

# The Future Strategic Environment of East Asia: Implications of a PRC-Taiwan Reunification

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CNA CHINA  STUDIES



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COP D0025806.A1  
September 2011

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# Introduction

## ***Background***

When the Chinese civil war ended in 1949, no one anticipated that six decades later the two sides of the Taiwan Strait would still be separate political entities. Chiang Kai-shek fled to the island of Taiwan—a small outpost of Chinese territory that had only recently returned to China after 50 years of Japanese colonization—fully anticipating that his struggle with the new leaders of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was not over. Still, both he and his rival Mao Zedong declared that mainland China and Taiwan were part of the same country, and must be reunified under a single government.

Most observers assumed that it would be only a short time before Taiwan fell to the Communist forces. President Truman made a strategic decision not to intervene with U.S. military force in the face of an anticipated PRC invasion of Taiwan in the spring of 1950.<sup>1</sup> Only with the onset of the Korean War in June 1950 did the U.S. armed forces take on the deterrent posture in the cross-Strait situation that persists today.<sup>2</sup>

In the intervening decades, an intricate security architecture has emerged in the Asia-Pacific region around a still-divided PRC and Taiwan. Today, the political separation of Taiwan from the People’s Republic of China has become a core feature of the East Asian security environment.

## ***The question***

When considering the future security environment of East Asia, it is intriguing to consider how this architecture might be affected by a cross-Strait reunification. What would China choose to do with this new situation? How would U.S. partners and allies in the region respond? And what opportunities and challenges would open up for the United States?

The answers depend in large part on the post-reunification *mindset* of China, of other countries in Asia, and of the United States. A cross-Strait reunification would bring the United States, China, and U.S. regional allies and partners to a decision point. All actors in the region would need to reevaluate their previous assessments of the regional security environment, and the policies resulting from these assessments.

These assessments, in turn, would result from the specific changes to facts on the ground. Certain facts would not automatically change as a result of a reunification. Issues that have long shaped the East Asian security environment, such as tensions

on the Korean peninsula, would remain unaltered. The United States would still have a basic interest in maintaining access to sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and in ensuring peace and stability in the region. U.S. alliances, which are not contingent upon Taiwan and China remaining separate, would persist.

Conversely, a cross-Strait reunification would also result in some *unambiguous* changes to security facts-on-the-ground. For instance:

- A reunified China would move its geographic borders 100 miles east to the first island chain, gaining an entry point into the open ocean. From this location, China would have greater access to regional transit lanes in all four directions.
- China's military force, built to take and hold the island of Taiwan, would no longer be pinned down with this mission.
- Two economies—which collectively total nearly \$U.S. 5.5 trillion and have a dominant global market share in such important products as semiconductors and other electronics—would be merged.<sup>3</sup>

Between these certain continuities and certain changes are a large number of unknowns. The specific military implications of reunification would, for instance, depend in large part on the way in which reunification had occurred—whether Taiwan had been taken by force, whether the Chinese military had suffered significant losses, and so on. Similarly, the exact economic implications of reunification would depend on the timeframe in which reunification had occurred.

In other words, a vast number of factors would come together to shape any post-reunification environment, and until reunification occurs it is impossible to know which ones would be relevant. A thorough consideration of all possible scenarios, even if feasible, would quickly lead to a list of potential outcomes too long to be useful.<sup>4</sup>

Even without knowing the specific circumstances of reunification, however, we can identify the *types* of factors that would matter. In so doing, we may highlight the underlying dynamics of inter-state relations that would shape a post-reunification regional security environment. This paper aims to do so.

## ***Assumptions***

The purpose of this think-piece is to provide a framework for assessing the implications that a China-Taiwan reunification would have for the United States. Our study proceeds from four assumptions:

- The PRC-Taiwan situation has been resolved through reunification or a reunification-like arrangement.

- The PRC and Taiwan have reunified under a mainland government that is roughly similar to today's Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-led regime. In other words, the PRC has not become a democracy.
- This reunification has been formally recognized by the global community, including the United States.
- The relationship between the United States and China is the same as it is now: a combination of cooperation, competition, and hedging.

This think piece does not assume a specific timeframe. We assess that the factors discussed in this paper would be relevant regardless of whether a reunification occurred soon or in the distant future.

## ***Approach***

We decided that the most productive approach to assessing implications of a cross-Strait reunification was to identify and discuss the *variables* that would be most relevant for shaping the post-reunification security environment in Asia, rather than the countless number of *specific* outcomes that could result. Five key variables would shape a post-reunification Asia:

- China's assessment of its post-reunification priorities
- China's desired role in the Asia-Pacific region: hegemony or multipolarity?
- China's preferred approach to meeting its national goals: coercion or cooperation?
- The response of Asian nations to a changed regional security architecture
- The United States' desired position in a post-reunification Asia-Pacific region.

In this paper, therefore, we consider the post-reunification Asia-Pacific region from the perspectives of China, the United States, and other Asian nations.

For each variable, we explore the inter-state dynamics that would drive the possible outcomes of cross-Strait reunification. We then discuss the extent to which reunification would fundamentally alter the concerns and motivations of the different countries involved.



## Key Findings

### *Overview*

#### **Reunification would change some things, but not everything.**

The five variables we discuss in this paper are relevant for understanding the Asian regional security environment *today* as well as after a reunification. Each represents a continuum of decisions that the United States, China, and other Asian nations must make—today and in the future—in response to their regional security environment. We found that while some of these decisions would probably be altered by the changed security environment following a cross-Strait reunification, many others are determined by issues unrelated to the Taiwan situation. For this reason, these variables can be used to highlight the dynamics of Asian decision-making in other circumstances as well.

### *China*

#### **There are three critical unknowns regarding China's choices in a post-reunification environment.**

- How would China assess its national priorities and interests?
- What roles would China want the U.S. and PRC leadership to have in the Asia-Pacific region?
- How would China view the use of coercion (military, economic, or diplomatic) to achieve its national objectives?

#### **The answers to these questions may not be knowable until after reunification occurs.**

- Beyond Taiwan, the PRC has a host of other security concerns competing for its attention. Following reunification, China's leaders would reassess the strategic environment in order to derive a new priority list. China's post-Taiwan priorities could range from a fully inward-focused emphasis on domestic issues, to an outward-orientated focus on security around China's western borders or its eastern maritime periphery, or even further afield.
- It is easy to assume that China seeks regional hegemony, but there is evidence that China's leadership is still pondering the role that their country should seek to play in the world. Post-reunification, there are reasons that China might accept a multipolar regional security architecture that included a prominent role for the United States. China would be particularly likely to do so if its leadership thought that resolving Taiwan's status would remove a chief obstacle to cooperation with the United States.

- The PRC has historically used a blend of cooperation and coercion to pursue its foreign policy goals, based on its assessment of what would best allow it to achieve its national security objectives. We found no reason to believe that reunification would cause China to more strongly prefer either cooperation or coercion as a primary means of achieving its national goals.

## **Asia**

### **Reunification would cause nations in Asia to reassess their relationships with the United States and the PRC. Three factors would shape the calculus of countries in the region in a post-reunification Asia:**

- *Perceived military strength of the United States and of China in the region.* Asian nations would consider the capabilities and limitations of both the United States and China to use military force to accomplish an objective within the Asia-Pacific region.
- *Perceived reliability of the United States and of China as security partners.* Asian nations would calculate whether they could rely on U.S. or Chinese security partnerships, asking whether: (1) the United States or China could be counted on to keep commitments; (2) the United States or China would help during a crisis; and (3) the United States or China would keep its own requests for support reasonable, and not ask for concessions that Asian nations were unable or unwilling to give.
- *Perceived current and potential future value of the United States and of China as economic and diplomatic partners.* Few (if any) countries in the region could afford not to maintain an economic relationship with the United States or with China. But how each country assessed the *relative* value of this economic relationship after reunification would play into their desire to maintain relationships in the economic and other sectors with the United States and China. Asian nations would also consider how reunification had affected the relative regional and global diplomatic weight of the United States and China in determining their preferred future partnerships with both.

## **The United States**

### **Reunification would not radically change the United States' overarching goals or desired role in Asia—only, possibly, its desired security presence.**

- U.S. goals in Asia have remained relatively stable over the past century. Since the United States first established a permanent presence in Asia in 1898, it has had two persistent goals in the region: to preserve access to Asian markets; and to prevent any single non-U.S. power from dominating

Asia's regional security order. Since World War II, the United States has additionally provided active support to its allies and partners in Asia, in order to build and maintain a peaceful, stable, and democratic Asia-Pacific.

- The current irresolution of Taiwan's status does not drive U.S. national goals in Asia, and its removal would not change them. The United States initially took on the role of security guarantor in Asia based on its concerns over several security issues that have not yet been resolved, to include stability on the Korean peninsula, non-proliferation, and freedom of navigation. Absent Taiwan, the United States would still have a clearly defined role in helping to manage and resolve those issues.
- One cannot dismiss the possibility that reunification could significantly change the scope and composition of the U.S. desired presence in Asia—particularly its military presence. In a post-reunification environment, it might be possible for the United States to meet its goals and fulfill its preferred role in Asia in ways that would not require as robust a military footprint and thus be less expensive in terms of both financial costs and opportunity costs.
- There is no cross-Strait reunification scenario in which the United States would cease to be a Pacific nation. U.S. economic, social, and cultural ties to the region will require a strong *comprehensive* presence in Asia for the foreseeable future.



## Variable 1: China's Assessment of its Post-Taiwan Priorities



When identifying the range of possible outcomes from a cross-Strait reunification, the first issue we consider is *China's assessment of its post-reunification priorities*. What underlying strategic concerns and dynamics would drive this assessment?

- Although China gives a very high priority to reunification with Taiwan, it also has a host of other security concerns competing for its attention.
- Reunification would force China to reassess the importance of its existing security concerns and to consider any new issues that might arise afterwards.
- China has a well-defined process for assessing its strategic environment, which would provide indicators for observers trying to understand how a reunified China was prioritizing its next security concerns.
- China's post-Taiwan priorities could range from a fully inward-focused emphasis on domestic issues; to an emphasis on resolving security tensions with its neighbors on the western land periphery or eastern maritime periphery; to a focus on global power projection.
- How China chose to prioritize its security concerns and military missions would depend on external circumstances, and on the nature of reunification—including the role that the United States had played in reunification.

The arrow above indicates the likely implications that a range of possible outcomes would have for the United States. If China were to focus its post-reunification attention outward, there would be a greater possibility of friction or conflict with the United States or with U.S. allies and partners. If China were to prioritize the management of domestic issues over power projection, it would be less likely to be regionally disruptive.

***Bringing Taiwan under mainland Chinese rule has long been one of the highest priorities of the PRC regime.***

There are two main reasons for the PRC's enduring focus on bringing Taiwan under mainland Chinese rule: Taiwan's symbolic value, and its strategic value.

## Taiwan's symbolic value

China views its separation from Taiwan as the final vestige of a long period of “humiliation” that stretched from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, during which large portions of China’s territory were lost either to independence movements or to semi-colonization by foreign powers. A prominent mainland military strategist has described the retaking of Taiwan as “the last campaign to end China’s civil war.”<sup>5</sup>

Today, “accomplishing the great task of reunifying the motherland” by regaining Taiwan is deemed by China’s government to be the “sacred duty of all Chinese people” and “the bounden duty of the Chinese Communists,” and has become a focus of popular nationalism in China.<sup>6</sup> In 2005, China codified its commitment to reunifying with Taiwan through its “Anti-Secession Law,” which states that “Taiwan is part of China. The [PRC] state shall never allow ... Taiwan [to] secede from China under any name or by any means,” and reserved the right to use force to compel reunification.<sup>7</sup> Reunification has thus become a central element of the CCP regime’s legitimacy.<sup>8</sup>

## Taiwan's strategic value

Taiwan also is believed to be of high strategic importance for China, sitting as it does in the middle of the “first island chain” off China’s coast (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Asia's first and second island chains<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2010* (Washington, DC, 2010), p. 23, [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010\\_CMPR\\_Final.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010_CMPR_Final.pdf), accessed 15 August 2011. The OSD report notes that “PRC military theorists conceive of two island “chains” as forming a geographic basis for China’s maritime defensive perimeter.”

