

# Lessons of the Cold War in the Pacific: U.S. Maritime Strategy, Crisis Prevention, and Japan's Role

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Available From:

**ASIA PROGRAM**

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars  
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004-3027

[www.wilsoncenter.org](http://www.wilsoncenter.org)

ISBN: 978-1-938027-55-0

Cover Image Source: U.S. Navy, "US, Japan Plan Maritime Field Training Exercise", *NavalToday.com* (2015).

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Authors Narushige Michishita, Peter M. Swartz, and David F. Winkler at the Wilson Center March 7, 2016.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the late 1970s, the United States learned that the Soviets highly valued their strategic ballistic missile submarine force, given that it was vital to their concept on how to fight a war with the West. The U.S. Navy believed that if it could damage or destroy the Soviet ballistic missile submarines, it could affect Soviet strategic calculations. Deterrence worked because the Soviets knew the United States could fight effectively.

The similarities—as well as the differences—between the Cold War period and present day are striking. The continental powers—the Soviet Union and China—seem to use their naval forces in the same way to prevent the United States from reaching their coasts. Faced with the new challenge, the U.S. Navy is much smaller today. In contrast, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force is bigger and more powerful. During the Cold War, the Kuril Islands offered the Soviet Union a useful natural barrier. Today, Japan controls the Southwestern or Ryukyu Island chain, and can use it as a natural defensive barrier. However, while the only exits Soviet fleets had for advancing to the Western Pacific were the three straits near Japan, China's fleets have at least nine to eleven paths to the Western Pacific. Furthermore, China's economic performance is superior to the Soviet Union.

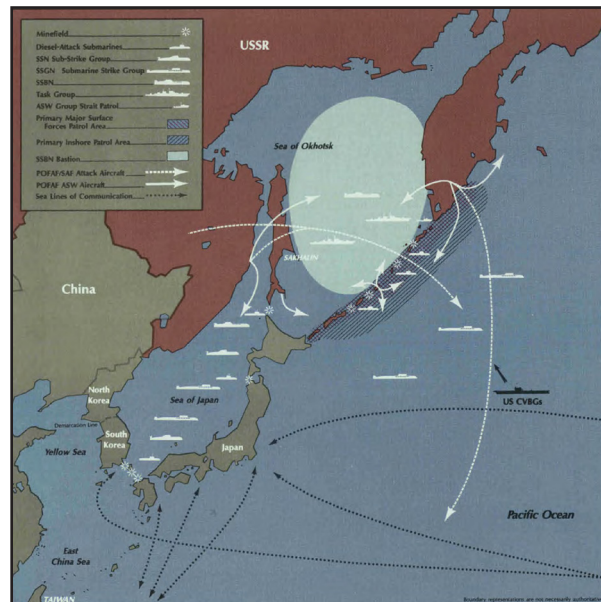
Japan was making the biggest international security commitment in the 1980s in its history to date by playing a critical role of helping the United States execute the Maritime Strategy in the Pacific: blockading key chokepoint straits and defending critical sea lines of communication (SLOC). The mission of the SLOC defense was to make it possible for the U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups to sail safely to striking positions near Hokkaido. Japan played such an important role that the United States discussed scenarios on what would take place if Japan did or did not play its part in its Maritime Strategy. In the 1980 war game, the Soviet Union detonated three nuclear weapons east of Japan to intimidate the Japanese government into neutrality. The U.S.-Soviet Incidents at Sea Agreement (INCSEA) served as a successful behavior modification regime. It allowed U.S. and Soviet naval officers to effectively communicate their maneuver intentions at sea and helped maintain civil relations between them despite confrontations at sea.



If the United States and China fight tomorrow, U.S. carriers will definitely survive. The result is not as certain if conflict were to arise 40 years from now. But, the U.S. Navy will certainly try its best to make its ships as survivable as possible. The Soviet Union turned its coastal navy into a blue-water navy; China is doing the same. The U.S.-PRC Military Maritime Consultative Agreement of 1998 together with the 2014 Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea can be as effective as INCSEA was during the Cold War. Proliferation of social media can prevent isolated irresponsible actions, but on the other hand it can encourage other deliberate actions aimed at demonstrating capabilities and/or intentions. Uploading events on social media could lead to headline news before an incident is briefed up the official channels in Washington DC or Beijing. Once public opinion weighs in, the situation could become difficult to manage.

Meanwhile, Japan's defense role in dealing with future conflict in the Pacific will look very much as it did during the Cold War with some new additions such as ballistic missile defense mission. It will also face similar challenges. As the Soviet Union sought to neutralize Japan in case of conflict, North Korea and China will do so, too. Since fear of entrapment remains strong in Japan, keeping the isolationist Japan committed to global security will remain a challenge. Moreover, in the Self-Defense Force, the number of enlisted men has dramatically shrunk while the number of non-commissioned officers increased since the end of the Cold War, casting doubts on its vitality as a combat force. At-sea exercises and war games have been extremely important in developing, practicing and signaling U.S. strategy. They are expected to play the same role in the future.

#### Soviet and U.S. Operations in the Sea of Okhotsk/ Northwest Pacific



Source: Department of Defense, *Soviet Military Power 1989: Prospects for Change* (US Government Printing Office, 1989), p. 116.

