



Congress and the New Pacific Strategy – Setting Policy by Acquisition by Colleen Hanabusa

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An uncertain future and looming budgetary constraints raise legitimate questions about what the US military will look like years down the road. The United States has invested vast amounts of time and resources in working out an answer, be it through the Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review, the Quadrennial Defense Review, the Navy's 30-year Shipbuilding Plan, or simply the defense authorization put forth every year. These documents offer insight, but no definitive answer. As General Peter Chiarelli, then vice chief of the Army, once put it, "We have been one hundred percent right in something, and that's never getting anything right."

The role of Congress in this equation is to provide oversight on what the Pentagon wants to fund now, and we must consider carefully how these choices will define the future. Decisions we make in force structure and weapons platforms will affect the United States years down the line, and often once a choice is made, it is difficult to make necessary adjustments. In this sense, regardless of what different reports project as the correct path for the country, we limit our policy flexibility by the choices we make now; that is, we set our policy by acquisition.

The most notable recent strategic guidance from the Pentagon was released in January 2012. The document recommends a new approach to the future US military makeup, commonly referred to as "strategic rebalancing," that calls for the United States to shift 60% of its naval assets to the Asia-Pacific theater, while increasing the presence and engagement of forces in the region, among many other shifts in posture, investment, and capability. Greater US influence in and military commitment to the Asia-Pacific will ensure that the dynamic growth seen in the region will continue, and our force structure must be adjusted to achieve this goal.

Austerity in the US defense budget is another key factor in the Defense Department's new Pacific strategy. The Budget Control Act imposes on the Pentagon cuts of \$487 billion, with sequestration threatening to take another \$500 billion. In the future, the United States will have a smaller, more agile force that takes advantage of technological advances coming from the defense industrial base. An initiative for the US military to become a more joint force is also likely to foster a shift from the current structure to one that prioritizes integration of assets, allowing them to become leaner, in order

to achieve greater efficiency as key players take on different missions.

US allies in the Asia-Pacific have taken notice of these changes and are following suit. The Republic of Korea (ROK) is undertaking a similar shift in the capabilities of its armed forces. The ROK Defense Reform Plan 2020 lays out a long-term investment strategy for the country's military to reduce the overall number of personnel and become a more agile, technologically advanced force. These shifts, along with the relocation of US troops to Pyeongtaek, are in line with the United States' own military realignment, making it clear that our regional allies accept the new rebalancing strategy.

The US military alignment must further take into account emerging relationships with new partners throughout the Pacific, as well as reinforce and strengthen long-standing alliances with Australia, Japan, the Philippines, the ROK, and Thailand. The United States must work with its allies and partners to further deepen this engagement, and identify the capabilities we need to maximize our resources in the region, continue to create innovative platforms, and define what new investments need to be made in the area to provide the best bang for our buck.

The creation of a more sea-based rotational force could augment prepositioned ground forces in the region and make operations less costly in the long run, while continuing to provide most of the previous capability with new technology and naval assets. This augmentation will help the US military sustain its status as the premier provider of security in the Asia-Pacific. A more agile force will be able to cover more ground in less time, and thus will give the United States the option to provide greater economic stability in the world at a lower cost to taxpayers.

This new force could also take on greater humanitarian missions, allowing the United States' military presence in the Pacific to have implications far beyond what we classically consider within our defense posture. Clearly the role of the military will no longer be simply that of a fighting force; it will also bear a diplomatic and humanitarian face and, as a stated purpose, enable trade and economic growth in the area. As President Obama has said, the Asia-Pacific region will largely define whether the 21st century will be marked by conflict or cooperation.

The outreach from diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives will provide the US military the capability to become a global force for good, while reinforcing our presence in the Pacific region and supporting US allies. As we in Congress work with military experts to plan a strategy for the 21st century, we face numerous hurdles. As the ultimate decision-maker, Congress must take the lead in facilitating a balance between the needs of today and those that represent the future. The security, prosperity, and vital interests of the United States are

increasingly tied to other countries, and we must seize the opportunity this presents for our armed forces to assume new roles and missions in the Asia-Pacific.

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