

HOW WE WOULD FIGHT CHINA

The Middle East is just a blip. The American military contest with China in the Pacific will define the twenty-first century. And China will be a more formidable adversary than Russia ever was

BY ROBERT D. KAPLAN

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For some time now no navy or air force has posed a threat to the United States. Our only competition has been armies, whether conventional forces or guerrilla insurgencies. This will soon change. The Chinese navy is poised to push out into the Pacific—and when it does, it will very quickly encounter a U.S. Navy and Air Force unwilling to budge from the coastal shelf of the Asian mainland. It's not hard to imagine the result: a replay of the decades-long Cold War, with a center of gravity not in the heart of Europe but, rather, among Pacific atolls that were last in the news when the Marines stormed them in World War II. In the coming decades China will play an asymmetric back-and-forth game with us in the Pacific, taking advantage not only of its vast coastline but also of its rear base—stretching far back into Central Asia—from which it may eventually be able to lob missiles accurately at moving ships in the Pacific.

In any naval encounter China will have distinct advantages over the United States, even if it lags in technological military prowess. It has the benefit, for one thing, of sheer proximity. Its military is an avid student of the competition, and a fast learner. It has growing increments of "soft" power that demonstrate a particular gift for adaptation. While stateless terrorists fill security vacuums, the Chinese fill economic ones. All over the globe, in such disparate places as the troubled Pacific Island states of Oceania, the Panama Canal zone, and out-of-the-way African nations, the Chinese are becoming masters of indirect influence—by establishing business communities and diplomatic outposts, by negotiating construction and trade agreements. Pulsing with consumer and martial energy, and boasting a peasantry that, unlike others in history, is overwhelmingly literate, China constitutes the principal conventional threat to America's liberal imperium.

How should the United States prepare to respond to challenges in the Pacific? To understand the dynamics of this second Cold War—which will link China and the United States in a future that may stretch over several generations—it is essential to understand certain things about the first Cold War, and about the current predicament of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the institution set up to fight that conflict. This is a story about military strategy and tactics, with some counterintuitive twists and turns.

The first thing to understand is that the alliance system of the latter half of the twentieth century is dead. Warfare by committee, as practiced by NATO, has simply become too cumbersome in an age that requires light and lethal strikes. During the fighting in Kosovo in 1999 (a limited air campaign against a toothless enemy during a time of Euro-American harmony; a campaign, in other words, that should have been easy to prosecute) dramatic fissures appeared in the then-nineteen-member NATO alliance. The organization's end effectively came with the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, in the

aftermath of which, despite talk of a broad-based coalition, European militaries have usually done little more than patrol and move into areas already pacified by U.S. soldiers and Marines—a job more suggestive of the United Nations. NATO today is a medium for the expansion of bilateral training missions between the United States and formerly communist countries and republics: the Marines in Bulgaria and Romania, the Navy in Albania, the Army in Poland and the Czech Republic, Special Operations Forces in Georgia—the list goes on and on. Much of NATO has become a farm system for the major-league U.S. military.

The second thing to understand is that the functional substitute for a NATO of the Pacific already exists, and is indeed up and running. It is the U.S. Pacific Command, known as PACOM. Unencumbered by a diplomatic bureaucracy, PACOM is a large but nimble construct, and its leaders understand what many in the media and the policy community do not: that the center of gravity of American strategic concern is already the Pacific, not the Middle East. PACOM will soon be a household name, as CENTCOM (the U.S. Central Command) has been in the current epoch of Middle Eastern conflict—an epoch that will start to wind down, as far as the U.S. military is concerned, during the second Bush administration.

The third thing to understand is that, ironically, the vitality of NATO itself, the Atlantic alliance, could be revived by the Cold War in the Pacific—and indeed the re-emergence of NATO as an indispensable war-fighting instrument should be America's unswerving aim. In its posture toward China the United States will look to Europe and NATO, whose help it will need as a strategic counterweight and, by the way, as a force to patrol seas more distant than the Mediterranean and the North Atlantic. That is why NATO's current commander, Marine General James L. Jones, emphasizes that NATO's future lies in amphibious, expeditionary warfare.

Let me describe our military organization in the Pacific—an area through which I have traveled extensively during the past three years. PACOM has always been the largest, most venerable, and most interesting of the U.S. military's area commands. (Its roots go back to the U.S. Pacific Army of the Philippines War, 1899-1902.) Its domain stretches from East Africa to beyond the International Date Line and includes the entire Pacific Rim, encompassing half the world's surface and more than half of its economy. The world's six largest militaries, two of which (America's and China's) are the most rapidly modernizing, all operate within PACOM's sphere of control. PACOM has—in addition to its many warships and submarines—far more dedicated troops than CENTCOM. Even though the military's area commands do not *own* troops today in the way they used to, these statistics matter, because they demonstrate that the United States has chosen to locate the bulk of its forces in the Pacific, not in the Middle East. CENTCOM fights wars with troops essentially borrowed from PACOM.

