The Future of Military Exercises with Asia-Pacific Partners

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The U.S.'s strategic goals in the Asia-Pacific comprise a mix of desired ends and realistic means for achieving them. Foremost, the U.S. seeks a secure region – a necessary foundation to achieve remaining strategic goals (e.g. sustaining economic commerce). An enduring military presence highlights the U.S.'s continued support of its partners while maintaining global force projection and co-leadership of the region. Whether an enhanced U.S. military presence is compatible with improving U.S.-China relations remains to be seen. The U.S., however, should not remove China from the strategic calculus as deteriorating U.S.-China relations threaten regional stability.

The Department of Defense (DoD) is aware that military exercises have damaged relationships with China and North Korea while disrupting regional security. Yet military exercises strengthen DoD's worldwide presence and global reach through allies' cooperation and complementary military capabilities. Exercises expand the U.S.'s operational capacity, thus its ability to shape the regional security environment. Specifically, field training exercises provide training to conduct high-priority missions within U.S. regional commands' contingency plans.[1] Beyond its operational impact, exercises further establish military relationships and support U.S. commitments abroad. They are a tangible piece of interoperability and have implications for policymaking in the Asia-Pacific.

This article examines the initial development of DoD's Asia-Pacific military exercises, reviews their current status, and assesses their value to U.S. interests. Analyzing four projected implications - antagonizing adversaries, signaling allies, advancing interoperability and cost – helps shape four policy options and implementation schemes. This article prioritizes three of the five U.S. treaty allies and the uncertain future of U.S.-Taiwan exercises. Its focus is on the larger, more publicized exercises considering their impact at the strategic level.[2]

Current Status of Military Exercises with Asia-Pacific Partners

The Asia-Pacific includes four key U.S. partners, which are important in securing U.S. strategic goals: Japan, South Korea, Australia, and Taiwan. In addition, U.S.-China relations are a significant factor in determining U.S. strategy vis-à-vis its allies. China's lack of transparency and improving capacity to fight high-intensity regional conflicts concerns U.S. regional partners.

Japan remains a cornerstone of U.S. security strategy by providing forward bases and cooperation with U.S. military assets. Japan's recent maritime border disputes, albeit manageable, may spiral into military action and demand strong attention from the U.S.[3] The U.S.-South Korea (ROK) mutual defense partnership is founded on the U.S.-ROK Mutual Security Agreement, and countering North Korea's incessant aggression and military aspirations remain the focal point of security cooperation. Australia, a staunch U.S. ally in recent U.S. conflicts, maintains high levels of interoperability with the U.S. through multiple fora and exercises.[4] Absent an official diplomatic relationship or defense treaty, the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) manages a less formal U.S.-Taiwan security relationship. Taiwan's defense posture is dependent on interoperability with the U.S. and either the continued absence or start of exercises will shape future U.S.-China relations.[5]

Japan maintains the most exercises with the U.S. In addition to multilateral exercises Cobra Gold (CG) and Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), Iron Fist 2014 incorporated drones and air support to invade and retake island territory. While Japan's personnel and resources (P&R), totaling 250 troops, increased from Iron Fist 2013, U.S. personnel dwarfed Japan's contributions and were not entirely "intertwined" due to a significant language barrier.[6] The annual, bilateral Yama Sakura exercise had similar characteristics, as U.S. (1,000-1,500) and Japanese (4,500) forces simulated repelling an enemy force from a northern invasion of Japan. P&R integration was improved as each nation conducted pre-exercise plans face-to-face. The biennial, bilateral Keen Sword exercise held at training locations throughout Japan promotes interoperability between U.S. and Japanese air, land, and sea forces. Approximately 10,000 U.S. personnel and 37,000 Japanese troops engage in base security operations, integrated air and missile defense, and live-fire training.[7]

U.S. exercises with the ROK are most influenced by North Korea's incessant threats to regional and global security. The annual, bilateral Foal Eagle exercise incorporates ground, air, naval, expeditionary, and special operations. An estimated 7,500 U.S. troops train with approximately 200,000 ROK troops within a range of "realistic scenarios", most notably a DPRK military strike.[8] Foal Eagle is unique in that ROK/US Combined Forces Command integrates both nations' command staffs and forces, allowing them to constantly communicate and train together.[9] The ROK also participates in multilateral exercises with more general mission objectives (e.g. CG and RIMPAC). CG 2014's deputy director, Thai Army Major Gen. Wittaya Wachirakul, explained, "The main purpose of this exercise is to develop…a training ground for joint

and combined military exercises."[10] CG 2014 is considered the largest in Southeast Asia comprised of a diverse set of multinational events.

