



**Statement before the
Senate Armed Services Committee**

***“AN INDEPENDENT PERSPECTIVE OF U.S.
DEFENSE POLICY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC
REGION”***

A joint-testimony by:

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Thank you Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, members of the Committee, and staff. We appreciate this opportunity to testify today on our views of the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific and the importance of strengthening U.S. commitment to the Asia-Pacific region.

Independent Assessment

Congress directed in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2015 that the Department of Defense solicit an independent organization to assess U.S. strategy and force posture in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as that of U.S. allies and partners. The Department of Defense chose CSIS to conduct that assessment. CSIS built on a previous Congressionally-required assessment of U.S. defense posture in the Asia-Pacific. That assessment looked specifically at the realignment of U.S. Marines and their dependents and was concluded in 2012.

The current study required us to assess the region more broadly, and to achieve that wider view we assembled CSIS experts on the full range of the Asia-Pacific, as well as on defense capabilities and development. Research included interviews with leading defense and security officials, experts, and military officers throughout the United States government and foreign capitals. Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks, and Mark Cancian led that study for CSIS and were aided by a senior advisor group that includes General Conant. The report before you reflects the seriousness with which CSIS undertook this assessment as well as the range of challenges and opportunities facing the United States across the Asia-Pacific region.

Key Findings

The CSIS study team made four main findings about the security situation in the Asia-Pacific. The first two findings concern the need for greater commitment and direction from Washington, the second two findings address Beijing's growing capabilities and increased appetite for risk.

First, the Obama administration has not articulated a clear, coherent, or consistent rebalance strategy, particularly when it comes to managing China's rise. Many U.S. allies and partners in the region are looking to uphold the regional and international order that has enabled so many people throughout Asia to enjoy greater security and prosperity. Yet, too often U.S. statements have listed different objectives and priorities for the rebalance to Asia, confusing even the most careful observers. Without a single strategy document to guide the rebalance, this confusion will continue.

Second, defense budget cuts have limited the Defense Department's ability to implement critical rebalance initiatives. Cuts to the defense budget, and in particular the uncertainty caused by the combination of sequestration and the Budget Control Act, leave the Defense Department insufficient resources, and insufficient flexibility, to prepare for the growing range of challenges confronting the United States. Additionally, meeting demands in other regions—from ISIS to Russia—will require a level of resources and agility that is impossible under the current budget arrangements.

Third, the threat from so-called anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) threats is rising as some states seek to deny the United States the ability to project power in Asia. The breadth and pace of A2/AD investments throughout Asia, especially by China, are creating the potential for countries to hold at risk U.S. forward deployed and forward operating forces throughout the Western Pacific. Regional A2/AD capabilities are evolving more rapidly than the U.S. ability to counter them, requiring that the Department of Defense and regional allies work together if they are to maintain the ability to project power in East Asia.

Fourth, China's tolerance for risk has exceeded most expectations. China has surprised many experts by engaging in a series of coercive actions against neighboring states, including the creation of artificial features in disputed waters of the South China Sea. China's apparent willingness to challenge vital elements of the existing rules-based regional and international order should be of concern to U.S. policymakers, and to others around the world who believe a rules-based order provides benefits to all.

Taken together these trends suggest that the U.S. rebalance must be enhanced if the United States is to defend its vital interests in the PACOM area of responsibility. Executing an effective Asia strategy will require a clear and consistent but agile approach; continuous dialogue with regional allies, partners, and competitors; robust economic engagement throughout the region; development of new military concepts and capabilities for deterrence, defense, and crisis management; and close cooperation between the executive and legislative branches. We suggest 29 recommendations for doing so.

Main Recommendations

The report's recommendations fall into four key areas, discussed briefly below. Efforts are ongoing in many of these areas and should remain top priorities, but additional efforts are needed in other areas to adequately implement the rebalance.

First, the United States should align Asia strategy within the U.S. government and with allies and partners. Although the Obama administration issued a series of speeches and documents on the rebalance, there remains no central U.S. government document that describes the rebalance strategy and its associated elements. In interviews with leaders throughout the Department of Defense, in various U.S. agencies, on Capitol Hill, and across the Asia-Pacific, the study team heard consistent confusion about the rebalance strategy and concern about its implementation. Indeed, a 2014 study by CSIS found that language used to describe the rebalance has changed substantially since its announcement in 2011. Addressing this confusion will require that the executive branch develop and then articulate a clear and coherent strategy and discuss that strategy with Congress as well as with allies and partners across the world. We recommend preparing an Asia-Pacific strategic report; increasing administration outreach to Congress through an Asia-Pacific Observers Group; ensuring alignment between strategy and resources in the next QDR (now known as the Defense Strategy Review); better coordinating U.S. strategy

with allies and partners; and expanding confidence building mechanisms and crisis management with China.

