

***Rebalancing US Forces: Basing and Forward Presence in the Asia-Pacific.* Edited by Carnes Lord and Andrew S. Erickson. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2014. Hardcover: 226pp.**

Can the United States rely on its land bases, major naval surface combatants, and above all, its fleet of formidable nuclear-powered aircraft carriers to sustain a forward military presence in the Asia-Pacific region in the coming decades? This is the key question for Carnes Lord and Andrew Erickson, the editors of *Rebalancing US Forces: Basing and Forward Presence in the Asia-Pacific*. For nearly seven decades, US strategy in the Asia Pacific has remained relatively constant: to maintain a robust forward and active presence coupled with bilateral alliances to ensure peace, stability and prosperity. Since the end of the Cold War, however, East Asia's regional strategic template has become progressively more complex and multifaceted with the confluence of unresolved historical legacies in traditional flashpoints such as the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan Straits, territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas as well as a range of non-traditional security challenges such as energy and cyber security.

Above all, however, it is China's increasing power projection capabilities embedded in the People Liberation Army's (PLA) growing technological developments, including long-range precision-strike assets, that is gradually redefining the regional military balance and subsequently US strategy. In particular, China's asymmetric "counter-intervention" concepts and weapons technologies, designed to deny the American military and its allies the freedom of action in China's "near seas" by restricting deployments of US forces into theatre (anti-access) and denying them freedom of movement there (area denial), amplify the magnitude of strategic and operational challenges for US commanders in the region. In this context, Lord and Erickson argue that the current constellation of US forward bases in East Asia — "main operating bases" with a permanent US military presence, "forward operating sites" maintained by a relatively small US support presence for temporary deployments and "cooperative security locations" designed for contingency use with little or no permanent US presence — will become increasingly vital, yet paradoxically vulnerable (p. 9).

The question of the long-term strategic effectiveness of America's forward presence in the region is analyzed in detail through select case studies of Guam, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Singapore, the Indian Ocean and Central Asia. Chapter One, by Andrew Erickson and Justin Mikolay, focuses on the increasing geostrategic importance of Guam as a "sovereign anchor of American force posture in East Asia" with a potential "to play a key supporting role in military operation across the region" (p. 17). Here, the authors map the diverse factors, situational advantages as well as challenges that both enable and constrain the deployment and basing of more US ships and submarines. On one hand, for example, Guam allows for a rapid response to regional contingencies by reducing transit times for submarines and other pre-positioned naval and air power assets. On the other hand, however, Guam's Naval Base requires "significant infrastructure and equipment upgrades" (p. 20) to support US forces in the region, and perhaps more importantly, mitigate the increasing risks and vulnerabilities to China's precision-strike missiles. Guam therefore represents a key benchmark for basing resource allocation and development necessary for the United States to retain its Asia-Pacific leadership in the future.

In Chapter Two Toshi Yoshihara explores the strategic ramifications of China's increasingly sophisticated arsenal of conventional ballistic missiles for the US forward presence in Japan and US-Japan defence cooperation. This chapter is noteworthy as it analyses not only Chinese strategic assessments of the importance of US naval bases in Japan, but also how these bases fit into the PLA's evolving missile strategy and doctrine. In his analysis, Yoshihara draws upon key publications closely affiliated with the PLA, including the Academy of Military Science and the National Defense University. He concludes that "Washington and Tokyo will encounter a more complex geometry of deterrence with the emergence of a robust Chinese theater-strike capability" (p. 59) and that "theater-level interactions involving conventional missile strikes against regional bases could be highly unstable and prone to miscalculation on all sides" (p. 60).

In Chapter Three Terence Roehrig reflects on the continuity and change in the character of the US-South Korea alliance and its implications for the future of American bases in South Korea. Specifically, Roehrig examines the historical trajectory of the alliance, and current issues including the ongoing restructuring

and relocation of the US force presence in South Korea to attain greater operational flexibility, the debates surrounding the proposed changes in the military command structure and return of wartime operational control to South Korea, as well as disagreements over the cost sharing of the alliance. Notwithstanding these challenges, Roehrig argues that “the alliance is slowly moving toward an arrangement that is more of a partnership than a patron-client relationship dominated by the United States” (p. 82). Perhaps more importantly, he notes that the broader vision of the alliance is gradually widening from deterrence *vis-à-vis* North Korea to “addressing common global security concerns, such as piracy, peacekeeping, trafficking, and the spread of nuclear weapons and technology” (p. 82).

In a similar framework of analysis, the next four chapters — “The U.S. Strategic Relationship with Australia” by Jack McCaffrie and Chris Rahman, “Singapore: Forward Operating Site” by Chris Rahman, “Diego Garcia and American Security in the Indian Ocean” by Walter Ladwig, Andrew Erickson and Justin Mikolay, and “U.S. Bases and Domestic Politics in Central Asia” by Alexander Cooley — provide a comprehensive overview of the history, geopolitics, strategic and operational military functions and challenges of US forward presence in Australia, Singapore, the Indian Ocean and Central Asia. The central theme of these chapters is the deepening relationships in America’s regional force-posture arrangements in these geostrategically important locations, and the increasingly dynamic character in facilitating future regional military cooperation amid challenges posed by a more assertive China. At the same time, however, the chapters note differences in the alignment of strategic priorities and preferences between the United States and its regional allies, which is creating a variance in the magnitude, scope and future orientation of security cooperation.

Last but not least, the concluding chapter by Sam Tangredi examines the conceptual adaptation, experimentation, and ongoing debates concomitant to the concept of sea basing. The US Department of Defense defines sea basing as “the deployment, assembly, command projection, reconstitution and reemployment of joint power from the sea without reliance on land bases within the operational area” (p. 200). Tangredi critiques this definition, pointing to its near-exclusive association with amphibious warfare. In contrast, if sea basing is defined in a broader term “as using the sea in the same way U.S. forces use regional land bases,

clearly there can be degrees of sea basing in the same way that there are different types of land bases” (p. 201). He proceeds to clarify the concept in relation to other concepts of sea control, sovereignty and anti-access and concludes that “the ability to assemble a robust sea base — defined broadly — from forward-deployed joint and naval forces would be the most effective tool and means of practical deterrence” principally *vis-à-vis* conventional missile strikes.

Taken together, *Rebalancing U.S. Forces: Basing and Forward Presence in the Asia-Pacific* shows the increasing complexity of issues shaping the US forward presence in Asia, as well as the need for a deeper understanding of country-specific strategic priorities, debates and choices. In this regard, the publication makes a significant contribution to both theoretical and policy-oriented literature focusing on strategic studies in the Asia-Pacific region.

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