## INTRODUCTION

The similarities and differences between the strategic environment in the Pacific during the Cold War and at the present time are striking. The Soviet Union turned the Sea of Okhotsk into a sanctuary and operated its nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs) capable of attacking the U.S. continent there. In parallel, China is constructing military installations in the South China Sea in an effort to control it and is building its SSBN bases on Hainan Island. The Soviet Union attempted to keep U.S. forces at bay by establishing two defensive lines for “sea control” and “sea denial.” China is creating two defensive lines called the “First Island Chain” and the “Second Island Chain” to deny U.S. access.

There are notable differences as well. The Soviet economy collapsed as a result of the arms race with the capitalist Western bloc countries. The U.S. economy might go broke in an arms race with China. The Soviet Union was a sophisticated military superpower capable of waging a global nuclear war. China is still a long way from becoming a similarly capable military power in both the conventional and nuclear realms. And, most of all, while the United States and the Soviet Union were in the Cold War, the United States and China are not in such a standoff.

Learning lessons from the Cold War experience will be critical to find a better way to maintain peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region while shaping a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship among the United States, Japan, and China.

#### China's A2/AD Strategy and the First and Second Island Chains



Source: Department of Defense, “Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2011,” Annual Report to Congress, 2011, p. 23.

The Woodrow Wilson Center's Asia Program invited three experts—Narushige Michishita, Peter M. Swartz, and David F. Winkler—to discuss successes and challenges of the Cold War in the Pacific, and their current implications on two separate occasions: a closed presentation and discussion session on March 2, 2016 and a public forum on March 7, 2016 in Washington. This report is the result of the presentation, discussions, and questions and answers which took place in these sessions.

## COLD WAR SUCCESSES

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### *Emergence of U.S. Maritime Strategy*

**Peter Swartz:** The basic operational objectives of U.S. Maritime Strategy in the 1980s included deterring both conventional and nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union with their respective allies. In the case that deterrence failed, the United States intended to fight and win the war against the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> In the 1970s, the Soviets were advancing into different parts of the world including Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East and the Far East. The United States regarded this as Soviet adventurism, and attempted to halt it and put the Soviets on the defensive. In the 1980s, the United States worked closely with its allies and friends, including China. China's view on possible war between the United States and Soviet Union was an important part of the calculus on all sides, and affected the U.S. Maritime Strategy.

After the Vietnam War, the Carter Administration refocused U.S. defense policy on improving NATO forces in Central Europe, which was identified as the most important theater for deterrence and warfighting against the Warsaw Pact. President Carter sought to reinforce the U.S. army and air force presence in Germany, but often overlooked the importance of other theaters. By this time, however, the Soviet Union had extended its influence into countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Grenada, Angola, Vietnam, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and North Korea, and the U.S. Navy believed that any U.S.-Soviet confrontation would inevitably be global. With this assessment, the Navy advocated the forward application of naval power in other theaters such as northern and southern Europe, the Far East and the Arctic.

In the late 1970s, the Navy developed Sea Plan 2000, which was an alternative concept that sought to implement global, forward, offensive, and aggressive operations against the Soviet Union as a deterrent and as an option in real combat. In the mid-1970s, the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet Admiral Thomas Hayward developed an additional warfighting concept called "Sea Strike," which aimed to use conventional operations against the Soviet Union and its allies in the Far East. The idea was to pin down Soviet forces in the Far East, counter Soviet attacks on U.S. treaty allies, prevent them from swinging forces from East Asia towards Europe in the event of war, and hold what the Soviets regarded important as hostage, such as SSBNs and their bases in Petropavlovsk and Vladivostok.<sup>2</sup>

### *Adoption of the U.S. Anti-SSBN Strategy*

**David Winkler:** Originally, in the 1960s, the United States thought the Soviet Navy was building a fleet that was offensively oriented. In the 1970s however, Robert Herrick argued that the Soviet naval strategy was defensively oriented in the sense that its primary objective was to protect the motherland first from American aircraft carriers and then SSBNs. Consistent with Herrick's argument, while the Americans initially thought the Kiev-class aircraft carriers were designed for offensive purposes, their central mission was revealed to be anti-submarine warfare.

**Swartz:** Given that the U.S. Navy was always offensive, it was hard for the Americans to understand that the massive and far-reaching Soviet Navy was "defensive." But, the Soviets thought like the Soviets, not like Americans or the old German *Kriegsmarine*. In the late 1970s, the U.S. Navy's Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) received extremely authoritative intelligence on the priorities of the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> The United States learned that the Soviets put particular value on their SSBN force, as this reserve was vital to their concept on how to fight a war with the West.<sup>4</sup> It was difficult for the Americans to understand this because they did not think a lot about protecting their own SSBNs. U.S. SSBNs were supposed to go out to sea and operate on their own, undetectable by the Soviets. Soviet

SSBNs however, were more detectable. The United States knew where they were, and the Soviets were aware that the Americans knew where these submarines were. This made the Soviets particularly concerned, as their weapons systems were vulnerable, and their SSBN force was a nuclear strategic reserve vital to their war plans. In order to protect their SSBN reserves, the Soviets put them in bastions in the Sea of Okhotsk and the Barents Sea.

...it was hard for the Americans to understand that the massive and far-reaching Soviet Navy was "defensive." But, the Soviets thought like the Soviets.

With this new intelligence, the United States realized the strategic importance of acquiring the capability to attack these bastions. This new intelligence, combined with the Navy's new global, forward offensive outlook became part of the U.S. Maritime Strategy. All of these were tested in a series of Global War Games in the late 1970s at the Naval War College in Newport. The U.S. Navy thought that if it could damage or destroy the Soviet SSBNs, it could affect Soviet strategic calculations.

