

# STRATEGY FOR THE PACIFIC CENTURY?<sup>1</sup>

by  
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We are told that we have entered the "Pacific Century" yet our military seems more wedded to the challenges of the Fulda Gap than of the Taiwan Straits. Through the Cold War, U.S. defense strategy focused on deterring Soviet nuclear weapons and containing the Bear until it collapsed of its own weight. In the 21st century, the key challenge for US national strategy and the U.S. military might be a similar duality focused on the People's Republic of China (PRC) rather than Moscow.

The two-pronged strategy will be to deter use of weapons of mass destruction and advanced conventional weapons by the People Liberation Army (PLA) while, at the same time, engaging the Chinese until the lure of world economic community lead it irrevocably on a path away from military confrontation. Zalmay Khalilzad of RAND has coined the term "congame" for this mixed strategy of containment and engagement.

The tensions between congame's two critical pillars are clear. Pursuing capabilities to deter China could antagonize its leadership and promote hostility rather than engagement. On the other hand, failing to have the military means (and ensuring that the Chinese clearly understand that we have the means) to deter China from aggression could lead to Chinese pursuit of objectives with military force, leading to a far worse world environment for both nations.

Are we developing the appropriate mix of military capabilities to convince the

Chinese that war with the United States is not a viable option?

In no small part, we should learn from our past as we adapt to the future since our potential adversaries have done so. Looking at Desert Storm and Allied Force, the operations that bracket the 1990s, the core elements of U.S. warfighting seem clear: move mountains of supplies forward and rely on short-range tactical aviation as part of a strategy to minimize (hopefully avoid) US casualties.

As one looks to PLA preparations for a potential conflict over Taiwan, it is clear that they plan to make this an impossible strategy to follow. They are preparing thousands of ballistic missiles with advanced conventional warheads to rain down on Taiwan and, potentially, US forward bases in Japan and Korea. The PLA is also developing capabilities to engage ships at sea with the same devastating effects. Within minutes of the opening of a conflict, no forward bases will exist for the thousands of highly-capable US tactical aircraft. Taiwan, the United States, and the world will be faced with a *fait accompli* – Taiwan will be defenseless and the United States will have little ability to do anything about the situation without risking massive casualties as occurred with the drive across the Pacific against Japan during World War II.

Nothing in today's Pentagon planning suggests that we will be prepared to confront this threat adequately. Yes, we are pursuing theater missile defense

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(TMD) and it is possible that regional allies (including Taiwan) will have access to this program. Yet, conservative estimates now place missile defense as about an order of magnitude more expensive than offense – ten dollars in defense is required to offset one dollar in offensive investments. With this sort of resource problem, it seems unlikely that Taiwan will have the ability to deal with hundreds, let alone thousands, of incoming missiles.

The current reexamination of strategy underway at the highest levels of the Pentagon is, without a doubt, taking this threat very seriously since such an anti-access strategy is the most significant conventional threat that can be seen to be emerging in coming decades. The above suggests several requirements to make this a more difficult (or, hopefully, impossible) strategy to pursue. First, would be the requirement to develop the capacity to support Taiwan without the need to rely on Taiwanese or regional bases. Derived requirements include long-range strike and reconnaissance capabilities, in addition to strengthening

naval abilities to operate in the face of a serious anti-access threat; and continued development of theater missile defense to, at a minimum, deny an enemy's (such as the PRC) assurance that their missiles will strike their targets.

The objective of the U.S. military strategy should be to convince the PRC that it cannot win with military confrontation. With a belief that a military victory option is not viable, the Chinese will seek to gain their objectives peacefully through economic and political engagement in the world. US strengths in this arena are clear – from our universities to our banking system to McDonald's -- the battleground will shift to an arena where victory will come without any bloodshed. This alternative “battlefield” is also one where a U.S. victory is one for ourselves, our “opponents”, and the entire world.

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