Among the U.S.'s regional partnerships, U.S.-Australia interoperability "comes easy".[11] The spirit of the Australia, New Zealand, and U.S. (ANZUS) Treaty suggests shared strategic objectives remain flexible and open.[12] A recurring theme throughout each U.S. partnership, the U.S. seeks an enduring, far-reaching presence while its partner (i.e. Australia) hopes for a major security guarantor. Australia's two annual exercises with the U.S., the bilateral Talisman Saber and RIMPAC, present more general mission directions.[13] However, the degree of P&R integration in Talisman Saber 2013 was extensive, as the U.S. trained "in cohesion with Australian forces" and collaborated on a multitude of exercises.[14] Talisman Saber is the primary training venue for a short warning, power projection, forcible entry scenario.[15] With the U.S. as the lead nation, its forces maintained a 2:1 ratio with Australian Defense Forces (ADF), totaling 27,000 troops in the exercise.[16] Despite strong P&R integration, exercise engagement with Australia is limited due to its geographic isolation from likely regional contingencies and its strategic aspirations outpacing ADF operational capabilities.[17]

The foundational piece to the U.S.-Taiwan military relationship is U.S. legislation rather than a multinational agreement. Therefore, political sensitivities, mostly along U.S.-China lines, determine the absence of U.S.-Taiwan exercises. Interoperability is achieved through extensive software co-development, high level RDT&E, and tactical training at U.S. facilities.[18] U.S. arms sales are central to U.S.-Taiwan armaments cooperation. Taiwan is seeking greater involvement in RIMPAC, where China will participate per Secretary Panetta's 2012 invitation to build a healthier U.S.-China military relationship.[19] Taiwan plans to observe China's exposed capabilities in RIMPAC 2014 and sharpen its naval capabilities alongside U.S. forces.[20] Top DoD officials must weigh the additional operational value of including Taiwan against disrupting both cross-strait and regional stability vis-à-vis China.

Demands for Reassessing Exercises and Introducing Areas of Analysis

Three demands – the need to shift to the Asia-Pacific, the need to cut costs, and the need to manage a complex security environment cognizant of adversaries' reactions – compel DoD to reassess what it expects from military exercises. Both U.S. service and multinational doctrine highlight that interoperability does not require common military equipment, but spans across "technical, procedural, and human dimensions."[21] High degrees of interoperability require synchronization between materiel and non-materiel domains at the tactical, operational, and strategic level. Interoperability moves along a

continuum where a diverse set of actions either promote or inhibit different military organizations to conduct joint operations. These demands bring forth four policy options regarding the future structure of U.S. military exercises: maintain current levels of engagement, advance engagement with each country, maintain or advance engagement bilaterally, and consider advancing exercises with China.

Option 1 - Maintain Current Levels of Engagement

Antagonizing Regional Adversaries

U.S. military exercises in Asia have antagonized China in the past. Often the PLA's reactions are rhetorical, yet in some instances involve legitimate exercises.[22] China fears outside powers establishing a military presence around its periphery.[23] In response to conflicts across its borders China has declared war to ensure adequate protection of claimed territory.[24] While the U.S.'s exercises are not explicitly offensive, their ability to sharpen both U.S. and allied forces' capabilities to defend allied-claimed territory may fuel China's fears. Advancing exercises will place China on the defensive. Considering several bilateral exercises ostensibly structured around Chinese aggression, extending China's observer status in CG or its participation in RIMPAC 2014 will only assuage, not eliminate, China's fears of a U.S. containment policy via its military.[25]

In 2010, Major General Luo Yuan, Deputy Secretary General PLA Academy of Military Sciences, criticized U.S.-ROK military exercises in the Yellow Sea. General Yuan believed the proximity of the exercises pose a direct threat to China's mainland while impeding the healthy development of U.S.-China military relations. U.S.-Japans' Keen Sword exercise in Okinawa also falls under this category.

