

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Asia-Pacific region is undergoing enormous change, fueled by rapid levels of economic growth and competition alongside deepening levels of regional and global integration, significant demographic and income shifts in key nations, rising nationalism, and a growing public awareness of—and assertiveness toward—many sensitive occurrences beyond national borders. These forces and others are generating a shift in the distribution and expression of economic, political, and military power across the region. In general, the region is moving away from the narrow domestic social concerns and bipolar ideological rivalries of the Cold War era, toward a far more complex security environment.

This security environment is marked by the emergence of several new power centers (notably China and, to a lesser extent, India, but also a range of dynamic smaller nations such as South Korea and Indonesia), more intense and crosscutting levels of regional cooperation and rivalry, and, in many states, an increasingly close relationship among domestic nationalism, rapid (and sometimes highly disruptive) social change, and external economic, military, and political events. Overall, these developments are intensifying certain types of interstate rivalries over issues of territorial sovereignty, resource competition, energy security, and market position and access. At the same time, they are creating incentives for cooperation in handling a growing array of common security-related problems, from climate change to pandemics, terrorism, and global financial instability.

This rapidly changing security environment poses a major and increasingly difficult challenge for the United States, the historically dominant military, political, and economic power in maritime Asia. Efforts to enhance regional cooperation, reassure allies and friends, and deter and shape potentially destabilizing behavior are demanding a more complex mixture of U.S. skills and understanding. At the same time, overall U.S. capabilities and influence in the region are diminishing in some areas, placing an even greater burden on U.S. decisionmakers to do more (and better) with relatively less.

This report examines the current and likely future long-term forces that will drive both cooperation and conflict across the Asia-Pacific region. It is part of a much larger project sponsored by the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), “Drivers of Conflict and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region Over the Next 5–25 Years,” which comprises both classified and unclassified studies and activities undertaken by analysts at ten research institutes, universities, and consulting groups.

The analytical approach employed in this report is a “strategic net assessment,” similar to a Carnegie Endowment report published in 2013 on the long-term impact of the Chinese military on the U.S.-Japan alliance to 2030. That report identified a range of possible security environments involving the U.S.-Japan-China relationship that could emerge over the subsequent fifteen to twenty years, the possible major drivers for each environment, and the implications of that analysis for U.S. policy. The current report adopts a similar analytical approach—examining not only various military factors but also an equally important range of nonmilitary domestic and external variables likely to influence regional security behavior. In addition, it covers a wider variety of variables, over a longer time frame, and assesses the strategic future of the entire Asia-Pacific region.

This report identifies nearly forty current and possible future trends and features of the Asian security environment that will likely influence its long-term future, in areas ranging from historical memories and leadership outlooks to structural economic and demographic factors. One uncertain feature of the environment is the nature of U.S. initiatives affecting the region’s trends. According to the analysis contained in these pages, these sets of variables present more than a dozen types of strategic risks and opportunities for the United States and could evolve over the long term into five future security environments, from an episodic Asian hot war environment involving frequent but limited conflict, to a largely cooperative, mutually beneficial and peaceful region, as well as three overlapping middle-range futures.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the environment deemed likely to emerge under the most probable combination of variables is some variant of the current, dynamic Asia-Pacific regional environment, marked by a mix of cooperative and competitive features. Such an environment is sustained by several enduring economic, political, and social factors. However, the report also concludes that this mixed environment could evolve in some

extremely negative directions over the next twenty-five years, involving more severe political-military tensions and crises that eventually produce an Asian-Pacific Cold War environment or worse. The analysis also suggests that such dire outcomes could be mitigated or avoided altogether if specific types of actions are undertaken over the short, medium, and long term. These include a clear determination of U.S. and Chinese long-term primary and secondary interests, the development of a genuine U.S.-China strategic dialogue (involving input from U.S. allies and other key states), and the crafting of a resulting series of bilateral and multilateral security assurances.

