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CENTCOM's China Challenge: Anti-Access and Area Denial in the Middle East

Lieutenant Colonel Eduardo A. Abisellan,
United States Marine Corps
FEDERAL EXECUTIVE FELLOW

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the last year, America has sought to refocus its diplomatic and military attention to East, rather than Middle East. This makes perfect sense. The last decade of wars in the greater Middle East have been draining in terms of both blood and treasure, while the Asia-Pacific region appears to be the new center of future world politics and economy. The region has been described as "the demographic hub of the 21st century global economy, where 1.5 billion Chinese, nearly 600 million Southeast Asians and 1.3 billion inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent move vital resources and exchange goods across the region and globe."[1]

Yet, there is an irony. While the US is looking more towards the Pacific, China's needs are driving it more towards the Middle East. To fuel and sustain economic growth, China is heavily reliant on Middle Eastern oil. The resource rich and volatile Middle East is a critical center of gravity for the Asia-Pacific and the key for China's continued economic prosperity.

Therefore, despite the rebalancing of U.S. efforts away from the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East today is fast becoming an arena for another "Great Game," one that may inevitably pit the U.S. against China in a regional competition for influence and power. China, through its economic ties to the region, has already achieved influence parity with the U.S. Now it could very well leverage this growing influence to gain further concessions and achieve a future positional advantage to counter U.S. regional hegemony and naval supremacy in both the Middle East and within the Asia-Pacific region— all the way from the source of its energy supplies through its long and vulnerable sea lines of communications (SLOCs) and to home ports in China.

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how China could leverage its use of soft power and regional allies as a strategy within the Middle East of an asymmetric anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) through other means. This novel approach may allow China to "circumvent America's traditional military strengths,"[2] during a crisis. Thus, the monograph note the limits of any strategic rebalancing that ignores ongoing political and economic dynamics across regions. The U.S. may want to pivot away from the Middle East, but in reality the Middle East remains the focal point for the continued economic prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region, U.S. national interests, and U.S allies' energy needs in the Middle East. A continued presence in the region will be of critical value to strategic efforts in the Asia-Pacific, serve to assure allies, safeguard the flow of oil and thus promote global economic and political stability.

Notes

[1] Kaplan, Robert D. and Cronin, Patrick M. "Cooperation from Strength: U.S. Strategy in the South China Sea." P.9.

[2] Greenert, Jonathan and Schwartz, Norton. "Air-Sea Battle Doctrine: A Discussion with the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and Chief of Naval Operations." (Brookings Institution, 16 May 2012). P.9. Available from: http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/events/2012/5/16%20air%20sea%20battle/20120516_air_sea_doctrine_corrected_transcript.pdf. Internet accessed 12 June 2012.

CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

The most recent strategic guidance issued by the U.S. Secretary of Defense in January of 2012 states that "the Joint Force will need to recalibrate its capabilities and make selective additional investments" to project power despite anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) challenges. The document further states that "China and Iran will continue to pursue asymmetric means to counter U.S. power projection capabilities."[1]

Although the challenge to strategic access or access denial is most often thought of in terms of military forces, weapons, and technology, China's pursuit of asymmetric means to "counter U.S. power projection capabilities"[2] can also be applied to a much broader application of national power. The very definition of asymmetric warfare provides a glimpse into the complexity of the challenge. Asymmetric warfare and means refers to: (1) Warfare between dissimilar forces; (2) War between two sides with dissimilar goals; (3) Warfare in which new technology is used to defeat the superior with the inferior; (4) Warfare which encompasses anything - strategy, tactics, weapons, personnel - that alters the battlefield to negate one side or the other's advantage.[3]

In this context, the asymmetric A2/AD challenges posed by a nation such as China go far beyond the mere application of military power. Military capability is but one means, and not necessarily the predominate one, to achieve a desired outcome (indeed a core notion of not only traditional western thinkers but also ancient Chinese strategists like Sun Tzu). The best strategies are often those that implement multidimensional and complementary methods that incorporate all elements of national power. Therefore, as the U.S. rebalances to the Asia-Pacific it will find China has laid the foundation for an asymmetric A2/AD strategy specifically designed to not just limit U.S. power projection capabilities and regional influence but also mitigate China's critical vulnerability- its growing dependency on Middle Eastern oil.

While the U.S. pivots east to focus its efforts on the Asia-Pacific, China is looking west towards the Middle East out of strategic necessity to fuel and sustain its impressive economic growth. The Middle East's (Persian Gulf) vast energy wealth is a global center of gravity and will remain, for the foreseeable future, the vital oil supply to the Far East and specifically China. The center of gravity, as defined by the Prussian military theorist Carl Von Clausewitz in his work *On War*, is "the hub of all power and movement on which all depends."[4] In this case, oil is the strategic resource that sustains the life of industrialized nations.

Ironically, despite the termination of the war in Iraq, the anticipated withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, and the rebalancing of U.S. national interests to the Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East is fast becoming an arena for another "Great Game," one that could inevitably pit the U.S. against China in a regional competition for influence and power.

