernize its armed forces. China’s defense budget grew by roughly 640 percent (adjusted for inflation) between 1996 and 2014, and Beijing will reportedly raise spending by another ten percent (before inflation) in 2015.¹ The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) lags behind the U.S. military in most qualitative measures, but it has narrowed the gap across virtually all military domains. More importantly, in the event of conflict it would enjoy geographic advantages that would largely offset many U.S. strengths.

The PLA has developed “counter-intervention” capabilities that would exacerbate the problems posed by geography. These capabilities—labeled anti-access, area denial (A2/AD) by U.S. defense analysts—would make it difficult for the United States to deploy to, and operate in, conflict areas. A large inventory of accurate ballistic and cruise missiles, a growing fleet of modern submarines, sophisticated air defense systems, as well as counterspace and electronic warfare capabilities, all combine to complicate U.S. intervention. Together with modern combat aircraft and surface ships, China can challenge U.S. military dominance at an increasing distance from the Chinese coast.²

The ability of accurate ballistic and cruise missiles to threaten air bases, ports, command-and-control nodes, and aircraft carriers poses a particular challenge to U.S. operations.³ Today, China's inventory of conventionally-armed missiles includes roughly 1,200 short-range ballistic missiles, roughly 100 medium-range ballistic missiles, and hundreds of long-range cruise missiles. The short-range ballistic missiles are focused on Taiwan, but the medium-range ballistic missiles and ground-launched cruise missiles can threaten locations throughout Japan and the northern Philippines. Furthermore, China is building more of these weapons and developing conventional ballistic missiles that could reach Guam.⁴

Improvements to quality have been as significant as the increase in number, and these missiles now pose a real threat to critical point targets on airbases and other key facilities. Accurate missiles equipped with submunition warheads could wipe out aircraft on the ground or shut down airbases to U.S. and allied air operations for days or potentially weeks.

Threats to U.S. carrier-based airpower have also increased in magnitude and multiplied in form. The Chinese DF-21D land-based anti-ship ballistic missile, the first of its kind anywhere in the world, has attracted particular attention.⁵ While a novel threat, China would likely need to fire salvos of them to account for uncertainties in target location and the reliability of the missile itself. Furthermore, the DF-21D depends upon a supporting network of sensors and command and control links that might themselves be disrupted. Arguably a more immediate and certain threat is the modernization of China's submarines. Two decades ago, China possessed only antiquated boats based on 1950s designs. They were noisy, had limited range, and were exclusively armed with torpedoes. Today, modern designs comprise roughly half of China's submarine force. These new boats are faster, quieter, and armed with cruise missiles as well as torpedoes, giving them an ability to attack at longer ranges.

In addition to the increasing size and quality of its missile and submarine forces, China has developed a sophisticated long-range integrated air defense system. China now deploys roughly 700 modern fighter aircraft (categorized as 4th-generation fighters by U.S. analysts). It also includes surveillance radars, airborne warning and control aircraft, and modern long-range surface-to-air missile systems such as the Russian-built SA-20. Over the past twenty years, this expanding network (concentrated on China's east coast) has created a growing volume of airspace within which it would be dangerous to operate during a conflict.

To be sure, the United States enjoys a number of strengths and advantages. The training and operational capabilities of U.S. personnel, honed over decades of active deployments, remain unparalleled. The U.S. military has operated

stealth aircraft (now including 5th-generation fighters) for decades, while China is still developing its first models. The United States currently operates ten nuclear-powered aircraft carriers—this will increase to eleven in 2016 when the USS *Gerald R. Ford* enters service—as well as nine large amphibious assault ships capable of launching fixed-wing aircraft. China, on the other hand, recently commissioned its first aircraft carrier, its only vessel capable of launching fixed-wing aircraft.⁶