The report clearly shows that the role of U.S. policies and behavior over the next twenty-five years will prove decisive in determining whatever future security environment emerges in the Asia-Pacific region. Indeed, American initiatives, in some instances involving new or controversial undertakings, will likely prove essential in averting conflict and maximizing the chances that a cooperative and peaceful region will emerge over the long term.

## **ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 each assess one of four sets of factors that will influence the evolution of security environments in the Asia-Pacific over the next twenty-five years:

1. Domestic political and social stability
2. Defense spending and military capabilities
3. National and transnational objectives, military doctrines, and approaches to the use of force
4. Interstate bilateral and multilateral relationships

Each of the first four chapters is organized as follows:

### **Overview and Significance**

- An introductory section provides an overview of the chapter's topic and its significance.

### **Introduction of the Variables**

- The second section outlines the variables that shape the topic under consideration.

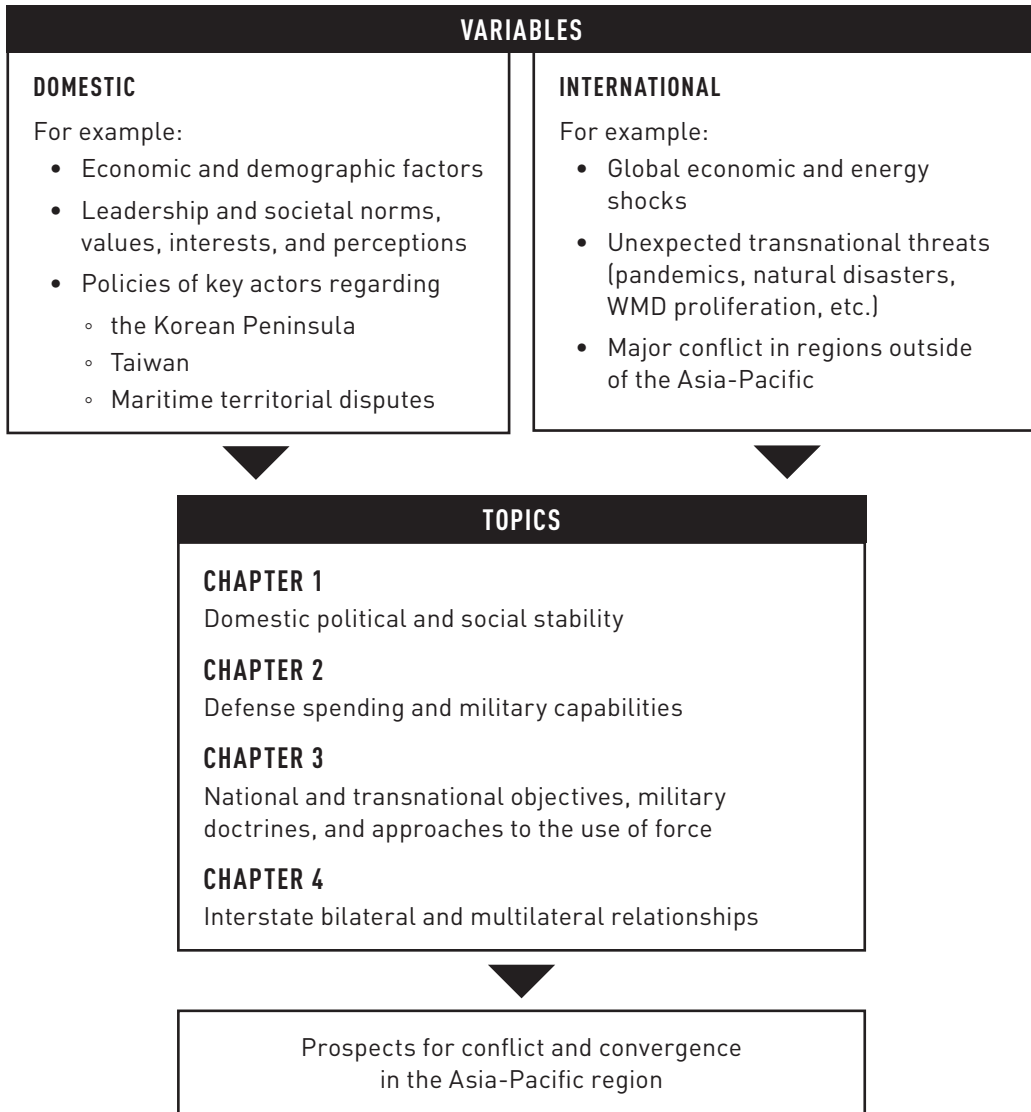
### **The Variables in the Asia-Pacific**