According to an article written by Jacqueline Newmyer, "Oil, Arms, and Influence: The Indirect Strategy behind Chinese Military Modernization:"

> China, as a rising power heavily reliant on imported oil, has three options to secure its energy requirements. First, is to trust that free markets in energy will continue to function. Second, China might pursue the military capability necessary to project power and secure its global energy supply lines. Third-the indirect approach-would be for China to defend its energy supplies by disrupting hostile alliances and replacing them with a network of well-armed friends or client states along key oil routes.[5]

China is unlikely to pursue one option at the expense of another. The most likely and logical approach for China to take is concurrently to modernize the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and build military capability to project power, while systematically developing "a network of well-armed friends or client states along key oil routes"[6] to help it protect its vital energy and economic interests.

While China builds military capability to project power it may, in the interim, leverage its influence into an effective asymmetric A2/AD strategy through other means-soft power and by leveraging allies—to "circumvent America's traditional military strengths and thereby blunt U.S. military power."[7]

This strategy is sufficiently indirect to afford China room to maneuver without openly having to confront the U.S.; its network of allies can do that in its stead. This may also improve China's strategic position and ability to counter U.S. regional hegemony and naval supremacy in both the Middle East and within the Asia-Pacific region- from the source of its energy supplies through to its long and vulnerable sea lines of communications (SLOCs) and all the way to home ports.

The following chapters will explore this multifaceted A2/AD strategy through other means in the Middle East. First, China's growing need to solidify its energy sources and SLOC, resulting in an array of soft power investments will be surveyed, then the steady build up of nascent military alliances and presence will be examined, followed by a look at the utilization of rogue states. A series of recommendations for US policymakers will conclude.

Notes

[1] Panetta, Leon E. "Strategic Defense Guidance." (Washington, D.C. Jan 2012). Available from: http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf. Internet accessed on 22 June 2012.

[2] Ibid

[3] Asymmetric Threat.Net. Asymmetric Warfare. Available from: http://asymmetricthreat.net/glossary.shtml. Internet accessed 20 May 2012.

[4] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), P.595-596.

[5] Newmyer, Jackqueline. "China and the Politics of Oil." (Foreign Policy Research Institute, E-notes, May 2012). Available from: http://www.fpri.org/enotes/2012/201205.deal.china-politics-oil.pdf. Internet accessed 12 June 2012.

[6]Ibid.

[7] Greenert, Jonathan and Schwartz, Norton. "Air-Sea Battle Doctrine: A Discussion with the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and Chief of Naval Operations." (Brookings Institution, 16 May 2012). Available from http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/events/2012/5/16%20air%20sea%20battle/20120516_air_sea_doctrine_corrected_transcript.pdf . Internet Accessed 12 June 2012.

CHAPTER TWO
Soft Power Investment

"In all fighting, the direct method may be used for joining battle, but indirect methods will be needed in order to secure victory. In battle, there are not more than two methods of attack - the direct and the indirect; yet these two in combination give rise to an endless series of maneuvers." – Sun Tzu

China's use of both the direct and indirect approach is best characterized by Sun Tzu's axiom. The direct method implies the use of force and fielding of forces to engage in battle. The indirect method could refer to the enticement of an ally with soft power such as trade and investment, technology transfers, and arms sales, to enable the application of force, or threat of force by proxy. Additionally, it could also imply the means to deny an opponent access or the use of territory, or some other advantage due to shared common interests.

In the Middle East, this type of approach would lead to two complementary Chinese soft power investment goals: first, ensure access to energy supplies to fuel its economy; and second, to limit U.S. influence and regional hegemony. To this end, based on the level of trade and investment in the Middle East, China appears to be pursuing such a multidimensional strategy that incorporates an indirect (soft power) approach that complements its broad military modernization and force projection efforts to not only secure its energy needs but also potentially limit U.S. access and ability to disrupt Chinese energy supplies in a time of crisis.

First, it is important to establish just how critical the Middle East is to China. The significance of the Middle East in fueling the global economy cannot be overstated: five of the top ten countries with proven oil reserves are in the Persian Gulf region. Saudi Arabia alone possesses one fifth of the world's proven oil reserves. Iran has 137 billion barrels (bbls); Iraq, 115 bbls; Kuwait, 104 bbls; and the United Arab Emirates possesses 98 bbls of proven oil reserves.[1]

China, out of sheer economic necessity, has developed closer ties with these Persian Gulf States in order to satisfy its voracious energy appetite. The World Energy Outlook 2011 report predicts that the Chinese economy, notwithstanding a global economic downturn, will continue to grow at a rate of 8.1 percent per year through 2020.[2] Therefore, China's quest for energy is a critical factor in sustaining its impressive economic growth.

In 2010, China imported nearly 4.8 million barrels of crude oil per day (bbl/d), of which over 2.2 million (47 percent), came from the Middle East. By comparison, 1.5 million bbl/d (30 percent) came from Africa, 176,000 bbl/d (4 percent) from the Asia-Pacific region, and 938,000 bbl/d (20 percent) came from other countries."[3] By 2020, China is anticipated to overtake the United States in terms of oil imports, and by 2030 it will become the largest oil consumer in the world, consuming 15 million bbl/d- nearly double 2009 levels.[4]

China purchases oil from all parties regardless of their domestic political system; its primary concern has been and remains to fuel its growing economy and ensure sufficient markets are available to sustain future energy demands and economic growth. A secondary effect of increased Chinese dependency on Middle Eastern oil has been the significant rise in the amount of trade between China and the Middle East. According to a recent article by James Chen, "The Emergence of China in the Middle East," "from 2005 to 2009, the total trade volume between China and the Middle East rose 87 percent to $100 billion, and Middle East's exports to China grew by 25 percent. China is also the top source of the region's imports, most of them being low-cost household goods."[5]