**Winkler:** Later in the 1980s, the Soviets extended the bastion concept up into the Arctic. They constructed the Typhoon-class SSBNs—a submarine that could hide under the polar ice cap and surface by breaking through the ice—and sought to launch ballistic missiles against the U.S. continent from the Arctic. The United



States trained its attack submarine force to operate under the ice to deny the Soviets this Arctic sanctuary.

### ***Role of the Marine Corps in Maritime Strategy***

**Swartz:** The U.S. Marine Corps also contributed to the Maritime Strategy particularly in planning for operations in north Norway and other possible northern theaters of war.<sup>5</sup> Even before the Maritime Strategy appeared, the Marines relearned how to ski and reopened a cold weather training center in Bridgeport, California, which they had used during the Korean War. They bought special equipment and stored it in caves in Norway. They were not adept at cold-weather operations at first, but improved greatly with time. The Marines also trained to have the capability to land on the Kuril Islands. They exercised in Shemya and Attu islands of the Aleutians in January in harsh winter conditions, and exercised with Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force. This training was noticed by both the Japanese and the Soviets, and worked as a signal and deterrent against the Soviet Union.

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#### **U.S. Marines exercising in the Aleutian Islands in 1987**



Source: Operation Kernel Potlatch at Shemya, JO1 Brent Johnston, USN

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**Winkler:** The U.S. Marine presence in Okinawa had the same deterrent effect.

### ***Maritime Superiority of the United States and its Allies***

**Winkler:** During the Cold War, the United States needed maritime superiority in order to demonstrate its credibility to allies in Europe and Asia. In order to show

that the United States would be able to respond in a time of crisis to send reinforcements and additional combat power overseas, the U.S. Navy needed to assert control over its sea lanes.

The United States had two main objectives in Asia during the Cold War. The first was to restore Japan as a productive and responsible partner—one which was not remilitarized, but maintained a viable “Self-Defense Force.” The second objective was to contain the Soviet Union and Communism, which was once seen as monolithic. Despite the failures of the United States to contain Communism in Asia, as demonstrated with the Soviet occupation of North Korea in 1945, Communist control of mainland China in the late 1940's, victory of the Communists over the French in North Vietnam in 1954, and the subsequent struggle in the rest of South East Asia over the next two decades, the Kissinger/Nixon opening of China provided an opportunity to deepen a wedge between the Soviet Union and China. It turns out that Communism was not monolithic after all. During the 1970s and early 1980s, the Chinese saw the Soviet Union as the greater threat. Thus the containment line went up to Manchuria instead of Vietnam, and the United States was able to contain the Soviet Union.

And with the naval presence in the maritime front lines of the Sea of Japan, the United States demonstrated it could respond credibly against the Soviets in the Pacific. For example, when I was assigned to USNS *Navasota*, an oiler based in Sasebo in 1984, I participated in exercises involving multiple U.S. carriers operating off Vladivostok. It was a big “in your face” demonstration aimed to dissuade the Kremlin leadership from conducting offensive ground operations against our allies in Europe where we had collective defense treaty obligations because of NATO, or China, where we didn't have a treaty obligation.

### ***Japan's Role***

**Narushige Michishita:** The contention that Japan was a security free rider during the Cold War is simply wrong. In fact, Japan was making the biggest international security commitment in the 1980s in its history to date by playing a critical role of helping the United States execute its Maritime Strategy in the Pacific. Positioned in the center of the theater of confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Pacific, Japan undertook two new important missions: blockading key chokepoint straits—Soya, Tsugaru, and Tsushima—and defending critical sea lines of communication (SLOC). The strait blockade sought to prevent Soviet naval forces from advancing from Vladivostok into the Western Pacific. The Maritime Self-Defense Force dramatically improved its anti-submarine warfare capabilities; the Air Self-Defense Force acquired C-130 transport aircraft as a mine-laying platform; and the Ground Self-Defense Force introduced surface-to-ship missiles to attack Soviet surface vessels.

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The mission of the SLOC defense was to make it possible for the U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups to sail safely to striking positions near Hokkaido. The Maritime Self-Defense Force was tasked with hunting down Soviet submarines and providing safe passages in the Western Pacific for the U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups. While taking up these new missions, the Self-Defense Forces continued to provide protection over U.S. bases in Japan, such as the air force bases in Misawa, Yokota and Kadena, navy bases in Misawa, Yokosuka, Atsugi and Sasebo, and marine air stations in Iwakuni and Futenma. Under the air defense provided by the Self-Defense Forces, U.S. forces could focus on offensive strike operations against the Soviet Far East.

