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Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Prepared Statement of Janine Davidson

Senior Fellow, Center for a New American Security

Thank you Chairman Cardin and members of the committee. I am honored to testify today on the important topic of the U.S. “rebalance” in the Asia-Pacific. I began my career as an Air Force officer and C-130 pilot stationed in Yokota Air Base, Japan (1990-1993) where I flew missions throughout the region, including multiple bi-lateral training exercises in Korea and Malaysia, the evacuation of the Philippines following the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, and in support of our POW/MIA repatriation initiatives in Vietnam. Most recently, I served for three years as the deputy assistant secretary of defense for plans, where I had the responsibility for U.S. global defense posture policy. As such, I helped develop options for the military’s part in the rebalance and was also the co-chair for the U.S.-Australia Working Group. Having left government over a year ago, my comments today reflect my personal views, not those of the Department of Defense (DOD), the U.S. government, or the Center for a New American Security.

Although most of the significant policy moves for America’s “rebalance” strategy are rightly focused on economic and diplomatic engagement, such activities are enabled by a stable and secure region. Thus, my comments today will address the importance of the Asia-Pacific to U.S. interests as a whole; how a new U.S. role in the region can better address emerging challenges and opportunities; and more specifically, how a forward postured and engaged U.S. military can support this strategy.

The U.S. in the Region

For 70 years America’s sustained forward presence in Asia has been a stabilizing force. As the foundation for our key alliances, our military posture in the region has underwritten decades of peace and enabled the region’s extraordinary economic successes of the last twenty years. Sustained American military leadership in Asia, through which flows 40% percent of global trade¹ and which represents nearly a quarter of global GDP,² has paid dividends in peace and prosperity for America and the world. In short, America’s military posture in Asia has been a smart investment for the United States.

Looking to the future, the economic importance of a rising Asia is clear. Maintaining peace and stability in this region is thus vital to America’s continued prosperity. But this is not the same Asia in

¹ “Malacca Strait is Strategic Chokepoint,” Reuters, 4 March 2010;
<http://in.reuters.com/article/2010/03/04/idINIndia-46652220100304>

² World Trade Organization, Statistics Database:
<http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFReporter.aspx?Language=E>

which we based our forces at the end of WWII. Although North Korea continues to menace our allies – and now our homeland – necessitating our sustained military commitment in the Northeast, vibrant growing economies across Southeast Asia are enhancing their own militaries and learning to work together and with us to promote security and stability across the rest of the region. Our presence, policy, and military posture must adjust to these changing dynamics. America must remain engaged in this vibrant and growing region, but in ways that promote the multilateral cooperation, interoperability, and burden-sharing that will underwrite the next 70 years of growth and security.

Security Challenges Old and New

For all the advances in the past few decades, the region still faces a number of challenges – some familiar, some emerging. North Korea is edging closer to deploying nuclear warheads deliverable by long-range ballistic missiles and has an untested young leader who may still be consolidating his grip on power. China, despite a small dip in its economic growth rate, remains a rising strategic competitor to the United States with expanding military capabilities and potentially destabilizing domestic problems. Regional maritime disputes abound in the Asia-Pacific and while they don't present challenges as fundamental as those of China and North Korea, the risk of miscalculation among claimants increases the chances of sparking conflict, applying pressure on the United States to intervene in defense of its treaty allies. Asia is replete with non-traditional security threats as well. Given the importance of Asian shipping lanes, piracy is an enduring challenge as is the potential for international terrorist plots emanating from the region. Global climate change threatens to exacerbate these challenges over the coming decades through more severe natural disasters that will no doubt require military responses. Finally, well-documented offensive cyber activities in Asia further threaten stability.

In light of these issues, there is a need for a new model of U.S. leadership in the region. Washington must take the steps necessary to secure American economic and security interests, assure allies and partners and promote multilateral cooperation and adherence to international law. However, although a U.S. presence is widely desired by our partners and allies in the Asia-Pacific, a heavy-handed approach could undermine U.S. interests and inadvertently reverse longstanding peace and stability in the region. Simultaneously, the United States should recognize that there is a trend developing of strengthening intra-Asian security relationships in Asia. Instead of trying to insert itself into this activity, the United States should let it develop organically. While U.S. military planners must continue to plan for worst-case contingencies, these plans represent only a part of a larger strategy that integrates “partners” – not “host-nations” – and works in a measured, cooperative fashion to promote sustained peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific.