Increased trade and infrastructure investments by Chinese firms in the Middle East and by Middle Eastern firms in China have significantly brought the Middle East and Far East closer together. The relationships between China and the Middle East may have started as the result of basic supply and demand economics, but just as China's energy needs are projected to grow, so is its relationship with key oil producing states within the Persian Gulf. Moreover, "Beijing's calculations regarding a possible war with the United States over Taiwan increases the importance of having powerful and independent minded oil producing friends in the Middle East that will be willing to supply oil in a contingency."[6]

A more benign conclusion is that the Chinese have thus far remained ambivalent to regional issues. But this ambivalence (or rather strategy of non-intereferenence in domestic matters) has come with political gains to Chinese compared to the US position with several key regimes. The Chinese do not challenge the local regimes and ruling monarchies on issues such as democracy or human rights. It is both a friend and ally to competing nations in the region, the Gulf monarchs on one side of the Persian Gulf and Iran on the other. This relationship has benefited both China and the region. Bilateral trade between China and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), composed of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, "topped $70 billion in 2008; according to some estimates, the Sino-GCC trade volume will reach between $350 and $500 billion by 2020."[7]

Opposite the GCC, "China has become Iran's largest trade partner since the United States began its attempt to negotiate with Iran and sanction simultaneously."[8]

China has taken advantage of the international sanctions against Iran to maximize and diversify its energy security position, "with bilateral exchanges worth $21.2 billion compared to $14.4 billion three years earlier. Western sanctions have also paved the way for Chinese companies, which last year directly supplied Iran with 13% of its imports ($7.9 billion)."[9]

Despite the obvious dangers of courting opposing countries, China provides the next best alternative to the U.S. in the region. It is an alternative that comes without preexisting conditions for friendship. The Chinese do not expound governmental or political system reform as conditions for doing business. China leans towards authoritarian regimes without upsetting the status quo; the U.S. engages non-democratic regimes with an eye towards reform and promoting democracy, but this process is of course often messy and rife with tension as the US tries to balance competing demands. In the end, the Chinese through trade, investment, and non-intrusive policies stand to be looked at as a better friend, ally, and benefactor than the U.S., at least under the current governmental structures in the region.

The recent popular uprisings (Arab Spring) in North Africa, and the manner in which the U.S. abruptly abandoned a 30-year ally in President Mubarak of Egypt, further complicated the US position. While the shift was likely on the right side of history, it has no doubt changed the perception of U.S. loyalty to its other regime allies. Gulf monarchs began asking themselves how the U.S. would react in the event of similar popular uprising within their states. Would the U.S. stand beside them or abandon them? Most interpreted the latter would be the case.

The U.S. and China walk a fine line between friendship with the established ruling class and the population represented by its authoritarian rulers. The rise of popular democratic movements may benefit the U.S. more than China, but the true outcome of revolutions will not likely be known for years to come. The challenge for the U.S. will remain its ability to balance its national interests and democratic ideology with the less intrusive Chinese view of the world. In this regard, the Chinese have a clear advantage: they are not going to upset the status quo, nor do they come with some of the historical baggage from 50 years of involvement in the region that makes US relations even with dissidents or popular democratic movements difficult.

Adding to these trends are calls from within the U.S. to wean America from foreign oil dependency. Public statements along these lines further reinforce the perceived need in the Gulf States to seek new alliances and focus their efforts on where the demand for energy is projected to be the strongest- the Asia-Pacific region. The 2011 World Energy Report predicts that Asian countries that lie outside the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) will have the largest demand for oil, with China and India topping the list, whereas OECD consumption rates will level off, if not decline.

Moreover, with new shale oil and gas discoveries in the United States and oil sands from Canada, many believe that "the U.S. is at the forefront of the unconventional revolution."[10] According to PFC Energy, a Washington-based consultancy:

> By 2020, shale sources will make up about a third of total U.S. oil and gas production, by that time the U.S. will be the top global oil and gas producer, surpassing Russia and Saudi Arabia… That could have far-reaching ramifications for the politics of oil, potentially shifting power away from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries toward the Western hemisphere. With more crude being produced in North America, there's less likelihood of Middle Eastern politics causing supply shocks that drive up gasoline prices. Consumers could also benefit from lower electricity prices, as power plants switch from coal to cheap and plentiful natural gas.[11]

This obviously could be of great benefit to the U.S. However, the shift to actual energy self-reliance is not readily apparent. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the U.S. currently leads the world in oil consumption and imports about 45 percent of its oil needs. In 2011, the U.S. consumed 18.8 million barrels per day (MMbd) of petroleum products and imported 11.4 MMbd. 52 percent of U.S. crude oil and petroleum products imports came from the Western Hemisphere (North, South and Central America, and the Caribbean including U.S. territories). About 22 percent of U.S. imports of crude oil and petroleum products come from the Persian Gulf countries of Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. The largest sources of crude oil and petroleum products imports came from Canada (29 percent) and Saudi Arabia (14 percent). Other sources of U.S. Net Crude Oil and Petroleum Products imports are: Nigeria (11 percent); Venezuela (10 percent); and Mexico (8 percent).[12]

Many will see the potential for increased domestic oil and gas production as a means to wean America off the Middle Eastern (Persian Gulf) oil spigot, retrench, and save costs abroad. On the surface, the potential for domestic oil production to offset foreign imports alleviates the problem associated with dependency on Middle Eastern oil, such as the fluctuation in prices due to instability, or in the worst case, the disruption of supplies due to regional conflict. Moreover, due to the fungible nature of oil; the fluctuation in prices due to instability or conflict has the potential to impact the price of oil worldwide and thus impact global economies directly. Therefore, supplanting oil imports from volatile and/or unstable regions with domestic production insulates the nation against potential supply disruptions and price hikes.