The point is not that Chinese forces are a match for those of the United States aircraft-for-aircraft or ship-for-ship. Rather, the improvement of Chinese capabilities, combined with the specific advantages conveyed by geography, would challenge the ability of U.S. commanders to gain air and naval superiority at the outset of a conflict. The U.S. Air Force's peacetime posture in East Asia includes only eight fighter squadrons spread across a handful of regional airbases, all under threat from ballistic and cruise missile attack. Chinese aircraft, on the other hand, operate from dozens of far more secure locations. U.S. forces would necessarily rely on space-based communications, while China could employ more robust ground-based systems. U.S. reinforcements would flow from bases located anywhere from 5,000 to 9,000 miles distant, while Chinese units could deploy directly into battle. Such are the advantages of geography, or the "tyranny of distance."

In an extended war, U.S. forces would almost certainly defeat the PLA, but not without suffering serious losses. The prospect of the United States prevailing in a protracted war may be sufficient to deter China even in the absence of all-aspects dominance. But deterrence is a function of perception, and much remains unknown about how China might view the balance of political and military forces in a crisis. Chinese leaders might overestimate their own military capacity. Alternatively, they might believe that the asymmetry of national interests at stake, combined with the likely costs of war, might dissuade the United States from entering a conflict, even if the PLA could not win outright.

Since the end of the Cold War, military dominance has freed U.S. strategists from the need to consider deterrence as a problem

separate and distinct from military advantage. Military dominance, and the ability to decisively defeat potential opponents instead of simply denying them their war aims, is generally a sufficient condition for deterrence. But as U.S. thinking on conventional deterrence during the Cold War indicates, dominance is not a necessary condition for deterrence. As the military challenges posed by China grow, and the United States faces new resource constraints, the time is ripe to revisit deterrence.

Dominance is not a necessary condition for deterrence.

The Current Deterrence Debate

The challenges posed by a shifting global economic and military balance of power have prompted increased debate about U.S. grand strategy and military doctrine. The discussion revolves around whether the United States should continue to pursue deep engagement, committing its prestige and military forces to the resolution of even small disputes, or whether it should adopt a strategy of offshore balancing and engage more selectively.⁷ Advocates of the latter suggest that strategic restraint would acknowledge the limits of U.S. economic power and encourage partners to contribute a greater share of cost in their own defense. While offshore balancing calls for the biggest changes to U.S. policy in Europe and the Middle East, it would nevertheless lighten the U.S. footprint in Asia.

Related to the ongoing discussion of U.S. grand strategy is the debate over military strategy for Asia, including both how forces should be postured during peacetime and how they should fight in the event of conflict. Notwithstanding the shift in economic power eastward and the importance of Asia to the United States, the debate on regional military strategy remains underdeveloped. One pole in the debate focuses on restoring all-aspects dominance for U.S. forces to conduct a robust forward defense.⁸ The other pole, typically called “offshore control,” focuses on Chinese economic vulnerabilities. Advocates would employ the threat of blockade to deter China, and, in the event of war, to coerce Chinese capitulation.⁹ Each of these strategies faces challenges.

Advocates of restoring all-aspects dominance recognize that current U.S. force posture in Asia relies on a small set of forces permanently deployed forward in areas very close to the Chinese mainland. To maintain freedom of action in the face of Chinese counter-intervention capabilities, U.S. forces would have to degrade and destroy adversary strike capabilities early in a conflict. In order to do this, they would likely have to penetrate Chinese defenses and attack key targets on the mainland such as radar sites, command-and-control facilities, and ballistic missile storage locations. If successful, this strategy could restore decisive U.S. advantage at the outset of a conflict.

There are two problems in this approach. One is cost. The most explicit and detailed proposal for restoring dominance has come from the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments.¹⁰ The study offers a vision of AirSea Battle, an operational concept for defeating China’s anti-access and area denial capabilities. It includes a long list of highly sophisticated and technologically ambitious systems that would likely prove prohibitively expensive.¹¹ The long-range strike bomber program alone is projected to cost \$55 billion, even assuming no cost overruns.¹² A second objection has to do with the impact on crisis stability. Should the United States procure the offensive systems under

More forward deployment of offensive systems could give both sides greater incentives to strike first.

discussion and maintain its current forces roughly in their present positions, both China and the United States would have high incentives to strike first during a crisis. With highly capable systems based within each other's offensive envelopes, both sides might be locked into a precarious and unstable use-it-or-lose-it dilemma, where the temptation to preempt would be high.