- The third section considers how the variables could evolve and shape the topic in the Asia-Pacific.

**Effects on Conflict and Cooperation**

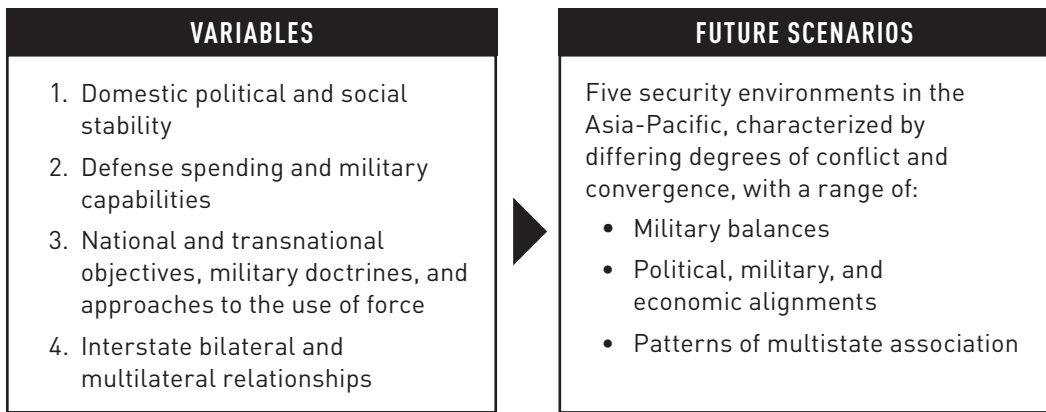
- The fourth and final section of each chapter discusses the possible effects the topic under consideration could have on conflict and cooperation outcomes in the Asia-Pacific by 2040.

**FIGURE 1.1 Analytical Framework: Chapters 1–4**



Chapter 5 combines the analysis from the preceding four chapters to identify five future security environments that could unfold in the Asia-Pacific region over the next twenty-five years. In this analysis, the topics of the first four chapters (domestic political and social stability; defense spending and military capabilities; national and transnational objectives, military doctrine, and approaches to the use of force; and interstate bilateral and multilateral relationships), and especially those trends and features identified as leaning toward regional conflict or cooperation, become independent variables under consideration. The influence of these variables on levels of strategic risk and opportunity are summarized as a prelude to a description of the five regional and global security environments.

**FIGURE 1.2 Analytical Framework: Chapter 5**



The concluding section, chapter 6, presents the policy implications of the analysis contained in the preceding chapters, and provides specific recommendations for PACOM.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Five Possible Security Environments

Five different security environments could emerge in the Asia-Pacific region over the next twenty-five years (listed in order of likelihood):

- I. **Status Quo Redux:** Constrained but ongoing economic and political competition alongside continuing cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region
- II. **Asia-Pacific Cold War:** Deepening regional bipolarization and militarization, driven by a worsening U.S.-China strategic and economic rivalry in Asia