Quietly in recent years, by negotiating bilateral security agreements with countries that have few such arrangements with one another, the U.S. military has formed a Pacific military alliance of sorts at PACOM headquarters, in Honolulu. This is where the truly interesting meetings are being held today, rather than in Ditchley or Davos. The attendees

at those meetings, who often travel on PACOM's dime, are military officers from such places as Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, and the Philippines.

Otto von Bismarck, the father of the Second Reich in continental Europe, would recognize the emerging Pacific system. In 2002 the German commentator Josef Joffe appreciated this in a remarkably perceptive article in *The National Interest*, in which he argued that in terms of political alliances, the United States has come to resemble Bismarck's Prussia. Britain, Russia, and Austria needed Prussia more than they needed one another, Joffe wrote, thus making them "spokes" to Berlin's "hub"; the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan exposed a world in which America can forge different coalitions for different crises. The world's other powers, he said, now need the United States more than they need one another.

Unfortunately, the United States did not immediately capitalize on this new power arrangement, because President George W. Bush lacked the nuance and attendant self-restraint of Bismarck, who understood that such a system could endure only so long as one didn't overwhelm it. The Bush administration did just that, of course, in the buildup to the invasion of Iraq, which led France, Germany, Russia, and China, along with a host of lesser powers such as Turkey, Mexico, and Chile, to unite against us.

In the Pacific, however, a Bismarckian arrangement still prospers, helped along by the pragmatism of our Hawaii-based military officers, five time zones removed from the ideological hothouse of Washington, D.C. In fact, PACOM represents a much purer version of Bismarck's imperial superstructure than anything the Bush administration created prior to invading Iraq. As Henry Kissinger writes in *Diplomacy* (1994), Bismarck forged alliances in all directions from a point of seeming isolation, without the constraints of ideology. He brought peace and prosperity to Central Europe by recognizing that when power relationships are correctly calibrated, wars tend to be avoided.

Only a similarly pragmatic approach will allow us to accommodate China's inevitable re-emergence as a great power. The alternative will be to turn the earth of the twenty-first century into a battlefield. Whenever great powers have emerged or re-emerged on the scene (Germany and Japan in the early decades of the twentieth century, to cite two recent examples), they have tended to be particularly assertive—and therefore have thrown international affairs into violent turmoil. China will be no exception. Today the Chinese are investing in both diesel-powered and nuclear-powered submarines—a clear signal that they intend not only to protect their coastal shelves but also to expand their sphere of influence far out into the Pacific and beyond.

This is wholly legitimate. China's rulers may not be democrats in the literal sense, but they are seeking a liberated First World lifestyle for many of their 1.3 billion people—and doing so requires that they safeguard sea-lanes for the transport of energy resources from the Middle East and elsewhere. Naturally, they do not trust the United States and India to do this for them. Given the stakes, and given what history teaches us about the conflicts that emerge when great powers all pursue legitimate interests, the result is likely to be the defining military conflict of the twenty-first century: if not a big war with

China, then a series of Cold War—style standoffs that stretch out over years and decades. And this will occur mostly within PACOM's area of responsibility.

To do their job well, military officers must approach power in the most cautious, mechanical, and utilitarian way possible, assessing and reassessing regional balances of power while leaving the values side of the political equation to the civilian leadership. This makes military officers, of all government professionals, the least prone to be led astray by the raptures of liberal internationalism and neo-conservative interventionism.

The history of World War II shows the importance of this approach. In the 1930s the U.S. military, nervous about the growing strength of Germany and Japan, rightly lobbied for building up our forces. But by 1940 and 1941 the military (not unlike the German general staff a few years earlier) was presciently warning of the dangers of a two-front war; and by late summer of 1944 it should have been thinking less about defeating Germany and more about containing the Soviet Union. Today Air Force and Navy officers worry about a Taiwanese declaration of independence, because such a move would lead the United States into fighting a war with China that might not be in our national interest. Indonesia is another example: whatever the human-rights failures of the Indonesian military, PACOM assumes, correctly, that a policy of non-engagement would only open the door to Chinese-Indonesian military cooperation in a region that represents the future of world terrorism. (The U.S. military's response to the Asian tsunami was, of course, a humanitarian effort; but PACOM strategists had to have recognized that a vigorous response would gain political support for the military-basing rights that will form part of our deterrence strategy against China.) Or consider Korea: some Pacific-based officers take a reunified Korean peninsula for granted, and their main concern is whether the country will be "Finlandized" by China or will be secure within an American-Japanese sphere of influence.

