Over the past 20 years, Asia has undergone a remarkable transformation. Under an umbrella provided by U.S. security guarantees and American military presence, the region has witnessed tremendous economic growth, an expansion of its democratic institutions, and relative peace. Although several countries suffered serious economic setbacks in 1997–1998, most, with the notable exception of Indonesia, have recovered.

The United States has a profound interest in seeing that events in Asia continue down the path of economic development, democratization, and regional peace. However, Asia faces potentially serious problems that could unravel the fabric of peace and prosperity. India and, especially, China are rising powers that seek their place in the world and, in the process, could potentially disrupt the regional order. At the same time, India is involved in an ongoing confrontation with Pakistan that now extends to nuclear weapon capabilities on both sides. Pakistan also confronts a deep crisis of governance. Beijing glares covetously at Taiwan, maintaining a threatening posture toward it in both word and deed. Indonesia, the most populous country in Southeast Asia, is rent by ethnic and religious tensions, which could bring about its fragmentation. Malaysia and the Philippines suffer their own internal unrest. And overshadowing all else, from the U.S. perspective, the military confrontation on the Korean peninsula has now entered its sixth decade, notwithstanding favorable political trends.

To help shape events in Asia in the interests of ensuring peace and stability, the United States must successfully manage a number of
The United States and Asia

critical challenges. Among these—the one that must occupy the immediate attention of the United States—is Korea. The U.S. military posture in Northeast Asia must continue to deter and defend against North Korea. Over the longer term, however, it is possible that the North Korean threat will disappear as a result of the political unification of the Korean peninsula, an accommodation between North and South, or a collapse of the North Korean regime. The June 2000 summit meeting between South Korean president Kim Dae Jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il offers evidence that the political-military situation in Asia may change much more quickly than had once been thought.

Even if the Korean threat persists, the rest of Asia is changing in ways that seem likely to require major adjustments in U.S. strategy and military posture. One of the most important changes is the emergence of China as a rising power, its military modernization program, and its enhanced role in the East Asian region.\(^1\) For the U.S. military, this highlights the near-term question of how to respond to a possible Chinese use of force against Taiwan. In the long term, China’s increased power will entail substantial implications for the region and for U.S. strategy and its military—particularly if China pursues a policy of regional primacy.

But Korea and China are not the only parts of this dynamic region where important changes are occurring. India too has begun to assume a larger role in regional political-military affairs, and it also faces Pakistan-supported insurrection in Kashmir, a situation made more dangerous by the nuclear tests conducted in 1998 by both countries. In Southeast Asia, the turmoil surrounding the fall of the Suharto regime, together with Indonesia’s separatist movements and civil strife, highlights growing uncertainty about the country’s territorial integrity and stability. As the largest country in Southeast Asia, Indonesia will have a significant impact on the region as a whole. In addition, Japan and Russia aspire to enhanced political and military status. A unified Korea could similarly play a major political-military

role in the region. Even without unification, South Korea appears to be developing the economic, technological, and military resources to pursue a more active regional policy.

U.S. OBJECTIVES

In order to meet all these potential challenges, the United States must begin to formulate an integrated regional strategy. The overall long-term U.S. objective for the region should be to preclude in Asia the growth of rivalries, suspicions, and insecurities that could lead to war. This overall objective necessitates, in turn, three subordinate goals:

- **Prevent the rise of a regional hegemon.** Any potential Asian hegemon would seek to undermine the U.S. role in Asia and would be more likely to use force to assert its claims. Given Asia’s human, technological, and economic resources, the domination of the region by a hostile power would pose a global challenge and threaten the current international order.

- **Maintain stability.** Stability has been the foundation of Asia’s prosperity. If Asia is to become more prosperous and more integrated, each country must be free to develop peacefully.

- **Manage Asia’s transformation.** The United States may not be able to be actively engaged in all disputes in Asia, but it can try to influence events so that they do not spiral out of control.

In addition, the United States wishes to maintain and increase economic access to the region as a whole. This implies a continuation of policies favoring free trade that have underpinned the region’s prosperity in recent decades.