The Value and the Logic of Forward Stationed American Forces

As Senator McCain made clear in his recent speech at the Center for a New American Security, America's current economic challenges and the debilitating grid-lock in Congress, have led many in Washington to call for retrenchment. But the idea that dis-engaging from the world would be in

America’s best an interest is misguided. American forward military presence remains a wise investment in a globally interconnected world, especially in this fiscally constrained environment, for the following reasons:³

First, as our decade-long experience in Iraq and Afghanistan should suggest, preventing wars is undoubtedly cheaper than fighting them. To the extent that America’s presence in Asia can continue to deter enemies from launching attacks that kill innocent people and destabilize the global economy, we will save taxpayer dollars and precious lives.

Second, our presence in Asia assures allies that there is no need for them to over-militarize or, worse, to develop destabilizing nuclear arsenals. If the United States were to retrench from the region and create doubts about its commitment to the defense of South Korea or Japan, both of those countries, and maybe some others in the region, would be pressured by their publics to develop nuclear weapons. Although the immediate motivation would be protection against an increasingly belligerent North Korea, a nuclear arms buildup in Northeast Asia would be perceived as a threat to other countries and have destabilizing spillover effects across the region. Given the potential ripple effects of instability beyond the Asian region, this is not a “new normal” anyone in the world should want to see emerge across this region.⁴

Third, forward stationing military assets, especially naval ones, is more efficient than rotating military forces from bases at home on an as-needed basis. In addition to host nation financial support, port facilities in allied nations provide a forward location for periodic maintenance, saving resources in transit time. Thus, as budgets shrink, having a larger percentage of a smaller force forward, is a prudent economic choice.

Fourth, forward stationed forces are better positioned to manage tensions and to facilitate collective responses to crises. Deploying forces all the way from the United States in times of crisis not only takes more time than might be available; it can also be seen as provocative and escalatory. In contrast, having forces in theater conducting regular bi-lateral and multi-lateral exercises and other training activities, allows for sustained engagement with ally and partner militaries. Such engagement promotes interoperability, builds capacity where needed, and, importantly, develops personal relationships among military professionals that can pay dividends during crises. Over time, as partner militaries improve their own capability and capacity, the possibility of burden sharing increases, ultimately preserving U.S. resources as regional actors are better able to respond to regional security challenges and to contribute to other multi-lateral operations

³ Michèle Flournoy and Janine Davidson, “Obama’s New Global Posture: The Logic of U.S. Foreign Deployments,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 4, July/August, 2012, pp. 53-63.

⁴ *Rising Voices in S. Korea, Japan advocate Nuclear Weapons*,” *Voice of America*, February 12, 2013; <http://www.voanews.com/content/rising-voices-in-south-korea-japan-advocate-nuclear-weapons/1604309.html>

Finally, these steady state activities with our partners and allies promote burden sharing in and out of the region in a self-reinforcing fashion. For example, our anti-piracy efforts in the Horn of Africa are fully multi-lateral, with seven of the 27 participating nations coming from Asia. These real-world multilateral operations, like the myriad exercises conducted with partners in Asian waters, further develop rules of engagement, interoperability, and shared values for professional militaries that respect human rights, the rule of law, and civilian control. Such lessons and common operating frameworks can be brought to bear in places like the straits of Malacca or the South China Sea, where multilateral cooperation can similarly address piracy and trafficking issues or mitigate potential territorial disputes and freedom of navigation issues.

The “Rebalance” and the American Military

The Obama administration’s emphasis on the importance of Asia is a reflection of the rising economic role the region plays and the interdependence of our economies. Thus, the economic and diplomatic engagement is the core of the rebalance policy. That said, the military has an important supporting role in America’s overall Asia-Pacific engagement, as peace and stability in the region enables economic prosperity and free flows of trade.

The Pentagon’s strategic approach here is wise. Our military posture in Asia is meant to be “operationally resilient” vis-à-vis core threats, while also becoming more “geographically distributed” to address the changing dynamics in Southeast Asia. Recognizing that each of the emerging powers in the region has its own interests and domestic political considerations, the Obama team also asserted that U.S. military posture should be “politically sustainable.” Thus, while the Pentagon had a vision for the long-term changes they might want to see in the region, their adage was to “go slow and consult” with regional partners before making dramatic changes that might have negative diplomatic repercussions. Thus, the term “rebalance” is more appropriate than “pivot,” as the former connotes a more gradual process and one that makes adjustments in approach and activities, rather than a simple and abrupt repositioning of forces. Moreover the changes are to occur *within* the region as more emphasis is placed on activities and engagement in Southeast Asia (while holding strong in the Northeast), as well as *across* regions, as more American resources are made available following the large-scale wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Our military posture in the Asia-Pacific should adjust to the changing dynamics and capabilities of emerging partners, while also taking care not to abandon long-standing arrangements that are still working or are still needed. Thus, the first imperative must be to sustain our core deterrence posture and continue to assure our Northeast Asian allies against the existential threat posed by a nuclear-armed North Korea. Our long-standing posture in this region, including nearly 30,000 troops in South Korea and an additional 50,000 in mainland Japan and Okinawa, are the key to remaining ready to respond to emerging crises. Our bases in Guam, which will absorb approximately 5,000 marines from Okinawa, also provide airfields and naval ports for a more dispersed footprint and thus promote a more operationally resilient posture.