However, it is strategically shortsighted to believe that weaning the U.S. off Middle Eastern oil supplies will solve America's national security issues in this volatile region. The geopolitical and strategic implications of continued U.S. presence and involvement in the Middle East (Persian Gulf) transcend the basic need for oil imports from the region. The scope is much broader and inextricably connected to the larger

global economy and the role the U.S. plays in exercising global leadership to confront emerging threats, deter aggression, and assure allies around the world—many of whom are heavily reliant on the free trade in energy (and goods) to fuel their economies. If the U.S. is not the guarantor of the free flow of trade throughout the global commons, who will be?

Yet, a war- and deficit-weary U.S. government and a sluggish domestic economy, when coupled with the rebalancing of U.S. interests to the Asia-Pacific region, could easily cloud the larger strategic picture. The strategic issue is not whether the U.S. can or should become less dependent on Middle Eastern oil and less embroiled in the region, but whether energy self reliance and a rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific region will cause the U.S. to scale back its efforts from the Middle East altogether. The latter would be a strategic mistake.

In short, U.S. willingness to support popular democratic uprisings, the expressed desire to wean the nation off Middle Eastern oil, and growing oil demand and consumption in the Far East are all conditions that could significantly influence, if not alter, the geostrategic and political landscape of the Middle East in the 21st century. This set of circumstances will reinforce Persian Gulf states' incentives to distance themselves from the U.S. and to develop even stronger partnerships with nations such as China.

The impact of this of US needs in a crisis situation in the Asia Pacific may be more noteworthy than often understood. The disruption of Chinese oil supplies would likely be a prime U.S. objective during a crisis situation involving a potential dispute with China over Taiwan, or another contingency scenario. But the aforementioned factors may be reasons why Gulf States may not support U.S. actions during a crisis between the U.S. and China: why bite the hand that increasingly feeds you?

However, the U.S. is dependent on regional military bases, such as the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet Headquarters in Bahrain, the U.S. Air Force's Combined Air Operations Center in Qatar, and other military capabilities based throughout the Arabian Peninsula, to exercise its military options. Without the assistance of regional partners or access to bases from which to operate, military action would be difficult to initiate and sustain. Constraints placed against the U.S. may range from Persian Gulf states continuing to supply oil to China despite a conflict with the U.S. Or they could deny the U.S. the ability to launch military actions against China from their territory, thus making it more difficult for the U.S. to pursue a comprehensive military campaign to interdict Chinese oil supplies.

In sum, China's building economic and political ties has engendered closer relations with the Gulf States, with growing soft power significance. This relationship may have already set the conditions for China to be able to counter U.S. efforts to strike

at China's critical vulnerabilities- its heavy reliance on imported oil and lengthy SLOCs. Moreover, China could further use its economic leverage to court potential allies to counter alliances arrayed against it along its periphery. Soft power enticements, trade concessions, and arms sales could ultimately lead to increased military cooperation and mutual defense.

Notes

[1] U.S. Energy Information Administration. Available from: http://www.eia.gov/countries/index.cfm?view=reserves. Internet accessed on 21 May 2012.

[2] International Energy Agency. "2011 World Energy Outlook." (Paris, France, 2011), P.57.

[3] U.S. Energy Information Administration. "China Analysis Brief, 2011." Available from http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=CH. Internet accessed 10 March 2012.

[4] International Energy Agency. "2011 World Energy Outlook Report." (Paris, France, 2011) P.80.

[5] Chen, James. "The Emergence of China in the Middle East" (Washington D.C. NDU Press, 2012), P.2.

[6] Alterman, Jon B. and Garver, John W. *The Vital Triangle: China, the United States, and the Middle East*. (Washington, D.C. Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2008), P.47-48.

[7] Zambelis, Chris. "Bloc Politics in the Persian Gulf: China's Multilateral Engagement with the Gulf Cooperation Council. Publication." China Brief Volume: 10 Issue: 19. Available from: http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=36917&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=414&no_cache=1. Internet accessed 11 June 2012.

[8] Clawson, Patrick. *The Redline: How to Assess Progress in U.S. Iran Policy*. (Washington, D.C . The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2010), P.5.

[9] Farrar-Wellman, Ariel and Frasco, Robert: "China Iran Foreign Relations, 2010." Available from: http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/china-iran-foreign-relations. Internet accessed 10 March 2012.

[10] Chazan, Guy. "Big Oil is Heading Back Home." Wall Street Journal, 5 Dec 2011: Available from: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204479504576638731600191382.html. Internet accessed on 12 June 12, 2012.

[11] Ibid.