PACOM's immersion in Asian power dynamics gives it unusual diplomatic weight, and consequently more leverage in Washington. And PACOM will not be nearly as constrained as CENTCOM by Washington-based domestic politics. Our actions in the Pacific will not be swayed by the equivalent of the Israel lobby; Protestant evangelicals will care less about the Pacific Rim than about the fate of the Holy Land. And because of the vast economic consequences of misjudging the power balance in East Asia, American business and military interests are likely to run in tandem toward a classically conservative policy of deterring China without needlessly provoking it, thereby amplifying PACOM's authority. Our stance toward China and the Pacific, in other words, comes with a built-in stability—and this, in turn, underscores the notion of a new Cold War that is sustainable over the very long haul. Moreover, the complexity of the many political and military relationships managed by PACOM will give the command considerably greater influence than that currently exercised by CENTCOM—which, as a few military experts have disparagingly put it to me, deals only with a bunch of "third-rate Middle Eastern armies."

The relative shift in focus from the Middle East to the Pacific in coming years—idealistic rhetoric notwithstanding—will force the next American president, no matter what his or

her party, to adopt a foreign policy similar to those of moderate Republican presidents such as George H. W. Bush, Gerald Ford, and Richard Nixon. The management of risk will become a governing ideology. Even if Iraq turns out to be a democratic success story, it will surely be a from-the-jaws-of-failure success that no one in the military or the diplomatic establishment will ever want to repeat—especially in Asia, where the economic repercussions of a messy military adventure would be enormous. "Getting into a war with China is easy," says Michael Vickers, a former Green Beret who developed the weapons strategy for the Afghan resistance in the 1980s as a CIA officer and is now at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, in Washington. "You can see many scenarios, not just Taiwan—especially as the Chinese develop a submarine and missile capability throughout the Pacific. But the dilemma is, How do you *end* a war with China?"

Like the nations involved in World War I, and unlike the rogue states everyone has been concentrating on, the United States and China in the twenty-first century would have the capacity to keep fighting even if one or the other lost a big battle or a missile exchange. This has far-reaching implications. "Ending a war with China," Vickers says, "may mean effecting some form of regime change, because we don't want to leave some wounded, angry regime in place." Another analyst, this one inside the Pentagon, told me, "Ending a war with China will force us to substantially reduce their military capacity, thus threatening their energy sources and the Communist Party's grip on power. The world will not be the same afterward. It's a very dangerous road to travel on."

The better road is for PACOM to deter China in Bismarckian fashion, from a geographic hub of comparative isolation—the Hawaiian Islands—with spokes reaching out to major allies such as Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and India. These countries, in turn, would form secondary hubs to help us manage the Melanesian, Micronesian, and Polynesian archipelagoes, among other places, and also the Indian Ocean. The point of this arrangement would be to dissuade China so subtly that over time the rising behemoth would be drawn into the PACOM alliance system without any large-scale conflagration—the way NATO was ultimately able to neutralize the Soviet Union.

Whatever we say or do, China will spend more and more money on its military in the coming decades. Our only realistic goal may be to encourage it to make investments that are defensive, not offensive, in nature. Our efforts will require particular care, because China, unlike the Soviet Union of old (or Russia today, for that matter), boasts soft as well as hard power. Businesspeople love the idea of China; you don't have to beg them to invest there, as you do in Africa and so many other places. China's mixture of traditional authoritarianism and market economics has broad cultural appeal throughout Asia and other parts of the world. And because China is improving the material well-being of hundreds of millions of its citizens, the plight of its dissidents does not have quite the same market allure as did the plight of the Soviet Union's Sakharovs and Sharanskys. Democracy is attractive in places where tyranny has been obvious, odious, and unsuccessful, of course, as in Ukraine and Zimbabwe. But the world is full of gray

areas—Jordan and Malaysia, for example—where elements of tyranny have ensured stability and growth.

Consider Singapore. Its mixture of democracy and authoritarianism has made it unpopular with idealists in Washington, but as far as PACOM is concerned, the country is, despite its small size, one of the most popular and helpful in the Pacific. Its ethnically blind military meritocracy, its nurturing concern for the welfare of officers and enlisted men alike, and its jungle-warfare school in Brunei are second to none. With the exception of Japan, far to the north, Singapore offers the only non-American base in the Pacific where our nuclear carriers can be serviced. Its help in hunting down Islamic terrorists in the Indonesian archipelago has been equal or superior to the help offered elsewhere by our most dependable Western allies. One Washington-based military futurist told me, "The Sings, well—they're just awesome in every way."