Taiwan's strategic value has been the subject of discussion among those in the PLA charged with formulating military strategy and doctrine. For instance, a PLA senior captain from the Naval Research Institute, which plays an important role in formulating the PLA Navy's doctrine, has described Taiwan and the Hainan islands as a "pair of eyes" looking over the Pacific, explaining that:

China is surrounded and cut off from the Pacific by numerous islands and island chains. Only Taiwan directly faces the Pacific, and it still has not reunified with mainland China. Therefore, China has no unhindered channels to the sea.<sup>9</sup>

Another important doctrinal writing, the 2005 *Science of Military Strategy*, describes Taiwan as "the key to the southeast coast of China" and "a strategic key area and sea barrier for defense and offense."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the irresolution of the cross-Strait situation has thus long occupied a high place on China's list of both national policy and security concerns, and a Taiwan scenario has been a key driver of China's military modernization.<sup>11</sup>

### **But Taiwan has never been the PRC's only security concern.**

Despite the emphasis on reunification, however, China's military has never had the luxury of focusing solely on Taiwan. As suggested by a quote from a PRC State Councilor, in the text box at right, China's leaders prioritize several "core" national interests, of which ensuring "state sovereignty and territorial integrity"—which includes the restoration of Taiwan—is only one. In the past, even when China's military and civilian leaders have been the most focused on regaining Taiwan, they have always had to simultaneously manage other enduring security concerns that touch upon all three of these "core interests." These concerns include (but are not limited to):

#### **China's interests today**

"China's number one core interest is to maintain its fundamental system and state security; next is state sovereignty and territorial integrity; and third is the continued stable development of the economy and society."

— Dai Bingguo, PRC State Councilor, 2009<sup>12</sup>

- *The desire to gain or consolidate control over other PRC-claimed territory.* Since the 1950s, PRC leadership has engaged in repeated diplomatic and military efforts to resolve territorial disputes to its favor, both with its continental neighbors and with regard to various islands in the East and South China Seas.<sup>13</sup> Should China regain control over Taiwan, its leadership would presumably seek to identify its next most pressing territorial concern. However, with the Taiwan situation resolved, it is not clear how high a

priority the Chinese government would place on the regaining of other PRC-claimed territory.

- *The need to protect itself from threats on its land borders.* Throughout its history, the PRC has faced repeated threats from its continental neighbors. In the 1960s it prepared for war with the Soviet Union; it fought cross-border wars with India in 1962 and with Vietnam in 1979; and today it faces the possibility of terrorism and instability spilling over from Central Asia into its own restive western regions.<sup>14</sup> These concerns could easily replace the regaining of PRC-claimed territory as China's highest sovereignty-related priority.
- *The need to protect China's maritime borders.* Threats to sovereignty and territorial integrity also come from the sea. Defending China's coastline from invasion or attack has long been a concern of Chinese governments. Today, Chinese military leaders fear that a hostile power could move naval forces close enough to launch attacks on important political, economic, and military targets along China's coasts. Accordingly, in recent years they have placed a greater emphasis on maritime strategic depth for offshore defensive operations.<sup>15</sup>
- *The need to manage internal unrest and challenges to CCP legitimacy.* The PRC leadership faces a growing culture of public protest within China's own borders: such protests, or "mass incidents," number tens of thousands per year.<sup>16</sup> The Chinese government currently lacks the institutional capacity to effectively manage the people's complaints, many of which center on economic inequality, joblessness, and other negative impacts created by China's rapid economic expansion. Periodically the legitimacy of CCP rule is challenged outright, sometimes violently, by democracy activists and by ethnic separatists, primarily in Xinjiang and Tibet.
- *The need to protect access to resources and markets that support China's economic development.* As China's economy has opened to the outside world, the ability to sustain rapid, export-led economic growth has become increasingly central to the PRC government's legitimacy. Since the 1980s, and especially since the early 1990s, the ability to protect access to resources, trade routes, and markets has become a major security concern.<sup>17</sup>

**Over the past decade, China's security concerns have continued to diversify.**

In addition to these enduring security concerns, today China faces an even longer list of new and emerging security concerns that it must balance with its persistent desire to regain Taiwan. These emerging concerns include:

- The need to protect the growing number of overseas investments and Chinese citizens working abroad
- An increasing perception of dependence on foreign energy sources

- A desire to stabilize China's western border regions
- The need to develop space and cyber capabilities.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, because China's list of security concerns is ever growing, a number of high-level issues could compete for the leadership's attention after a cross-Strait reunification.

### **China's military is expected to help manage these security concerns.**

The diversity of China's non-Taiwan security concerns, and the way that they might play into the future military missions of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) are captured in a directive given to China's military in 2004. In that year PRC president Hu Jintao issued his "Historic Missions of the Armed Forces in the New Period of the New Century" (hereafter, "New Historic Missions"), in which he outlined the ways that the PLA is expected to help address the wide range of security concerns facing the PRC.<sup>19</sup>

The four "New Historic Missions" are:

- *Uphold Party rule.* As the armed forces of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), China's military is expected to defend CCP rule over China and maintain unquestioned loyalty to the Party. (Hu also emphasized that the Party itself bears a responsibility for buttressing its popular legitimacy by improving its capacity for effective governance.)
- *Provide a "staunch security guarantee" for national development.* The PLA should protect against a number of critical security threats that, if badly handled, could derail China's long-term economic development strategy. These include threats to China's national sovereignty, national unification, and social stability.
- *Support the "expansion of national interests."* The PLA is expected to build up its capacity to protect China's expanding security interests, particularly in the maritime, space, and electromagnetic domains.
- *"Uphold world peace and promote common development."* China's military should help shape a world order that is conducive to China's development and to peaceful, cooperative relations with other powers.

The issuance of the "New Historic Missions" makes it clear that the PRC government has devoted considerable attention to the question of how its security concerns should be managed. However, the "New Historic Missions" do not make clear *which* of these issues would be at the top of a post-reunification priority list—or even which ones are at the top of the list now.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, without more information about the exact nature of the post-reunification regional environment, it is impossible to assess which of China's security concerns

would prevail. However, we *can* shed some light on the process by which this assessment would be made, as described below.

***China would prioritize its post-reunification security concerns based on a “strategic assessment” of the regional security environment.***

With the Taiwan situation resolved, China’s leaders would undertake a well-established process to determine a new priority list. When China’s leaders make decisions about national security policy, they begin by making what they call a “strategic assessment” (*zhanlüe panduan*; 战略判断) of the global and regional security environment. A new strategic assessment is issued rarely—there have been only four iterations since 1956—and only when the PRC government believes that there have been significant changes in one or more of the following:

- The international order
- The regional and global security environment and China’s security situation
- China’s domestic situation
- The nature of warfare itself.<sup>21</sup>

In 1993, for instance, China’s leaders examined a number of changes that had taken place in the previous decade, including the demise of the Soviet Union, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, the accelerated development of a Taiwan identity separate from the PRC, and military developments showcased in the First Gulf War. They concluded that China’s overall security situation was more stable than it had been at any time since the end of the Chinese civil war, but that a host of new challenges were emerging from the rise of ethnic and religious tensions, the emergence of local conflicts, the potential for a high-tech military arms race, and Taiwan’s nascent independence movement. This conclusion is an example of a “strategic assessment.”

This strategic assessment is the basis on which the PRC government determines the armed forces’ “main strategic direction” (*zhuyao zhanlüe fangxiang*; 主要战略方向) and, at times, their “secondary” or “other” strategic directions. The “main strategic direction” is the PRC government’s judgment of the most likely future contingency: Who is the most likely next enemy? Where is war most likely to break out? And how should the PLA prepare for this contingency? The “secondary strategic directions” (of which there can be none, one, or several) highlight additional contingencies for which the PLA should prepare. In 1964, for instance, China’s “main strategic direction” was the Soviet Union, and its “secondary strategic directions” were Vietnam and Taiwan. Since 1993, China’s “main strategic direction” has been Taiwan, and its “secondary strategic directions” have been the Sino-Indian border and the South China Sea.

These current “secondary strategic directions” tell us that China’s leadership currently believes that both the Sino-Indian border and the South China Sea have a high potential to pose a security threat to the PRC. However, we cannot know now whether these risks would still be viewed as important by the time a reunification might occur. Moreover, the circumstances of reunification might themselves significantly alter the regional security environment. Almost certainly, China’s leadership would undertake a new strategic assessment at this time. While the process of creating this assessment is obscure, as outside observers we would expect to see the results of this new assessment announced in high-level fora and publications such as the biennial defense white paper; speeches at Party Congresses; and speeches at expanded meetings of the Central Military Commission (CMC). Only then would a clearer picture emerge of China’s ranking of post-Taiwan security priorities.

***Post-reunification, China could take any of four “strategic directions.”***

Unless a specific new or reinvigorated threat emerged in the region, we assess that a reunified China would turn its security attention—and thus the attention of its future military development—in one of four directions. It is worth noting that all of these represent concerns that China’s government *already* has. The difference is simply that, without a Taiwan contingency to worry about, China’s leadership would be able to turn greater attention and more resources to these other issues.

**A reunified China could look inward, concentrating its resources on bolstering Party rule within its own borders.**

In a post-Taiwan world the PRC government could determine that its greatest national challenge came from within. Domestic popular unrest stemming from social and economic grievances could pose a potentially grave threat to China’s top “core interest”—i.e., the need to “maintain its fundamental system and state security”—and to the third “core interest” of “continued stable development of the economy and society.” A reunified China could thus decide to put greater emphasis on an internal “strategic direction”—i.e., the need to maintain the CCP’s social control and to address long-standing governance problems. It could do so through economic and social policy (e.g., creating jobs or a social safety net), or through coercive measures such as forcibly putting down public protests.

*Militarily*, a PRC decision to focus inward could ratchet down tensions with other nations in the South and East China Seas. In this case, China’s government might choose not to press its territorial and jurisdictional claims in those areas, perhaps even reorienting its military posture and budgets to better manage internal security issues. Even an inward-focused China, however, is unlikely to allow its military capabilities to significantly deteriorate—and for this reason, other nations in the region would probably continue to watch China warily.

*Economically*, an inward-focused China could have a significant impact on other countries in the region. If, for instance, the PRC leadership were to focus on job creation and economic adjustment far more than it does at present, this could lead to heightened economic protectionism, manipulated exchange rates, or a poorer investment climate for foreigners. On the other hand, if the PRC were to give greater attention to reining in its runaway economic growth, enhancing domestic social equity, and improving trade relations with neighbors, it could become a force for economic stabilization and regional prosperity.

### **A reunified China could look outward, to its western periphery.**

A more outward-focused PRC would have several choices. One would be to prioritize concerns about stability along China's continental borders, particularly in the west and southwest. China increasingly relies on Central Asian oil and gas supplies to diversify its energy sources and minimize its vulnerability to an interruption of its maritime supply lines, but many Central Asian countries are unstable. Muslim extremism in the region also concerns China, as many Muslim extremist communities have ties to ethnic minority groups in China that are resistant to CCP rule. Thus China might choose to prioritize securing access to oil pipelines in Central Asia; settling its remaining land border dispute with India; or working with neighboring countries to quell extremism.

Such a shift in attention could have a significant impact on China's security relations with Central and South Asia. China could put diplomatic or military pressure on its neighbors to secure pipelines, for instance, or to put down restive ethnic populations. China could adversely affect relations with its neighbors by militarily fortifying its borders or otherwise seeming to threaten their sovereignty. Alternatively, it could work cooperatively with these same neighbors to contain unrest, to manage cross-border tensions, and to protect transit lines. Some such actions—particularly with the nondemocratic regimes of Central Asia—could be viewed as counter to U.S. values and interests, depending on the particulars. *Any* significant change in China's western-oriented posture would surely affect the security calculus of Russia and India, as well as that of the United States.

### **A reunified China could look outward, to the sea.**

A reunified, outward-focused China could instead choose to use the maritime assets once focused on Taiwan to pursue other goals in regional waters. The airfields, ports, and naval bases on Taiwan and its outlying islands (including Taiwan's airfield on Itu Aba in the Spratly archipelago), could provide useful access for securing other goals in the Yellow, East, and South China Seas.