Japan's commitment to the U.S. global strategy however, did not result from political initiatives. It was a result of concerted efforts made by the officials and officers of the Japan Defense Agency, the Self-Defense Forces, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Finance. Japanese political leaders were largely left out of the process partly because of their lack of knowledge and interest in security matters. It was only when Yasuhiro Nakasone came into office in 1982 that the Japanese prime minister consciously endorsed his country's commitment to the global security strategy. U.S.-Japan strategic cooperation produced good results. According to James E. Auer, a retired U.S. Navy officer and a Japan specialist, no U.S. Navy operator would doubt the importance of U.S.-Japan cooperation in executing the Maritime Strategy. It was "unbelievable," he said, "We tracked every [Soviet] submarine [by the end of the Cold War]."<sup>6</sup> Former Soviet Navy leaders agreed. One of the retired former Soviet naval officers has admitted that the Soviets took the presence of allied navies such as

Japanese in U.S. exercises seriously. He even emphasized his respect for the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force.<sup>7</sup>

**Winkler:** Thanks to a U.S.-Japan agreement signed in August 1972 the United States was able to forward deploy an aircraft carrier in Japan starting with USS *Midway*. Having a forward-deployed aircraft carrier on station in the Far East saved the United States from having to operate three aircraft carriers. It was a significant cost saving for the United States due to the deployment cycle of aircraft carriers. Besides the *Midway* and successor carriers such as the *Ronald Reagan*, we have maintained minesweeping and amphibious ships at Sasebo, and a destroyer squadron and an aircraft carrier in Yokosuka for several decades. Currently, we have 20 warships home-ported forward deployed in Japan. This saves us from having to operate two additional command ships, six additional cruisers, eight additional amphibious ships, eight additional mine countermeasure ships, and a dozen additional destroyers to meet the forward presence mission. When I served on *Navasota* at Sasebo, Japan, I must say the responsiveness of the Japanese shipyard workers to our maintenance was impressive. Up in Yokosuka, they considered *Midway* as one of their own ships, and took great care of her. Even after *Midway*'s retirement, pushing 50 years, she was in incredibly good material condition. She now sits as a museum in San Diego—a tribute to the work of the shipyard workers in Japan.

**Swartz:** The Soviets paid attention to not only the possibility of a land war in Europe but also to maritime operations in the Pacific. They viewed the U.S.-Soviet confrontation as a global one, and knew that the Far East was an integral part of it. They saw their own Far East as part of their homeland and were concerned about the increasing closeness and improved competence of the U.S. Navy-Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force relationship.

USS *Midway* docked in San Diego, still in good shape



Source: meunierd (Shutterstock.com, 2015)

## COLD WAR CHALLENGES

### *Swing or Not to Swing?*

**Swartz:** Until the early 1970s, most U.S. operational carriers were in the Pacific, attacking North Vietnam and supporting South Vietnam. In the late 1970s, the Carter administration adopted a "Swing Strategy" that aimed at moving a number of these carriers from the Seventh Fleet in the Pacific to reinforce NATO in Europe. Officials in the Carter Administration thought carriers were taking away too many resources from the needs of ground forces in Central Europe. When the number of carriers was reduced and Soviet forces in the Pacific were strengthened, the "swing" strategy started to look awfully inappropriate. Moreover, if the United States were to swing its carriers from the Pacific to the Atlantic, it would take a month for them to get there. The Navy therefore opposed this strategy.

However, the Europeans liked the swing strategy and wanted it to remain. In order to satisfy European concerns, the Carter Administration decided to keep the swing strategy, at least on paper. Actually implementing the swing strategy

would upset Japan, and if it had been known by China, would not have made them happy either. Ultimately, we do not know whether the United States would have swung if there had been a global war with the Soviet Union. But plans were important. They affected how people thought, and that had real-world consequences.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Soviet Military Capabilities, Espionage, and Arms Control Offensive***

**Swartz:** Soviet strategy was to push U.S. and allied naval forces far away from its homeland, achieve sea control in adjacent waters, and execute sea denial against the United States and its allies even further out. Achieving these sea control and sea denial goals would, in fact, sever the vital sea lines of communications between the United States and its European and East Asian allies. What the Soviets saw as a prudent defense would have the effect of destroying the linkages within the western alliances that had been created to keep them at bay. A challenge to the Maritime Strategy was the fact that the Soviets had built up formidable forces of aircraft and had powerful land-based naval air arms. These air arms were optimized to look for, find, and kill U.S. and allied naval ships. The Soviets also had an enormous submarine fleet of attack submarines, and also possessed ballistic-missile submarines and new amphibious ships. The U.S. Navy believed it would be difficult—but not impossible—for the United States to combat the Soviets on strategic, operational, and tactical levels.<sup>9</sup>

Another issue was espionage. Spies within the U.S. government and U.S. Navy, such as the Walker brothers and those within the National Security Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency provided data to the Soviets on U.S. naval forces' intentions, plans, and capabilities. This inflicted significant damage as the Soviets knew about U.S. plans and capabilities, and were shocked to learn of their own vulnerabilities, which they sought to correct.

Soviet arms control diplomatic offensives were also a challenge. With the backdrop of the arms treaties during the Nixon and Ford administrations, the Soviets started a worldwide campaign to constrain the United States through naval arms control. For example, they proposed the creation of zones where no submarines or carriers could operate as well as the need to announce large exercises in the Norwegian Sea. Such tactics constrained the United States and its allies far more than the Soviets. Gorbachev undertook a major diplomatic offensive because he knew his country's economy could not support a military buildup, and that the Americans were now pushing back against the Soviets globally at sea.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Domestic Opposition***

**Swartz:** Some Americans both within and outside the U.S. Navy cast doubts on

the U.S. Navy's ability to execute the Maritime Strategy.<sup>11</sup> Some allied commentators thought so too. Some thought that the Soviet forces were too strong to defeat. The Navy, however, looked at many possible ways to execute the Maritime Strategy, including using concealment and deception. In fact, many U.S. Navy leaders thought that we could do it. Admirals James Lyons, Henry Mauz, Henry Mustin and others thought we could. Retired U.S. Navy Admiral Stansfield Turner wrote, "I never met an admiral who would do it," but that was simply not true. (He must not have met many serving U.S. admirals!)