PACOM's objective, in the words of a Pacific-based Marine general, must be "military multilateralism on steroids." This is not just a question of our future training with the "Sings" in Brunei, of flying test sorties with the Indian air force, of conducting major annual exercises in Thailand, or of utilizing a soon-to-open training facility in northern Australia with the approval of our alliance partners. It's also a matter of forging interoperability with friendly Asian militaries at the platoon level, by constantly moving U.S. troops from one training deployment to another.

This would be an improvement over NATO, whose fighting fitness has been hampered by the addition of substandard former-Eastern-bloc militaries. Politics, too, favors a tilt toward the Pacific: tensions between the United States and Europe currently impede military integration, whereas our Pacific allies, notably Japan and Australia, want more military engagement with the United States, to counter the rise of the Chinese navy. This would work to our benefit. The Japanese military, although small, possesses elite niche capabilities, in special-forces and diesel-submarine warfare. And the aggressive frontier style of the Australians makes them cognitively closer to Americans than even the British.

Military multilateralism in the Pacific will nevertheless be constrained by the technical superiority of U.S. forces; it will be difficult to develop bilateral training missions with Asian militaries that are not making the same investments in high-tech equipment that we are. A classic military lesson is that technological superiority does not always confer the advantages one expects. Getting militarily so far ahead of everyone else in the world creates a particular kind of loneliness that not even the best diplomats can always alleviate, because diplomacy itself is worthless if it's not rooted in realistic assessments of comparative power.

At the moment the challenges posed by a rising China may seem slight, even nonexistent. The U.S. Navy's warships have a collective "full-load displacement" of 2.86 million tons; the rest of the world's warships combined add up to only 3.04 million tons. The Chinese navy's warships have a full-load displacement of only 263,064 tons. The United States deploys twenty-four of the world's thirty-four aircraft carriers; the Chinese deploy none

(a principal reason why they couldn't mount a rescue effort after the tsunami). The statistics go on. But as Robert Work, a senior analyst at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, points out, at the start of the twenty-seven-year Peloponnesian War, Athens had a great advantage over Sparta, which had no navy—but Sparta eventually emerged the victor.

China has committed itself to significant military spending, but its navy and air force will not be able to match ours for some decades. The Chinese are therefore not going to do us the favor of engaging in conventional air and naval battles, like those fought in the Pacific during World War II. The Battle of the Philippine Sea, in late June of 1944, and the Battle of Leyte Gulf and the Surigao Strait, in October of 1944, were the last great sea battles in American history, and are very likely to remain so. Instead the Chinese will approach us asymmetrically, as terrorists do. In Iraq the insurgents have shown us the low end of asymmetry, with car bombs. But the Chinese are poised to show us the high end of the art. That is the threat.

There are many ways in which the Chinese could use their less advanced military to achieve a sort of political-strategic parity with us. According to one former submarine commander and naval strategist I talked to, the Chinese have been poring over every detail of our recent wars in the Balkans and the Persian Gulf, and they fully understand just how much our military power depends on naval projection—that is, on the ability of a carrier battle group to get within proximity of, say, Iraq, and fire a missile at a target deep inside the country. To adapt, the Chinese are putting their fiber-optic systems underground and moving defense capabilities deep into western China, out of naval missile range—all the while developing an offensive strategy based on missiles designed to be capable of striking that supreme icon of American wealth and power, the aircraft carrier. The effect of a single Chinese cruise missile's hitting a U.S. carrier, even if it did not sink the ship, would be politically and psychologically catastrophic, akin to al-Qaeda's attacks on the Twin Towers. China is focusing on missiles and submarines as a way to humiliate us in specific encounters. Their long-range-missile program should deeply concern U.S. policymakers.

With an advanced missile program the Chinese could fire hundreds of missiles at Taiwan before we could get to the island to defend it. Such a capability, combined with a new fleet of submarines (soon to be a greater undersea force than ours, in size if not in quality), might well be enough for the Chinese to coerce other countries into denying port access to U.S. ships. Most of China's seventy current submarines are past-their-prime diesels of Russian design; but these vessels could be used to create mobile minefields in the South China, East China, and Yellow Seas, where, as the *Wall Street Journal* reporter David Lague has written, "uneven depths, high levels of background noise, strong currents and shifting thermal layers" would make detecting the submarines very difficult. Add to this the seventeen new stealthy diesel submarines and three nuclear ones that the Chinese navy will deploy by the end of the decade, and one can imagine that China could launch an embarrassing strike against us, or against one of our Asian allies. Then there is the whole field of ambiguous coercion—for example, a series of non-attributable cyberattacks on Taiwan's electrical-power grids, designed to gradually demoralize the

population. This isn't science fiction; the Chinese have invested significantly in cyberwarfare training and technology. Just because the Chinese are not themselves democratic doesn't mean they are not expert in manipulating the psychology of a democratic electorate.