While much of China's concerns at this time resulted from ad hoc exercises rather than recurring ones (e.g. a U.S.-ROK anti-submarine drill in response to the "Cheonan" sinking in March 2010), Foal Eagle and Dawn Blitz elicit similar responses. In June 2013, Japan's inclusion in the originally U.S.-only Dawn Blitz sparked Chinese criticism and diplomatic demands to cancel parts of the exercise. Exercises such as Dawn Blitz have placed "military pressure" on China.[26] In response to Japan's inclusion, China announced a large-scale joint exercise with Russia throughout July and August 2013.[27] This series of tit-for-tat military responses suggests military exercises are an acceptable and appropriate response to adversaries' exercises.

Assuming static U.S. military engagement with the PLA and exercises as a means of creating "more integrated military partnerships", the advancement of U.S.-allied exercises has hampered the development of a cooperative U.S. military relationship with China.[28] Chinese officials argue the U.S.'s "zero-sum game" has threatened regional

stability.[29] While alternatives to this zero-sum game are in play (i.e. the PLA's invitation to RIMPAC 2014), maintaining current levels across each partnership would further the U.S.-China military relationship more effectively and set the stage for cooperative progress.

This policy direction's second piece, advancing interoperability through other means, is not immune to adverse Chinese reaction. Advanced U.S. equipment and latent capabilities of regional militaries concern Chinese officials.[30] Continued U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and Japan's growing "offensive" capabilities in December 2013 aggravate the PLA.[31] The U.S.'s rebalance (without advancing exercises) cannot avoid antagonizing China altogether, but eliminates a clear hurdle towards creating a more cooperative U.S.-China military relationship.

Assessing the DPRK's reaction to U.S. exercises is difficult in that responses range from outlandish military threats to actual testing and deployments of military hardware.[32] The U.S. tested the DPRK's retaliation threshold during Foal Eagle 2013 with the deployment of U.S. nuclear-strike bombers. Due to the DPRK's nuclear strike threats and redeployments of intermediate range ballistic missiles on its eastern coast, Foal Eagle 2014 excludes U.S. heavy bombers. Yet there is no guarantee maintaining U.S.-ROK exercises will placate DPRK provocations, and the DPRK's continued aggression and advancing asymmetric capabilities could leave U.S.-ROK forces "unprepared".[33]

Signals to Allies

Through maintaining current levels of engagement, the U.S. sends mixed signals of its military role with partners, particularly Japan. Beginning as a U.S. Navy-Marine Corps exercise in 2010, Dawn Blitz expanded in 2013 to include Canada, New Zealand, and Japan. Also, Iron Fist 2013 realized a tenfold increase in Japanese troops from its 2006 debut. Maintaining current levels stops this gradual trend. As Japan begins to make greater contributions to regional security interests, the U.S. needs to follow through on its promise of greater engagement.[34]

Exercises are overt, publicized, and politically loaded actions that substantiate the U.S.'s rhetoric of strengthening partnerships. With exercises' focus on accomplishing military ends, stagnant engagement suggests the U.S.'s rebalance is more diplomatic in nature. Allies may perceive the maintaining of exercise engagement as U.S. reluctance to further its military commitments in fear of Chinese criticism.[35]

Considering several U.S. exercises with NATO and 2012's Shangri-La Dialogue, Asia-Pacific allies expect progress with their exercises. U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey summarized this rebalance as three "mores": more interest, more engagement, and more quality. Gen. Dempsey explained greater

engagement translates into additional exercises and leader development exchanges.[36] Maintaining exercise engagement places Gen. Dempsey's demands on hold. This policy direction signals to U.S. partners that exercises, claimed as a key piece to the U.S.'s rebalance, now play a smaller role.