One possible goal would be for China to pursue its unresolved territorial claims in these three seas. The PRC has disputes with several of its neighbors regarding the territorial sovereignty of a number of islands in those three seas, as well as the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) jurisdiction for fishing, transit, and military

activities. (See figure 2, below.) Pressing those claims might appear to be a particularly appealing option if, following reunification, there were an upsurge of calls from Chinese nationalists to restore the rest of China's "lost" territory. Such an action has the potential to bring China into conflict with a number of East Asian nations, including Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, and Malaysia. In recent years the upswing of regional frictions over these islands has shown that other claimant nations are willing to take diplomatic action to defend their claims against China, and that in some cases they will call for the United States to take sides—even if the U.S. might prefer to stay out of such disputes.

**Figure 2: China's territorial and jurisdictional disputes<sup>b</sup>**



Alternatively, China could choose to concentrate on simply securing access to resources and markets against threats from piracy, terrorism, or unstable states, without pursuing territorial claims. Such a choice *could* lead to conflict with other nations, but it would not necessarily do so. Alternatively, it could provide opportunities for cooperation between China, the United States, and other Asian nations—for example, for joint development of natural resources or joint military patrols of SLOCs.

<sup>b</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2010* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2010), p. 16, [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010\\_CMPR\\_Final.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010_CMPR_Final.pdf), accessed 15 August 2011.

### **A reunified China could look further afield, to its economic interests beyond Asia.**

Finally, China could concentrate on protecting its increasingly far-flung global economic assets. The PRC could, for instance, seek to secure shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean and beyond, or to increase its ability to undertake non-combatant evacuations (NEOs) of its citizens overseas.

This new role could provide ample opportunity for cooperation with other nations, through such activities as anti-piracy operations, joint patrols of SLOCs, and shared humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) missions. It could also, however, create opportunities for conflict: if the PLA were to become more active in protecting Chinese interests abroad, the possibility of miscalculation or confrontation with other military or civilian populations would increase.

### ***Impact of reunification***

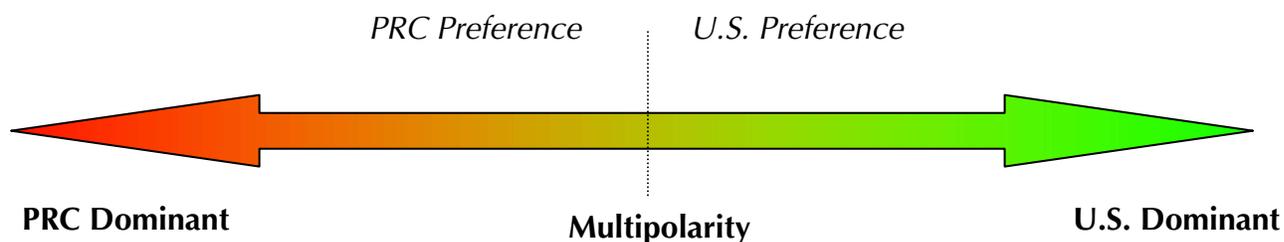
Would reunification fundamentally change the PRC leadership's decisions about its new strategic priorities?

To some extent, no. China at present has so many security concerns beyond Taiwan that it would not need to create a new list after reunification, and the current list provides some indication of China's perception of its most likely next threats. In the absence of other significant change in the region, for instance, China's current "secondary strategic directions" of the South China Sea and the Sino-Indian border might retain priority.

Up until now, however, the need to plan for a Taiwan contingency has driven the PLA's military modernization program. Reunification would free up military resources that have long been focused on retaking Taiwan, and would force China's government to undertake a major assessment of how to reallocate these resources.

This assessment would be driven in part by regional and domestic circumstances unrelated to reunification, which are impossible to specify in advance: issues such as relations with other states, and China's economic circumstances and ability to allocate funds to the military. On the other hand, one factor *is* directly related to the circumstances of reunification: whether China regained Taiwan through force, or through peaceful means. A peaceful reunification in which no external powers intervened could decrease China's general threat perception. A forceful reunification, on the other hand, might increase China's sense of threat from other nations and from the United States. If some portion of Taiwan's population continued to resist reunification after the fact, China could also focus on pouring military resources into holding the island, thus postponing the question of how to prioritize its other concerns.

## Variable 2: China's Desired Role in the Asia-Pacific Region: Hegemony or Multipolarity?



The second question to examine when considering the range of possible outcomes from a cross-Strait reunification is, *What role do PRC leaders want China to play in a post-reunification Asia?*

- Would China accept the United States' long-standing role as guarantor of peace and stability in the region?
- Would China strive for a multipolar East Asia where several strong nations (potentially including the United States) share regional power and influence and no individual nation dominates?
- Alternatively, would China aspire to become the regional hegemon in Asia and attempt to minimize the role and presence of the United States in a *Pax Sinica*?

The arrow above depicts a continuum of possible power balances in Asia. In the middle of the arrow is true multipolarity: an Asia in which two or more strong nations share influence and power but no single country predominates. At either end is regional unipolarity: one country is the dominant power across military, economic, and diplomatic sectors. Reasonable people disagree on where exactly the regional power structure currently is on this arrow; however, the general consensus is that we are on the right half of the arrow but are moving to the left, toward a multipolar (or bipolar) Asia.

It is safe to say that the United States will always prefer a regional power structure somewhere to the right of the midpoint on the arrow—ranging from multipolarity to U.S. dominance. And it is equally safe to say that any post-reunification China would prefer a regional power structure on the left side of the midpoint, seeking a regional architecture not based on U.S. alliances. Beyond that, however, future preferences are not self-evident.

Further, we assess that:

- It is easy to assume that China seeks regional hegemony, but there is also abundant evidence that China is still pondering the role it seeks to play in the world.
- Post-reunification, there are reasons that China might accept or even prefer a multipolar regional security architecture that includes a prominent role for the United States.
- China's perception of threats from the United States and other countries after reunification would be a significant factor in determining its preferred regional security architecture.

### ***China's preferred regional security architecture is uncertain.***

There has been much speculation in recent years about China's desired power structure in Asia. This speculation has been heightened by the fact that at present there appears to be a growing divergence between China's words and its deeds with regard to its preferred regional security architecture.

#### **China's words support multipolarity.**

For many years, China's political elites and public intellectuals have asserted their preference for a global security architecture that differs from the competitive, zero-sum relations of the Cold War era. China has emphasized that after its own experience as a semi-colonized nation, it will never seek "hegemony," either regionally or globally, and that it is committed to the establishment of "equality" among nations through multilateral institutions and other arrangements that reflect a multipolar architecture in which no one country dominates.<sup>22</sup> President Hu Jintao has repeatedly stated the assertion that, as he put it at the 17<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress in 2007, "China opposes all forms of hegemonism and power politics and will never seek hegemony or engage in expansion."<sup>23</sup>

Such statements clearly serve a political purpose, but we cannot automatically dismiss them as disingenuous. Outside observers have drawn on both international relations theory and PRC public writings to argue that China would prefer regional multipolarity in Asia, either due to the costs of maintaining regional hegemony or out of a genuine preference for sharing regional power and influence.<sup>24</sup>

#### **China's recent deeds trend toward a China-led unipolarity.**

Many other U.S. scholars and policy-makers, drawing on international relations theory about the nature of rising powers and on examples of China's increasingly assertive rhetoric and behavior against other nations (particularly the United States), have argued that China will eventually seek to shut the United States out of Asia.<sup>25</sup> Some suggest that the only factors that have stopped the PRC from assuming the

role of regional hegemon thus far are a lack of military capability, on one hand, and the continued irresolution of the cross-Strait situation on the other.<sup>26</sup> By this logic, reunification would lead to a China more inclined to assert its desired dominance over the region—and, depending on the circumstances, more capable of doing so.

Such suspicions are bolstered by the fact that since late 2008 China's behavior—particularly in the maritime realm—has grown increasingly assertive. Ranging from the harassment of USNS *Impeccable* in March 2009, to outspoken opposition to U.S. naval exercises with South Korea in the Yellow Sea and Vietnam in the South China Sea in 2010, China's actions have appeared to be asserting a desire to restrict U.S. activities in Asia and to attenuate U.S. regional alliances and friendships. Some analysts have also pointed to China's enthusiastic participation in regional institutions that do not count the United States among their members, such as the Association of Asian Nations Plus 3 (ASEAN+3), as evidence that China seeks to shut out the United States from regional economic and diplomatic arrangements.<sup>27</sup>

If China pursued this preference after reunification, at the very least it would seek to dominate Asia's existing regional security architecture. In a worst-case scenario, China could seek to dismantle the U.S. security coalition through a combination of diplomatic, military, and economic coercion of its Asian neighbors. (On the likelihood of China pursuing a coercive strategy, see Variable #3.)

### ***Post-reunification, China would not necessarily seek hegemony.***

It is easy to speculate that the irresolution of Taiwan's status has held the PRC back from establishing regional hegemony—and thus that the resolution of that issue would push China further toward the left side of the arrow. Yet, there are reasons to question whether this would necessarily follow.

### **The PRC has historically accepted a range of power structures in Asia.**

Over the past century China has weathered many different regional power configurations. At times, one nation has been militarily and/or economically dominant; at others, multiple countries have shared regional influence and power. At times, Asia has been under the domination of an outside power, or powers, as it was during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Britain and other European nations held sway; at others, a single Asian power has been dominant, as Japan was in the 1930s. If we substitute "other country dominant" for "PRC dominant" at the left (red) end of the arrow, we see that Asia's situation has ranged across nearly the entire arrow during the past century.

This history reminds us that a future Chinese *preference* against a continued strong U.S. regional role does not necessarily mean that China would not *accept or*

*tolerate* such a role for the United States. Depending on the costs to China's regional and global reputation of seeking regional hegemony, and on the material costs of taking on the full burden of securing Asia, even a dominant-leaning China might reluctantly accept an arrangement in which the United States maintained a significant role in Asia.

**China's sense of threat from the United States and from other Asian nations could change after a reunification.**

A reunified China would be likely to formulate its preferences based on its strategic assessment of the post-reunification global and regional security environment—not on China's past practice.

A reunified China would view itself as having scored a major ideological victory—and, depending on the circumstances of reunification, perhaps a major military victory—and it might feel more confident about its ability to respond to other future security challenges. This could, possibly, serve to improve China's relations with the United States and with other Asian powers. In discussions with their American counterparts today, Chinese military and civilian elites state repeatedly that Taiwan is the “main obstacle” to improved China-U.S. relations. *If* they are right, the removal of that obstacle should reduce China's concern about a continued U.S. regional presence.

However, there are indications today that China's leadership views the United States—and some other Asian nations—as threats to Chinese interests regardless of Taiwan's situation. Many Chinese international relations commentators today express the belief that the United States seeks to “contain” China in Asia. Further, they assert that some other Asian nations seek either to compete directly with China, or to encourage the United States to maintain its presence as a counterweight to China's growing power.<sup>28</sup> As evidence that justifies their concerns, these Chinese commentators point to:

- U.S. military transits and surveillance operations in China's EEZ
- U.S. basing and other arrangements throughout Asia that are viewed as contributing to a “strategic encirclement and blockading of China by the U.S. military”<sup>29</sup>
- Military buildups (particularly naval buildups) by Japan, the ROK, Russia, Australia, India, and some Southeast Asian nations.<sup>30</sup>

The nature of reunification would be central to China's interpretation of U.S. intentions post-reunification. If reunification had been achieved through a military confrontation involving the United States, China would almost certainly be unable to see any positive future role for the U.S. in Asia. A peaceful reunification is a slightly more complicated scenario. If the United States had expressed reservations prior to peaceful reunification, China might view it as seeking to oppose even

peaceful actions that could serve to strengthen China. If the United States had stayed true to its stated policy of support for a “peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves,” China might view the U.S. in a more positive light<sup>31</sup> —or it might view the U.S. as weak or accommodating.