[12] U.S Energy Information Administration. "How Dependent Are We on Foreign Oil." Available from: http://www.eia.gov/energy_in_brief/foreign_oil_dependence.cfm. Internet accessed on 12 June 2012.

CHAPTER THREE
Military Modernization and Alliances

"What is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy— he who excels at resolving difficulties does so before they arise. He who excels in conquering his enemies triumphs before the threats materialize."- Sun Tzu

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and other observers "believe that the near term focus of China's military modernization effort, including its naval modernization effort, has been to develop military options for addressing the situation with Taiwan."[1] In other words, "act as an anti-access force—a force that can deter U.S. intervention in a conflict involving Taiwan, or failing that, delay the arrival or reduce the effectiveness of intervening U.S. naval and air forces."[2]
According to the leading US studies, Chinese longer term goals are:

- Asserting or defending territorial claims in the South China Sea;
- Enforcing the view that it has legal right to regulate foreign military activities in its 200 mile maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ);
- Protecting its sea lines of communication (SLOCS), including those running through the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf, on which China relies for much of its energy imports;
- Protecting and evacuating Chinese nationals living and working in foreign countries;
- Displacing U.S. influence in the Pacific; and
- Asserting its status as a major world power.[3]

For the U.S., in turn, its stated strategic focus is to "play a larger and long-term role in shaping the Asia-Pacific region and its future by upholding core principles and in close partnership with allies and friends."[4] President Obama also stated that the U.S. would be making its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region a "top priority" despite looming defense budget cuts.[5]

In pursuit of this strategy the U.S will expand its military influence and improve its force posture around China's periphery to "project power and deter threats to peace."[6] U.S. Marines will deploy to Darwin, Australia, others will move from Okinawa to Guam, and the Navy's new Littoral Combat Ship will be based out of Singapore. Additionally, closer ties will be fostered with Vietnam and Cambodia.

Yet despite these moves, the use of terms such as "rebalance" and "pivot" to describe the current strategy for the Asia-Pacific is misleading because it implies the U.S., at some point, left the Asia-Pacific and is now attempting to return or reassert itself in the region. 50 years of history argue against this. The truth of the matter is that "America's strategic position in Asia is built on a foundation of military power. Since the end of the Second World War, the United States has bound itself to others (and others to it) by extending security guarantees, offering defense assistance and in some cases, stationing its forces on foreign soil."[7]

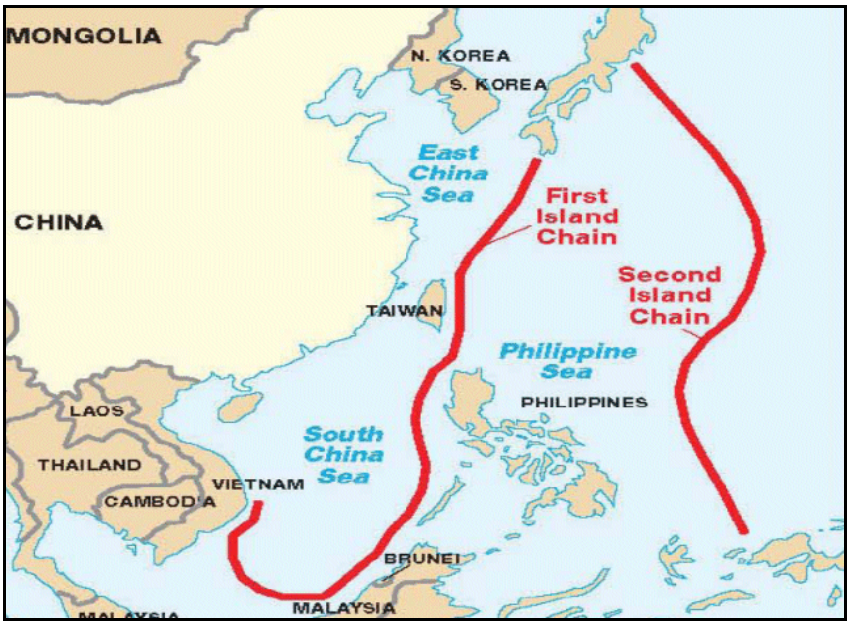
The security umbrella and stability the U.S. has provided for the last half century has enabled allies and others to concentrate on economic development and thus prosper. The "extension of security guarantees"[8] to allies has been made possible by forward-stationed Army and Marine forces within the Asia-Pacific (Japan, South Korea, and now Australia) and the ability of the U.S. to quickly project land and air power from regional bases and the continental U.S, as well as the at sea mobility provided by U.S. Navy's carrier battle groups and Marine Expeditionary Units.

As China continues its military modernization efforts, it too is likely to pursue many aspects of the same strategy used by U.S. A rising continental power, in all logic, will project military power beyond its shores to protect its growing vital national interests. Many thus project that China is likely to similarly bind "itself to others (and others to it) by extending security guarantees, offering defense assistance and in some cases, stationing its forces on foreign soil."[9]

To this end, China has been steadily building up its naval capabilities. China's naval buildup has thus far been primarily focused on its ability to project power in the "near seas" and support a conflict over Taiwan. However, China is also making strides in developing a "blue water" naval capability that may in the near future challenge the U.S. Navy regionally. China's first aircraft carrier, the Soviet-era designed *Varyag*, may be commissioned as early as August of 2012.[10] Others are in the works as well. The Chinese Navy currently "possesses some 75 principle surface combatants, more than 60 submarines, 55 medium and large amphibious ships, and roughly 85 missile-equipped small combatants."[11]

It will take years for China to build a truly global blue water naval capability that can actually sortie and sustain itself beyond the near seas. Recently, however, the "Chinese Navy has demonstrated the capability to conduct limited deployments of modern surface platforms outside the second island chain." [12] Notably, this has included nine separate deployments to the Gulf of Aden to support sustained counter-piracy operations from 2009 to mid-2011, illustrating a growing capability to be a player in Middle East matters.