While an enhanced (and offensively-oriented) forward defense strategy has been widely

criticized on economic and stability grounds, few have offered viable alternatives. One exception has been the idea of offshore control. Advocates of offshore control argue that because China is vulnerable to maritime blockade, Beijing might be deterred from adventurism by U.S. naval power based in the Indian Ocean and around the exits from the South and East China Sea. U.S. blockade forces, operating outside the range of China's most threatening capabilities (such as its conventionally armed ballistic and cruise missiles), would enable the United States to dictate the pace, scope, and termination of a conflict. This strategy seeks to place China on the horns of a dilemma: either it must sortie its forces beyond the reach of its counter-intervention capabilities and fight at a disadvantage, or accept painful economic dislocation during a conflict. A blockade could take different forms. Some argue it should focus on restricting energy imports to China and others argue that it should restrict critical raw materials more generally.

While offshore control has several features to recommend it, it also suffers from a number of risks and dangers. Most importantly, it effectively abandons the defense of key allies and partners: Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan would likely fall outside the zone of U.S. operations. If leaders in these states were entirely confident of the U.S. commitment to fight on and re-conquer lost territory—or to press a blockade until China collapsed—then reassurance might hold. But allied leaders are far more likely to see practical impediments. They will question the credibility of the U.S. commitment to persist in a blockade after China had already achieved its operational goals.

Asian states remain incapable of filling the void in conventional forces that a U.S. withdrawal would create. Thus, they might either bandwagon with China or seek to balance against it. Given the imbalance in resources between China and other regional actors, some could see pursuing nuclear weapons as a reasonable course, with serious repercussions for regional stability. Japan has long held that weaponizing its considerable stocks of plutonium and pursuing an indigenous nuclear weapons option are not advisable as long as U.S. extended deterrence remains credible. But the discussion of nuclear weapons there is no

longer taboo. Similarly, in South Korea, North Korea's nuclear programs have prompted increased public interests in nuclear weapons. A shift towards reliance on blockade would almost certainly undermine the credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent and prompt more serious consideration of nuclear weapons in both countries.¹³

Offshore control is also likely to offer a weaker conventional deterrent. By offering China a chance at a *fait accompli*, the strategy might—under certain circumstances—tempt it to seize that opportunity. Leaders in China might hope that once they had gained their objective, they could begin focusing their efforts on deescalating the crisis. World opinion, fearing a major war between nuclear-armed powers, might pressure the United States to negotiate with China rather than fighting to return regional borders to their *status quo ante bellum*.

Were there no military alternative to offshore control, it might be more appealing than forward defense. However, a viable option does exist. An active denial strategy would, unlike offshore control, provide for the effective direct defense of allies without requiring the escalation risks of a forward defense.

An Active Denial Strategy

An active denial strategy seeks to deter Chinese adventurism by maintaining a capability to refuse China the benefits of military aggression. This is different than maintaining all-aspects dominance. Dominance is fast becoming prohibitively expensive and may well be inadvisable when confronting a nuclear-armed great power. Instead, active denial involves both defending the territory of U.S. allies and partners as well as making retaliatory strikes against Chinese combat forces involved in offensive operations. The active denial strategy differs from the offshore control strategy by meeting Chinese aggression directly, thereby making it more difficult for China to achieve a *fait accompli*. Unlike the alternative approaches outlined earlier, active denial offers a broad strategy that includes many branch options for a U.S. president.