What we can probably expect from China in the near future is specific demonstrations of strength—like its successful forcing down of a U.S. Navy EP-3E surveillance plane in the spring of 2001. Such tactics may represent the trend of twenty-first-century warfare better than anything now happening in Iraq—and China will have no shortage of opportunities in this arena. During one of our biennial Rim of the Pacific naval exercises the Chinese could sneak a sub under a carrier battle group and then surface it. They could deploy a moving target at sea and then hit it with a submarine- or land-based missile, demonstrating their ability to threaten not only carriers but also destroyers, frigates, and cruisers. (Think about the political effects of the terrorist attack on the USS *Cole*, a guided-missile destroyer, off the coast of Yemen in 2000—and then think about a future in which hitting such ships will be easier.) They could also bump up against one of our ships during one of our ongoing Freedom of Navigation exercises off the Asian coast. The bumping of a ship may seem inconsequential, but keep in mind that in a global media age such an act can have important strategic consequences. Because the world media tend to side with a spoiler rather than with a reigning superpower, the Chinese would have a built-in political advantage.

What should be our military response to such developments? We need to go more unconventional. Our present Navy is mainly a "blue-water" force, responsible for the peacetime management of vast oceanic spaces—no small feat, and one that enables much of the world's free trade. The phenomenon of globalization could not occur without American ships and sailors. But increasingly what we will need is, in essence, three separate navies: one designed to maintain our ability to use the sea as a platform for offshore bombing (to support operations like the ones in Iraq and Afghanistan); one designed for littoral Special Operations combat (against terrorist groups based in and around Indonesia, Malaysia, and the southern Philippines, for example); and one designed to enhance our stealth capabilities (for patrolling the Chinese mainland and the Taiwan Strait, among other regions). All three of these navies will have a role in deflecting China, directly and indirectly, given the variety of dysfunctional Pacific Island republics that are strengthening their ties with Beijing.

Our aircraft carriers already provide what we need for that first navy; we must further develop the other two. The Special Operations navy will require lots of small vessels, among them the littoral-combat ship being developed by General Dynamics and Lockheed Martin. Approximately 400 feet long, the LCS requires only a small crew, can operate in very shallow water, can travel very fast (up to forty knots), and will deploy Special Operations Forces (namely, Navy SEALs). Another critical part of the littoral navy will be the Mark V special-operations craft. Only eighty feet long, the Mark V can travel at up to fifty knots and has a range of 600 nautical miles. With a draft of only five feet, it can deliver a SEAL platoon directly onto a beach—and at some \$5 million apiece, the Pentagon can buy dozens for the price of just one F/A-22 fighter jet.

Developing the third type of navy will require real changes. Particularly as the media become more intrusive, we must acquire more stealth, so that, for example, we can send commandos ashore from a submarine to snatch or kill terrorists, or leave special operators behind to carry out missions in an area over which no government has control.

Submarines have disadvantages, of course: they offer less of a bombing platform than aircraft carriers, and pound for pound are more costly. Nevertheless, they are the wave of the future, in no small measure because protecting aircraft carriers from missile attack may slowly become a pursuit of diminishing returns for us.

Our stealth navy would be best served by the addition of new diesel submarines of the sort that Australia, Japan, South Korea, Germany, and Sweden already have in the water or under development—and which China will soon have too. But because of our global policing responsibilities, which will necessarily keep us in the nuclear-sub business, we're unlikely to switch to diesel submarines. Instead we will adapt what we've got. Already we are refitting four Trident subs with conventional weapons, and making them able to support the deployment of SEAL teams and eventually, perhaps, long-range unmanned spy aircraft. The refitted Tridents can act as big mother ships for smaller assets deployed closer to the littorals.

None of this will change our need for basing rights in the Pacific, of course. The more access to bases we have, the more flexibility we'll have—to support unmanned flights, to allow aerial refueling, and perhaps most important, to force the Chinese military to concentrate on a host of problems rather than just a few. Never provide your adversary with only a few problems to solve (finding and hitting a carrier, for example), because if you do, he'll solve them.

