

# **IMPLICATIONS OF THE RISE OF CHINA FOR THE U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE<sup>1</sup>**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the single minded focus on terrorism and homeland security in the wake of the 11 September attacks on the World Trade towers and the Pentagon, scant attention has been paid to the 30 September release of the Bush Administration new defense strategy.

In legislation passed in 1993, the United States Congress required the Department of Defense to submit a report every four years that serves as an overall strategic planning document that describes general DOD goals and policy objectives. Known as the Quadrennial Defense Review, or QDR, the report is normally the focus of considerable attention and commentary. Before September 11, 2001, there was a great deal of interest shown by defense experts around the world in how the Bush Administration would address topics such the “transformation” of the US military, whether this administration would continue to follow a two major regional war strategy, what role missile defense would have in US strategy, whether greater strategic focus would be placed on Asia, and what “weight” China might be accorded in future US strategy.

In fact the QDR does address these as well as other issues. While this short paper is not the place to address the totality of the QDR, it is appropriate to draw from the QDR those concepts and policy directions that are applicable to the topic at hand—namely the impact that the rise of China will have on the US-Japan Alliance. Whether one agrees with the approach outlined in the new QDR or not, it is important that it be considered because it will provide an important context for how the relationship between China, Japan and the United States evolves.

## **THE QDR AND EAST ASIA**

The importance of allies and friends is the point of departure for the strategy of the Bush Administration. The vision of America’s role, as spelled out in the QDR, relates global stability and confidence, and hence, economic prosperity to the network of alliances and friendships that the United States maintains. This will come as no surprise to anyone who has followed the speeches of senior defense officials since the administration was

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a first draft and represents the personal judgments of the author and should not be construed as representing the views of the CNA Corporation or the views of any of CNA’s clients.

inaugurated in January 2001, or more tellingly, who has watched the care the administration has taken in assembling the broadest possible anti-terrorist coalition. Nonetheless, it is significant that the very first of the four goals of U.S. defense strategy is:

“Assuring allies and friends of the United States’ steadiness of purpose and its Capacity to fulfill its security commitments;”

Further, of direct interest to Japan and Korea and by implication to the rest of East Asia, the QDR places great importance on forward-deployed U.S. forces. Of particular significance, the QDR indicates that forward forces must be capable of, “... swiftly defeating an adversary’s military and political objectives with only modest reinforcement.” This is an important concept, and contrasts in important ways from how forces stationed in East Asia have been discussed in the past few years. Of late much of the discussion surrounding U.S. forces stationed in East Asia has focused more on what changes, meaning reductions, might result from a more peaceful Korean peninsula. While the QDR does not rule this out, the QDR’s Asia focus is clearly broader than Korea, and is more focused on ensuring on that, what some call “combat credible” forces, are kept in East Asia to deal with a full-range of possible contingencies. Specifically, another of the four strategic goals of the United States is to:

“Deter aggression and coercion by deploying forward the capacity to swiftly defeat attacks and impose sever penalties for aggression on an adversary’s military capability and supporting infrastructure.”

When the QDR discusses U.S. national interests, Asia receives particular attention when it comes to list regional areas that are “critical” to the United States. Listed among the enduring national interests of the United States is the requirement to preclude hostile domination of critical areas, “... particularly Europe, Northeast Asia, the East Asian littoral (defined as the region stretching from south of Japan through Australia and into the Bay of Bengal), and the Middle East and Southwest Asia.”

This formulation is interesting because it specifically bifurcates East Asia into Northeast Asia (which I take to mean Japan and Korea) and the littoral states between Japan and India. This was done, I believe, to make certain that it was widely understood that the United States had important interests in Asia *in addition to* its Japanese and Korean allies. I take the characterization “East Asian littoral” to include Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Brunei, Papua New Guinea, Malaysia and Thailand as well as the South China Sea and key Indonesian international straits. Choosing to define the **littoral** as a crucial area—as opposed to saying Southeast Asia, or Indochina—reflects a carefully chosen formulation that geographically includes Taiwan while avoiding a definition that suggests U.S. *critical* interests include continental Asia. This formulation is implicit recognition of the de facto division of Asia into two “military spheres of influence.” China is the dominant military power on the mainland of Asia, while the U.S. and its

littoral allies hold sway in what might be termed maritime Asia. I will return to this de facto “condominium” of power between the United States and China later in the paper.

The Bush administration is clearly concerned about the rise of China. While they do not name China by name, the DOD report holds that Asia is “...gradually emerging as a region susceptible to large-scale military competition.” The report goes on to conclude that maintaining a stable balance in Asia will be a complex task, and, clearly implying China, holds that a “military competitor with a formidable resource base will emerge.” Aside from Japan, no other East Asian country but China fits this profile—and Japan, of course, is an ally not a competitor.

To address this issue and to preclude China, or anyone else for that matter, from dominating Northeast Asia or the East Asian littoral, the QDR says U.S. defense strategy will focus on promoting security cooperation with friends and allies in order to create a “favorable balance of military power” to improve deterrence and prevent aggression and coercion. In fact, a principle objective for “security cooperation” (the term of art that evidently replaces “engagement” as a way to characterize military-to-military contacts between the United States and the countries of East Asia) will be to ensure access, interoperability with allies and friends, and intelligence cooperation. This is because there are so few U.S. bases in Asia and the distances are so vast. As a result, the report indicates, the United States will place a premium on securing additional access and infrastructure agreements in the region.