There are three mutually-reinforcing components of the active denial strategy. The first is resilient U.S. combat power, capable of surviving a pre-emptive Chinese strike; this will require a portfolio of adjustments to survivability and deployment patterns. The second is capabilities optimized for attacking Chinese forces directly engaged in offensive operations such as amphibious ships, aircraft, and landed forces. And the third is bolstering and leveraging the capabilities of allies and partners. The

A resilient posture, counterattack capability, and enhanced alliances are key to this denial strategy.

United States should assist partners in improving their defensive capabilities (create mini-A2/AD bubbles) as well as fully using the geographic advantages offered by partner states.

A Resilient Force

Surviving a pre-emptive Chinese strike requires that U.S. forces be resilient in the face of Chinese attacks. This includes a portfolio of measures including hardening airbase facilities; dispersing aircraft and other critical assets; repositioning missile defenses; employing camouflage and concealment, electronic warfare, and rapid repair capabilities; as well as developing procedures and training for fighting under attack. Making aircraft carriers and air bases operationally resilient introduces risk into Chinese military options by denying the PLA confidence in its ability to suppress U.S. air power.

Dispersal can take two forms. On-base dispersal spreads aircraft, maintenance equipment, and fuel supplies around a given base and minimizes the amount of damage that a single arriving weapon can do. Theater-level dispersal spreads aircraft across more locations in order to minimize the impact of losing any single location. U.S. Marine Corps concepts for distributed operations using the short takeoff and vertical landing F-35B from improvised bases offer an extreme example of theater-level dispersal. The Marines have also demonstrated their capability to operate conventional fighters from expeditionary airfields, for example during the 2012 Geiger Fury exercise held on the island of Tinian in the Northern Marianas. In a similar vein, the U.S. Air Force has developed a “Rapid Raptor” concept for quickly deploying F-22 fighters to austere locations for short periods. Dispersal will stress combat support capacity, likely requiring Army support for key enablers such as logistics, security forces, and combat engineers. All of these dispersal concepts would complicate Chinese targeting and offer survivability benefits.

In addition to dispersal, the operational resilience portfolio will need to include some hardening of key facilities (air bases, command-and-control centers, and ports). Hardening key nodes at those facilities (e.g., communications, fuel storage, and aircraft) can be a cost-effective way to mitigate vulnerabilities. This could involve reinforcing existing buildings with steel or concrete or constructing new bunkers and underground facilities (if local geography permits). However, attempting to make entire facilities invulnerable is prohibitively costly, and probably unrealistic. Therefore, hardening efforts must pursue cost-effective ways of protecting critical capabilities.

U.S. forces would come under the most intense attacks at the start of a conflict. Consequently, a resilient force posture would seek to exploit U.S. strategic depth in Asia. At the outset, relatively more U.S. forces might be deployed at a distance

from China, rather than being concentrated overwhelmingly in China's immediate periphery as they are today. Long-range bombers flying from lower threat areas, in conjunction with submarines firing cruise missiles, could provide a great deal of U.S. combat power during the opening phase of a conflict. Resilient air bases and carriers near conflict areas will generate sorties to support these other assets, and will become a primary means of attack as adversary surveillance capabilities are diminished and missiles inventories exhausted.

Missile defenses (such as Navy ships armed with SM-3 interceptors and the Army's Patriot air defense system) can intercept some portion of incoming ballistic missiles. These capabilities are far from perfect but they can reduce the number of missiles that could reach defended aircraft carriers and bases, forcing an adversary to expend more missiles to achieve its goals and drawing down its finite quiver of ballistic missiles more quickly. In the future, directed energy systems might augment these layered defenses.¹⁴ Camouflage, concealment, and deception could complicate China's ability to locate U.S. forces. A final component of the resilience portfolio lies in rapid repair capabilities. The U.S. Air Force recently demonstrated a rapid runway repair capability able to fill dozens of craters in an air base's runways and taxiways in eight hours.¹⁵

In the event of a conflict, this resilience portfolio would multiply targets and confuse PLA planners, thereby minimizing the damage that a Chinese attack could do and enabling U.S. forces to rapidly rebound from what damage did occur. Although U.S. forces would initially be deployed in greater depth than they are today, resilience would not require ceding ground to China from the outset. Some U.S. forces would remain in areas close to China during peacetime and at the outset of a conflict. And as the war progressed, the resilient force posture would permit U.S. forces to shift their center of gravity back towards the Chinese mainland.