Advancing Interoperability

Maintaining exercise engagement with each partner stagnates U.S. operational capabilities. Exercises' ability to organize and sharpen U.S. forces' response to potential contingencies may become inadequate as the region's security environment evolves. This is not to say U.S. operational capacity hinges on exercises. DoD could advance its regional capabilities through procurement of more advanced weapon systems. Advancing U.S. operational capacity through procurement, however, requires more money and time through the acquisition process to yield clear results.

Cost

The exact costs of U.S. exercises are not easily discernable. While each service's annual O&M budgets cover the cost of exercises, these costs are dispersed throughout the budget. The clearest section relating to exercises is "Direct Mission Support of Combatant Commands and Subordinate Unified Commands". Even then, resources devoted to exercises are masked behind various participants' (e.g. U.S. Forces Japan) distinct lines in the budget. Despite exercise costs not being accurately assessed, USPACOM-JCS Exercise Program's estimated $60 million (in FY2008 dollars) in strategic airlift and equipment for Foal Eagle, Keen Sword, Talisman Saber, and Cobra Gold serves as a rough base estimate for exercise costs.[37]

Notwithstanding clear cost figures for U.S. exercises, raising exercise levels will demand a parallel reaction across several budget lines affecting each service. Consider the U.S. Navy's $12 million order for biofuel for RIMPAC 2012.[38] While such purchases are incorporated into the Navy's fuel costs within its O&M budget, a clear policy maintaining exercise levels would help stabilize the Navy's bottom line for FY2015. This principle applies to other services' FY2015 O&M budget estimates.

Exercise costs, however, are marginal considering service O&M budgets. The U.S. should assess the cost effectiveness of exercises by analyzing the value of a well-functioning partnership or a multilateral coalition's response to a contingency against unilateral U.S. action or an ad-hoc multilateral response absent of robust exercises. Both financial and operational costs of the latter are an order of magnitude greater.[39] As "allied forces serve as force multipliers and reduce operational requirements of U.S.

forces", maintaining exercise engagement and the coalition training environments they provide to achieve marginal cost savings now appears a short-sighted policy.[40]

Implementation Strategy

The U.S. may continue its exercises with each partner, even allowing marginal improvements in exercises' focus and direction, P&R integration, or P&R balance. Advancing interoperability through other means faces DoD's reluctance in advancing interoperability policies. DoD balks at prioritizing interoperability, particularly in times of fiscal restraint. A lack of "requirements flow" from the combatant commands to drive integration results in minimal funds to support the desired engagement. In the words of a former Joint Staff officer, "DoD voices its desire for interoperability, yet puts forth much less effort to obtain it."[41]

High-level civilian leadership within DoD should voice this policy at the highest level of defense collaboration within each partnership (e.g. U.S.-Japan two-plus-two security talks). Through these fora, the U.S. must communicate that it is accomplishing its rebalance outside exercises.

<u>Option 2 – Incremental Advancement of Exercises with each Nation</u>

Antagonizing Regional Adversaries

China will likely respond negatively to an incremental advancement of exercises with each partner. Provoking the clearest reaction would be the U.S.'s first exercise with Taiwan, which could derail recent diplomatic progress in cross-strait relations. If increased U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, an action China has reluctantly accepted since 1979, elicit China's suspension of military contacts and meetings with the U.S., an unprecedented exercise with Taiwan will demand a greater response.

China perceives U.S.-Japan exercises as military preparation over disputed maritime territories. Pundits argue expanded naval exercises with Japan have unnecessarily challenged Beijing.[42] Whether in response to or conceived independently of Japan's broadened training, China conducts exercises "that look a lot like island-grabbing."[43] By either creating a new bilateral exercise or advancing features of current exercises, a more assertive Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF) with U.S. support will likely harden China's position on disputed territorial claims.

Advancing exercises with South Korea will likely aggravate China, and certainly the DPRK. The potential presence of U.S.-ROK forces within China's exclusive economic zone sparked China to issue official protests to U.S.-ROK naval exercises in November 2010.[44] In fact, similar protests in July 2010 successfully shifted U.S.-ROK exercises east of South

Korea to the Sea of Japan.[45] Even when U.S.-ROK exercises occur outside the Yellow Sea, China contests these exercises disrupt regional stability by provoking the DPRK.