Andersen Air Force Base, on Guam's northern tip, represents the future of U.S. strategy in the Pacific. It is the most potent platform anywhere in the world for the projection of American military power. Landing there recently in a military aircraft, I beheld long lines of B-52 bombers, C-17 Globemasters, F/A-18 Hornets, and E-2 Hawkeye surveillance planes, among others. Andersen's 10,000-foot runways can handle any plane in the Air Force's arsenal, and could accommodate the space shuttle should it need to make an emergency landing. The sprawl of runways and taxiways is so vast that when I arrived, I barely noticed a carrier air wing from the USS *Kitty Hawk*, which was making live practice bombing runs that it could not make from its home port in Japan. I saw a truck filled with cruise missiles on one of the runways. No other Air Force base in the Pacific stores as much weaponry as Andersen: some 100,000 bombs and missiles at any one time. Andersen also stores 66 million gallons of jet fuel, making it the Air Force's biggest strategic gas-and-go in the world.

Guam, which is also home to a submarine squadron and an expanding naval base, is significant because of its location. From the island an Air Force equivalent of a Marine or Army division can cover almost all of PACOM's area of responsibility. Flying to North Korea from the West Coast of the United States takes thirteen hours; from Guam it takes four.

"This is not like Okinawa," Major General Dennis Larsen, the Air Force commander there at the time of my visit, told me. "This is American soil in the midst of the Pacific. Guam is a U.S. territory." The United States can do anything it wants here, and make huge investments without fear of being thrown out. Indeed, what struck me about Andersen was how great the space was for expansion to the south and west of the current perimeters. Hundreds of millions of dollars of construction funds were being allocated. This little island, close to China, has the potential to become the hub in the wheel of a new, worldwide constellation of bases that will move the locus of U.S. power from Europe to Asia. In the event of a conflict with Taiwan, if we had a carrier battle group at Guam we would force the Chinese either to attack it in port—thereby launching an assault on sovereign U.S. territory, and instantly becoming the aggressor in the eyes of the world—or to let it sail, in which case the carrier group could arrive off the coast of Taiwan only two days later.

During the Cold War the Navy had a specific infrastructure for a specific threat: war with the Soviet Union. But now the threat is multiple and uncertain: we need to be prepared at any time to fight, say, a conventional war against North Korea or an unconventional counterinsurgency battle against a Chinese-backed rogue island-state. This requires a more agile Navy presence on the island, which in turn means outsourcing services to the civilian community on Guam so that the Navy can concentrate on military matters. One Navy captain I met with had grown up all over the Pacific Rim. He told me of the Navy's plans to expand the waterfront, build more bachelors' quarters, and harden the electrical-power system by putting it underground. "The fact that we have lots of space today is meaningless," he said. "The question is, How would we handle the surge requirement necessitated by a full-scale war?"

There could be a problem with all of this. By making Guam a Hawaii of the western Pacific, we make life simple for the Chinese, because we give them just one problem to solve: how to threaten or intimidate Guam. The way to counter them will be not by concentration but by dispersion. So how will we prevent Guam from becoming too big?

In a number of ways. We may build up Palau, an archipelago of 20,000 inhabitants between Mindanao, in the Philippines, and the Federated States of Micronesia, whose financial aid is contingent on a defense agreement with us. We will keep up our bases in Central Asia, close to western China—among them Karshi-Khanabad, in Uzbekistan, and Manas, in Kyrgyzstan, which were developed and expanded for the invasion of Afghanistan. And we will establish what are known as cooperative security locations.

A cooperative security location can be a tucked-away corner of a host country's civilian airport, or a dirt runway somewhere with fuel and mechanical help nearby, or a military airport in a friendly country with which we have no formal basing agreement but, rather, an informal arrangement with private contractors acting as go-betweens. Because the CSL concept is built on subtle relationships, it's where the war-fighting ability of the Pentagon and the diplomacy of the State Department coincide—or should. The problem with big bases in, say, Turkey—as we learned on the eve of the invasion of Iraq—is that they are an intrusive, intimidating symbol of American power, and the only power left to

a host country is the power to deny us use of such bases. In the future, therefore, we will want unobtrusive bases that benefit the host country much more obviously than they benefit us. Allowing us the use of such a base would ramp up power for a country rather than humiliating it.

I have visited a number of CSLs in East Africa and Asia. Here is how they work. The United States provides aid to upgrade maintenance facilities, thereby helping the host country to better project its own air and naval power in the region. At the same time, we hold periodic exercises with the host country's military, in which the base is a focus. We also offer humanitarian help to the surrounding area. Such civil-affairs projects garner positive publicity for our military in the local media—and they long preceded the response to the tsunami, which marked the first time that many in the world media paid attention to the humanitarian work done all over the world, all the time, by the U.S. military. The result is a positive diplomatic context for getting the host country's approval for use of the base when and if we need it.