### ***China’s post-reunification assessment could have three outcomes.***

China’s post-reunification assessment of the regional security environment could have three outcomes, described below.

#### **A reunified China could aspire to regional hegemony, and attempt to exclude the United States from Asia.**

While a reunified China might not be able to keep the United States out of Asia, it could work very hard to do so. It could, for instance, persuade U.S. allies and partners to question the credibility of U.S. commitment to the region; use economic or diplomatic coercion to shut the United States out of regional institutions and bilateral arrangements; or increase its military capacity to deny the United States access to Asia. China’s leadership has in the past undertaken activities that would support all of these goals.

#### **A reunified China might prefer to see U.S. presence significantly diminished, but be willing to share power and influence with other Asian nations.**

China could seek to improve relations with its Asian neighbors while still minimizing U.S. presence in Asia. Many of the concerns that China has expressed about the military buildup of other Asian nations appear to be filtered through its perception that the United States wishes to lead a regional effort to contain China. The PRC might be less hostile to the military development of other Asian nations if it believed that these efforts were not being led by the United States. China could then engage in burden sharing and cooperate militarily with neighboring countries to meet a range of common national security goals. For instance, they might work together to control piracy in the Malacca Strait, perform cooperative search and rescue operations, or undertake humanitarian missions. They could also join together to keep the United States out of Asia.

This scenario would be most likely if the nature of cross-Strait reunification had done serious damage to the credibility of the United States as a security partner. Were China to take this approach, it might seek to appeal to Asian nations’ common heritage and interests, and imply that the United States would not be able or willing to support Asia’s future interests. Alternatively, China might use various forms of coercion to increase the cost to U.S. allies and partners of maintaining their relationship with the United States.

## **A reunified China could prefer a multipolar regional power structure in which the United States maintains a strong Asian presence.**

There are a number of reasons that China might opt for a continued strong U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific region. For instance:

- China might welcome U.S. support in defending SLOCs and promoting stability in the East Asian maritime domain. If China's leadership had assessed that other security concerns were of higher priority, it might welcome this burden-sharing on its maritime periphery.
- China might see U.S. presence as essential for reassuring Japan and thus checking a future Japanese military buildup.
- China might view the United States as a useful partner in maintaining stability on the Korean peninsula.

### ***Impact of reunification***

Would reunification affect China's preferences for hegemony or multipolarity after reunification?

To an extent, yes. A successful cross-Strait reunification could accelerate China's already-growing sense of confidence in its ability to respond to security challenges and shape its regional environment.

If China had successfully employed force against the United States as part of the reunification process, the PRC leadership could be pushed further in the direction of a China-led unipolarity—both because China's confidence in its military capabilities would be bolstered, and because a direct military confrontation with the United States over Taiwan would only increase PRC suspicions that the U.S. seeks to prevent China from achieving its interests. In this scenario, China would strive, so far as possible, to push the United States out of Asia following a reunification.

If reunification had occurred peacefully, its impact on Beijing's perception of its role in the region would be less dramatic. China might still be emboldened upon having achieved this central national security objective, but its threat perception of other nations would not be increased. Indeed, a peaceful reunification *could*—though not necessarily *would*—decrease China's sense of threat from the United States. If the United States had acted on its policy that states its support for a “peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question by the Chinese themselves,” real and substantive opportunities for cooperation could emerge on a wide range of issues central to the U.S.-China relationship.<sup>32</sup> Such an outcome could preserve America's status as a major actor in the region and set the baseline for the power balance in Asia at a position of multipolarity.

### Variable 3: China's Preferred Approach to Meeting its National Goals: Coercive or Cooperative?



A third variable to consider in a cross-Strait reunification scenario is *the means by which the PRC would choose to pursue its national interests and shape the post-reunification East Asia security environment.*

- China has shown in the past that it is willing to use a blend of cooperation and coercion to achieve its security goals.
- China's willingness to use coercion to achieve certain aims does not mean that it will always choose to do so.
- Reunification would not significantly change the PRC's calculus of when to behave coercively or cooperatively in the region.

The arrow above shows the likely implications that a range of PRC preferences would have for the United States. A coercive China would be more likely to behave in ways detrimental to the interests of the United States and of U.S. regional allies and partners. A fully cooperative China would almost certainly benefit the United States, while a China that maintained a degree of competition with its neighbors would be both a more likely outcome and a more ambiguous one in its implications for the United States.

#### ***China has effectively used both cooperation and coercion to achieve its national goals.***

In the past, China has shown—in both word and deed—that it values cooperation as a means of addressing certain areas of national interest. Many scholars of China's foreign policy suggest that China's decision-makers generally prefer using "softer" instruments of national power, such as economic influence and military diplomacy, rather than employing "hard" military power to achieve overarching national goals.<sup>33</sup> But China also has shown repeatedly that it sees value in coercion (and, at times, in oppression). Indeed, the PRC historically has displayed skill at using a blend of cooperation and coercion to pursue its foreign policy goals. Moreover, it has shown an ability to comfortably wield a wide range of coercive tools, in the diplomatic, economic, and military realms.

## **The rhetoric of cooperation: The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the New Security Concept**

In 1982 the PRC wrote into its constitution the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” that were to form the basis of its foreign policy, including all forms of cooperation with other nations.<sup>34</sup> They include:

- Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity
- Mutual non-aggression
- Non-interference in each other's internal affairs
- Equality and mutual benefit
- Peaceful co-existence.

These principles are reaffirmed in China’s 1997 “New Security Concept,” which promotes “dialogue,” “cooperation,” and “mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination.” These principles theoretically aim at creating a regional and global system in which nations refrain from forms of competition that could lead to inter-state conflict.<sup>35</sup>

When the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were established, they were self-serving: the PRC at that point did not have the capability to effectively coerce other nations, and sought to ensure that China would not jeopardize its own safety by engaging in bilateral relations. Over time the PRC leadership’s interpretation of these principles has evolved, as China’s interests and its ability to protect them have expanded. Where once China’s leaders took a strict stance of non-participation in any regional or global activities that could be construed as “interfering” in other nations’ domestic affairs, they now allow more active participation in multilateral activities that protect China’s interests and show the PRC to be a good global citizen—such as peacekeeping, or participation in multilateral anti-piracy operations.<sup>36</sup>

Even as the interpretation of these principles has evolved, however, the basic rhetorical adherence to cooperation and non-interference has remained a fundamental element of the PRC’s foreign policy heritage, and of the regional and global image it seeks to project. The rhetoric of cooperation influences the way China frames its foreign interactions.

### **Creating a cooperative image: China’s Southeast Asian “charm offensive”**

In the late 1990s and early to mid 2000s, China put these cooperative principles into action in order to pursue its national goals in Southeast Asia. China’s ability to reassure and to maintain strong relations with its neighboring countries is partly dependent on its appearing to be a peaceful power, and Chinese leaders know this. The PRC leadership has thus pursued what outside observers have labeled a “charm offensive” in Southeast Asia. Despite some enduring points of contention

with these nations, China's leaders during this period made a concerted effort to establish and participate in regional organizations, bilateral discussions, and forms of security cooperation that could help manage conflict, if not resolve it.<sup>37</sup> In the East and South China Seas, for instance, China has:

- Discussed joint development of natural resources in some disputed regional waters
- Established notification mechanisms with other claimants when conducting military activities in disputed waters
- Established a long-debated "Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea" with ASEAN in 2002 and indicated its commitment to framing a more binding "Code of Conduct" in the future
- Worked with the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to negotiate a framework for confidence-building measures among regional militaries.<sup>38</sup>

In adopting this cooperative approach, China emphasizes the advantages that all parties will gain if China and other Asian nations strengthen their cultural, economic, and security ties.<sup>39</sup> China's leaders frequently stress that such ties can help Asia become more economically powerful and more self-sufficient in the security realm (i.e., free from foreign influence, particularly that of the United States).<sup>40</sup> Indeed, this "charm offensive" could be viewed as an example of how a hegemonic-leaning China might co-opt its neighboring nations into discouraging U.S. presence in Asia.

### **Blending coercion and cooperation: Taiwan**

While China has a clear history of using cooperation and soft power to attain national goals, it also has shown itself to be willing to use various forms of coercion to pursue its objectives. One example is the Chinese navy's increasingly assertive behavior in the South China Sea between 2008 and 2011—even as China was simultaneously continuing to carry out the more cooperative activities discussed above.

For even longer-term examples of the wide range of coercive methods China has employed in the past, we can look at the Taiwan case itself. Over time, China has used military, economic, and diplomatic coercion to deter Taiwan independence and to isolate Taiwan internationally.

- *Military coercion:* China carried out attacks of various intensities on Taiwan's offshore islands from the 1950s until 1979.<sup>41</sup> Things remained relatively quiet, until the mid 1990s, when—alarmed by what they viewed as the independence leanings of Taiwan's then-president Lee Teng-hui—China's leaders carried out large-scale military exercises in the Taiwan Strait. In 2005 China codified its willingness to use military force to compel reunification in the Anti-Secession Law.<sup>42</sup>

- *Diplomatic coercion:* China has shown itself willing to “punish” nations and institutions that maintain official or even unofficial ties with Taiwan that have not been approved by Beijing. For instance, the PRC suspended high-level dialogues with the United States in 1995, when the U.S. government allowed President Lee to visit Cornell University; the PRC similarly suspended high-level talks with Singapore in 2004 (and threatened to hold up free-trade discussions) following a visit of that country’s prime minister to Taiwan. Finally, the Chinese have repeatedly suspended military-to-military contacts with the United States following announcements of arms sales to Taiwan or other actions that China does not like.
- *Economic coercion:* In 1993 China retaliated against France’s sale of frigates and Mirage fighter jets to Taiwan by excluding French companies from consideration in bidding to build Guangzhou’s subway and by ending its purchases of French wheat for several years.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in early 2010, China reportedly threatened to impose sanctions on U.S. defense firms selling arms to Taiwan under a newly approved arms package, although it did not follow through on this threat.<sup>44</sup>

***China’s willingness to use coercion to achieve certain aims does not mean that it will always choose to do so.***

Yet China has not always employed coercion on issues of national interest. For instance, China’s leadership did *not* place sanctions on European firms that agreed to sell Taiwan a number of search-and-rescue helicopters in February 2010; rather, it merely issued a brief statement through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs noting that it would “continue to monitor the situation.”<sup>45</sup>

More broadly, China’s leaders have worked hard to create links with Taiwan across all sectors—political, cultural, military, and economic—that are, for the most part, perceived to benefit both Taiwan and China and to create stronger affinities across the Strait. China’s government has, for instance, offered a formulation of reunification designed to appeal to the island’s political culture: the PRC’s 1993 white paper on Taiwan reunification pledges that a peacefully reunified Taiwan would continue to “run its own party, political, military, economic, and financial affairs ... [and] may keep its military forces and the mainland will not dispatch troops or administrative personnel to the island.”<sup>46</sup> To the PRC, this represents a significant political compromise for the sake of regaining its lost territory of Taiwan.

Indeed, in the case of Taiwan the PRC has seemingly based its use of coercion on a continuous assessment of how receptive its Taiwan audience would be to a more cooperative approach. In periods where Taiwan’s government has been deemed more receptive to peaceful overtures, China’s government has extended more

active forms of cooperation. For instance, during the administration of Taiwan's current president Ma Ying-jeou:

- China offered aid to Taiwan following Typhoon Morakot in 2009.
- In 2010 China and Taiwan signed an "Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement" aimed at integrating certain aspects of the two economies more closely, and China has not objected to Taiwan's pursuit of free trade agreements with other nations since that document was signed.
- In 2010 the coast guards from both sides of the Taiwan Strait engaged in a large-scale joint maritime search and rescue exercise off the coast of Jinmen, aimed at coordinating accident management for commercial and passenger boats in the Taiwan Strait.<sup>47</sup>

While China may at times incorrectly assess how its coercive and cooperative actions will be received, these examples suggest that the PRC is interested in using whatever tools it believes will work to achieve its goals, rather than relying on a rigidly consistent set of actions.