Based on their models, some deterrence theorists like Barry Posen and John Mearsheimer criticized the Maritime Strategy for being de-stabilizing and escalatory. The Maritime Strategy, however, was based on intelligence on real Soviet intentions. We believed that having a capability to go after Soviet SSBNs was stabilizing and that it would enhance deterrence. The canard that the United States was "going at it alone" or that the U.S. Navy was not cooperating with other services was not true, either. The Maritime Strategy's assumption was to work closely with U.S. allies such as Norway or Japan. The U.S. Navy was working closely with the U.S. Air Force. It was happy to see B-52 bombers laying mines, providing satellites, refueling Navy aircraft, and otherwise cooperating.

That said, ultimately, the choice was in the hands of political leaders. The U.S. Navy was prepared to execute an anti-SSBN strategy and other forward offensive campaigns, but it would implement them only if political leaders so ordered.

### ***Protecting Carriers***

**Swartz:** Carrier protection was one of the most important issues for the U.S. Navy during the Cold War. The Soviet Union was prepared to use Tu-22M Backfire bombers to attack U.S. aircraft carriers. That is why the United States developed "Outer Air Battle" tactics in order to knock down the Backfire and Tu-95 Bear bombers. The Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) had mathematicians to inform the U.S. Navy of how best to counter Soviet use of bombers against the aircraft carriers.

The United States used deception to fool the Soviets. It made them think that a destroyer was a carrier when the carrier was somewhere else. When they found out, it would have been too late; our F-14 Tomcat fighters would have jumped at them. Watch the film "Top Gun."

The United States also had its own spy. Adolf Tolkachev, an engineer in a Soviet military design bureau, fed information to the CIA. It allowed the United States to find out how best to defeat Soviet aircraft radar and avionics systems.<sup>12</sup> Deterrence worked because the Soviets knew the United States could fight effectively. That was why the U.S. Navy thought and did what it did. It was a major contribution to global peace and security.

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**We believed that having a capability to go after Soviet SSBNs was stabilizing and that would enhance deterrence.**

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## Neutralization of Japan

**Swartz:** From the 1950s on, the U.S. Navy had a warm and healthy respect for the Japanese naval forces. The Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force was considered a very competent naval ally. During the Nakasone period in the 1980s, the United States and Japan would study, plan, game and exercise as equals, and the Maritime Self-Defense Force was often the first to obtain new equipment from the United States. Japan was a key player in the U.S. Maritime Strategy. Japan played such an important role that during the Global War Games at the U.S. Naval War College in Newport, the United States discussed scenarios on what would take place if Japan—or other allies—did or did not play their part in its Maritime Strategy. It examined the possible effects of a neutral Japan on the strategy, and deemed it harmful to U.S. strategic interests.

**Michishita:** The U.S. government clearly indicated its concern that Japan might be neutralized in war. For example, the *Soviet Military Power* published by the U.S. Department of Defense in 1989 stated that the Soviet military objectives in the Pacific included “protecting Soviet strategic strike capabilities, conducting strategic and theater-nuclear strikes when ordered, keeping the People’s Republic of China out of any war, and neutralizing Japan and South Korea by military or political means to prevent them from supporting the United States.”<sup>13</sup>

Several related scenarios were examined in the Global War Games conducted at the U.S. Naval War College in the 1970s and the 1980s. In the 1979 game, the Soviet Union offered incentives to France, Israel, Japan, Pakistan, and Algeria to remain neutral. In the 1980 game, the Soviet Union detonated three nuclear weapons east of Japan to intimidate the Japanese government into neutrality. In the 1984 game, the Soviet Union perceived that it would be impossible to keep Japan neutral just with diplomatic pressure and military threat, and launched a large-scale air attack on Japan.<sup>14</sup> The scenario in the three-year serial games conducted between 1985 and 1987 was more complicated and sophisticated. In these games, Japan went back and forth between the United States and the Soviet Union. During the first week of hostilities, the United States conducted air operations with units based in Japan against the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union protested that this was not in keeping with Japan’s professed neutrality, the Japanese government condemned U.S. actions and banned the future use of Japanese soil as a base for U.S. attacks on Soviet forces. But then, Japan decided to take two damaged U.S. aircraft carriers into the ports in Yokosuka and Osaka. Moscow regarded this as a serious violation of neutrality and attacked Japan. Then, the Japanese government finally made a decision to fully undertake alliance obligations and pledge to use its Self-Defense Forces to protect U.S. forces in Japan.

These were certainly hypothetical scenarios used for war games. Nevertheless, the repeated appearance of this theme clearly indicated the fact that U.S. planners took this issue seriously and examined how best to prevent Japan from getting neutralized and, if it did, how to fight the global war without Japan’s participation. In fact, it is hardly surprising that U.S. planners were concerned

about the neutralization of Japan. First, despite Japan’s acquisition of modern military equipment such as F-15 fighters, P-3C patrol aircraft, and indigenous SSM-1 surface-to-ship missiles, it was doubtful that the Self-Defense Force had real war-fighting capabilities. Shortage of ammunition supply seriously limited the execution of realistic live-fire exercises. Many of the Self-Defense Force’s air bases did not have aircraft shelters. There were no emergency laws defining the rights and privileges of Japanese citizens, or laws that regulated military operations conducted by the Self-Defense Forces in wartime. In 2003 and 2004, more than 10 years after the Cold War ended, the Japanese parliament enacted a set of legislation necessary for wartime operations.