Often the key role in managing a CSL is played by a private contractor. In Asia, for example, the private contractor is usually a retired American noncom, either Navy or Air Force, quite likely a maintenance expert, who is living in, say, Thailand or the Philippines, speaks the language fluently, perhaps has married locally after a divorce back home, and is generally much liked by the locals. He rents his facilities at the base from the host-country military, and then charges a fee to the U.S. Air Force pilots transiting the base. Officially he is in business for himself, which the host country likes because it can then claim it is not really working with the American military. Of course no one, including the local media, believes this. But the very fact that a relationship with the U.S. armed forces is indirect rather than direct eases tensions. The private contractor also prevents unfortunate incidents by keeping the visiting pilots out of trouble—steering them to the right hotels and bars, and advising them on how to behave. (Without Dan Generette, a private contractor for years at Utapao Naval Station, in Thailand, that base could never have been ramped up to provide tsunami relief the way it was.)

Visiting with these contractors and being taken around foreign military airfields by them, I saw how little, potentially, the Air Force would need on the ground in order to land planes and take off. Especially since 9/11 the Air Force has been slowly developing an austere, expeditionary mentality to amend its lifestyle, which has historically been cushy in comparison with that of the other branches of the armed forces. Servicing a plane often takes less on the ground than servicing a big ship, and the Air Force is beginning to grasp the concept of light and lethal, and of stealthy, informal relationships. To succeed in the Pacific and elsewhere, the Navy will need to further develop a similar outlook—thinking less in terms of obvious port visits and more in terms of slipping in and out in the middle of the night.

The first part of the twenty-first century will be not nearly as stable as the second half of the twentieth, because the world will be not nearly as bipolar as it was during the Cold War. The fight between Beijing and Washington over the Pacific will not dominate all of world politics, but it will be the most important of several regional struggles. Yet it will

be the organizing focus for the U.S. defense posture abroad. If we are smart, this should lead us back into concert with Europe. No matter how successfully our military adapts to the rise of China, it is clear that our current dominance in the Pacific will not last. The Asia expert Mark Helprin has argued that while we pursue our democratization efforts in the Middle East, increasingly befriend only those states whose internal systems resemble our own, China is poised to reap the substantial benefits of pursuing its interests amorally—what the United States did during the Cold War. The Chinese surely hope, for example, that our chilly attitude toward the brutal Uzbek dictator, Islam Karimov, becomes even chillier; this would open up the possibility of more pipeline and other deals with him, and might persuade him to deny us use of the air base at Karshi-Khanabad. Were Karimov to be toppled in an uprising like the one in Kyrgyzstan, we would immediately have to stabilize the new regime or risk losing sections of the country to Chinese influence.

We also need to realize that in the coming years and decades the moral distance between Europe and China is going to contract considerably, especially if China's authoritarianism becomes increasingly restrained, and the ever expanding European Union becomes a less-than-democratic superstate run in imperious regulatory style by Brussels-based functionaries. Russia, too, is headed in a decidedly undemocratic direction: Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, reacted to our support of democracy in Ukraine by agreeing to "massive" joint air and naval exercises with the Chinese, scheduled for the second half of this year. These unprecedented joint Russian-Chinese exercises will be held on Chinese territory.

Therefore the idea that we will no longer engage in the "cynical" game of power politics is illusory, as is the idea that we will be able to advance a foreign policy based solely on Wilsonian ideals. We will have to continually play various parts of the world off China, just as Richard Nixon played less than morally perfect states off the Soviet Union. This may well lead to a fundamentally new NATO alliance, which could become a global armada that roams the Seven Seas. Indeed, the Dutch, the Norwegians, the Germans, and the Spanish are making significant investments in fast missile-bearing ships and in landing-platform docks for beach assaults, and the British and the French are investing in new aircraft carriers. Since Europe increasingly seeks to avoid conflict and to reduce geopolitics to a series of negotiations and regulatory disputes, an emphasis on sea power would suit it well. Sea power is intrinsically less threatening than land power. It allows for a big operation without a large onshore footprint. Consider the tsunami effort, during which Marines and sailors returned to their carrier and destroyers each night. Armies invade; navies make port visits. Sea power has always been a more useful means of realpolitik than land power. It allows for a substantial military presence in areas geographically remote from states themselves—but without an overtly belligerent effect. Because ships take so long to get somewhere, and are less threatening than troops on the ground, naval forces allow diplomats to ratchet up pressure during a crisis in a responsible—and reversible—way. Take the Cuban Missile Crisis, in 1962. As the British expert H. P. Willmott has written, "The use of naval power by the Americans was the least dangerous option that presented itself, and the slowness with which events

unfolded at sea gave time for both sides to conceive and implement a rational response to a highly dangerous situation."