Countering Attacking Forces

A robust ability to counter Chinese power projection will require another portfolio of capabilities. The United States must be prepared to counter power projection in three domains: naval forces, air power, and landed forces. The strategy focuses on defeating PLA assets beyond China's shores, rather than on striking mainland targets.

In countering Chinese naval forces, U.S. submarines will continue to have a significant advantage over Chinese anti-submarine warfare capabilities. But U.S. submarines have capacity limitations both in how many torpedoes each carries and how many submarines can operate in a given area. In addition to submarines, the military will need an expanded inventory of joint long-range anti-ship missiles. Integrating such missiles on U.S. Air Force aircraft will expand anti-surface warfare capacity. Land-based anti-ship cruise missiles, either

operated by the Army or by U.S. allies, could also play a role, as could modern anti-ship mines. Expanding the ability to air-deliver mines from stand-off ranges would give the U.S. military additional flexibility and free up other high-demand assets such as submarines.

In countering Chinese air power, the first line of defense would be provided by U.S. aircraft from aircraft carriers and resilient ground bases working in conjunction with allied air forces. Air defenses, in the form of U.S. Navy air defense destroyers and cruisers or land-based air defenses such as the Patriot system, could provide a second line of defense. Allies and partners could contribute to this second line of defense with their own assets. These could be bolstered by foreign military sales facilitated by the United States and possibly by Japan, which has recently relaxed its ban on arms exports.

To defeat landed forces, a combination of capabilities would again be required. Many of the same weapons needed to attack adversary surface warfare groups could be used to interdict amphibious forces before they reached land. A suite of weapons could be used against beachheads, including air-delivered weapons optimized to attack ground forces (such as cluster munitions and sensor-fused weapons), naval fires (land-attack missiles and, in the future, perhaps rail guns), and ground-based fires (including artillery, multiple-launch rocket systems, and anti-tank guided missiles). The ultimate means of reducing Chinese ground forces is through land power, ideally that of a partner or ally but potentially with U.S. support.

Leveraging Allied Strengths

The third component of a denial strategy is buttressing allied strengths and capitalizing on partner geography. One possibility is to assist allies and partners in creating their own A2/AD zones equipped with air defenses, anti-ship cruise missiles, mines, and sensor networks. By focusing on defensive weapons, the effort would seek to make U.S. partners and allies dangerous porcupines whose capabilities would only be a threat to an aggressor seeking to change the status quo. A second important facet will be improving partners' ability to operate with U.S. forces. Measures could include combined training exercises, data sharing procedures, military advisors, embedded liaisons, and prepositioned supplies to enable U.S. forces to rapidly deploy into the country.

During peacetime, the sales of key defensive systems and combined training exercises will demonstrate the challenges China would face if it attempted to change the status quo through force. Increasing the scope and frequency of exercises would also improve familiarity between the United States and its partners, enabling them to operate together better should deterrence fail. The April 2014 agreement with the Philippines regarding an expanded U.S.

rotational presence is an important step in deepening contact between the U.S. military and key allies and partners.¹⁶

Shifting the Cost-Exchange Ratio

All three elements of the denial strategy are designed to turn the tyranny of distance on its head, or at least to neutralize the most significant disadvantages posed by geography. China can, and likely will, build power projection forces (i.e. longer-range missiles, aerial tankers, longer-range bombers, and improved satellite-based communications and surveillance) to challenge the United States farther from its coast. But these systems will begin to place China on the losing side of cost-exchange ratios. The two-stage missiles required to strike targets beyond roughly 1,000 kilometers are more expensive than single-stage systems, and all other things equal, doubling the range of a bomber roughly doubles its cost. In summary, the resiliency measures described above make U.S. forces less lucrative targets against which China would have to launch more expensive missiles and bombers. If executed correctly, this strategy would proliferate targets more quickly and more cheaply than China could add to its missile inventory.