## Preventing Crises: Positive Lessons from the Cold War

**Winkler:** In the 1960s, a Tu-16 Badger flying very low ahead of the USS *Essex* hit the sea surface and cartwheeled into the North Sea. The *Essex* quickly communicated the incident to Washington which contacted Moscow, saying that we did not shoot it down. Fortunately, this potentially dangerous incident did not result in inadvertent escalation. After this incident, the United States approached the Soviets about safety at sea talks. Since the Soviets had built an ocean-going fleet in the 1960s, they had to place relatively young, inexperienced officers in command of some very expensive hardware. In November 1970, a Soviet destroyer was sliced by the British carrier *Ark Royal*. The Soviets decided it was time to talk.

During the initial round of talks, a representative of the U.S. delegation related the story of the Badger as he served on *Essex* and had the grim task of returning the recovered body of a Soviet pilot. His Soviet counterpart knew the story well,

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### Draft U.S.-USSR INCSEA signing in Washington D.C. - May 1972



Image: John Warner

Source: David F. Winkler, “Breaking News: Incidents at Sea Did Not End with the Cold War!” *Canadian Naval Review*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2014), p. 16.



as the pilot had been his son. In May 1972, U.S. mining of Haiphong Harbor in North Vietnam trapped Soviet merchant ships. With this incident, the Soviets could have easily cancelled the planned Nixon-Brezhnev summit. However, after the Sino-U.S. rapprochement earlier that year, the Soviet Union sought to improve its relations with the United States. One of the deals that came out of that summit was the Incidents at Sea Agreement (INCSEA)—one of the positive lessons learned from the Cold War.

INCSEA served as a successful behavior modification regime and had a positive influence on the U.S.-Soviet relationship. It allowed U.S. and Soviet naval officers to effectively communicate their maneuver intentions at sea, talk to each other professionally at annual review sessions, and helped maintain civil relations between them despite confrontations at sea.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

### *Similarities and Differences*

**Swartz:** There are similarities between the Cold War period and hypothetical future naval conflict. The continental powers—the Soviet Union and China—seem to use their naval forces in the same defensive way to prevent the United States from reaching their coasts, and pose the same anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) challenges, extending their seaward defenses out farther and farther. The Soviets used Backfires then, and today, the Chinese are developing modern cruise missiles and anti-ship ballistic missiles.

Differences also exist. The U.S. Navy is much smaller today, though each ship is much more capable.<sup>15</sup> Contrastingly, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force is bigger and more powerful. Another big difference is the absence of European allies—Europe is not a significant military player in East Asia. The Soviet Union then was a global power, but the China we see today is a regional power.

**Michishita:** When the current strategic environment in the Western Pacific is compared with that of the Cold War era, there are both good news and bad news. During the Cold War, the Kuril Islands offered the Soviet Union a useful natural barrier separating the Western Pacific from the Sea of Okhotsk. Today, Japan controls the Southwestern or Ryukyu Island chain, and can use it as a natural defensive barrier. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was a sophisticated military superpower with the ability to wage a global nuclear war. China is growing but still inferior to the United States and Japan in terms of conventional capabilities and does not have strategic nuclear capability comparable to the Soviet Union.

There is bad news, however. While the only exits Soviet fleets had for advancing to the Western Pacific were the three straits of Soya, Tsugaru, and Tsushima, China's fleets have at least nine to eleven locations that could be used for the same purpose. Furthermore, China's economic performance is superior to the

Soviet Union. The Soviet economy collapsed as a result of the arms race that it locked itself into with the United States. The same might not happen between China on the one hand and the United States and Japan on the other. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Chinese defense spending grew by a remarkable 167 percent from 2005 to 2014. During the same period, the U.S. and Japanese defense spending decreased by 0.4 and 3.7 percent respectively.

Unlike in the Cold War when the Soviets physically controlled four southernmost islands in the Kuril Island chain which it had illegally occupied in 1945, Japan controls the Senkaku Islands today. This is certainly a good thing for Japan, but there is one downside to this: since Japan controls the islands, it has to defend them. China can keep challenging Japan's sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands by sending its ships and aircraft at the timing of its own choosing. As a result, Japan is forced to divert resources away from other similarly important defense needs and constantly maintain a certain level of forces near those islands.

### *Maritime Strategy and the Air-Sea Battle Concept*

**Swartz:** The Maritime Strategy and the Air-Sea Battle concept are two completely different things. The Maritime Strategy was a concept of how the United States would deal with the Soviets in peacetime, crises, and full-scale war, including nuclear war. Air-Sea Battle was a concept used in the Pentagon to rationalize Navy and Air Force programs so that they would not conflict and/or duplicate each other. Some people outside the government started to write about Air-Sea Battle as if it was a strategy. Others criticized the Air-Sea Battle for failing to be a strategy.

Air-Sea Battle has now grown and become integrated into a "Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons," with the Marine Corps and the Army added. But, it is nothing like the Maritime Strategy. There is no publicly designated enemy like the Soviet Union now. That said, the Maritime Strategy is still on the shelf. If we need it, we can use it. But the Sino-U.S. relationship today is simply not like the U.S.-Soviet relationship.