U.S. STRATEGY: TOWARD A NEW EQUILIBRIUM

To achieve these goals, an integrated political-military-economic strategy is required. A necessary precondition for this strategy is continued American global leadership. This assumes, in turn, that the United States will continue to make the necessary political, technological, and military investments to ensure its global preeminence. Economically, the United States should further Asia’s development
by continuing to support the expansion of free-trade policies—e.g., by the expansion of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to include China as well as other countries.

In political-military terms, a four-part strategy is required.

First, the United States should both deepen and widen its bilateral security alliances to allow for the creation of a comprehensive partnership. This multilateralization—which would serve as a complement to rather than a substitute for existing bilateral alliances—could ultimately include the United States, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and perhaps Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand. Initially, however, the United States will need to promote trust among its allies and encourage them to create militaries that can respond to regional crises as coalitions. Improved relations between Japan and South Korea, for example, would facilitate the future cooperation of these countries on security issues. As part of this effort, the United States should also encourage information sharing among these nations. Moreover, the United States should support Japan’s efforts to revise its constitution to allow it to expand its security horizons beyond its territorial defense and acquire appropriate capabilities for supporting coalition operations.

Second, the United States should pursue a balance-of-power strategy among the major rising powers and key regional states in Asia—including China, India, and a currently weakened Russia—that are not now part of the U.S. alliance structure. The objective of this strategy must be to deter any of these states from threatening regional security or dominating each other, while simultaneously preventing any combination of these states from “bandwagoning” to undercut critical U.S. strategic interests in Asia. Developing a stable balance of power among major powers in Asia will require great political and strategic agility. Washington should seek strengthened political, economic, and military-to-military relations with all, but especially those least likely to challenge U.S. strategic interests.

Third, the United States should address those situations that could tempt others to use force. The United States should clearly state, for example, that it opposes the use of force by China against Taiwan (as
well as a declaration of independence by Taiwan).² At the same time, it should work to resolve territorial disputes in the South China Sea and oppose the use of force there, while emphasizing its commitment to freedom of navigation and to adherence to an agreed code of conduct in the area. The United States should also promote the cohesion, stability, and territorial integrity of Indonesia and other Southeast Asian states and foster security cooperation and interoperability, and it should similarly use its influence to encourage the resolution of the Kashmir dispute through peaceful means and prevent an outbreak of a regional nuclear war. The United States should, moreover, encourage Russia to resolve its territorial dispute with Japan over the Northern Territories.

Finally, the United States should promote an inclusive security dialogue among all the Asian states.³ This dialogue would not only provide for a discussion of regional conflicts and promote confidence building but also encourage states to enter into a multilateral framework at some point in the future. The United States should also maintain flexibility of relations with as many countries as possible for ad hoc coalitions to deal with specific future challenges—challenges that might concern not only the United States and its allies but many others in the region as well.

**TOWARD A NEW MILITARY POSTURE**

Implementing such a wide-ranging and flexible strategy in Asia will require major adjustments to the current U.S. military posture. Since the 1950s, the focus of U.S. attention in Asia has been in the north-east, oriented toward the Soviet Union (until the end of the Cold War) and North Korea. This posture will need to shift broadly

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²Should the United States and China come into conflict over Taiwan or some other issue, the American military would confront an adversary having capabilities—an arsenal of theater ballistic missiles, evolving capabilities for information and counterspace operations, and, of course, the means to strike U.S. targets with nuclear weapons—well beyond those fielded by other potential adversaries. While a critical U.S. objective must be to avoid making an enemy of China, the U.S. Air Force and its sister services should think through how best to counter these capabilities if American military power must at some future time be projected into East Asia in the face of active Chinese opposition.

³This is important in order to address the reluctance of many Asian states to engage in cooperative efforts that might offend the People’s Republic of China (PRC).
southward. To be sure, this does not mean that the United States should abandon its existing security arrangements in Northeast Asia; even if the confrontation on the Korean peninsula should end, the United States would benefit from maintaining basing and access in both South Korea and Japan. In fact, modifying access in Japan by establishing possible forward operating locations (FOLs) for U.S. Air Force (USAF) fighters in the southern Ryukyu Islands would be of great help were the U.S. military called on to support Taiwan in a conflict with mainland China. However, this may be politically problematic in Japan.