Advancing exercises will likely cause a combination of direct military threats and responses from the DPRK. Whether the U.S. advances Foal Eagle or establishes a new exercise, the Jong-un regime will continually claim U.S.-ROK exercises as preparation for an unprovoked invasion into North Korea.

China's reaction to U.S.-Australia exercises is characterized by its concern of a greater U.S. military presence in Australia. The U.S.'s November 2011 decision to eventually deploy 2,500 Marines to Australia provoked a harsh response from China's foreign ministry.[46] Also, Talisman Saber appears to be directed at potential Chinese aggression.[47]

As a whole, China will interpret a policy advancing exercises with each U.S. partner as a coordinated effort to counter, rather than cooperate with, the PLA's force modernization and expanding regional influence. A reaction would most likely include a combination of sharp diplomatic disapprovals and further developing internal exercises. Similarly, the DPRK will feel threatened; however its reactions are more unpredictable. A unified advancement of U.S.-allied exercises will likely disrupt DoD's strategic challenge of finding "the right balance between firmly deterring Chinese assertiveness over territorial disputes and other issues that disrupt regional stability, on the one hand, and avoiding a U.S.-China confrontation, on the other."[48]

Signals to Allies

An incremental advancement of exercises with each partner sends stronger signals of the U.S.'s military commitment and solidifies exercises' role in the rebalance. This option characterizes a more balanced approach regarding the U.S.'s military presence. Reflecting Secretary Clinton's "broad-based" military presence, this option avoids choosing among partners in which to focus exercises.[49] Beyond sending broad signals of cooperation, this policy direction seeks to advance more narrow military purposes, specifically with the ROK. Any progress in U.S.-ROK exercises intends to better prepare both militaries to defend South Korea. These exercises are not simply to build stronger ties.[50]

Considering Admiral Locklear's comments in September 2012 that deployed U.S. Marines to Australia were to participate in "bilateral and multilateral training in the region", allies will view this policy as more consistent with the Administration's rhetoric furthering engagement .[51]

Advancing Interoperability

Relative to option one, this option enhances the U.S.'s operational capacity and ability to keep pace with changes in the security environment. For example, a U.S.-Taiwan exercise expands the U.S.'s options in countering the PLA's capabilities by leveraging Taiwan's troops, defense resources, and location. Likewise, advanced exercises with both the ROK and Japan strengthen the U.S.'s operational role in managing conflict on the Korean peninsula. Addressing exercises with each partner quickens USPACOM's response time to contingencies across its area of responsibility encompassing nearly half of the earth's surface.

Cost

This policy option purports that costs, however marginal, will not become a constraining factor towards greater engagement. This policy aligns with President Obama's response to the Budget Control Act of 2011 and promise to the Australian Parliament that U.S. defense cuts "will not – I repeat, will not – come at the expense to the Asia-Pacific."[52] If U.S. partners expand their role in existing multilateral exercises, DoD would incur minimal additional costs across each service's budget. However, if new bilateral exercises were established, or U.S. P&R expanded, services' O&M budgets would realize slight increases of several budget lines including troop transport, fuel, and maintenance.

Implementation Strategy

This policy option's implementation strategy requires changes in DoD operations, and demands bureaucratic action outside DoD. This strategy calls for analyzing each partner separately while considering the operational and political realities of both U.S. and allied governments.

A U.S.-Taiwan exercise would likely be multilateral and take place outside the Taiwan Strait or East China Sea. Even then, such action requires a more liberal interpretation, if not rewriting, of the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979. Either step resulting in Taiwan's inclusion is unlikely.[53] No mention of Taiwan's participation in RIMPAC 2014 in the final FY2014 National Defense Authorization Act reflects this bureaucratic hurdle. The U.S. would most likely advance engagement with Japan through greater P&R integration and other exercise characteristics. Iron Fist's focused mission direction and recent influx of Japanese personnel are promising, but the language barrier inhibits greater P&R integration.[54] Investments in language training and exchange programs may help each force train as a more cohesive unit.

