

Asia's Security Outlook Appears Favourable

Excerpts from U.S. Secretary of Defense Weinberger's Annual Report to Congress for Fiscal Year 1988, 14 January 1987

Regional Balances: The East Asian Balance

The Soviets continue expanding and modernizing their forces in East Asia. They are upgrading the equipment of their more than 50 divisions deployed in the Far East. Their more than 40 tactical air regiments stationed there are receiving newer aircraft. The latest generation of interceptor aircraft are also entering the regional inventory. Backfire aircraft continue to augment the older inventories of Badgers, and the Soviets are deploying modified Bear aircraft in areas from which they can support Far East operations. The Soviet Pacific Ocean fleet is the largest in the Soviet navy.

It contains two of the Soviet Union's three vertical/short-take-off and landing (V/STOL) aircraft carriers, over 80 principal surface combatants, and more than 80 submarines. These conventional forces are supplemented by a substantial number of short- and intermediate-range nuclear forces, including the land-mobile SS-20.

Outside the Northeast Pacific, the Soviet naval and air presence in the South China Sea now comprises approximately 30 ships and submarines, and 40 aircraft. Operating from Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, these and other support forces pose a significant threat to Southeast Asian sea lines of communications, and highlight close and continuing Soviet support for the Vietnamese regime in its aggressive action in Cambodia. The Sino-Soviet military balance continues to favor the Soviet Union. It will continue to do so as Chinese emphasis on economic growth reduces funds available for immediate defense improvements in its long-term modernization programs. Although China continues to make incremental improvements in reorganizing and streamlining its military, Beijing still relies on its large population and resource base, and geographical size as the heart of its conventional deterrent.

Even though the Soviets maintain an enormous strategic nuclear superiority over the Chinese, China's extensive use of camouflage, concealment, and mobility is likely to preclude a disarming Soviet first strike against China's relatively small nuclear force. Slow growth over the next five years will likely include the introduction of a small number of SLBMs. The effectiveness of China's strategic forces will be reduced by ongoing Soviet upgrades to its missile defense systems.

The second significant regional balance, between North and South Korea, is of critical interest and concern to the United States. The military preparedness of the Republic of Korea, coupled with North Korea's perception of America's resolve, have been instrumental in keeping the peace for nearly 34 years. North Korea persists in its efforts to modernize its large armed forces, despite the devastating effects on its notoriously weak economy. It is also deploying these forces forward that reduces the warning time for South Korea. Current estimates indicate that North Korea carries a defense burden exceeding 20 per cent of its gross national product. North Korean modernization programs include continued reorganization and forward deployment of its army, and development of the second

largest special operations forces in the world. All these forces are postured to attack in ways that maximize the opportunity of surprise.

The Republic of Korea, with U.S. assistance, has also been modernizing its forces, balancing these efforts within a strong, growing economy that is roughly four times the size of North Korea's. This economic asymmetry makes the long-term prospect for the Korean balance favorable. Nevertheless, in the face of Pyongyang's aggressive actions, and in view of the potential for Soviet intervention that would quickly upset the balance, our current efforts to assist South Korea in redressing specific military problem areas must continue.

Southeast Asia is the locus of the remaining significant regional balance. Vietnam fields the world's third largest army. With direct financing from the Soviets, it continues to occupy Cambodia, threatens Thailand and the overall stability of ASEAN, and poses a constant menace to China by deploying some 700,000 troops along the Chinese border. In exchange for base rights, the Soviets provide military equipment and continue to support the failed Vietnamese economy. Containing this threat requires our continued attention.

Although some aspects of the regional balance favor the Soviets, there are many important theater-wide considerations that favor the United States and its allies. Japan plays a significant role in bolstering democratic defenses in the region. By virtue of its key location, improving capabilities, modernizing self-defense forces, and its assumption of new missions, Japan provides a major part of its own defense and offers essential infrastructure support to U.S. forward-deployed forces. The Soviet deployment of SSBNs in bastions close to the Soviet Union magnifies the strategic importance of islands that dominate the entrances to the Sea of Japan and the Sea of Okhotsk. The inclusion of Japan in this Soviet "sea-control" area underscores the Soviet threat to Japan. The rapid economic development of Japan and the newly industrialized countries of the East Asian rim, together with the growth of the Chinese economy, continue to broaden the basis for developing the self-defense capabilities of friendly regional countries. The United States is pursuing economic and security policies that tie our countries more closely together, while assuring that technology transfer does not redound to the West's disadvantage. In view of these positive economic trends in East Asia, with the notable exception of Soviet allies or clients, the long-term regional trends appear favorable from our perspective.

Regional Security: East Asia and the Pacific

Events in East Asia and the Pacific over the past year have focused attention on important U.S. security and economic interests in the region. The change of government in the Philippines emphasized our determination to support the popular wishes of that democratic nation. On a negative note, the strength of the ANZUS treaty was weakened by New Zealand's actions leading to its suspension from U.S. security obligations under the treaty.

1. The Challenge of Preserving Independence and Stability in East Asia and the Pacific.

The Soviet Union continues to extend its power and influence in the region. Over 50 Soviet divisions are deployed in the Soviet Far East, along with about 2,000 tactical aircraft and one-third of the SS-20 mobile missile force. Modernization of Soviet naval forces in the region continues with the addition of Kirov cruisers to the expanding Soviet Pacific Fleet. The Soviets have also built up their forces in Vietnam and the South China Sea. More than 2,500 Soviet military advisors are supporting efforts in Vietnam, and approximately 30 Soviet ships routinely patrol the South China Sea. This build-up is clearly aimed at the United States and its allies and friends in the region.