- III. Pacific Asia-Pacific:** Increased U.S.-China and regional cooperation and tension reduction
- IV. Asian Hot Wars:** Episodic but fairly frequent military conflict in critical hot spots, emerging against a cold war backdrop as described in the Asia-Pacific Cold War scenario
- V. Challenged Region:** A region beset by social, economic, and political instability and unrest separate from U.S.-China competition

### Status Quo Redux

The Status Quo Redux security environment is characterized by constrained but ongoing economic and political competition alongside continuing cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. Within this environment, national objectives and military doctrines in the United States and China and across the Asia-Pacific would remain development-oriented and restrained or nonconfrontational, involving continued high levels of mutually beneficial economic and political engagement and cooperation in the management of transnational issues. At the same time, major suspicions and uncertainties would remain regarding the ultimate security intentions and capabilities of Beijing and Washington toward one another, especially over the long term. This would result in continuing efforts by the United States and China, as well as other countries, to strengthen counterbalancing military capabilities or maintain hedging options. Defense spending and military capital stocks would thus continue to increase, albeit not at rates above historical levels. Consequently, although engagement in the region would still be positive-sum, the security environment would likely witness intensifying patterns of military competition and rivalry.

### CAUSAL OR SHAPING VARIABLES

For this environment to be present, the more destabilizing forms of domestic political and social unrest, including serious elite conflict and ultranationalistic pressures, would not emerge in key countries in the region, particularly China and the United States. Indeed, the absence of strong ultranationalist leadership is a vital condition for the continuation of the current mixed environment status quo. If economic growth remains high enough to avert domestic unrest and elite rifts, the likelihood of such extreme leadership shifts will remain low. Nevertheless, national leaders could provoke limited incidents or react to crises in destabilizing ways. The chances of such politically motivated provocations would increase if nationalist sentiments and overall public anxiety toward the regional and global environment continue to expand in the region. Although sustained economic growth would help prevent domestic instability in countries throughout the region, in the absence of credible and effective security assurances, it would also permit continued

moderately high or steadily increasing levels of defense spending and conventional military capabilities. This could contribute to heightened security competition and an action-reaction dynamic that could escalate into a costly, destabilizing regional arms race.

### Asia-Pacific Cold War

The Asia-Pacific Cold War security environment is characterized by deepening regional bipolarization and militarization, driven by a worsening U.S.-China strategic and economic rivalry in Asia. In the political or diplomatic sphere, this could involve zero-sum competitions for influence over the Korean Peninsula, intensive U.S. efforts to strengthen its alliances and obstruct or reverse the further integration of Taiwan with mainland China, U.S.-China competition over the political allegiance of large and small non-aligned powers, U.S. attempts to entice or pressure India into a strategic alliance against Beijing, more aggressive Chinese actions toward Taiwan and disputed maritime territories, and rivalry for dominant influence in important multilateral diplomatic forums and structures in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. In the economic sphere, a U.S.-China cold war would likely involve intense efforts by both countries to expand bilateral and multilateral trade, investment, energy, and technology interactions across the region at the expense of the other side. In the military and defense sphere, this environment would almost by definition necessitate an expanding and intensifying security competition requiring high levels of defense spending and accumulating military capital stocks. It would probably also involve an intense arms race over the ability to control the first and second island chain, and perhaps beyond. Ultimately, this environment is defined by a strong belief in both the United States and China that vital national interests could not be ensured without greatly restricting the capacity and influence of the other side.

### CAUSAL OR SHAPING VARIABLES

An Asian-Pacific Cold War environment would most likely require the emergence of a combination of the most conflictual trends and features along with the disappearance of most—if not all—of the positive trends and features. Increasing competition for resources, declining benefits of mutual investment and trade, and less open and compatible economic and trading systems would reduce incentives to cooperate across the region. Similarly, steadily increasing regional tensions and insecurity associated with growing Chinese military, economic, and political influence in Asia and declining U.S. influence—including intensified security competition and an arms race more severe than in the case of the Status Quo Redux—would accentuate conflict in the region. However, defense spending and military capabilities would contribute to the emergence of such an environment only in the context of other factors, such as changes in leadership objectives,

overreaction to unexpected developments, and severe miscalculations during political-military crises between Washington and Beijing. Such crises and miscalculations would become more likely in the absence of significant security assurances, confidence-building measures, or crisis management mechanisms.