Figure 1: The Second Island Chain[13]



How does a continental power make up for a lack of naval capability and project power beyond its shores? In the interim, without sufficient blue water naval capability, many also believe that China is using carefully crafted alliances to project power by "following the so called String of Pearls strategy—building close ties along the sea-lanes from the Middle East to the South China Sea in order to protect China's energy interest and sea-lanes."[14] Refer to figure 2 for a graphic depiction of the "String of Pearls" and the series of Chinese facilities that are already in being or potentially in process that follow China's crucial SLOC into the Middle East. This allow potential lily pads for China to then employ its state of the art A2/AD "battle network that could constrain the U.S. military's ability to maneuver in the air, sea, undersea, space, and cyberspace operating domains."[15] Such advanced, and now more regionally distributed A2/AD capabilities may enable Chinese dominance in the Straits of Taiwan, lead to localized superiority in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean, and enhance power projection into the Middle East.

The use of regional partners, such as Pakistan, may enable a positional advantage with direct hard power applications. In the near term, China could exploit the deteriorated diplomatic relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan to strengthen its position and possibly set the conditions for its first forward garrison in the so called "String of Pearls." A few of the critical factors defining the complexity of the issues and distrust confronting the U.S. and Pakistan relationship are the ongoing war in Afghanistan, drone strikes within Pakistan by the U.S., and the discovery of Osama Bin Laden's hideout in Pakistan and subsequent unilateral American raid.

Figure 2: The String of Pearls Concept

Source: Adapted from Juli MacDonald, Amy Donahue, and Bethany Danyluk, *Energy Futures in Asia*, Booz Allen Hamilton report sponsored by the Director of Net Assessment, November 2004, 17.

These issues are likely to cause the U.S. and Pakistan to drift further apart and push Pakistan and China closer together out of strategic necessity. The Chinese could then easily capitalize on previous investments in Pakistan to further promote their agenda. China has invested heavily in the Pakistani Port of Gwadar, developing a blue water port in the Pakistani Baluchistan Province with access to the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean and in close proximity to the strategic choke point of the Straits of Hormuz. China could court Pakistan to allow it to develop the Port of Gwadar into military base with joint applications for both countries.

The Port of Gwadar could theoretically serve as a forward naval base in which to station ships, submarines, maritime interdiction and surveillance aircraft, anti-ship ballistic missiles, and a host of other military capabilities. This would give the Chinese a strategic location, close to the Straits of Hormuz, from which to eventually sortie naval assets with the support of land-based aircraft. The military applications of the Port of Gwadar can serve multiple strategic roles; for Pakistan, it provides a means to strengthen its position against India, alleviating the potential for any disruption of commerce and or naval activity from the Port of Karachi in the event of conflict.

China, on the other hand, would have the means to monitor and track Gulf shipping. Gwadar would also facilitate the potential to link Chinese A2/AD capability to that of Iran's already formidable (Chinese-based) A2/AD defenses. This would geographically extend China's A2/AD network and alleviate Chinese concerns over a critical portion of their SLOCs from the Middle East. The strategic placement of these bases could in theory provide a means to not only deny access to strategic areas or SLOCs but serve in the future as advance force bases for naval and other forces to operate from.

The bottom line here is that China's power and relevance to the Middle East is also growing in the hard power category. In addition to the economic alliances and use of soft power previously alluded to within the Persian Gulf, China is also extended its military reach through both power projection and a nascent networks of bases and hubs. It can use other regional partners such as Pakistan to further limit U.S. influence, gain concessions, and achieve a future positional advantage, thereby alleviating concerns over their SLOCs in the event of war over Taiwan or other contingency involving the U.S. and its allies.

Notes

[1]O'Rourke, Ronald: China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress, (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2012), P.4-5.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

[4] Obama, Barack. Available from: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament. Internet accessed 12 June 2012.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7]Alterman, Jon B. and Garver, John W. *The Vital Triangle: China, the United States, and the Middle East*. (Washington, D.C. Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2008), P.3.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid.

[10]The Economic Times. China's First Aircraft Carrier to be commissioned in August. Available from http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-03-09/news/31139765_1_varyag-first-aircraft-aircraft-carrier: Internet accessed 10 March 2012.

[11]Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, P.31.

[12]Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, P.32.

[13] Global Security.Org. "People's Liberation Navy-Offshore Defense." Available from: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/plan-doctrine-offshore.htm. Internet accessed on 22 June 2012.

[14] Lai, Harry Hongyi. China's Oil Diplomacy: Is it a global security threat? (Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, Third World Quarterly, Vol. 28. No.3 2007), P.528.