Since North Korean President Kim Il-Sung's visit to Moscow in 1984, the Soviet Union has expanded its military assistance to North Korea. In exchange, the Soviets have received overflight rights for both strike and reconnaissance aircraft. These improvements in Soviet-North Korean military co-operation clearly threaten security in Northeast Asia. Our support to the Republic of Korea (ROK) under the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1954, and in particular, the presence of U.S. forces in Korea, have played a key role in deterring North Korean aggression. North Korea's military modernization, reorganization, and repositioning of forces nearer the DMZ has seriously reduced attack warning time for U.S. and South Korean forces. We are, however, committed to meeting the challenges to regional security in Northeast Asia both by maintaining U.S. strength in the region and by aiding South Korea in its self-defense efforts. Our developing defense relationship with China is based on a commonality of security interests. A secure, modernizing China can be a force for peace and stability in East Asia and the world. During my recent visit to China, I reaffirmed our willingness to play a positive role in China's defense modernization. We will continue to pursue high-level dialogues, functional military exchanges, and military technological cooperation in areas that will enhance China's ability to defend itself against external threats.

The Cambodian people continue to suffer under a brutal Vietnamese military occupation. At the same time, the large Vietnamese force in Cambodia threatens our ally Thailand. We will continue to help the Thai Government meet regional threats and defend its borders against Vietnamese aggression.

2. U.S. Forces

A strong and visible U.S. presence in the region is necessary to deter the Soviet Union, North Korea, and Vietnam from interfering with the independence and stability of our allies and friends.

The U.S. Commander in Chief for the Pacific (USCINCPAC), with headquarters in Hawaii and forces spread across the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans, has responsibility for U.S. military operations in a region covering more than 50 per cent of the earth's surface.

3. Fulfilling Our Security Commitments in the Region

The sheer size of the East Asian and Pacific region and the limited availability of U.S. forces necessitates close cooperation with our friends and allies to meet threats posed by potential adversaries.

Japan. Japan's importance to security in the region cannot be overestimated. Though limited to a defensive role, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces are improving their capabilities.

The Japanese defense budget has grown, albeit from a low base, during the past 16 years, rising by more than 5 per cent in real terms annually despite a slowdown in overall government spending. This continuation of sustained real growth in defense spending is one in a series of encouraging steps that demonstrate Japan's recognition of its responsibility as a member of the democratic community of nations, an obligation formally accepted by Prime Minister Nakasone. Other positive steps include the acceptance of the defense of sea lines of communication to 1,000 nautical miles (forces for which are addressed by Japan's 1986-1990 Defense Plan) and, most recently, the decision to permit commercial participation in the Strategic Defense Initiative research effort.

Republic of Korea (ROK). The threat to the ROK remains North Korea. Even though the presence of American troops gives the ROK important military advantages, North Korea today could launch a massive attack with minimal warning. Together with the ROK and our United Nations partners, we must continue to strengthen U.S. and ROK capabilities on the Korean peninsula. To this end, U.S. and ROK forces are modernizing steadily and participate jointly in five annual training exercises in Korea. Stability on the peninsula will enhance the success of international events, such as the 1988 Olympics, that are being held in the ROK, and sustain the growth in national pride and confidence that results from such successes.

The Philippines. Our security relationship with the Philippines rests on several interrelated factors. U.S. military facilities in that country permit us to maintain a continuous air and naval presence in the region. We are committed under the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951 to assist in the defense of the Philippines in the event of attack. Finally, we share an interest in the maintenance of a friendly, democratic government in the Philippines, which is critical to the stability of Southeast Asia. Last February, the Philippine people took control of their own destiny through a peaceful democratic revolution. Communist insurgents, however, have been quick to capitalize on the economic hardships of the Marcos era. As a result, their insurgency has grown rapidly over the past few years and now constitutes a grave threat to Philippine democracy. The United States has moved since last February to provide substantial additional amounts of economic and military assistance to the Philippines. Continued assistance will be required in order to ensure that the Philippine Government has sufficient economic and security resources to complete the transition to permanent democratic government.

Thailand. While Thailand, a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), has pledged of support from several of its neighbors in the event of an attack by the large Vietnamese forces in Cambodia and Laos, the Thais still consider the United States their primary defense ally. Under the Manila Pact, the United States has supported Thailand with a broad range of programs to improve and modernize the Thai armed forces. Our efforts have included joint participation in combined exercises, provision of equipment and training, and improved cooperative logistics support through the U.S.- Thai war reserve stockpile agreement. These robust, ongoing programs are enhancing both Thailand's security and world peace.

Australia and New Zealand. The ANZUS treaty, which until recently joined us with both Australia and New Zealand in common defense efforts, now operates in a practical sense as a bilateral mutual-security pact with Australia. While our commitment to security in the South Pacific remains as strong as ever, the New Zealand Government's unyielding position on port access forced us to drop New Zealand from formal U.S. security obligations. Bilateral cooperation with Australia, under ANZUS, will continue, however, as the cornerstone of our security efforts in the South Pacific. We look forward to New Zealand's early resumption of normal allied cooperation.