### Pacific Asia-Pacific

The Pacific Asia-Pacific security environment is characterized by increased U.S.-China and regional cooperation and reduced tension. This environment would evince a clear and sustained decrease in the number and severity of destabilizing events across the Asia-Pacific, including political-military crises, changes in alliances, tensions over trade and investment practices, and disputes over the management of regional and global security issues. Instead, most nations would concentrate a high level of resources and attention on domestic social and economic issues and the peaceful resolution or management of common transnational threats and issues of concern. Differences and even some significant disputes would certainly remain over a variety of issues, but they would not generate zero-sum approaches or solutions.

### CAUSAL OR SHAPING VARIABLES

Such an environment would most certainly require a very stable and enduring balance of power across the region—especially between the United States and China—along with greater levels of overall trust and a high level of confidence that differences could be handled peacefully and in a manner beneficial to those involved. While an enduring balance of power could emerge even in the Asia-Pacific Cold War environment, only high levels of trust and the peaceful settlement of disputes, such as a long-term solution to tensions on the Korean Peninsula, would provide a basis for the kind of enduring positive cooperation that could generate a peaceful region. Such a development would require a near-reversal of the current negative dynamic driving security competition across much of the Asia-Pacific. This would necessitate prior domestic consensus on the interests of each state in the region, a clear grasp of how each state would react to specific developments, and agreement on a series of steps that recognize the legitimate features of modernization required for national security while reducing the extent of possible threats to others. Ultimately, this would facilitate a far more cooperative atmosphere even as military capabilities increase overall.

### Asian Hot Wars

The Asian Hot Wars security environment is characterized by episodic but fairly frequent military conflict in critical hot spots, emerging against a cold war backdrop as described



in the Asia-Pacific Cold War scenario. Such military conflict could occur deliberately or escalate from unforeseen accidents. It would likely take place as a result of a dispute over Taiwan, maritime territories in the East or South China Seas, freedom of navigation issues along China's maritime periphery, or the Korean Peninsula. In this environment, both Washington and Beijing would develop war-oriented national objectives and military doctrines and would engage in intensely competitive efforts to expand influence across the Asia-Pacific through political, military, and economic means. Sustained, very high levels of defense spending and accumulated military capital stocks would likely be maintained among all major powers, as well as efforts to strengthen or create military alliances and other forms of adversarial behavior evident in the Asia-Pacific Cold War environment. Mutually hostile domestic political environments could further increase the rigidity of elite opinion and lead to a highly unstable political-diplomatic environment. Overall, this environment showcases an increased reliance on military instruments to advance interests, reduce vulnerabilities, and ensure credibility.

#### CAUSAL OR SHAPING VARIABLES

The key contributing factors to the Asian Hot Wars environment are similar to those of the Asia-Pacific Cold War. Indeed, this environment would almost certainly be preceded by many of the political, economic, and military trends and features that would produce an Asian cold war. As in the Asia-Pacific Cold War environment, decreasing benefits would be associated with mutual investment and trade, and economic and trading systems would be less open and compatible. Simultaneously, no credible bilateral or multilateral security assurance processes, confidence-building measures, or crisis management mechanisms would exist, and the major powers' conventional military means of deterring one another from escalating a crisis would be of questionable value. The environment would be characterized by sustained, high levels of defense spending and accumulated military capital stocks among all major powers, as well as those Southeast Asian nations involved in maritime or territorial disputes. Expanded capabilities of the military, law enforcement agencies, and commercial actors would result in increased numbers of vessels and aircraft and more frequent close encounters in contested waters, thus producing greater opportunities for conflict. Finally—and perhaps the most important condition for the emergence of this environment—would be the rise to power in both the United States and China of strong, ultranationalist leaderships dedicated to sustaining or upending the previous regional balance of power in favor of the United States.