The denial strategy is designed to turn the tyranny of distance on its head.

On the U.S. side, although many of the capabilities required for an active denial strategy would be provided by legacy systems (such as *Virginia*-class attack submarines and long-range cruise missiles carried by B-52 and B-1 bombers) some new or expanded capabilities would be required. Improving the resilience of air bases and the survivability of aircraft carriers would require new spending in areas such as electronic warfare, rapid repair capabilities, and hardening. The most expensive element would likely be missile defenses with, for example, a single SM-3 interceptor costing approximately \$10 million.¹⁷

Although some new capabilities would be required under an active denial strategy, their total costs would be far less than those associated with a strategy aimed at restoring all-aspects dominance. Moreover, the strategy would probably not require an increase in the overall defense budget. Curtailing investment in conventional prompt global strike and reducing the F-35 buy, which would become less critical under a strategy that does not depend on penetrating Chinese mainland air defenses, are savings that could pay for the active denial strategy. As of 2013, the total acquisition cost of the F-35 program was estimated at over \$320 billion (in 2012 dollars).¹⁸ The F-35 will still be a key U.S. Air Force capability, and one that is critical for air superiority, but fewer of

these aircraft would be required under a strategy predicated on a dynamic defense-in-depth, or active denial strategy.

Bolstering Deterrence under Austerity

U.S. force posture in Asia—especially the overwhelming concentration of manpower and materiel in a few vulnerable bases in Japan and Korea—is largely a product of historical legacy. Specifically, it is a product of the Second World War and the occupation of Japan; of the Korean War and the division of the peninsula; and of the Soviet Cold War challenge to Northeast Asia. Similarly, the very thin presence outside of Northeast Asia is a function of limited U.S. strategic interest and opportunity elsewhere in East Asia after the Vietnam War. To highlight the legacy aspect of U.S. force posture is not to indict recent U.S. leadership. The balance of power has shifted with extraordinary speed over the last two decades. Few strategic policies are cut new from whole cloth, and change is difficult and risky.

Nevertheless, the current U.S. force posture in Asia does not address the primary challenges we face today. Doubling down on the current force posture by acquiring the offensive systems necessary to strike quickly at the outset of a conflict to reassert U.S. dominance, as some have advocated, is both unaffordable and unlikely to succeed. The capabilities necessary to pursue such a course could undermine stability by contributing to growing incentives for both sides to strike first in the event of crisis. At the same time, however, moving to an “offshore control” strategy is no more advisable. Such an approach would profoundly undermine confidence in U.S. security assurances, causing strategic instability of another sort. Ultimately, the United States should move towards a more resilient strategy, one that will reassure allies, provide numerous options to a U.S. president, and can be adjusted over time as conditions demand.

Active denial would make the U.S. position in Asia more resilient.

Students of conventional deterrence have long noted a number of difficulties in dissuading challengers, but most agree on one principle: in a crisis involving a state looking to overturn the status quo, deterrence is most likely to fail when a predictable and quick victory appears possible.¹⁹ Undermining confidence in a quick victory, as well as increasing the number and types of risks

inherent in military action, enhances deterrence. By making the U.S. position in Asia more resilient, diversifying the manner in which the United States can deliver combat power to blunt offensive forces, and bolstering the defensive

capabilities of partners and allies, an active denial strategy would diminish Chinese prospects for quick victory.

At the same time, the active denial strategy would ease the urgency and requirement for early U.S. offensive action; in other words, it would also reduce U.S. pre-emption pressures. Resilient air bases and more survivable carriers would enable the United States to avoid being knocked out in initial attacks, allowing U.S. forces to wage counteroffensive operations at a more deliberate pace. A U.S. campaign could see phased operations, in which U.S. forces systematically reduce threats in areas progressively closer to China before shifting the balance of operations to those locations.