Although we need not – and should not – build large new American bases across the region, we should also be cautious as we make changes to our legacy basing arrangements. As our experience in the Philippines demonstrates, executing a precipitous departure can shock relationships and limit future options. That said, where ally countries host our military forces, we must remain conscious of the fact that these are not our territories. In places like Japan and Korea, decades of political change and economic growth have altered significantly the local environments in which our forces reside. Our posture must account for such shifts, taking an evolutionary, not revolutionary, approach. As the recent adjustments in Okinawa and Korea demonstrate, it is possible to make changes to our traditional posture model that meet our operational requirements while also respecting our allies’ political realities and the need for change.⁵

Elsewhere in the region, where a robust U.S. footprint would not be desirable or practicable, new modes of military engagement by the U.S. should be designed to enhance regional stability. Changing dynamics and challenges in the ASEAN region present opportunities for constructive U.S. military engagement. ASEAN countries are thickening bi-lateral ties among each other across the region and promoting cooperative approaches to shared challenges. In contrast to our partners in Europe who are decreasing defense spending, many Asian countries are investing in new defense capabilities and building their military capacity.⁶ The U.S. role here should be to promote such regional engagement by hosting some of the larger multilateral military exercises, such as RIMPAC⁷ (Rim of the Pacific) and participating in activities hosted by others when invited, such as ADMM, (ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting) or PITCH BLACK (multilateral air forces exercise hosted by Australia). The fact is, the United States has convening authority in the region such that if our military is due to participate, others will sign on. Thus, just by showing up, the U.S. presence can act as a powerful catalyst for multilateral cooperation with very little investment.

As such activity expands, however, it is important that the United States along with its allies and other regional militaries ensure that China also has the opportunity to participate. Regular participation in military exercises builds confidence among participants, dismisses Chinese misperceptions about “encirclement” or “containment,” and promotes shared norms for multilateral cooperation. Additionally, should tensions rise over territorial disputes or other issues,

⁵ In Okinawa, the overall number of marines will be reduced from approximately 18,000 to 10,000 by moving some to Guam, Hawaii and elsewhere in the region. In Korea, U.S. military personnel are moving to less populated parts of the country to accommodate growth in more urban areas. Karen Parish, “U.S., Japan, Agree on Okinawa Troop Relocation,” *Defense News*, April 27, 2012; <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=116105> ; T.D. Flack, “Yongsan Relocation Plan Moving Forward,” *Stars and Stripes*, July 10, 2005, <http://www.stripes.com/news/yongsan-relocation-plan-moving-forward-1.35625>

⁶ “Military Spending in Southeast Asia,” *The Economist*, March 21, 2012; <http://www.economist.com/node/21551056>

⁷ “PACOM Supports China Invite to RIMPAC 2014,” *Navy Times*, September 19, 2012; <http://www.navytimes.com/article/20120919/NEWS/209190323/PACOM-supports-China-invite-RIMPAC-2014>

the military to military relationships forged through such engagement can provide a valuable avenue for communication that can avoid miscalculations or unintended escalation.

Being forward postured is the down payment that enables all of this engagement. The enhanced rotational Marine Corps presence in Australia as well as the four littoral combat ships to be stationed in Singapore are steps in the right direction. The agreement with Australia reflects the shared desire to enhance interoperability on the very important amphibious role for which the U.S. Marine Corps is so proficient. The plan to start small with 250 marines and grow eventually to 2,500, reflects the flexible “go slow and consult” approach. The engagement should be assessed each year, lessons should be incorporated, and each country should remain flexible along the way to the larger partnership. Meanwhile, the LCS, is the right platform for the maritime challenges in the region. U.S. forces’ participation in the region’s multilateral and bilateral exercises on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) not only improves local capability and capacity to respond locally to such crises, but also enhances the general interoperability among all of the militaries participating that will pay dividends in cooperative military responses to future crises of any sort.