Submarines have been an exception to this rule, but their very ability to operate both literally and figuratively below the surface, completely off the media radar screen, allows a government to be militarily aggressive, particularly in the field of espionage, without offending the sensibilities of its citizenry. Sweden's neutrality is a hard-won luxury built on naval strength that many of its idealistic citizens may be incompletely aware of. Pacifistic Japan, the ultimate trading nation, is increasingly dependent on its burgeoning submarine force. Sea power protects trade, which is regulated by treaties; it's no accident that the father of international law, Hugo Grotius, was a seventeenth-century Dutchman who lived at the height of Dutch naval power worldwide. Because of globalization, the twenty-first century will see unprecedented sea traffic, requiring unprecedented regulation by diplomats and naval officers alike. And as the economic influence of the European Union expands around the globe, Europe may find, like the United States in the nineteenth century and China today, that it has to go to sea to protect its interests.

The ships and other naval equipment being built now by the Europeans are designed to slot into U.S. battle networks. And European nations, which today we conceive of as Atlantic forces, may develop global naval functions; already, for example, Swedish submarine units are helping to train Americans in the Pacific on how to hunt for diesel subs. The sea may be NATO's and Europe's best chance for a real military future. And yet the alliance is literally and symbolically weak. For it to regain its political significance, NATO must become a military alliance that no one doubts is willing to fight and kill at a moment's notice. That was its reputation during the Cold War—and it was so well regarded by the Soviets that they never tested it. Expanding NATO eastward has helped stabilize former Warsaw Pact states, of course, but admitting substandard militaries to the alliance's ranks, although politically necessary, has been problematic. The more NATO expands eastward, the more superficial and unwieldy it becomes as a fighting force, and the more questionable becomes its claim that it will fight in defense of any member state. Taking in yet more substandard militaries like Ukraine's and Georgia's too soon is simply not in NATO's interest. We can't just declare an expansion of a defense alliance because of demonstrations somewhere in support of democracy. Rather, we must operate in the way we are now operating in Georgia, where we have sent in the Marines for a year to train the Georgian armed forces. That way, when a country like Georgia does make it into NATO, its membership will have military as well as political meaning. Only by making it an agile force that is ready to land on, say, West African beaches at a few days' or hours' notice can we save NATO.

And we need to save it. NATO is ours to lead—unlike the increasingly powerful European Union, whose own defense force, should it become a reality, would inevitably emerge as a competing regional power, one that might align itself with China in order to balance against us. Let me be even clearer about something that policymakers and experts often don't want to be clear about. NATO and an autonomous European defense force cannot both prosper. Only one can—and we should want it to be the former, so that Europe is a military asset for us, not a liability, as we confront China.

The Chinese military challenge is already a reality to officers and sailors of the U.S. Navy. I recently spent four weeks embedded on a guided-missile destroyer, the USS *Benfold*, roaming around the Pacific from Indonesia to Singapore, the Philippines, Guam, and then Hawaii.

During my visit the *Benfold* completed a tsunami-relief mission (which consisted of bringing foodstuffs ashore and remapping the coastline) and then recommenced combat drills, run from the ship's combat-information center—a dark and cavernous clutter of computer consoles. Here a tactical action officer led the response to what were often hypothetical feints or attacks from China or North Korea.

Observing the action in the combat-information center, I learned that although naval warfare is conducted with headphones and computer keyboards, the stress level is every bit as acute as in gritty urban combat. A wrong decision can result in a catastrophic missile strike, against which no degree of physical toughness or bravery is a defense.

Sea warfare is cerebral. The threat is over the horizon; nothing can be seen; and everything is reduced to mathematics. The object is deception more than it is aggression—getting the other side to shoot first, so as to gain the political advantage, yet not having to absorb the damage of the attack.

As enthusiastic as the crew members of the *Benfold* were in helping the victims of the tsunami, once they left Indonesian waters they were just as enthusiastic about honing their surface and subsurface warfare skills. I even picked up a feeling, especially among the senior chief petty officers (the iron grunts of the Navy, who provide the truth unvarnished), that they might be tested in the western Pacific to the same degree that the Marines have been in Iraq. The main threat in the Persian Gulf to date has been asymmetric attacks, like the bombing of the *Cole*. But the Pacific offers all kinds of threats, from increasingly aggressive terrorist groups in the Islamic archipelagoes of Southeast Asia to cat-and-mouse games with Chinese subs in the waters to the north. Preparing to meet all the possible threats the Pacific has to offer will force the Navy to become more nimble, and will make it better able to deal with unconventional emergencies, such as tsunamis, when they arise.

Welcome to the next few decades. As one senior chief put it to me, referring first to the Persian Gulf and then to the Pacific, "The Navy needs to spend less time in that salty little mud puddle and more time in the pond."