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## Basing and the Pivot: Rebalancing U.S. Forces: Basing and Forward Presence in the Asia-Pacific

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## REVIEW ESSAY

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### BASING AND THE PIVOT

*Robert E. Harkavy*

Lord, Carnes, and Andrew S. Erickson, eds. *Rebalancing U.S. Forces: Basing and Forward Presence in the Asia-Pacific*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2014. 226pp. \$33.42

This excellently edited volume of essays, most contributed by Naval War College faculty, is devoted to the ongoing rebalancing of U.S. forces (the Obama administration's much-heralded "pivot") and their concomitant basing structure from Europe and the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific. For reasons only dimly understood by this retired professorial reviewer, the term "containment" appears to be politically or otherwise incorrect, not only in this work, but also in other current efforts. Yet it is indeed containment, and its hope is to impede the rise of incipient hegemonic China. One derives a certain sense of déjà vu—that "heartland" and "rimland" have returned with a vengeance, evoking the memories of Halford Mackinder and Alfred T. Mahan, respectively. Indeed, another of the old geopolitical theorists, James Fairgrieve, predicted a century ago that the heartland would one day migrate eastward, and so it has.

Sprinkled throughout the many "cases" are statements and analyses from Chinese military and political officials indicating the seriousness with which they take the strategic inevitability of a hegemonic struggle with the United States. It is further apparent that Chinese planners at least contemplate preemptive strikes, even the use of nuclear weapons, in connection with the main conflict scenarios

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that may potentially involve the United States, such as a Chinese invasion of Taiwan or a Chinese attempt to take over the Senkaku Islands. It is clear that the United States now has fewer problems in Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Singapore than

before, for the obvious reason that its allies are nervous about American weakness and their own vulnerability in the face of rising Chinese power and North Korean nuclear weapons.

This work involves a chapter-by-chapter analysis of the past, present, and projected future of U.S. basing and forward presence, running roughly east to west, from Guam to former-Soviet Central Asia (Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan). The analyses are dense and detailed.

The opening chapter, on Guam, by Andrew Erickson and Justin Mikolay, examines its role as a “strategically central sovereign location”—that is, “a well-placed and politically reliable location” and a major global support and logistics hub. The pros and cons of this location and of placing so many assets on one relatively small island are well covered. Above all, the authors lay out the facts of the ongoing big military buildup on Guam and the corresponding construction costs. There is also a discussion of the Chinese missile threat to Guam, particularly from the DF-4 (CSS-3).

The chapter on Japan, by Toshi Yoshihara, ominously and bluntly titled “Japanese Bases and Chinese Missiles,” makes extensive use of Chinese military writings and pronouncements. There is a good review of the long-held U.S. basing sites in Japan and of the complexity of U.S. facilities and force deployments in Okinawa. As with all the other chapters, a good map displays the base locations. However, not covered here are a plethora of important U.S. technical facilities facing China, North Korea, and Russian Siberia. The politics, past and present, surrounding the U.S. presence in Okinawa is discussed; however, the core of the analysis is whether the United States might be denied use of Japanese bases in a crisis under the threat of Chinese missiles.

The chapter on South Korea, by Terence Roehrig, is a review of the subject going back to the 1953 United States–Republic of Korea Mutual Defense Treaty. Current modernizations are seen to have focused on Apache helicopters and PAC-3 Patriot surface-to-air missiles. Most importantly, the United States has moved forces southward, away from the Demilitarized Zone and vulnerable Seoul, hence making for more reliance on Republic of Korea forces to repel attack. Despite past political problems and an altered command structure for wartime operational control, relations between the United States and the host appear to have improved. Also discussed are scenarios using U.S. forces outside Korea (Taiwan-China) and how they may be perceived by the South Koreans.

In a chapter by Jack McCaffrie and Chris Rahman, the U.S. strategic relationship with Australia is seen as having gone through three phases. In the first, the United States used Australian bases during World War II to repel the Japanese drive to take over the southwest Pacific and Australia itself. In a second phase, during the Cold War, the United States made use of several major “technical”

facilities, especially Pine Gap and Nurrungar. More recently, the United States has continued use of these facilities, but also of training facilities and ports and other facilities for prepositioning, maintenance, logistics, and rotational deployment of Marine units. This new, third, phase, China's strong trade relations with Australia notwithstanding, has engendered little political opposition.