#### Challenged Region

The Challenged Region security environment is characterized by social, economic, and political instability and unrest separate from U.S.-China competition. Political leaders

would focus in a sustained manner on dealing with urgent—indeed, virtually overwhelming—common problems such as climate change, pollution, pandemics, domestic political and social unrest, and terrorism, while the need or opportunity to pursue historical rivalries or engage in forms of security competition would decline. Ultimately, as in the Pacific Asia-Pacific environment, the level of interstate tension and conflict would be consistently low and the incentives to cooperate much higher. Defense spending would thus decline or remain level as states focused more resources on dealing with domestic and foreign regional and global challenges. Security concerns would remain, but their salience as urgent issues requiring attention would decline in the political calculations of leaders and the sentiments of the public.

#### CAUSAL OR SHAPING VARIABLES

Obviously, the most important catalyst for this environment would involve the emergence of major and pressing, long-term transnational, nontraditional threats to the safety, health, and security of populations and governments across the Asia-Pacific region. The severity of such threats would need to be very high and sustained over several years, thus clearly overshadowing other potential sources of national concern. This environment would thus not be as “pacific” as the Pacific Asia-Pacific environment in that serious non-traditional security threats would drive most interstate behavior. The absence of interstate conflict would result more from an urgent need for nations to cooperate in combating common problems than from a fundamental structural transformation in the region.

### STRATEGIC RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

These five possible future regional security environments and the contributing factors for each together suggest several types and levels of strategic risk and opportunity for the United States and PACOM over the short, medium, and long term.

#### Strategic Risks

The most overall significant risk for the United States involves movement toward the competitive and conflictual side of the Status Quo Redux security environment. This risk would be most salient in the short to medium term (although it could emerge only over a longer time frame) and would result in the long-term danger of a transition toward an Asia-Pacific Cold War–type environment.

This type of evolution of the Asian security environment ultimately presents several primary and secondary risks. The first primary risk is a steady, strategic shift of resources in many Asian states away from peaceful and cooperative economic development toward

greater arms development or racing, along with various types of zero-sum political, economic, and military security competition and rivalry. The second primary risk consists of an increased tendency among key regional states to engage in tests of resolve or efforts to “lock in” advantages over territorial and resource disputes in the seas along China’s maritime periphery. The third, occurring directly as a result of the previous risk, is a significant danger of the United States becoming embroiled in confrontations between local disputants, many of which are U.S. allies or partners. The fourth primary risk involves a general weakening of relative U.S. power over the medium to long term and the overall cohesion of the U.S. alliance system in the Asia-Pacific.

The secondary risks presented by the changing security environment include: the possibility of increasing tensions over various types of bilateral and multilateral political and economic arrangements that favor some countries over others or seek to exclude specific countries; increasing domestic unrest and political repression in key states associated with economic, demographic, and political difficulties; and domestic instability and the rise of ultranationalist forces in China. Another secondary risk could result from U.S. miscalculations or overreaction in response to a more powerful and assertive China.

### Strategic Opportunities

Fortunately, a range of factors conducive to current and future strategic opportunity also exists in the Asia-Pacific region. These factors could serve to restrain or even eliminate many of the strategic risks. They include common support for continued economic growth and access to resources; the absence of deeply adversarial and existential disputes; the high likelihood that Washington will continue to exercise strong, if not clearly dominant, economic, military, and political influence across the Asia-Pacific region; the possibility that a stronger, more secure, and confident Beijing might become more flexible and accommodating in the future, especially in altercations with neighbors; the possibility of more cooperation in dealing with North Korea; and the imperative on the part of most Asian states to maintain cooperation in addressing various types of future transnational, nontraditional security threats, from pandemics, terrorism, and piracy to the health of the international economic order and common energy security challenges.