### ***Impact of reunification***

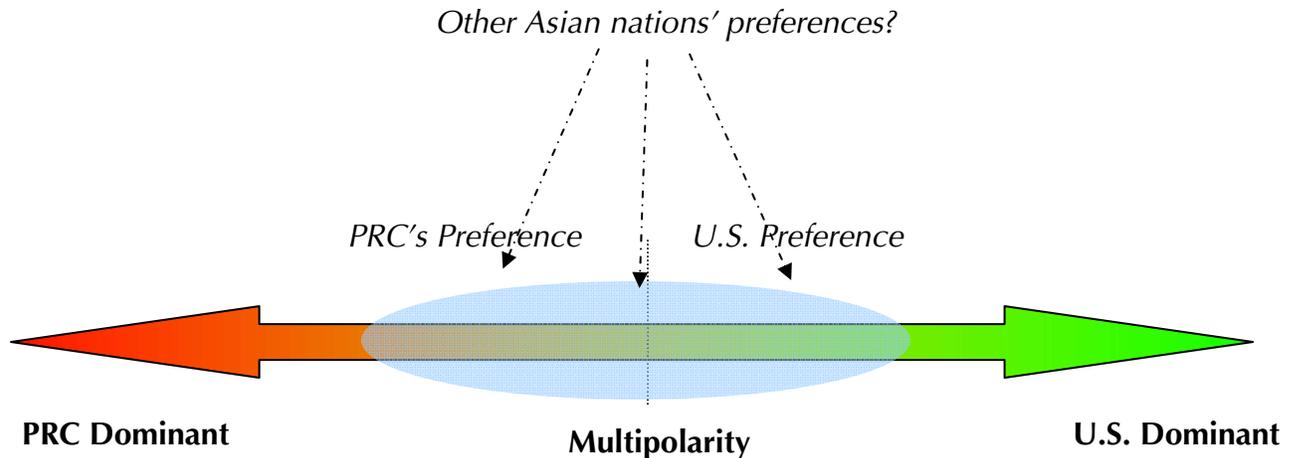
Would reunification change the PRC's preferred balance between cooperation and coercion in its foreign policy?

Probably not. The specific circumstances of reunification could, certainly, change the receptiveness of other nations in the region to China's overtures. If, for instance, China had taken Taiwan by military force after an extended period of economic coercion, other Asian nations might be suspicious of China's underlying motivations in pursuing economic or military cooperation with them. If reunification had been peaceful and if China had made significant concessions to Taiwan's political preferences, Asian nations might be more receptive to cooperation with China.

However, these shifts would not change China's own historical preference for pragmatism. China has displayed a willingness to move between cooperation and coercion based on its assessment of what would best allow it to achieve its national aims—and, over many decades, it has developed the ability to blend cooperation and coercion. There is no reason to think that reunification would fundamentally change its incentives to do so.



## Variable 4: The Response of Asian Nations to a Changed Regional Security Architecture



The United States and China are not the only countries in the region with preferences about the power structure in East Asia. The United States Pacific Command (PACOM) area of responsibility is made up of 36 independent states, sovereign actors who make this determination based on an assessment of their own national self-interest. A cross-Strait reunification would be a decision point for them, as well as for the United States and China. All involved would be forced to re-examine their assessment of the security environment and to re-evaluate their preferences regarding the power structure in East Asia. This raises several questions for the United States, illustrated by the arrow above.

- Would current U.S. allies, partners, and friends in the region continue to support the current power structure? At a minimum, would they continue to prefer a structure that is somewhere to the right of the arrow's midpoint—that is, a structure that is more U.S.-dominant than PRC-dominant?
- Would countries that currently prefer a structure near the middle of the arrow begin to move their preferences toward one end of the continuum?
- Would countries that currently lean toward China move further in that direction, or would they begin to desire more multipolarity or even U.S. dominance?
- If more countries chose to cluster towards the center of the continuum—moving away from U.S. dominance—what would the regional power balance look like?

### ***Three factors that would shape responses***

This section examines three higher-order factors that we assess would be most important for shaping the post-reunification preferences of Asian nations:

- *Perceived military strength of the United States and of China in the region.* Asian nations would consider the capabilities of the United States and China to use military force to accomplish an objective within the Asia Pacific region. They also would consider the military limitations that each would face.
- *Perceived reliability of the United States and of China as security partners.* Asian nations would calculate whether they could rely on U.S. or Chinese security partnerships. They would ask:
  - Could the United States or China be counted on to keep commitments, and to follow the spirit as well as the letter of treaty obligations or security promises?
  - Would the United States or China help during a crisis, when called upon for aid or humanitarian relief?
  - Would the United States or China keep its own requests for support reasonable, and not ask for concessions that Asian nations are unable or unwilling to give?
- *Perceived current and potential future value of the United States and of China as economic and as diplomatic partners.* Each Asian nation would consider the current and potential future value of its economic and diplomatic relationship with both China and the United States after reunification. The result of that assessment would affect its desire to maintain relationships with the United States and/or China in other areas.

### **Perceptions of military strength after reunification**

Of the areas listed above, the one most likely to change significantly as a result of cross-Strait reunification is the first: perceptions of U.S. and PRC military strength. The circumstances of reunification would strongly influence these perceptions.

#### *Perceptions of the United States*

The most important issue affecting perceptions of U.S. military strength would be whether the PRC had brought about reunification through the use of force against Taiwan. Any outcome that could be seen as a military defeat for the United States would be highly damaging for the credibility of U.S. military power in the region.

- If the United States absorbed significant military losses in a reunification scenario—for instance, a large number of combat deaths, a significant loss

of equipment, or major intelligence loss—the damage to the credibility of U.S. military power in the region would be great.

- If reunification came about through the PRC's use of force against Taiwan and the United States did not become involved, this could easily be painted as a deterrence victory for China's military. This would cause less damage than outright military defeat, but the perception of U.S. military strength in the region still would be diminished.

### *Perceptions of China*

For China, the manner in which reunification occurs is similarly critical. If the PRC were concerned about regional perceptions of its military strength, peaceful reunification would have some distinct advantages:

- The PRC would not incur heavy losses at the hands of either the United States or Taiwan, and the military force it had built for such a campaign would remain intact.
- The PRC could gain the military assets currently held by Taiwan.
- The PLA would probably avoid becoming enmeshed in a costly protracted campaign. Therefore, it would face an easier mission in holding Taiwan after reunification. Some portion of Taiwan's populace would inevitably be unhappy about reunification under CCP rule, but an armed insurgency would be less likely in the case of a negotiated settlement.

Reunification by force, on the other hand, could lead to an injured Chinese military that was distracted by the mission of holding the island of Taiwan. If, however, China took Taiwan by force quickly and easily with minimal losses to the PLA, the regional perception of its military strength would be enhanced.

### **Perceived reliability of the United States and of China as security partners**

Asian nations would also reevaluate both the United States and China in terms of their reliability as security partners. They would each consider their previous experiences partnering with the United States or with China; the way in which reunification had occurred; and the nature of China's and Taiwan's post-reunification arrangements. U.S. allies and partners in the region would be looking closely at the willingness of the United States to reassure them, and at the willingness of the PRC to use coercion or cooperation—as showcased by the circumstances of reunification—to attain national objectives.

### *Perceptions of the United States*

A reunification that occurred as a result of PRC-initiated compulsion would potentially cause great damage to the perception of U.S. reliability as a regional

security partner. If the United States had not intervened in a coerced reunification, it would be viewed as having abandoned Taiwan and having reneged on its commitment to support peace and democracy in Asia.

This perception could lead to two possible outcomes. On one hand, the United States might be considered a less *reliable* security partner in the future. On the other hand, following a coerced reunification the United States might be considered a more *desirable* security partner as a hedge against future Chinese coercion of other nations in the region.

In either case, other countries in the region would measure U.S. performance in meeting commitments to Taiwan against U.S. performance in honoring other commitments in the region. They would also ask what demands the United States might make in the face of the changed security circumstances in East Asia: for instance, would the United States require more robust basing rights, to hedge against a demonstrably coercive China? In a situation where the United States was perceived as a less reliable security partner than previously, it could be difficult to persuade Asian partner nations to agree to more demanding forms of partnership.

Therefore, any post-reunification scenario would likely involve calls for the United States to reassure Asian friends and allies, in a concrete way, of continued U.S. commitment to maintaining its special role in the region.

### *Perceptions of China*

The PRC has long stated its willingness to use force to compel reunification if necessary, and thus the manner in which reunification takes place would not fundamentally change other Asian nations' views of China's willingness to keep its commitments to other countries or to provide assistance during times of crisis.

Rather, the question that most countries in the region would be most concerned with is: What would China want in return for partnering with the PRC? Could they count on China not to make requests of them that would be too costly? Asian nations are already making this assessment today, and will continue to do so regardless of Taiwan's status. However, in a post-reunification scenario, the manner in which the reunification had taken place would matter a great deal to other countries when they assessed the type of partnership they might hope to have with China. A China that had been willing to use military coercion to achieve one national goal would likely be viewed as a China that was willing to use coercion (be it military, economic, or diplomatic) to attain other national objectives as well.

Moreover, other nations in the region would look closely at how China was living up to any agreement it had made with Taiwan, the United States, or any other countries that had played a role in facilitating reunification. If Taiwan retained some level of political, military, and economic autonomy following a peaceful

reunification—as China has long promised it would—China’s perceived trustworthiness would further increase. If, on the other hand, China reneged on this promise, its credibility as a security partner among Asian nations would be reduced.

### **The perceived current and future value of the United States and China as economic and diplomatic partners**

Finally, Asian nations would consider the perceived values of the United States and of China as economic partners—for instance, as trading partners, investors, and suppliers of aid—and as diplomatic partners in determining their post-reunification preferences.

The United States and China are both vital trading partners of most nations in Asia. The relative importance of this relationship varies for different countries in Asia, however, and some would be more sensitive to the economic effects of a cross-Strait reunification than others. For instance:

- South Korea, which today views itself as a direct economic competitor with Taiwan for the China market, could become even more concerned that it would be shut out of this market.<sup>48</sup> It might seek stronger trade assurances from China—or, conversely, it might seek alternate trading partners to mitigate the effects of an economic downturn in China.
- Countries for which trade in goods and services is a very high percentage of the national economy, such as Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand, would stand to benefit from a decrease in trade barriers and from the greater integration of high-tech supply chains that might result from the merger of the China-Taiwan economies.<sup>49</sup>
- For countries that count Taiwan among their top trading partners, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, a cross-Strait reunification would make the relative importance of the combined China-Taiwan economy greater.<sup>50</sup>
- For many countries in Asia Taiwan is a significant source of foreign direct investment—in some cases, more so than China. A reunification would thus increase the relative importance of China as a source of investment.

Even if China’s relative economic importance to Asian nations increased, however, there are few countries in the region that could afford or would desire to eschew an economic relationship with the United States. Desire to maintain a relationship with both the United States and a reunified China would likely be a moderating force, drawing Asian nations closer to the middle of the continuum. The pre-reunification economic relationships of these different actors are the most useful indicators for tracking how Asian nations would perceive the relative value of their economic relationships with the United States and the PRC after reunification.

Diplomatically the picture is more complicated. A China that had used coercion to reunify with Taiwan could suffer a downturn in regional diplomatic status. Countries might seek to diminish China's relative weight in regional multilateral fora, in part by inviting greater participation by the United States. On the other hand, if the United States were viewed as having reneged on its promises to Taiwan in a coercive reunification—and thus as an unreliable diplomatic partner—regional countries might turn to other powers, such as Japan, Australia, Russia, or India, to provide a diplomatic counterweight to China.

In the case of a peaceful reunification, China's regional diplomatic status would probably be enhanced.

### ***Three potential outcomes***

These factors point to three plausible regional responses to a reunification.