Advanced U.S.-ROK exercises can take many forms. The U.S. could expand South Korea's role in either RIMPAC or CG, but achieving a U.S.-ROK mission focus will be

difficult in large, multilateral exercises. Considering that a new U.S.-ROK exercise will spark sharp criticism from China and the DPRK, the U.S. can advance Foal Eagle by dedicating more U.S. forces to match the ROK's P&R. However, U.S. force levels decreased by 25 percent to 7,500 for Foal Eagle 2014 in light of political tensions.[55] Similarly, the U.S. has options in advancing U.S.-Australia exercises. The U.S. may request Australia's inclusion in CG or expand Australia's role in RIMPAC, yet both actions require multilateral cooperation. The U.S. could advance Talisman Saber by requesting more Australian forces to match the U.S.'s estimated force of 20,000.[56] Relative to the U.S.'s first option, this policy direction is more difficult to implement given unique changes with each partner and respective cooperation with U.S. demands.

<u>Option 3 - Maintain or Advance Exercises through a National Level Perspective</u>

Rather than viewing Asia-Pacific exercises as a unified whole, this option approaches the U.S.'s exercises through each partner individually. This policy's vision posits that the strategic claim of a rebalance, the need to cut costs, and the volatile security environment are not significant enough to overhaul DoD's exercise policy. As each partner is at a different position along an exercise engagement continuum, this option advances the status quo and continues with clear differences in exercise engagement among U.S. allies.

Taiwan

The determining factor of maintaining exercise engagement with Taiwan is potentially disrupting cross-strait relations and the U.S.'s flexible framework through the TRA. The law's subjectivity does not prohibit Taiwan's inclusion in RIMPAC, but will spawn different interpretations from China and the U.S. As of late 2013, several members of Congress determine such inclusion as "necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability".[57] China will likely interpret this as contradicting U.S. demands for a peaceful solution to Taiwan's sovereignty. Taiwan should not perceive China's participation in RIMPAC 2014 as an indirect threat to its defense. China's move past observer status is to facilitate U.S.-China military relations and build mutual trust, and its participating events (e.g. counter-piracy) are of little threat to Taiwan. The U.S. should not feel obligated to include Taiwan in attempt to equalize cross-strait military capabilities.

Australia

Similarly, the U.S. could maintain engagement with Australia given its isolation from likely regional contingencies and ADF capabilities not meeting high strategic aspirations.[58] Australia is unlikely to provide major combat support to a territorial dispute in the East China Sea, crisis in the Taiwan Strait, or conflict on the Korean peninsula. Although Australia's location offers sanctuary from the majority of the PLA's conventional missiles and strike aircraft, its value as a launch point for operations depends on the PLA's uncertain development in blue water naval capabilities.[59] Before advancing exercises with Australia, the U.S. must first encourage the ADF to augment its naval and air-strike systems' limited range, endurance, and payload capacity to more effectively conduct operations throughout the Asia-Pacific.[60]

South Korea

In contrast, the U.S. could advance exercise engagement with South Korea to strengthen its deterrence against an increasingly unstable DPRK and the U.S.-ROK's military response should that fail. Of particular concern is the Jong-un regime building up its military capability despite economic decline and political infighting.[61] The DPRK's advancing asymmetrical means of attack coupled with the ROK's strategy of disproportionate response breeds instability and increases the risk of conflict.[62] U.S.-ROK forces have shown difficulty in responding to asymmetric threats, ensuring command and control in a war surpassing weeks or months, and defending a vulnerable capital housing half of South Korea's population.[63] The combination of the U.S. assuming it has months to mobilize for an enduring conflict and South Korea denying such a possibility underestimates the DPRK's capabilities and may leave joint forces ill-prepared. To achieve higher readiness, Foal Eagle can address the alleged advantage of DPRK forces' navigation of local terrain and handling of small arms. In addition, either existing or new exercises could involve more forward operations. Balance Knife 13-1 within Foal Eagle 2013 exposed special operations forces to unfamiliar terrain and operating across the 38th parallel.[64] While risking an aggressive DPRK response, such offensive exercises have had a deterrent effect as well.[65]