### *Carrier Protection*

**Swartz:** The U.S. Navy trains its men and women very well. They are extraordinarily good at damage control. If something hits their ships; they often can save them. For example, USS *Samuel B. Roberts* (FFG 58)—a guided missile frigate which operated in the Persian Gulf at the height of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988—hit an Iranian mine. But, the crew—brilliantly, professionally and bravely—acted to keep the ship afloat.<sup>16</sup> The U.S. Navy's construction policies and damage control policies make its ships enormously survivable.

Ships have self-protection. The Phalanx close-in weapon system is for defense against anti-ship missiles. Ships are protected by other ships and airplanes and by the Aegis air defense system. There are also other classified measures for protection. This offense-defense cycle is endless. There is nothing new in this,

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...as the Soviet navy grew, very young inexperienced officers started to operate new big ships, which created a precarious situation.

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and many sank.

If the United States and China were to fight tomorrow, U.S. carriers would definitely survive. If they do so 40 years from now, we do not know what will happen. But, the U.S. Navy will certainly try its best to make its ships as survivable as possible. Certainly, the U.S. Navy is not putting all its eggs in one basket. It is continuing to build powerful aircraft, missiles, surface ships and submarines, and it is increasing their number. Submarines have different kinds of vulnerability and are delicate in some ways, but they are extremely stealthy, with very long endurance, and therefore vital to winning a war at sea.

**Winkler:** Big-deck aircraft carriers are definitely important for the United States to maintain presence. However, as we have seen in recent years, small unmanned vehicles (UAVs) have been used more frequently to conduct strike operations. Having such capability taking off from smaller ships might do more to challenge the viability of maintaining big-deck aircraft carriers in the distant future than any potential threat from anti-ship ballistic missiles.

### Preventing Crises

**Winkler:** The Soviet Union turned its coastal navy into a blue-water navy; China is doing the same. In the 1960s, as the Soviet navy grew, very young inexperienced officers started to operate new big ships, which created a precarious situation. That was partly why the Russians proposed INCSEA talks with the United States. China is learning to deploy a blue-water fleet similar to the Soviets in the 1960s and 1970s. It was after the United States demonstrated force in the Taiwan Straits in the 1990s that the United States and China started to consider an INCSEA-like arrangement between them. However, a U.S.-PRC INCSEA at the time would have had negative connotations in that the accord would imply a confrontational relationship—something that neither side desired given the economic and social ties the two countries had—in contrast to the U.S.-Soviet relationship. Rather, they signed the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement in 1998, similar to but somewhat different from INCSEA. It required them to talk to each other but did not have specific signals or navy-to-navy provisions.

and the U.S. Navy continues to pay a great deal of attention to it. Moreover, as Michael Haas correctly pointed out, the argument that operating in future high-threat areas would involve “unprecedented levels of risk” for U.S. carrier strike groups is simply wrong. In fact, the ability of U.S. carrier strike groups to operate “with impunity” was a post-Cold War aberration.<sup>17</sup> Carriers have always been vulnerable. They are fighting ships. Carriers fought carriers

Then, in 2014, the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) that was developed at the annual Western Pacific Naval Symposium was formally recognized by the People’s Republic of China. The U.S. Navy has used signals defined by the CUES with the Chinese naval vessels at sea and they have worked. The Military Maritime Consultative Agreement, together with CUES, can be as effective as INCSEA was during the Cold War. Something to keep in mind is that even with the INCSEA accord, incidents continued at a far higher rate between the United States and the Soviet Union than anything we have seen over the past two decades between the United States and China.

The U.S. side did bad things, too. On one occasion, a U.S. helicopter flew dangerously close to the Soviet *Minsk* aircraft carrier. The United States admitted the pilot’s overzealous maneuvering was inappropriate at the next annual INCSEA review. The point is such hanky-panky was kept out of the eyes of the media which could blow such an incident into a crisis.

Let me give an example. During the Cold War, I was on an ammunition ship in the Mediterranean Sea, when a Soviet destroyer came alongside our ship and pointed a gun at us. It was a violation of the INCSEA agreement but I did not bother to report it because I knew this fellow knew we were carrying ammunition, and if he fired his gun, he would be taking himself out too! Now if the same happens today, somebody would take a smartphone photo and it would be immediately out in Facebook, then on CNN, possibly creating a crisis between Washington and Beijing.

On one hand proliferation of social media can prevent isolated irresponsible actions, but on the other hand encourage other deliberate actions aimed at demonstrating capabilities and/or intentions. Moreover, if somebody on the spot with a camera creates a news cycle headline before an incident is briefed up in the official channels in Washington DC or Beijing, the situation might become very difficult to manage.

**Michishita:** The Japanese general public seems to take security threat from China more seriously than the Soviet threat during the Cold War partly because of its visibility. Wider availability of visual information of China’s activities at sea and in the air near the Senkaku Islands makes it easy for the Japanese people to understand the threat that China is posing to Japanese territories. During the 2010 crisis over the Senkaku Islands, a Japan Coast Guard member leaked a video which captured the scenes of a Chinese fishing vessel ramming into Japan Coast Guard vessels near the Senkaku Islands despite the Japanese government’s de-

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cision not to publicize it. It helped alarm the Japanese citizens of the increasing Chinese presence and activities in the area.