An active denial strategy would support U.S. peacetime diplomacy and a broad number of warfighting concepts. It would not strip U.S. forces from current forward positions, though it would disperse U.S. forces. It would expand the number of countries and locations to which smaller packages of U.S. forces might be deployed. The overall effect would be to strengthen regional confidence in the U.S. commitment. Additionally, it would improve the U.S. ability to support a wide range of contingencies including counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief. The strategy would also be flexible in the face of political uncertainty. Not all countries in Asia will be equally engaged by a given scenario, and distributing U.S. forces across a wider range of countries and locations will increase the chances of gaining access to a sufficient number of bases in the event of a crisis.

Finally, active denial is a flexible and broad approach that can offer many branch options for a U.S. president. During a crisis, the U.S. position can be reinforced without creating incentives for either side to strike first. At the same time, if the active denial strategy fails to deter, it will do so gracefully. The force structure developed would provide a variety of offensive, defensive, and coercive options. Other poles in the debate over U.S. defense strategy for Asia prematurely narrow U.S. options. Attempting to restore full dominance effectively commits the United States to escalation through offensive strikes on the mainland, while offshore control prematurely discards any direct defense of allies and partners. An active denial strategy avoids the dilemma presented to European leaders on the eve of WWI: fully mobilize and escalate or do nothing.²⁰ It therefore represents the best option for U.S. leaders seeking to deter China without either bankrupting the United States or undermining crisis stability.

Notes

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 11. It is important to note here that this one study does not necessarily reflect U.S. military thinking on AirSea Battle.
 12. "USAF Eyes Cost-Plus Bomber Contract," *Defense News*, March 5, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/air-space/strike/2015/03/05/lrsb-bomber-cost-plus-contract-air-force/24432697/>.

13. Richard J. Samuels and James L. Schoff, "Japan's Nuclear Hedge: Beyond 'Allergy' and Breakout," in Ashley J. Tellis, Abraham M. Denmark, and Travis Tanner, eds., *Strategic Asia 2013-2014: Asia in the Second Nuclear Age* (National Bureau of Asian Research, 2013); Peter Hayes and Chung-in Moon summarize (and rebut) the growing but still relatively modest South Korean sentiment for nuclear weapons in Peter Hayes and Chung-in Moon, "Should South Korea Go Nuclear?" Nautilus Institute, NAPSNet Policy Forum, July 28, 2014, <http://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/should-south-korea-go-nuclear/>.
14. See Mark Gunzinger and Chris Dougherty, *Changing the Game: The Promise of Directed-Energy Weapons*, (Washington: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2012).
15. Craig Mellerski and Craig Rutland, "The New Face of Rapid Airfield Repair," *Air Force Research Lab*, August 2009.
16. Mark Landler, "U.S. and Philippines Agree to a 10-year Pact on the Use of Military Bases," *The New York Times*, April 27, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/28/world/asia/us-and-the-philippines-agree-to-a-10-year-military-pact.html?_r=0.
17. SM-3 interceptor costs are in fiscal year 2010 dollars and reflect average procurement unit cost; see Missile Defense Agency, "Ballistic Missile Defense System (BMDS) Accountability Report (BAR) for 2010," Department of Defense, June 2010.
18. U.S. Department of Defense, "F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Aircraft Selected Acquisition Report," 2013, 21. The DoD is spending \$96 million in fiscal year 2015 on research and engineering for conventional prompt global strike; see Amy F. Woolf, *Conventional Prompt Global Strike and Long-Range Ballistic Missiles: Background and Issues* (CRS Report R41464) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 6, 2015), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R41464.pdf>.
19. See John Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), Jonathan Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare from 1953 to 1970*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), and Glen Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Towards a Theory of National Security*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).
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