Japan

The U.S. could also advance engagement with Japan. Not only is the enhancement of bilateral exercises explicitly stated in Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs' guidelines, but the DPRK threatens the Japanese mainland as well. Such aggression has forged closer U.S.-Japan defense cooperation.[66] Furthermore, Japan's pursuit of a multilayered strategy of engagement and hedging against China could include further development of exercises with U.S. forces.[67] Japan's National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) for

FY2011 created the "Dynamic Defense Force" concept, which represents an incremental innovation in JSDF's more static defense posture. The new NDPG mandates advances in operational cooperation with the U.S. "for situations in areas surrounding Japan" – language in which exercises fit well.[68] Advancing exercises will further develop JSDF capabilities as the U.S.'s rebalance expects allies to contribute more to common security interests.[69]

As a whole, this policy option offers a middle ground in antagonizing China and the DPRK as negative reactions from Japan and ROK exercises are partially offset by maintaining levels with Australia and Taiwan. Advanced exercises with Japan and South Korea will enhance DoD's operational capabilities in the East China Sea and Sea of Japan while sacrificing military effectiveness with Taiwan and the ADF. The implementation strategy is straightforward in that the U.S. focuses its efforts on South Korea and Japan, likely through incremental advancement of Foal Eagle and among the six U.S.-Japan exercises. Regarding exercises, this option signals that not all partnerships are created equal. Both Japan and South Korea's security concerns demand stronger signals of U.S. commitment and military aid. In addition, this option requires minimal cost increases due to existing exercises.

"Plan B" Option: Address Exercises with U.S. Partners and China

The previous policy options have avoided direct U.S. engagement with China and portray military relations as competitive and uncooperative. However, the U.S.-China military relationship has made incremental gains over several years. While the majority of military exchanges fall short of robust exercises or incorporate the PLA under observer or "observer-plus" status, the PLA's participation in RIMPAC 2014 for naval drills strive to develop a more cooperative military dialogue.[70] In conjunction with addressing exercises with treaty allies, the U.S. could advance exercises with China as a means of building mutual trust and a more transparent military relationship. Such action, however, requires a reciprocating outreach by China.[71]

Under its observer and "observer plus" status, it is difficult for China and the U.S. to make legitimate strides toward greater military cooperation. This status in CG 2014, consisting of building schools and other humanitarian and civil assistance (HCA) activities, failed to achieve robust troop exposure for both forces.[72] In addition, the National Defense Authorization Act of FY2000 places restrictions on the U.S. military's contact with the PLA. Regardless of addressing these restrictions, developing relationships among relatively low-level personnel are unlikely to make lasting impacts

on military relations.[73] China's role in CG should serve as a foundation for stronger U.S.-China military ties rather than an end-state.

Managing this policy option's implementation and signals to allies is both difficult and critical. The U.S. must determine the appropriate balance of designing engagement in such a way to be helpful to the PLA while not disclosing sensitive information, tactics, or weaponry.[74] It appears RIMPAC 2014 struck this balance by limiting China's role in surface warfare exercises while four of five warfare areas are non-combative.[75] The U.S. inviting the PLA as an active participant in CG 2015 and striking a similar balance will continue to progress the U.S.'s military-to-military relationship with China. Regardless, U.S.-China exercises will continue to be governed by U.S. law, which will likely maintain an apprehensive approach. Both the U.S. Congress and regional partners will remain skeptical, and advancing exercises alone cannot make two nations allies. The purpose of advancing U.S.-China exercises is to assuage the PLA's suspicion of the U.S.'s multilateral exercises in general, and create legitimate advances in mutual understanding. This option does not seek to advance U.S. operational capacity in any meaningful way.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The U.S.'s rebalance to the Asia-Pacific is by no means complete. Among the many facets of DoD's increased engagement with treaty allies (and potentially Taiwan) are military exercises. Not only do exercises solidify the U.S.'s military commitment at a strategic level, but also serve a narrower military purpose to enhance both forces' operational effectiveness against a common threat. Considering a majority of these exercises' iterations occurred before DoD's strategic shift in 2011-2012, the make-up of these exercises should reflect DOD's changing priorities towards the region, budget constraints for the foreseeable future, and an increasingly complex security environment. In addition, U.S. exercises, either with treaty allies and Taiwan or China directly, will help shape the U.S.-China military relationship as a whole. That relationship, alongside allied military partnerships, plays an integral role towards the U.S. achieving its strategic goals in the region.