These new models of engagement can be replicated elsewhere in the region. Although the United States traditionally thinks of Southeast Asia as a maritime domain, for many of the countries in the region their Armies are the dominant military branch. Thus, we might consider more army-to-army engagements and partner capacity-building efforts focused on land forces as a complement to our many maritime efforts.

Going forward, discussions with the Philippines and Vietnam are also promising. From a U.S. perspective, operating agreements in new places enhance our own operational resiliency while military to military engagement promotes stability. We must, however, remain savvy about the rising tensions in the region. As we promote stronger bilateral ties through military engagement, we must find a balance between assuring our allies and accidentally emboldening them to take more provocative actions that might enflame tensions. Our allies should not mistake our enhanced engagement throughout the region as an effort to encircle China or as carte blanche to fan the flames over territorial disputes. In short, we should affirm our commitment to defend our allies against attack; while also making it clear that we do not condone military aggression.

The Immediate Challenge

With Asian defense budgets rising and weapons proliferating, the United States must continue to serve as a moderating influence in the Asia-Pacific region, promoting shared values for the rule of law, human rights, and good governance. The low-cost, high-payoff initiatives outlined here should be protected as we allocate our stressed defense dollars. As Deputy Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter asserted, the Pentagon is “turning the great ingenuity of our department to the Asia-Pacific region, not only in hardware and technical investments, but intellectually – in language and culture

skills, regional and strategy affairs.”⁸ Congress should support such investments that underwrite our rebalance in the Asia-Pacific.

But for countries in Asia, the uncertainties created by political gridlock in Washington can have a destabilizing effect. Strategic competitors like China are emboldened by American political dysfunction and officials and strategists in allied and partner countries fear that the United States will not remain committed to the region, despite rhetoric to the contrary. It is imperative that the United States sends strong signals to allies like Japan and South Korea that we are adapting our security relationships to the changing strategic environments. Our partners must believe that they can count on continued U.S. presence and leadership. Lack of faith in U.S. commitment will lead to further hedging by our partners and allies; and such uncertainty will complicate an already complex web of security relations in the region with the greatest long-term economic importance to the United States. Congress has a vital role to play, not only in budgeting and oversight, but also in affirming our commitment to our allies and in speaking directly to the American people about the importance of Asia and our national interests there.

In closing, let me express my gratitude to the Committee for its attention to this important issue and for providing me with the opportunity to speak with you today. Thank you.

⁸ “*The U.S. Strategic Rebalance to Asia: A Defense Perspective*,” Ash Carter, speech delivered Asia Society, New York City, August 1, 2012; <http://www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1715>

Biography

Janine Davidson **Senior Fellow, Center for a New American Security**



Dr. Janine Davidson is an Assistant Professor in the School of Public Policy at George Mason University where she teaches courses on national security policy making, strategy, civil-military relations and public policy. From 2009 to 2012, she served as the deputy assistant secretary of defense for plans where she oversaw the development of guidance for military campaign and contingency plans. She also led policy efforts for U.S. global defense posture and international agreements related to U.S. forces stationed overseas, while co-chairing the U.S.-Australia defense posture working group. In 2012, she was awarded the Secretary of Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service.

Dr. Davidson began her career in the United States Air Force, where she was an aircraft commander and senior pilot for the C-130 and the C-17 cargo aircraft. She flew combat support and humanitarian air mobility missions in Asia, Europe and the Middle East and was an instructor pilot at the U.S. Air Force Academy. From 2006 to 2008, Dr. Davidson served as a director in Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict. In that capacity, she oversaw the founding of the Consortium for Complex Operations, an innovative interagency project to enhance education, training and performance in complex emergencies. In addition to her government and military experience, Dr. Davidson has also taught political science and international relations courses at Davidson College in North Carolina in 2002, and held positions as an associate at DFI International in Washington from 2003 to 2004, a research and non-resident fellow at the Brookings Institution from 2003 to 2004; 2008, and as the director for Counterinsurgency Studies at Hicks and Associates in Arlington, VA from 2004 to 2005.

Dr. Davidson holds a Ph.D. and a Master’s of Arts degree in international studies from the University of South Carolina and a B.S. in architectural engineering from the University of Colorado at Boulder. She is a Member of the Council on Foreign Relations and author of *Lifting the Fog of Peace: How Americans Learned to Fight Modern War*.