In practical terms, this guidance translates into sustaining the current continental-maritime military balance in East Asia. In other words insuring that a continentally dominant China does not develop, unchecked, the ability to project its power off the continent into what the ODR terms Northeast Asia and littoral Asia. Given the fact that China needs to cross open ocean to bring its formidable army to bear against Japan, or other allies and friends, including especially Taiwan, U.S. forces must be able to trump any attempts to do so.

Conceptually, in my judgment, this translates into a call for a combined U.S. and allied capability that is able to: (1) defeat China’s short and medium range ballistic missile force, which is currently the only credible way that China has to project power, (2) be able to deal with China’s large submarine force, (3) be able to maintain air superiority over the maritime approaches to Japan and Taiwan, and (4) to strengthen deterrence by being able to hold at risk targets of importance in China. Dealing with these tasks, plus the continuing need to deter in Korea, forms the bulk of broad mission capabilities that will be needed to satisfy what the QDR calls “regionally tailored” forces in East Asia.

Comparing this conceptual template to the specifics in the QDR, it specifically calls for an increase in aircraft carrier presence in the region (good for air defense and offensive strike operations), increased contingency stationing for the U.S. Air Force (the same), and the possibility that 3 or 4 for more surface combatants (good for anti-submarine warfare, air-defense, cruise missile strikes, and eventually missile-defense), and a yet to be converted Trident-class SSGN (a capability for “stealthy” cruise missile strike) could be forward stationed in East Asia.

The QDR is not specific about where these additional forces might be stationed, but certainly Japan cannot be ruled out. Taken together with the continued development of sea- and land-based missile defense systems that protect against short- and medium-range tactical ballistic missiles, these specific changes are directly relevant to either a Korean or Taiwan contingency and they also contribute to the overall goal of maintaining a “favorable balance of military power in East Asia.”

Finally, there is one more very important aspect to maintaining a favorable military balance in East Asia, and that is that key allies and friends of the United States must be able to successfully defend their own sovereignty. Japan is perhaps the best example of this requirement. The Self-Defense Force is professional, well equipped and under no constitutional inhibitions when it comes to the defense of Japan. It is important to U.S. strategy for East Asia that in the future Japan will continue to maintain such capability. This is not all that the United States might hope for in terms of Japanese military contributions to the alliance, but it is the irreducible minimum. In the context of the rise of China, Japan’s ability to defend the seaward approaches to Japan against Chinese submarines is important, as in the future, will be its ability to defeat Chinese ballistic missiles.

## **CHINA AND CAPABILITY BASED PLANNING**

One of the central “tenets” of U.S. defense strategy is the shift to the concept of “capabilities based planning.” This is a needed and sensible corrective to the fixation that the U.S. military has placed on Korea and Iraq as the only two canonical planning scenarios for sizing the U.S. force structure. This is not to say that deterring conflict in Korea will not continue to be a central mission for many of the U.S. forces in East Asia, but it also means more attention will be paid to potential future adversaries and more attention to how those adversaries might fight.

While the QDR does not call out China specifically it indicates that capabilities based planning, “... means identifying capabilities need to deter and defeat adversaries who will rely on surprise, deception and asymmetric warfare.” Given that these operational concepts are among the central tenets of Chinese military doctrine, the capabilities based planning approach as applied to Asia almost certainly will have China in mind—particularly as long as a Chinese attack on Taiwan cannot be ruled out.

Clearly the authors of the QDR are concerned about the potential of China, sometime in the future, to deny U.S. access to its allies, friend and interests in East Asia. What does this mean for the alliance with Japan—in the context of the rise of a China that could plausibly deny the United States access? The list of capabilities that are needed is not long:

- Continue to provide bases for U. S. forces
- Do not restrict the use of air bases in case of a Chinese attack on Taiwan
- Continue to maintain a “world-class” anti-submarine force

- Similarly, maintain the maritime self-defense mine countermeasures capability as an “alliance asset” that could be employed throughout the Asian littoral, or beyond, as it was following Desert Storm.
- Maintain the ability to control the air over and adjacent to Japanese sovereign territory
- In the future, once the capability is developed, maintain the ability to defend against Chinese ballistic missiles
- Dedicate Japanese intelligence resources to helping the alliance develop a deeper and more sophisticated appreciation for Chinese capabilities and intentions.

## **Conclusion**

The QDR is appropriately diplomatic in its formulations related to Asia and China. I have taken the liberty of trying to read between the lines and infer judgments and perceptions. I believe my reading of intent is generally correct, but I am also quick to point out that attitudes of policy makers are not cast in concrete; both experience on the job and events force reconsideration. But, it is interesting that in many ways the ODR accurately captures circumspect “Asian” attitudes about China. In private conversations across the region it is clear that most countries—Japan included—are apprehensive about the rise of China. They realize that if China’s economy continues to grow it will inevitably fuel continued PLA modernization—a modernization that neighboring states will be unable to match—especially if China’s economic growth tends to be at the expense of the rest of the region.

If this growth is coupled with regionally pugnacious behavior from Beijing, relationships between many of the nations of East Asia and the United States will be embraced because the United States would be the only likely counterbalancing power. Japan is no exception to this judgment. Japan’s capable self-defense forces will probably not be enough because over the long haul, Japan’s declining population in the face of a dynamic China means that Japan alone cannot match China’s comprehensive national power. That means that Tokyo will continue to value, and need, a U.S. alliance.