### Conditions Influencing the Prospects for Strategic Opportunities and Risks

The ability of the United States to minimize or eliminate strategic risks and maximize strategic opportunities over the short, medium, and long terms will depend on its ability to create or shape developments in five interrelated areas:

First, and arguably foremost, are the prospects for significant bilateral, multilateral, and regional security assurances or structures that could reduce the propensity of Asian

states—especially the United States and China—to engage in zero-sum forms of strategic rivalry and arms races. Second, and closely related to the previous point is the extent of understandings reached between the political leaderships in Beijing and Washington regarding each other’s national objectives, military doctrines, and potential use of force toward volatile issues or “hot spots” that could provoke intense confrontation and instability in the Asia-Pacific. Such volatile issues include North Korea, Taiwan, maritime and other territorial disputes involving third parties, maritime energy and resource requirements, and military surveillance activities in the vicinity of each side’s territorial borders. Third, the presence or absence of clear communication channels with, and avenues of influence and persuasion over, allies, partners, or key security interlocutors of the United States and China will prove increasingly important over time. Fourth, the ability of the United States to minimize strategic risks and maximize strategic opportunities will depend on the level of cooperation in managing critical common interests or preventing crises, including with regard to such issues as the health of the global economic system, the security of vital sea lines of communication, global and regional terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction proliferation. Fifth, opportunities for risk minimization and opportunity maximization will depend on the dynamic relationship between the forces of nationalism and growing public awareness of the government’s overseas policies and actions; national economic success or failure; and political leadership change in China, the United States, and third-party actors.

## **DIPLOMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

Much of the analysis in this report confirms that the evolution of the security environment in the Asia-Pacific over the next twenty-five to thirty years will be heavily—and in some cases decisively—influenced by the actions of the United States. In other words, the challenges and opportunities confronting the United States and PACOM in the Asia-Pacific are not simply developments to which Washington and Honolulu must respond; they exist and will evolve as a result of the actions U.S. leaders take now and in the future. While the United States remains the strongest and most influential power across the region, its ability to shape the region will likely diminish, especially if Asian (and particularly Chinese) economic growth continues at a relatively rapid pace, as expected. As a result, the development of a long-range strategy that can extract the maximum benefits out of an increasingly complex and possibly limiting security environment will be essential.

The analysis of this report suggests a range of possible policy recommendations for the U.S. government and PACOM.

First, the U.S. government should undertake an interagency discussion aimed at identifying the long-term primary, secondary, and tertiary strategic interests of the United States in the Asia-Pacific in the context of the dynamic changes identified in this report.

This exercise should focus not only on process-oriented interests (for example, in continued cooperative political and economic endeavors or alliance relationships), but also on preferred regionwide patterns of political, economic, and military power among the major powers and institutions over the medium and long term.

Second, as part of an expanded effort to develop more effective means of strategic reassurance between the United States and China and, indirectly, with other Asian states, Washington should actively support the development of a strategic dialogue with Beijing. Such a dialogue should be long term, more integrative regarding a variety of concerns, and more strategy-centered than the current dialogues held with China.

Third, as near- to medium-term initiatives designed to provide greater strategic reassurance between Washington and Beijing while addressing each side's vital interests, a variety of specific reciprocal and joint actions should be considered. Some policy analysts have already offered suggestions that, while controversial and not all agreed upon by those contributing to this report, are worth considering. They can be found in the Appendix.

Fourth, Washington should sharpen its policy approach toward maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas. In the South China Sea, it should encourage the disputants to take steps to lower the perceived value of the islands. The United States should also encourage the South China Sea disputants to enhance crisis management.