#### **Hold the United States close.**

We could easily see a post-reunification outcome similar to what we see in Asia today, with current relationships maintained or intensified. Allies and friends in the region could feel a heightened sense of threat from the emergence of a unified China in Asia. Many of the current economic and military concerns of China's neighbors could be exacerbated by the size of the combined PRC-Taiwan economy, with which they would need to compete and interact, and by the presence of a nearby powerful and ever-growing military force that was no longer focused on Taiwan. So long as they viewed the United States as a strong and reliable partner in the region, Asian nations probably would respond to these fears by encouraging a more robust U.S. presence in the region. For instance:

- Japan, which has recently started indicating a desire to build up its military capabilities and reinvigorate its alliance with the United States in order to counter what it views as increasing Chinese belligerence, could ask for greater U.S. commitments to defend against future Chinese aggression.<sup>51</sup>
- Southeast Asian nations could ask for greater U.S. involvement in regional institutions in order to counterbalance China.<sup>52</sup>
- Regional allies and partners might offer more favorable basing agreements or other forms of support for U.S. operations, and perhaps register strong protest against any changes to U.S. force disposition in the region that might put U.S. military commitment into question.

#### **Push the United States away.**

If U.S. credibility in the region were brought into question as a result of reunification, Asian nations could alternatively respond to reunification by downgrading their relationships with the United States in favor of stronger

relationships with China.<sup>53</sup> In this scenario, U.S. allies and partners would not support a continued robust U.S. military forward presence in Asia. They might provide little political support for U.S. basing; show less enthusiasm for joint military exercises, training, and other activities; and exclude the United States from new regional security institutions. They could also, conceivably, seek to downgrade other elements of their relationship with the United States, perhaps providing less political, military, or economic support for other U.S. activities around the globe.

### **Seek equilibrium between the United States and China.**

Finally, U.S. friends and allies in the region could determine that the safest way forward would be to hedge bets and seek a balance between the United States and China. Asian nations might feel that they could not afford to jeopardize their economic or other relations with either country, regardless of their ideal preferences.

Countries seeking equilibrium would try to avoid confrontation with either the United States or China. They might become reluctant to back the United States in a crisis involving China. They might also show be unwilling to support any new diplomatic initiatives with the United States that did not also include China, and could present fewer demands for U.S. presence in the region if they felt that doing so would irritate China.

They might also strive to become less reliant on *either* power to guarantee peace and stability in the region. One example of such behavior is illustrated in the text box at right. Other responses could include an “Asian arms race” in which other militaries would build up their capabilities

#### **Drawing together to respond to PRC economic coercion**

In September 2010, the PRC apparently blocked exports of “rare earth metals” immediately following a maritime confrontation with Japan over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. In response to this perceived Chinese bullying, Asian nations drew away from China and toward one another. China holds more than 90% of the global market share in these elements, which are an essential component of many advanced commercial and defense electronics. China did not warn Japan that it would stop these shipments, and it denied that the slowdown had anything to do with the Senkaku incident. Nonetheless, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and other nations quickly concluded that they could no longer afford to rely on China as the sole supplier of these materials, and began to seek multiple alternate supply lines, including making agreements with one another, in case such an event should reoccur.

to counter the PRC, rather than relying on the U.S. security umbrella. It might also result in greater reliance on regional multilateral institutions—perhaps ones that would exclude both the United States and China—to address issues of mutual concern. Finally, it could result in more-diversified economies as individual nations tried to avoid becoming overly dependent on the PRC.

## ***Impact of reunification***

Would reunification change the preferences of Asian nations with regard to the regional power structure?

Undoubtedly, a cross-Strait reunification would cause Asian nations to reassess their regional security environment. Although there would likely be a fair amount of variation in the ultimate preferences of different countries in the region, we can assume that *all* countries in the region would be deeply concerned about the implications of a reunification for relative Chinese and U.S. power and influence in Asia.

However, the precise outcome of a reunification scenario is unclear. A peaceful reunification would strengthen China's diplomatic and military credibility, but could also enhance countries' views of the United States as a force for stability and balance in the region. A forceful reunification would almost certainly adversely affect regional perceptions of U.S. military strength, and of the credibility of U.S. security commitments in the region, but China's credibility would also be undermined. Asian nations might still prefer partnership with a slightly weakened United States to reliance on a coercive, hegemonic China.

Even in a forced reunification scenario, the impact on U.S. credibility should not be overstated. Taiwan is but one of many U.S. regional commitments—which also include five bilateral treaty alliances, a long-standing commitment to freedom of navigation, robust development aid and humanitarian assistance, and participation in a number of regional security institutions. It is possible that partners and allies would view U.S. commitment to Taiwan as a “canary in a coalmine.” Should it choose to do so, however, the United States would have ample opportunities to display its resolve to remain diplomatically and militarily forward in Asia.

## Variable 5: The U.S.'s Desired Position in a Post-Reunification Asia-Pacific Region



A final variable that would affect the post-reunification security environment in East Asia is the *position that the United States wishes to take in Asia following a cross-Strait reunification*.

The arrow above illustrates a range of outcomes, from a relatively minimal U.S. presence in Asia, to a significantly expanded footprint. It is in a neutral color, because in our assessment it is not obvious that any specific-sized U.S. footprint in Asia is automatically preferable to others.

- While the United States has enduring national goals in Asia, these goals do not demand that the U.S. adopt a fixed role or a specific security presence in the region.
- The irresolution of Taiwan's status does not drive U.S. goals in Asia, and a cross-Strait reunification would not alter the United States' desire to secure its regional goals.
- Reunification would not radically change the United States' desired role in Asia.
- We cannot dismiss the possibility that the United States might be able to meet its goals and fulfill its preferred role in Asia in ways that would not require as robust a regional military presence as today.

***Position = goals + role + presence.***

The U.S. position in Asia has three elements:

- Its *goals*: What overarching national interests does the United States seek to support through its activities and relationships in Asia?
- Its *role*: What status does the United States seek to have in Asia relative to other powers there?

- Its *presence*: How does the United States want to place itself in Asia across the diplomatic, cultural, military, and economic realms?

These elements are related, but separable, and they have varied over time.

### **U.S. goals in Asia have remained relatively stable over the past century.**

Since the United States first established a permanent presence in Asia in 1898, it has had two persistent goals in the region: (1) to preserve access to Asian markets; and (2) to prevent any single non-U.S. power from dominating Asia's regional security order. Since World War II, the United States has additionally been interested in a third goal: (3) to provide active support to its allies and partners in Asia in order to build and maintain a peaceful, stable, and democratic Asia-Pacific.<sup>54</sup>

### **The United States' desired role and presence in Asia have changed over time.**

While its national goals in Asia have remained relatively consistent over time, the regional *role* that the United States wishes to play in order to attain these goals has changed. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, for instance, the United States sought not to become the single dominant power in Asia, but to be an equal player among other Western nations that were also contending for economic influence in the region. Only since the end of World War II has the United States assessed that it could best meet its goals of a stable, peaceful, and accessible Asia by becoming the chief guarantor of regional security and stability.

Even the United States' desire to play a "leading role" in Asia—a relatively stable desire over the past 65 years—does not lock in a specific relationship vis-à-vis other countries in the region.<sup>55</sup> In recent years, for instance, the United States has stated a commitment to sharing greater responsibility for regional defense with other Asian powers, particularly Japan and the Republic of Korea; as former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates put it in 2009, the United States hopes to become more of a "partner, as opposed to a patron."<sup>56</sup>

### **U.S. presence in Asia has changed significantly over time.**

It is in the area of *presence* that the U.S. position in Asia has changed the most over time. U.S. presence in Asia encompasses a wide range of interactions: economic, cultural, social, political, and military. Over the past several decades, U.S. presence in Asia across all these sectors has continually increased, in part because the United States has changed its approach to achieving its longstanding regional goals.

Due to the breadth of U.S.-Asia interactions, there are limits to how much the U.S. presence in Asia can grow or shrink in the future, regardless of U.S. policy preferences. Political and military presence in Asia is largely under the control of U.S. policy-makers, but many other interactions, such as family connections and some business-to-business ties, are not.

In those areas that *are* matters of policy—including diplomatic ties, military presence, and trade policy—the United States has adopted a range of postures over the years in order to meet its enduring national goals, as shown in table 1 on the next page.

Today, as the United States carries out its Global Posture Review, it is considering changes to its force disposition in Asia with an aim of creating a U.S. defense posture that is more politically sustainable, operationally resilient, and geographically dispersed.<sup>60</sup> Like previous changes to U.S. presence in Asia, this has been driven by an evolving assessment of how the United States can best achieve its enduring goals in the region.

**The U.S. presence in Asia today includes (but is not limited to):**

- *Trade ties.* In 2010, for the first time, Asia (including India) surpassed Europe as the top U.S. export destination, with nearly \$228 billion in exports over the previous 12 months.<sup>57</sup>
- *People-to-people ties.* Perhaps 750,000 Americans currently live in Asia. Five percent of Americans are of Asia-Pacific descent, and they are the second-fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States.<sup>58</sup>
- *Military presence.* Some 70,000 active-duty U.S. military personnel were stationed in Asia as of June 2010.<sup>59</sup>

**Table 1: U.S. goals and presence in Asia, 1898-present**

<b>U.S. goals and presence in Asia, 1898-present</b>			
<b>Dates</b>	<b>Catalyzing event</b>	<b>U.S. regional goal</b>	<b>U.S. political and military presence</b>
1898	Spanish-American War	Open and preserve access to Asian markets.	First U.S. forward naval base in the Philippines. Other Southeast Asian nations colonized by European powers.
1900-1930s	End of Boxer Rebellion	Prevent any single European power from becoming dominant in Asia.	U.S. pursues Open Door policy to promote equitable Asian trade policies with all Western powers. In 1920s-30s, U.S. signs treaties with Japan and several European powers aimed at fixing territorial claims and preventing a naval arms race in Asia and Europe.
1930s-1945	Japan colonizes portions of Asia	Prevent Japan from becoming dominant in Asia.	U.S. aligns with China to fight against Japanese military dominance in Asia.
1945-1960	End of WWII	Build regional stability.  Promote U.S. dominance in Asia.	U.S. establishes a “hub and spoke” system of bilateral alliances in Asia, largely to contain the influence of the Sino-Soviet alliance; participates in the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO, a non-binding collective defense organization in SE Asia); and establishes itself as the dominant naval power in Asia.
1960-1975	Sino-Soviet split	Maintain regional stability.	U.S. works with China to contain Russia on land, relies on the U.S. Navy to contain Russia at sea.
1975-1989	End of Vietnam War	Prevent Soviets from challenging U.S. dominance in Asia.	SEATO dissolves. U.S. bilateral alliances and partnerships are strengthened to contain and manage USSR influence in Asia. <sup>61</sup>
1990-early 2000s	Collapse of Soviet Union	Maintain regional stability.	As sole superpower, U.S. is militarily dominant in Asia; pursues peaceful engagement with China.
Early 2000s-present	China’s economic and military influence grow	Maintain U.S. dominance in Asia.	U.S. is militarily dominant in China, but concerned about the future.

## ***The irresolution of Taiwan's status does not drive U.S. goals in Asia.***

Finally, to understand the impact of a cross-Strait reunification on the United States' preferred position in Asia, we must examine the role of Taiwan in relation to other U.S. goals and relationships in the region.

The United States' five bilateral treaty alliances in Asia grew from mutual security interests going well beyond Taiwan, and have survived and flourished during the 60 years in which the resolution of Taiwan's status has been deferred. In most cases, these relationships have continued to grow even since the United States ended its mutual defense treaty with Taiwan in 1979. Moreover, the overview of U.S. presence in Asia given above shows that the United States is currently tied to the region in ways that would remain unaffected by any cross-Strait resolution. These include commitments to:

- Freedom of navigation
- Non-proliferation
- Stability on the Korean peninsula
- Robust development aid and humanitarian assistance
- Participation in a number of regional security institutions
- Strong trade ties and economic partnerships.

It is difficult to imagine that the resolution of Taiwan's status would fundamentally undermine the rationale behind these defense relationships.

## ***Impact of reunification***

Would reunification change the United States' desired presence in Asia? In some ways, yes; in other ways, not at all.

### **Reunification would not radically change the United States' overarching goals or desired role in Asia.**

As discussed above, the United States' overarching goals in Asia would persist after a cross-Strait reunification. The current irresolution of Taiwan's status does not drive U.S. national goals in Asia, and its removal would not change them.