[15] Gunzinger, Mark and Dougherty, Chris: "Outside-In: Operating from Range to Defeat Iran's Anti-Access and Area Denial Threats." (Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, 2011), P.1.

CHAPTER FOUR
Leveraging Rogue States

"China's criticism of, and resistance to, some of America's international policies and actions toward the Korean Peninsula, Iran, Syria, and elsewhere reflect the suspicion that they are based on injustice and narrow U.S. self-interest that will directly or indirectly affect China's interests."[1]

A third part of the potential A2/AD on a regional level is the relationships China has built with rogue states and or proxies. These offer another means to leverage concessions and limit U.S. influence in the Middle East and beyond, albeit indirectly.

In conjunction with China's strong economic bilateral exchanges with Iran, Chinese military ties and weapons sales offer a means to geographically extend China's A2/AD battle network in the region by proxy. "Iran's anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM) arsenal consists of a wide array of missiles, many of which were imported from China or derived from Chinese missiles."[2] In this context, during a crisis with the U.S., China might be able to leverage Iran's formidable A2/AD capabilities to mitigate U.S. "naval supremacy and ability to interdict China's seaborne oil imports." [3]

Therefore, China's ability to extend its A2/AD network by employing proxies such as Iran and allies such as Pakistan help to mitigate a critical vulnerability- its ability to protect its SLOCs and oil supplies. In this manner, China may be able to complicate US naval operations in the short term, and even one day effectively protect the route from the Gulf through the Straits of Hormuz and from the Arabian Sea to the Port of Gwadar in Pakistan. Overland routes could additionally be secured in Pakistan to ensure that at least small amounts of oil would flow to China for military and economic necessities.

One does not even have to use the scenario of a direct US-China confrontation to see the value of such a strategy. Present U.S. policy towards Iran includes possibility of using military action to stop Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. If diplomatic efforts fail, however, it would be mostly Chinese A2/AD weapons and technology in the hands of the Iranians that would be be put to the test against U.S. forced entry capabilities. This could provide China with lessons learned and examples of how to further improve and mitigate U.S. force projection capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region.

However, in dealing with rogue states one can never be certain of the outcome. If not careful, China's relationship with Iran could prove disastrous for everyone in the

region. A conflict in the Middle East involving Iran would have global repercussions, impacting the global economy through the very likely disruption of oil supplies either at the source or in transit through the strategic Straits of Hormuz. This would cause a significant spike in the price of crude oil worldwide and would be catastrophic for the global economy.

Consequently, if Iran is defeated militarily it would degrade China's ability to influence actions within the Middle East by proxy. Therefore, maintaining the status quo is to China's advantage. China can use its relationship with Iran against the U.S., playing one side against the other. It affords China a continued advantage in procuring oil and a way to counter U.S. influence and regional hegemony in the region. The loss of this bargaining tool would constitute a strategic defeat for China. China would lose the counterforce that Iran provides to the U.S. in the region.

Here again, the indirect means are the most profitable. China therefore is likely to forestall efforts to contain Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons for as long as it can in order to gain concessions and attempt to limit U.S. influence. In the end, China walks a fine line between being a friend to all and alienating its most reliable and abundant energy provider, Saudi Arabia, and others within the Gulf through its dual approach.

Notes

[1] Lieberthal, Kenneth and Jisi, Wang. "Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust." (Brookings Institution, 2012), P.VIII.

[2] Gunzinger, Mark and Dougherty, Chris: "Outside-In: Operating from Range to Defeat Iran's Anti-Access and Area Denial Threats." (Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, 2011), P.43.

[3] Alterman, Jon B. and Garver, John W. *The Vital Triangle: China, the United States, and the Middle East* (Washington, D.C. Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2008), P.48.

CHAPTER FIVE
Recommendations

As described, China does have a major and growing role in the Middle East. It has increasingly proven able to mitigate its lack of hard power capability through the use of soft power, regional partners, and proxies. As this effort gains, it will allow China to limit U.S. influence, gain concessions, and achieve a future positional advantage. It is the essence of A2/AD at a regional level.

China's asymmetrical approach to A2/AD, in which military strategy is but one factor and not necessarily the predominate one, is equally effective in that it alters the battlefield to negate America's advantage.[1] In this regard, the following recommendations are offered to counter the Chinese asymmetrical approach to A2/AD:

- The Department of Defense should conduct a comprehensive review of all current basing and force posture arrayed within the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific to determine which bases are most likely to be negatively impacted by Chinese direct (symmetrical) or indirect (asymmetrical) actions. The Department should determine the potential impact of an A2/AD strategy by proxy (a host nation aligned with China) and under what circumstances Chinese influence is likely to have the most counterproductive effect against U.S. interests. U.S. military bases and force posture must be better aligned to confront and mitigate Chinese regional alliances and the potential for Chinese interference whether direct or indirect.

  The move of U.S. Marines to Australia and from Okinawa to Guam is a step in the right direction within the Asia-Pacific. It provides strategic dispersion and safeguards against attack, yet forces are postured in a manner that they can respond to myriad threats in a timely manner. But more must be done to counter growing Chinese influence within the Middle East. As argued, China's use of soft power within the Middle East has the potential to cause Gulf States to deny the U.S. the ability to launch military actions against China from their territory. Economic interdependence between oil producing states in the Gulf and China is a strong motivating factor that may swing allegiance in favor of China, making it more difficult for the U.S. to pursue a comprehensive military campaign to interdict Chinese oil supplies. Without the assistance of regional partners and access to bases, U.S. military action would be difficult to initiate and sustain.