Fifth, Washington should undertake a sustained effort to develop joint maritime exercises and other activities among the United States, China, and other major Asian states designed to establish a coordinated force for sea lines of communication defense against both nonstate and state actors. Coordination in securing energy sea-lanes between the Middle East and Asia is a major opportunity in building mutual trust and collaborative mechanisms for maritime cooperation.

Sixth, Washington should consider a variety of crisis management mechanisms that could help avert or manage future political-military crises over maritime territorial disputes and other contentious issues. These include hotlines between the U.S. and Chinese militaries; an Incidents at Sea agreement covering interactions between U.S. (and Japanese) and Chinese ships and aircraft; the designation of one or more trusted individual emissaries to convey sensitive messages between the U.S. and Chinese sides in a crisis; and expanded joint fishing agreements among disputants in the East and South China Seas.

Seventh, in the energy realm, it is vital to begin dealing, in a regional forum, with strategic tensions in the Asia-Pacific region over control of energy resources and transportation routes.

Eighth, in the economic realm, the United States could consider promoting a free trade agreement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that focuses on

and takes full account of ASEAN priorities. The United States could focus on strengthening ASEAN institutions by endorsing their role as action-oriented institutions that are able and willing to tackle regional issues, including the protection of common fishing grounds, maritime rules of the road, environmental conservation in the Western Pacific, the management of pandemics, and perhaps even defense cooperation. The United States should also complement its ASEAN-centered approach with strategies toward individual ASEAN countries. Except in the most extreme cases, the United States should remain engaged in countries—at all levels—even where it has serious concerns about human rights and autocratic political systems. The United States will be better positioned to engage countries on human rights and democracy issues when it is seen as supportive of other, mutually beneficial, priorities.

## **ALTERNATIVE MILITARY-POLITICAL APPROACHES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES**

In addition to the largely diplomatic recommendations listed above, the analysis in this report suggests the applicability of the three major possible U.S. and allied military-political approaches to the evolving Asia-Pacific security environment that were presented in the aforementioned 2013 Carnegie Endowment report, *China's Military and the U.S.-Japan Alliance in 2030: A Strategic Net Assessment*. Each approach is primarily oriented toward creating sufficient levels of both deterrence and reassurance capabilities toward China, and each has its advantages and disadvantages.

The first possible approach would require that Washington and its allies maintain strong U.S. freedom of action and the clear ability to prevail in conflicts through a robust operational concept based on a heavy forward presence and stressing deterrence over reassurance of China, while pursuing security-related cooperation with both China and (especially) other Asian nations. This strategy would involve the creation of a very robust operational approach that integrates a strengthened U.S. alliance structure into a system designed to neutralize entirely any future anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) or power projection capabilities that China might deploy over the next twenty-five years.

The second possible strategic approach would entail a more conditional and balanced offense/defense-oriented strategy to preserve key military advantages, involving incremental changes in current doctrine, more limited United States–Japan alliance actions, and a more equal emphasis on deterrence and reassurance in relations with China. This strategy, born largely of an anticipation of long-term economic and political constraints and concerns and a greater attention—in both Washington and Tokyo—to the potentially destabilizing aspects of the strategy described above, would involve the creation of a less ambitious operational doctrine. It would be focused on two issues: preserving alliance advantages in a more limited number of areas, and neutralizing those Chinese A2/

AD-type capabilities located primarily outside the Chinese mainland and perhaps along China's coastline, not in the vast interior.

The third strategic approach would focus on a more limited offensive, primarily defensive force posture and doctrine, with a greater reliance on lower-visibility, rear-deployed forces. This strategy, perhaps favored by those most concerned about the negative aspects of the two approaches described above, would entail a shift away from efforts to sustain existing military advantages and freedom of action throughout the first island chain via offense-oriented, forward-presence-based military strategies and alliance-centered political strategies. It would require movement toward a more genuinely balanced regional power structure based on defense-oriented, asymmetric strategies, and much greater efforts to defuse the likely sources of future crises through mutual accommodation and meaningful multilateral security structures.