The United States would still require access to Asian markets and SLOCs; it would still prefer not to be subject to a single (non-U.S.) power dominating Asia's regional security order; and it would still be concerned with ensuring the peace and stability in the region, as part of a broader desire to maintain peace and stability around the world both as a global public good and as a way of protecting U.S. interests worldwide.

The United States initially took on the role of security guarantor in Asia following World War II based on its concerns over several security issues that have not yet been resolved, to include stability on the Korean peninsula, non-proliferation, and freedom of navigation. Absent Taiwan, the United States would still have a clearly defined role in helping manage and resolve those issues. There is reason to believe that other countries in the region would still value U.S. presence and would want U.S. involvement to continue, and possibly increase, in the region. And there is reason to believe that the United States would not easily trust other nations to protect interests so central to its own.

**Reunification could significantly change the United States’ desired security presence in Asia.**

The greatest potential change to the U.S. position in Asia following a cross-Strait reunification would be in U.S. regional *presence*, particularly in the security realm. This is not to imply that a change in the United States’ desired presence in the region is a necessary outcome of a resolution of Taiwan’s status. Indeed, larger U.S. goals—and the leading U.S. role that has long been deemed by Americans as most appropriate for achieving these goals—are likely to remain unchanged. However, reunification could create circumstances that would cause the United States to question the makeup of the presence that is required to meet these goals.

In a post-reunification environment, the United States might no longer view its current forward-oriented security posture as the best means for meeting its goals. Key factors driving U.S. preferences in this regard would include the following:

- The demand by U.S. allies and partners for U.S. presence in the region could increase or decrease dramatically (as described in Variable 4), depending on China’s post-reunification behavior.
- Other demands on the U.S. military force, such as the war on terror, transnational threats, and other contingencies, would certainly play into a national calculation of where U.S. resources were most needed.
- There could be significant domestic pressure for a peace dividend. If a post-reunification China were acting cooperatively and appeared to be genuinely comfortable with a multipolar regional security architecture, there could be strong domestic pressures for the United States to expend fewer resources on the U.S. forward presence that underpins the current Asian security architecture.

Thus one cannot dismiss the possibility that the United States might be able to meet its goals and fulfill its preferred role in Asia in ways that would not require as robust a military presence and thus are less expensive—in terms of both financial costs and opportunity costs.

That said, there are limits to how much the U.S. presence *could* change at a broad level. Decreased military presence is possible to envision, but it seems unlikely that this would carry over into other sectors of the U.S.-Asia relationship. There is *no* scenario in which the United States would cease to be a Pacific nation: its economic, social, and cultural ties to the region are too strong, and these would not be altered by a cross-Strait reunification.



## Conclusion

A cross-Strait reunification would bring the United States, China, and U.S. Asian allies and partners to a key decision point. Previous assessments of the regional security environment, and all policies resulting from these assessments, would need to be reevaluated. All parties in Asia would be forced to revalidate their national interests, assess the threats they face, and consider how they should best pursue their national goals. In many cases, this reevaluation is unlikely to result in significant change, but it is likely that all the previous assumptions that have formed a foundation for U.S. presence in the region would be re-examined.

### ***Reunification would change some things, but not everything.***

The five variables we discuss in this paper are relevant for understanding the Asian regional security environment *today* as well as after a reunification. Each represents a continuum of decisions on a particular issue that the United States, China, and other Asian nations make in response to their regional security environment.

Following reunification, some aspects of the regional security environment would almost certainly change. These include:

- *China's assessment of its new security priorities.* Reunification would free up Chinese military resources that have long been focused on retaking Taiwan, forcing the PLA to make hard choices about where to allocate these resources next.
- *The credibility of U.S. security commitments in Asia.* Any reunification scenario has the potential to affect other Asian nations' views of the credibility of U.S. security commitments in the region, at least for a while. Any post-reunification scenario would likely involve calls for the United States to reassure its Asian friends and allies of continued U.S. commitment to maintaining its special role in the region.

There are other features of Asia's security architecture that could change, but might not. Whether they change would depend on the way that reunification took place, and sometimes on other factors. These are:

- *China's preferred regional security architecture.* A reunified China would likely formulate its preferences based on its strategic assessment of the post-reunification global and regional security environment. It would consider both its available resources and its assessment of future threats in order to determine its preferred future role in Asia.

- *The credibility of U.S. military strength in Asia.* Any outcome that could be seen as a military defeat for the United States would jeopardize regional views of U.S. military power. If reunification had been achieved peacefully, this could—depending on the precise circumstances—be painted as a deterrence victory for China.
- *The degree of security presence the United States wants to have in Asia.* The U.S. might determine that there are ways to meet its goals and fulfill its preferred role in a post-reunification Asia that would not require as robust a military presence and thus would be less expensive—in terms of both financial costs and opportunity costs.

Finally, there are elements of the regional security environment that would probably not be significantly affected by a cross-Strait reunification. They are:

- *China's preference for coercive or cooperative means of achieving its national goals.* We found no reason to believe that reunification would cause China to more strongly prefer either cooperation or coercion as a primary means of achieving its national goals.
- *The United States' goals and desired role in the Asia-Pacific region.* The current irresolution of Taiwan's status does not drive U.S. national goals in Asia, and its removal would not change them. The United States initially took on the role of security guarantor in Asia following World War II, based on its concerns over several security issues that have not yet been resolved. Absent Taiwan, the United States would still have a clearly defined role in helping manage and resolve those issues.
- *A continued U.S. presence in Asia.* U.S. economic, social, and cultural ties to the region will require a strong comprehensive presence in Asia for the foreseeable future.

## Glossary

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
EAFTA	East Asian Free Trade Area
EEZ	Exclusive economic zone
HA/DR	Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
NEO	Non-combatant evacuation
PACOM	United States Pacific Command
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
SEATO	Southeast Asian Treaty Organization
SLOC	Sea line of communication
U.S.	United States
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of U.S. decision-making during this period, see David M. Finkelstein, *Washington's Taiwan Dilemma, 1949-1950: From Abandonment to Salvation* (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Cheng-yi Lin, "The Legacy of the Korean War: Impact on U.S.-Taiwan Relations," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* 11:4 (December 1992), 40-57.

<sup>3</sup> In 2010 China's total GDP was approximately USD 4.9 trillion, while Taiwan's was approximately USD 350 billion. Chinmei Sung and Weiyi Lim, "Taiwan Grew Faster-Than-Expected as Exports Weathered Risks," *Bloomberg* (19 August 2010), <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-08-19/taiwan-s-economy-grows-12-5-exceeding-estimate-may-prompt-rate-increase.html>; "China Overtakes Japan as World's Second-Biggest Economy," *Bloomberg* (16 August 2010), <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-08-16/china-economy-passes-japan-s-in-second-quarter-capping-three-decade-rise.html>. Taiwan holds more than half the global market share of custom computer chip manufacturing and other computing technologies. Steven Halpern, "Taiwan Semiconductor (TSM): The 'Intel' of Asia" (19 January 2010), <http://www.blogginstocks.com/2010/01/19/aiwan-semiconductor-tsm-the-intel-of-asia/>.

<sup>4</sup> Many people have written about the possible paths to a cross-Strait reunification and the consequent implications for the United States. See, for example, Roger Cliff and David A. Shlapak, *U.S.-China Relations after Resolution of Taiwan's Status* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007), 15, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND\\_MG567.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG567.pdf); Michael McDevitt and Dean Cheng, *Taiwan Post-Conflict Scenarios*, CNA Annotated Briefing D0013622.A2/Final (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2006); Phillip C. Saunders and Scott L. Kastner, "Bridge over Troubled Water? Envisioning a China-Taiwan Peace Agreement," *International Security* 33:4 (Spring 2009), 87-114. Far fewer, however, have addressed the question of what security implications a reunification would have for the United States *after* it occurred. One notable exception is Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, who in 2002 examined what U.S. interests would be at risk in a post-reunified Asia. Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, "If Taiwan Chooses Unification, Should the United States Care?" *The Washington Quarterly* 25:3 (Summer 2002), 15-28.

<sup>5</sup> He Di, "The Last Campaign to Unify China: The CCP's Unrealized Plan to Liberate Taiwan, 1949-1950," in *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience since 1949*, ed. Mark A. Ryan, David M. Finkelstein, and Michael A. McDevitt (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 74.

<sup>6</sup> "Full Text of Anti-Secession Law," Adopted at the Third Session of the Tenth National People's Congress (14 March 2005), [http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200503/14/eng20050314\\_176746.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200503/14/eng20050314_176746.html); Jiang Zemin, "CPC Sincerely Wishes to Make a Peaceful National Reunification Miracle" (speech given on 11 September 2001), <http://www.china.org/cn/english/18965.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> "Full Text of Anti-Secession Law."

<sup>8</sup> For a succinct and readable overview of Taiwan's symbolic importance to the PRC, see C. Fred Bergsten, Charles Freeman, Nicholas R. Lardy, and Derek J. Mitchell, *China's Rise: Challenges and Opportunities* (Washington, DC: Petersen Institute for International Economics and Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008), 170-171.

<sup>9</sup> PLA Senior Captain Zhang Wei, *National Maritime Security (Guojia Haishang Anquan; 国家海上安全)* (Beijing: Haichao Chubanshe, 2008), 415, 411.

<sup>10</sup> Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, eds., *The Science of Military Strategy* (Beijing: Military Science Publishing House, 2005), 442-443.

<sup>11</sup> In 1993, for instance, then-PRC president Jiang Zemin announced in a speech to the Central Military Commission that “at present and for a period in the future, our priority in terms of military struggle is preventing Taiwan from fomenting any great Taiwan independence incidents.” Jiang Zemin, “The International Situation and the Military Strategic Guidelines” (Speech delivered to an expanded meeting of the Central Military Commission (13 January 1993), published in *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin* (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, August 2006), Vol. 1, 278-294. On China’s military modernization being driven in large part by a Taiwan contingency, see, for example, Maryanne Kivlehan, Dean Cheng, Kenneth W. Allen, and David M. Finkelstein, *Evolving Operational Concepts of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army and Navy: A Preliminary Exploration*, CNA Research Memorandum D0007031.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, October 2002); Maryanne Kivlehan, David M. Finkelstein, Dean Cheng, and Kenneth W. Allen, *Institutional Reforms of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army: Overview and Challenges*, CNA Research Memorandum D0005777.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, May 2002); and Maryanne Kivlehan, *Doctrinal Change in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army: Institutions, Processes, and Influences*, CNA Research Memorandum D0008391.A1/SR1 (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, May 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Dai Bingguo, “Speech before the U.S.-China Strategic & Economic Dialogue” (28 July 2009), <http://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/news/2009/07-29/1794984.shtml>; in English translation at <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2009/08/dai-bingguo-%e6%88%b4%e7%a7%89%e5%9b%bd-the-core-interests-of-the-prc/>.

<sup>13</sup> For a complete list of China’s activities with regard to these disputed territories, see M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China’s Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> On current instability on China’s borders, see Murray Scot Tanner and Peter Mackenzie, *China’s Emerging National Security Interests*, CNA Research Memorandum D0023581.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, September 2010), 51-56.

<sup>15</sup> Information Office of the State Council, “China’s National Defense in 2006” (29 December 2006), Chapter II, “National Defense Policy,” <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/book/194421.htm>. See also Wei Daqiang and Li Ming, “Insight on Maritime Military Development Strategy in View of Harmony,” *Guofang* 2010: 2 (2010), 62-64; Tang Fuquan and Wu Yi, “A Discussion of China’s Maritime Defense Strategy,” *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue* 2007:5 (2007).

<sup>16</sup> Tanner and Mackenzie, *China’s Emerging National Security Interests*, 51; and David L. Shambaugh, “China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order,” *International Security* 29:3 (Winter 2004/05), 98.

<sup>17</sup> As a result, China’s government has paid ever-more attention both to protecting the SLOCs that are essential to its export-led economy, and to seeking alternative paths (e.g., railroads and other land routes) to diversify its supply routes.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion of these and other PRC security concerns, see Tanner and Mackenzie, *China’s Emerging National Security Interests*.