Second, the United States should strengthen ally and partner capability, capacity, resilience, and interoperability. The United States needs robust allies and partners across the Asia-Pacific, but we found growing concern that security challenges are outpacing the capabilities of regional states. Many allies and partners are struggling to mitigate security risks, particularly those having to do with maritime disputes in the South China Sea and East China Sea. The United States seeks and benefits from the success of all states throughout the region, so building ally and partner security capability and capacity is in the U.S. interest. Working together more closely, through coordination of strategic approaches and greater interoperability, is an important step in this direction. Strengthening regional security capability, capacity, resilience, and interoperability requires a differentiated strategy that works with highly capable militaries like Japan, Australia, India, South Korea, and Singapore while also assisting states in Southeast Asia struggling to meet basic defense needs. We recommend pursuing what we call federated approaches with highly capable regional allies; building maritime security capacity in Southeast Asia; forming a standing U.S. joint task force for the Western Pacific; encouraging Japan to establish a joint operations command; and deepening regional whole-of-government humanitarian assistance and disaster relief expertise.

Third, the United States should sustain and expand its regional military presence. We encountered concern both in Washington and in foreign capitals about the sustainability of U.S. military presence throughout the region. Forward-stationed U.S. forces are one of the most important ways to signal U.S. political commitment to the region. The political and military value of forward presence is enormous. U.S. military presence serves as a stabilizing force in the region, helping to deter conflict on the Korean Peninsula and manage crises from the South China Sea through the Indian Ocean. Forward presence provides opportunities for partnership, interoperating, training, and exercising with allies and partners that U.S.-based forces cannot support. We recommend continuing to implement and resource key posture initiatives; increasing surface fleet presence; improving undersea capacity; deploying additional amphibious lift; continuing to diversify air operating locations; bolstering regional missile defenses; advancing and adapting the U.S. Army's Regionally Aligned Forces concept; addressing logistical challenges; stockpiling critical precision munitions; and enhancing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance cooperation with allies.

Fourth, the United States should accelerate development of innovative capabilities and concepts. We identified capability gaps in two types of areas. First are those capabilities required to offset an emerging risk to U.S. forces, such as the growing ballistic missile risk to U.S. ships and forward bases. Second are those capabilities that the United States could develop to provide an asymmetric counter to potential regional competitors. Both will be needed for the U.S. military to retain a resilient forward presence and the ability to project combat power in the Asia-Pacific, despite competitors' efforts to constrain U.S. leaders by increasing the risk to U.S. forces.

Existing concepts and capabilities must be updated to ensure that the future force is capable of deterring and prevailing in potential conflicts. China's development of anti-access/area-denial capabilities aims to restrict U.S., ally, and partner freedom of maneuver. To overcome this challenge, the United States is developing new concepts of operation and next-generation capabilities. However, the security environment is highly dynamic and will require a culture of adaptability, a willingness to try new approaches and risk failure through experimentation, and the ability to move rapidly from concept to acquisition. We recommend institutionalizing a culture of experimentation; encouraging rapid platform evolution; developing advanced long-range missiles; funding innovative missile defense concepts; fielding additional air combat systems; exploiting the U.S. undersea advantage; and augmenting space, cyber, and electronic warfare capabilities.

Many of the efforts described above would require additional resources, as we describe in more detail in the full report. If the United States is to protect its interests in Asia, then meeting these resource challenges should be a top priority for U.S. leaders, both in the administration and in Congress.

Conclusion

The initiatives outlined above are focused on the defense portion of the rebalance, as directed by Section 1059 of the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act. However, additional effort is needed not just on the defense component of the rebalance, but on the prosperity and values aspects as well. Passing the Trans-Pacific Partnership, for example, is an economic initiative but is vital to regional security, as well as prosperity. Strengthening the rebalance to Asia will require that Washington use all the tools at its disposal if the United States and its allies and partners are to maintain a secure, peaceful, prosperous, and free Asia-Pacific region.