The U.S. should pursue a hybrid "3-b" option by addressing allied exercises through a national level perspective while advancing exercises with China. This provides senior DoD officials flexibility in their policy options, most effectively addresses the U.S.'s strategic goals cognizant of political and security realities, and is a reasonable extension of on-going efforts with U.S. allies and China.

The U.S. combining its third policy option while advancing exercises with China treats exercises with each ally as unique and attempts to strengthen the U.S.-China

military relationship. This hybrid option aligns with treaty allies' public opinion – at 84 and 56 percent, respectively, Japanese and South Korean citizens believe it more important to have strong ties with the U.S. instead of China.[76] Australia, however, is more split with 40 percent. In addition, pundits recommend the U.S. "advance a recent improvement in Sino-American military exchanges" to strengthen the weakest link between the two nations.[77] The "3-b" option places the U.S. in a leadership position to stop perpetuating the view that allies must choose between the U.S. and China.[78]

To secure interoperability, DoD would first advance Foal Eagle by introducing more forward operations. The U.S. would also advance current exercises with Japan as a clear response to the Abe administration's steps to increase JSDF's security burden in the region. The U.S. could devote more forces to any of its six exercises and take steps towards greater integration (e.g. bridging Iron Fist's language barrier). The U.S. should maintain exercises with Australia until the PLA's operational capabilities are clearer and the Australian domestic political environment permits a greater defense role leading to a stronger presence throughout the Asia-Pacific. Australia's hosting of several U.S. forward operating bases is sufficient in maintaining a U.S. forward presence without damaging military ties.[79] The U.S. advancing the PLA's status past observer-plus in CG 2015 is a reasonable first step in advancing U.S.-China exercises. As in RIMPAC, CG 2015's participating nations could form a consensus on the extent of the PLA's participation in both combat and non-combat exercises.

This hybrid option is not without potential drawbacks. The PLA may continue its reluctance to open up militarily. Therefore, U.S. efforts could have instead focused on its allies.[80] In addition, both Australia and Taiwan may feel abandoned militarily as other allies' (and China's) military relationships are strengthened. However, it is unlikely Taiwan's senior leadership will feel abandoned as the U.S. rebalance "has generally avoided explicit reference to Taiwan."[81] Taiwan does not expect the U.S. to establish a formal military relationship through a novel exercise. It is also unlikely Australia's senior leadership will perceive the U.S. maintaining existing exercises as strategic abandonment, considering Australia seeks to strike a balance "between relations with commercially vital China and the strategically important United States."[82]

A "3-b" option successfully addresses each of the U.S.'s strategic goals in the region. Advancing exercises with Japan, South Korea, and China while maintaining exercises with Taiwan and Australia ensures a robust U.S. military presence can respond to regional contingencies. It is unlikely the new exercise strategy will disrupt economic commerce to any significant degree. Lastly, the U.S.'s greater engagement with the PLA seeks to develop a military relationship that is integral to the region's future.

As the strategic shift to the Asia-Pacific remains intact, military exercises will not detract but become more advanced. These exercises remain a means to an end with a specified purpose, whether explicit or implied. The U.S. uses military exercises to advance its strategic interests, whether those are merely strengthening relationships or gaining operational knowledge and experience in fighting with partner forces. While an elusive term, interoperability is an integral step toward modernizing and strengthening U.S. alliances and partnerships, and covers a wide-range of actions across materiel, non-materiel, logistical, and intelligence-sharing domains.[83] However, a tangible factor enhancing interoperability across nearly all U.S. partnerships is conducting multinational training exercises.[84] The U.S. cannot manage the complex global security environment alone, and a stable international system demands the U.S. share responsibility for fostering peace and security.[85]

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