<sup>19</sup> For discussions of the import of the New Historic Missions, see, for example, Daniel M. Hartnett, *Towards a Globally Focused Chinese Military: The Historic Missions of the Chinese Armed Forces*, CNA Information Memorandum D0018304.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, June 2008); Tanner and Mackenzie, *China’s Emerging National Security Interests*, 20-23; and Office of

Naval Intelligence, *The People's Liberation Army Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics* (August 2009), 9.

<sup>20</sup> Many observers have attempted to derive tentative current priority lists from official PRC documents and from PLA activities. For a sampling of recent essays on this topic, see Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell, eds., *Beyond The Strait: PLA Missions Other than Taiwan* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, April 2009). These and other observers acknowledge that significant uncertainties persist in our understanding of how the PLA prioritizes specific tasks to address its broader security concerns.

<sup>21</sup> David M. Finkelstein, "China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines'," in *Right Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military*, ed. Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), 87.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of Chinese elites' evolving approach to the concepts of "hegemony" and "equality" among nations, see Alison A. Kaufman, "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order," *Pacific Focus* XXV:1 (April 2010), 23-26.

<sup>23</sup> Wu Jiao, "President: China Never Seeks Hegemony," *China Daily* (15 October 2007), [http://www2.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-10/15/content\\_6175043.htm](http://www2.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-10/15/content_6175043.htm).

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Paul H.B. Godwin, "China as Regional Hegemon?" in *The Asia-Pacific Region in Transition*, ed. Jim Rolfe (Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004). It is worth noting that China could accept global multipolarity while still aspiring to regional hegemony.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, John J. Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise," *Current History* 105: 690 (April 2006), 160-162; Denny Roy, "Hegemon on the Horizon? China's Threat to East Asian Security," *International Security* 19:1 (Summer 1994), 149-168; Dick K. Nanto, *East Asian Regional Architecture: New Economic and Security Arrangements and U.S. Policy*, CRS Report for Congress, RL22653 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), 31; and Dana R. Dillon and John J. Tkacik, Jr., "China and Asean: Endangered U.S. Primacy in Southeast Asia," *Backgrounders* (Heritage Foundation), no. 1886 (19 October 2005), [http://s3.amazonaws.com/thf\\_media/2005/pdf/bg1886.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/thf_media/2005/pdf/bg1886.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> For instance, some argue that China's need to focus its military development on a Taiwan scenario has slowed the PLA's ability to develop long-range power projection capabilities. Mark Cozad, "China's Regional Power Projection: Prospects for Future Missions in the South and East China Seas," in *Beyond the Strait*, ed. Kamphausen, Lai, and Scobell, 307-09, 311-15; and Murray Scot Tanner, *The Future Missions of the People's Liberation Army Air Force*, CNA Research Memorandum D0021779.A2/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, January 2010). Others suggest that tension in the Strait is the main factor that keeps the United States rooted in Asia—and thus that any cross-Strait resolution that caused the United States to step back from that role would create an opening for China to fill, either by stirring up conflict with its neighbors or by itself taking on the role of security guarantor for the region. "China's Intentions Unclear," *Asia-Pacific Defense Forum* 35:3 (2010), 38; Yoriko Koike, "The Struggle for Mastery of the Pacific," *Project Syndicate* (12 May 2010), <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/koike5/English>.

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Cronin and Paul Giarra, "China's Dangerous Arrogance," *The Diplomat* (23 July 2010), 86, <http://the-diplomat.com/2010/07/23/china%E2%80%99s-dangerous-arrogance/>; Nanto, *East Asian Regional Architecture*, 18. It is worth noting that China is not the only country to support regional arrangements that exclude the United States; Japan's proposed East Asian Free Trade Area (EAFTA), for instance, does so as well. A former U.S. ambassador to Japan expressed concerns at the time the EAFTA proposal was made that such a comprehensive regional FTA could harm the

interests of the United States. See, for example, "U.S. Envoy Expresses Concern About Japan's Idea of East Asia Free Trade Zone," *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific* (19 April 2006).

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Ma Yanbing, "The United States: I Will Dominate East Asian Security—a View from the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting," *Shijie Zhishi* (16 August 2010); Cai Penghong, "'South China Sea Issue' Concept Should Not Be Confused," *Huanqiu Shibao* (27 September 2010); and Hai Tao, "Which High Seas Areas Will Remain China-Japan Potential Points of Friction?" *Guoji Xianqu Daobao* (9 July 2010).

<sup>29</sup> For example, Major General Luo Yuan, "The International Strategic Structure in the Early 21st century and China's Regional Security Situation" (briefing, 2008), slide 33.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Thomas J. Bickford, Frederic Vellucci, Jr., and Heidi A. Holz, *China as a Maritime Challenge: The Strategic Dimension*, CNA Research Memorandum D0023549.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, September 2010), 55.

<sup>31</sup> "Joint Communiqué between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China" (28 February 1972).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, "The People's Liberation Army Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics"; Heidi Holz and Kenneth Allen, "Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics: The People's Liberation Army Experience with Military Relations," in *The PLA at Home and Abroad: Assessing the Operational Capabilities of China's Military*, ed. Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, June 2010), 429-473; Mark Cozad, "China's Regional Power Projection: Prospects for Future Missions in the South and East China Seas," in *Beyond the Strait*, ed. Kamphausen, Lai, and Scobell, 296, 304; and David M. Lampton, "China's Rise in Asia Need Not Be at America's Expense," in *Power Shift: China and Asia's New Dynamics*, ed. David Shambaugh (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> The Five Principles had been proposed in the 1950s as a basis for Sino-Indian cooperation, but was not initially extended to all of China's foreign relations.

<sup>35</sup> "China's Position Paper on the New Security Concept," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (31 July 2002), <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/gjs/gjzzyhy/2612/2614/t15319.htm>. For an overview of the process by which the New Security Concept was developed, see David M. Finkelstein, *China's New Security Concept: Reading between the Lines* (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> Allen Carlson, "Helping to Keep the Peace (Albeit Reluctantly): China's Recent Stance on Sovereignty and Multilateral Intervention," *Pacific Affairs* 77:1 (Spring 2004), 9-27.

<sup>37</sup> A useful overview of this period is provided in Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia."

<sup>38</sup> Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, 270-271, provides an excellent overview of China's disputes and cooperation in Asian waters during the 1990s and early 2000s. On the 2010 discussions, see, for example, "Binding ASEAN-China Code to Prevent Spratlys Conflict," *GMA News* (1 November 2010).

<sup>39</sup> Josh Kurlantzick, "China's Charm Offensive in Southeast Asia," *Current History* (September 2006), [http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Kurlantzick\\_SoutheastAsia\\_China.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Kurlantzick_SoutheastAsia_China.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> During recent discussions about creating an ASEAN Economic Community, for instance, China's Ambassador to ASEAN explained, "We collaborate and move together in the same direction, so we

can prevent or reduce the role of the outsider who is trying to use East Asia and ASEAN as a platform to implement its policy, particularly security policy." Shi Xianzhen, "Strengthened East Asian Cooperation Contributes to ASEAN Community Building: Economist," Xinhua (28 October 2010).

<sup>41</sup> For a useful overview of the PRC's approach to Taiwan through 1999, see Suisheng Zhao, "Military Coercion and Peaceful Offence: Beijing's Strategy of National Reunification with Taiwan," *Pacific Affairs* 72:4 (Winter 1999-2000), 495-512. For an overview of the 2000-2008 period, see Chien-min Chao and Wu-yen Chang, "Managing Stability in the Taiwan Strait: Non-Military Policy towards Taiwan under Hu Jintao," paper delivered at the International Conference on "Politics in the Hu Jintao Era: CCP's Adaptation to Domestic and Foreign Challenges" (Paris, 27 June 2008), [http://p00.nccu.edu.tw/po19\\_overea/1/96013-1.doc](http://p00.nccu.edu.tw/po19_overea/1/96013-1.doc).

<sup>42</sup> "Full Text of Anti-Secession Law," Articles 5 and 8.

<sup>43</sup> Markus Taube, "Economic Relations between the PRC and the States of Europe," *China Quarterly* 169 (March 2002), 78-107.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, "China Hits Back at U.S. over Taiwan Weapons Sale," *BBC News* (30 January 2010), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8488765.stm>.

<sup>45</sup> Ralph Jennings, "After U.S. Deal, Taiwan to Buy Helicopters from Europe," Reuters (5 February 2010), <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTOE61402920100205>.

<sup>46</sup> "White Paper—The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China," <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/twwt/WhitePapers/t36704.htm>.

<sup>47</sup> "Taiwan, China Hold Biggest Ever Search, Rescue Drill," *China Post* (17 September 2010).

<sup>48</sup> Cynthia J. Kim, "Korea Wary of China-Taiwan Trade," *The Korea Herald* (August 30, 2010); "China, South Korea Need to Ensure Continuity of their Economic Policies," Xinhua (May 29, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> For trends in exports and imports as percentage of GDP over the past 50 years, see <http://data.worldbank.org/indicators>.

<sup>50</sup> *CIA World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, "Defense Chief Says Japan Needs High Mobility Defense System," Kyodo World Service (21 October 2010); and "Japan to Expand Submarine Fleet to 22 Units from 16," Kyodo World Service (20 October 2010).

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Amitav Acharya, "Will Asia's Past be its Future?" *International Security* 28:3 (Winter 2003/04), 151.

<sup>53</sup> One scholar has argued, for instance, that for historical reasons Asian nations are comfortable with a China-led regional hierarchy of nations and have shown themselves more likely to bandwagon with China than to try to compete with it. David C. Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks," *International Security* 27:4 (Spring 2003), 67.

<sup>54</sup> For recent authoritative articulations of U.S. goals in East Asia, see, for example, Hillary Rodham Clinton, "America's Engagement in the Asia-Pacific" (28 October 2010), <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/10/150141.htm>; and Robert Gates, "America's Security Role in the Asia-Pacific," *First Plenary Session of the 8th IISS Asia Security Summit (Shangri-La Dialogue)* (30 May 2009), <http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2009/plenary-session-speeches-2009/first-plenary-session/dr-robert-gates/>.

<sup>55</sup> Clinton, "America's Engagement in the Asia-Pacific."

<sup>56</sup> Gates, "America's Security Role in the Asia-Pacific."

<sup>57</sup> Kelly Evans, "Sign of the Times: Emerging Asia Surpasses EU as U.S. Export Destination," *WSJ Blogs* (13 May 2010), <http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2010/05/13/sign-of-the-times-emerging-asia-surpasses-eu-as-us-export-destination/>. See also Soyoung Kim, Jong-Wha Lee, and Cyn-Young Park, *The Ties That Bind Asia, Europe, and United States*, ADB Economics Working Paper Series No. 192 (Asian Development Bank, February 2010), <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Working-Papers/2010/Economics-WP192.pdf>, for numbers through 2008.

<sup>58</sup> Association of Americans Resident Overseas, <http://aaro.org/about-aaro/66m-americans-abroad>; U.S. Census, <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb09-75.html>.

<sup>59</sup> The figure of 71,000 includes active-duty U.S. military personnel stationed in Japan (including Okinawa), the Republic of Korea, Guam, and the Philippines. It also includes those defined by DoD as "afloat." It does not include forces rotated out of Japan due to ongoing operations in the Middle East, forces that may be temporarily operating in the region for a military exercise, or forces transiting the region. Unofficial estimates suggest that 5,000 or more personnel may be participating in exercises in the region or transiting Asia at any given point in time. U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center, "Active Duty Military Personnel Strengths by Regional Area and by Country (309A)" (30 June 2010), <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/MILITARY/history/hst1006.pdf>. See also U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center, "Active Duty Military Personnel Strengths by Regional Area and by Country (309A)" (31 December 2008), <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/MILITARY/history/hst0812.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> Clinton, "America's Engagement in the Asia-Pacific."

<sup>61</sup> Ralph A. Cossa, Brad Glosserman, Michael A. McDevitt, Nirav Patel, James Przystup, and Brad Roberts, *The United States and the Asia-Pacific Region: Security Strategy for the Obama Administration* (Washington, DC: IDA, Pacific Forum CSIS, INSS, CNA, CNAS; February 2009), 19.

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