In "Singapore: Forward Operating Site," Rahman lays out the rather astounding growth of the U.S. presence in Singapore. During the Cold War, Britain and New Zealand had some access there, but the United States had none. Since then, and for the most part because the United States needed replacements for access lost in the Philippines, Singapore came into play. As Rahman suggests, "in some respects it could be argued that Singapore has become the most important partner in the U.S. Pacific Command security network after the three main formal allies—Japan, South Korea, and Australia."

The U.S. base at Diego Garcia, the "Malta of the Indian Ocean," is discussed by Erickson, Mikolay, and Walter Ludwig. Diego Garcia—a small island, part of the British Indian Ocean Territory belonging to the United Kingdom—has, along with Guam, Okinawa, and Singapore, become vital to the U.S. rimland posture. The problems and the invulnerability inherent in the distance factor are examined (unlike Guam, Diego Garcia is not easily threatened by China). India's long-held opposition to a U.S. base in the Indian Ocean (India wanted an "Indian lake") is now muted by improved U.S.-Indian relations and perhaps the latter's fear of China.

Alexander Cooley's chapter, "U.S. Bases and Domestic Politics in Central Asia," addresses the ups and downs of U.S. access to the K2 base in Uzbekistan and the Manas air base in Kyrgyzstan. The United States was granted access to Uzbek airspace for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and to Manas for basing and refueling, both in exchange for security and economic assistance. These were supplemented with refueling and air-corridor arrangements with Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. As the United States now prepares to leave Afghanistan, all of this appears moot. The Russians are rolling again in Central Asia, and America appears to be out of it.

The final chapter, by Sam J. Tangredi, examines sea basing. This subject appears to be embroiled in disputes between the Army and Navy / Marine Corps and within the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Just what scenario involving China might bring sea basing into play is a little difficult to discern.

A couple of other things emerge from this volume that are worth mentioning. It is noted that China has begun to leapfrog the containment ring, much as the Soviets did in the 1960s. Limited access is being acquired or at least speculated about in Pakistan, on Burmese islands, in Bangladesh, in Sri Lanka, and even in Zimbabwe. There is also the elephant in the room—whether India will constitute

a counterweight to China. Mention is also made of a U.S. carrier visit to the port of Chennai, possibly a harbinger of U.S. access in India.

Although this work was hatched in early 2014, the ongoing rush of world events may already have created the need for addenda, such as reports of pessimism in the Obama administration about the budgetary implications of the “pivot,” some new possibilities for bases in the Philippines, Putin-Russia-Ukraine and the prospect for more of the same, and the near collapse of the U.S. security and alliance structure in the Middle East. Max Boot, writing in *Commentary*, May 2014, says:

The Obama administration came into office declaring that the U.S. military forces would “pivot” from the Middle East, where they were supposedly overcommitted, to deal with growing challenges in the more important Asia-Pacific region, where they were “underweighted.” The administration doesn’t talk much about the “rebalancing” to Asia anymore, and for good cause. Katrina McFarland, Hagel’s assistant secretary of defense for acquisition, reflected the new reality when on March 4 she was quoted by *Defense News* as saying, “Right now the [Pacific] pivot is being looked at again, because candidly it can’t happen.”

This had been anticipated in the McCaffrie and Rahman chapter: “However, it is also worth noting that considerable concern remains in Australia over the long-term fiscal viability of the United States and its ability to maintain the regional strategic presence at current levels.”

On a brighter note, the United States appears to be returning to the Philippines, despite considerable domestic political opposition. As elsewhere in Asia, people in the Philippines seem to be getting a bit nervous. As for the resurgence of the Russian bear, the basing/forward-presence implications are not yet clear, keeping in mind the already strained budgetary implications of the “pivot.” How indeed to pay for all of this, or even part of it?