- In response to the growing A2/AD challenge posed by countries like China and Iran, the U.S. Navy and Air Force have teamed up to unveil a new strategic

concept to ensure access in any domain, under any set of conditions, in any part of the world: Air-Sea Battle. The pursuit of a military concept such as Air-Sea Battle is a prudent hedge against a future symmetrical threat posed by an adversary's weapons and technology, but it does not address the more subtle and indirect asymmetrical options a potential adversary may employ.

Therefore, in conjunction with the Air-Sea Battle concept, the U.S. should implement a complementary sea-basing concept and capability that allows it to phase, build combat power, launch offensive military action, and sustain combat forces from within range of a potential adversary's theater of operation. A sea-basing capability negates the need for land bases and mitigates the potential for host nations to limit or prevent military action from being launched from their territory. Moreover, it affords the U.S. greater political latitude, operational freedom of maneuver, and the ability to take unilateral action if need be without being hamstrung by regional politics or countervailing influence leveraged on client states by an adversary.

- Develop a comprehensive multidimensional strategy to counter Chinese direct and indirect A2/AD capabilities and threats in the Middle East. The strategy should incorporate diplomatic, informational, and economic elements of national power and not solely rely on the military aspect of countering A2/AD capabilities. Long term goals should be to:(1) Engage China on a wide diplomatic front to both counter existing Chinese A2/AD alliances and disrupt attempts to enlarge the alliance network; (2) Counter Chinese efforts to sway states along the periphery towards a Chinese axis; (3) Find new and innovative ways to mitigate China's relationships with rogue states, such as Iran, to counter their destabilizing influence and mitigate Chinese leverage over proxy states.

The strategy outlined above is a call to action, not a call to arms. US-China conflict is neither in each party's interests nor inevitable. In the end, the U.S. is unsettled by China's strong economic prospects and lack of military transparency, while China likely perceives and fears that the U.S. is attempting to contain it regionally and thus prevent it from achieving its rightful status as a major world power.

Despite fundamentally opposing views and ideology, the U.S. and China should develop a means to communicate at the highest levels of their respective militaries. Strategic communications on the military to military side is more crucial than ever. The potential for miscalculation is great, especially as the U.S. rebalances to the Asia-Pacific region and China continues its military modernization. The "flash to bang" response in today's high tech environment is faster than ever before, forces can clash across myriad operating domains from under-sea and cyber to space in the blink of an eye.

The Chinese political system is not nearly responsive enough to ensure that its civilian leaders can communicate effectively with its military during a crisis. This makes it all the more critical for the U.S. military and the Chinese military to have a means to communicate with each other directly. The goal should not be to attempt to instill transparency or democratic ideology but simply to have redundant means for China and the U.S. to communicate with one another during a crisis. The ability to communicate via multiple communications channels may provide a way to mitigate miscalculation that could lead to conflict or deescalate military action after an event or clash has occurred.

Notes

[1]AsymmetricThreat.Net. Asymmetric Warfare. Available from: http://asymmetricthreat.net/glossary.shtml. Internet accessed 20 May 2012.

CHAPTER SIX
Conclusions

For decades, U.S. national interests in the Middle East were primarily concerned with the Arab-Israeli conflict and with maintaining regional stability in order to safeguard the unimpeded flow of oil out of the Persian Gulf for the benefit of all. After the events of 9/11 and recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, counterterrorism efforts became a priority as well. And now Iran poses unique challenges with its pursuit of nuclear weapons. In short, US interests remains strong in the region, and it should not forego the strong foundation it has built in the Middle East or the role it has played there over many years.

But the reasons not to lose focus on the Middle East, as we shift our eyes to the Pacific, also ironically include better understanding China's needs and strategies. The U.S. may want to pivot away from the Middle East and rebalance to the Asia-Pacific, but in reality the Middle East is crucial to continued economic prosperity of China and a growing focal point in China's direct and indirect power projection efforts. And thus US leaders must be mindful of the fact that China has begun to lay the ground work of an effective A2/AD strategy there at a regional level.

The two competing efforts must be better understood by policymakers in Washington, in order to ensure success in both regions. U.S. national interests in the Middle East region are directly tied to a potential competitor (China), friends (OECD countries), and U.S allies' energy needs in the Middle East. A continued presence in the region will serve to assure allies, safeguard the flow of oil, and promote global political and economic stability.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lieutenant Colonel Eduardo A. Abisellan is the U.S. Marine Corps Federal Executive Fellow in the Brookings 21st Century Defense Initiative. He has served in the Marine Corps for over 20 years as an artillery officer. His most recent assignment before coming to Brookings was as the commanding officer of a cannon artillery battalion. He has a broad operational background, serving in a variety of roles within the Marine artillery community, Marine Expeditionary Forces, and joint duty with U.S. Central Command.

Lieutenant Colonel Abisellan graduated from The Military College of South Carolina, The Citadel, in 1990 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science. He is a graduate of the U.S. Army Field Artillery Officer Basic and Advanced Course, Naval Command and Staff College, and the Joint Forces Staff College. He has a master's degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College.