Elsewhere in Asia, the United States should seek to solidify existing access arrangements and create new ones. For example, Manila appears interested in improving relations with the United States, and the Philippines’ location makes it an attractive potential partner. In the longer term, Vietnam could provide additional access in Southeast Asia beyond that which Singapore and Thailand offer.

South Asia presents many distinct challenges. Critical in and of itself—it is probably the world’s most likely nuclear battleground—the region is also an important link between Asia proper and the Middle East and Central Asia. Yet the United States currently lacks reliable access to the subcontinent. Pakistan—currently under military rule and at risk of implosion—is hardly a reliable partner and current domestic trends promise to make it even less so. Relations between the United States and India are still in an early stage of post–Cold War thawing and have yet to overcome the differences and hesitancy bequeathed by the past. Of the basing possibilities in the region, Oman is one of the closest to the Indian-Pakistani border—about 500 nautical miles. Relations between the government of Oman and the United States are good, and Oman has shown itself to be a reasonably steadfast ally. In addition, the basing infrastructure in Oman is well developed.

Knitting together a coherent web of security arrangements among the United States and its core partners in Asia—Japan, Australia, and South Korea—that might expand to Southeast Asia will demand military as well as political steps. Training exercises will need to be expanded to include all the parties; planning forums will need to be
established; and some degree of hardware standardization will be necessary to foster human and technical interoperability. 4 Particularly useful in this regard could be the deployment of procedures and mechanisms for greater information sharing between the United States and its core regional partners at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.

The overall U.S. posture in the Western Pacific would benefit from three additional steps. First, Guam—a sovereign U.S. territory—should be built up as a major hub for power projection throughout Asia. Sufficient stockpiles of munitions, spare parts, and other equipment should be established to support the rapid deployment and employment of a sizable tranche of USAF assets—say, 100 to 150 fighters and up to 50 bombers—anywhere in the region. Within C-130 range of the Philippines, northwest Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand, assets could be quickly moved from Guam to FOLs across much of the region.

Second, the USAF and the U.S. Navy should work to develop new concepts of operations that maximize the leverage their combined forces could offer to a joint commander in a future Pacific crisis. With basing for land-based fighters at a premium in much of the region, the USAF and the U.S. Navy should, for example, plan and practice tactics and procedures to enable carrier-based fighters to provide air-to-air and defense-suppression support for Air Force bombers and in turn to be supported by USAF tankers and command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) platforms.

Third, the USAF should review its future force structure and consider whether it might not benefit from a mix that places greater emphasis on longer-range combat platforms. In this context, acquiring additional heavy bombers might be one option. Another option that is often discussed is the arsenal plane, an aircraft capable of delivering a large number of smart munitions from a stand-off range beyond the enemy’s defensive envelope. A third option would be to develop

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4 These steps could provide the political benefit of helping dispel the lingering distrust and animosity between South Korea and Japan.
and deploy a small fleet of high-speed, long-range strike aircraft.\textsuperscript{5} Asia is vast, and options for basing large numbers of land-based combat aircraft are few and far between; long range and high speeds have payoffs that might not be evident when looking at contingencies in more-compact theaters, such as Korea, Europe, or even the Persian Gulf.

\textsuperscript{5}By “high speed” we mean roughly a Mach-2 supercruise and by “long range” a minimum 2500-nm unrefueled range. If fitted with a dozen or so 250-pound small smart bombs (SSBs), such an aircraft could conduct missions currently executable only by B-1 or B-2 bombers at a sortie rate more comparable to that achieved by current fighter-bombers such as the F-15E or F-117. Preliminary calculations suggest that such a platform would be about the size of an F-4. See John Stillion and David T. Orletsky, \textit{Airbase Vulnerability to Conventional Cruise-Missile and Ballistic-Missile Attacks: Technology, Scenarios, and U.S. Air Force Responses}, Santa Monica: RAND, MR-1028-AF, 1999; and D. A. Shlapak, J. Stillion, O. Oliker, and T. Charlick-Paley, \textit{A Global Access Strategy for the U.S. Air Force}, Santa Monica: RAND, MR-1216-AF, forthcoming.