## Freedom of Navigation Operations

**Winkler:** Freedom of navigation (FON) operations are conducted by U.S. forces in order to express U.S. intention not to accept excessive maritime claims and to preserve the rights, freedoms, and uses of the sea and airspace guaranteed to all nations in international law. There was a bumping incident in the Black Sea in February 1988. The U.S. Navy sent a cruiser and a destroyer to conduct FON operations in order to demonstrate that the United States had the right under international law due to the principle of innocent passage to cut through the Soviet territorial waters near a peninsula. The Soviets reacted by sending two ships to bump into the U.S. ships. After the incident, the Soviets agreed to recognize the right for U.S. ships to sail through the Soviet territorial waters. In return, the United States cancelled future FON operations there.

When a U.S. naval vessel conducted FON in the South China Sea near newly created outposts claimed by China that now also claimed the surrounding waters out to 12 miles as territorial, The United States, nor anyone else in the region, recognizes these claims. Unfortunately, when we sent a destroyer through these claimed waters, some of the U.S. government officials said that it was exercising the right of innocent passage as discussed in the aforementioned Black Sea. These officials misspoke.

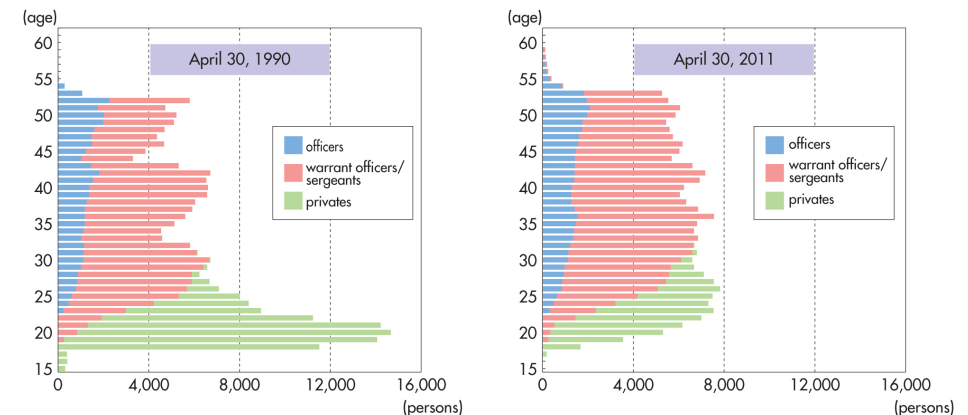
## Future Role of the U.S. Marine Corps

**Swartz:** The Marines are really good at amphibious operations including amphibious assaults, although they are not targeted against any one specific country, and are ready for crisis/incident response anywhere in the world. They are also

extremely agile. Marines are good at looking out and seeing some possible problems in the future and working to solve them. The Marines are capability based, and develop capabilities useful to solve many military problems. When operations work, they are happy. When they do not, they just cut them off. For instance, Marines have looked at gliders and parachuting operations. These operations did not work out for them, so they cancelled them. Marines have looked at riverine operations. They did not work out for their needs, so they stopped them. They created a chemical/biological response cell, and it worked well. They expanded it.

In Afghanistan and Iraq recently, the Marines operated like a second counter-in-

## The Rank and Age Structure of Self-Defense Force Personnel



Source: Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2012* (Tokyo: Erklaren, 2012), p. 348.

surgency land army, but they go back to more traditional amphibious and ready crisis-response mission areas when the work is done. Marines also have their own airpower integrated with their forces on the ground. They still exercise in the snow in winter in Norway, and maintain capabilities there. They do not assume one specific enemy, and that is what they will continue to do.<sup>18</sup>

## Japan: Similar Missions and Similar Challenges

**Michishita:** Japan's defense roles in future conflict in the Pacific will look very much like the ones during the Cold War. The Air Self-Defense Force will focus on air defense with new emphasis on cruise missile and ballistic missile defense. U.S. bases in Japan are becoming more vulnerable by the day with the continued North Korean and Chinese missile force buildup. Planned introduction of F-35 fighters will help ease the mounting pressure. Though limited in number, F-2 fighter-bombers can undertake strike operations against surface vessels.

The Maritime Self-Defense Force will continue to provide safe SLOC to U.S. carrier strike groups operating in the Western Pacific with its anti-submarine warfare capabilities—one of the best in the world. Moreover, it will now protect U.S. carrier strike groups from not only submerged threat but also anti-ship ballistic missiles. The sea-based upper-tier SM-3 Block IA interceptors will be upgraded to advanced SM-3 Block IIA in the years to come. The Ground Self-Defense Force might attempt to stop hostile surface vessels at the straits—much wider than the Soya and Tsugaru Straits—along the Southwestern or Ryukyu Island chain. It can deploy new Type-12 surface-to-ship missiles or its variant—currently under development—on the Southwestern Islands. With the expected range of over 150 kilometers, they can cover all of the straits in the island chain.

As the Self-Defense Force will execute similar defense missions, Japan will face similar challenges. As the Soviet Union sought to neutralize Japan in case of conflict, North Korea and China will do so, too. North Korea has deployed more



than 200 No Dong missiles capable of reaching Japan. With possibly miniaturized and usable nuclear devices at hand, North Korea can explode a nuclear bomb in Japan's vicinity in order to blackmail it into neutrality (i.e. not allowing the United States to use its bases in Japan) as the hypothetical Soviet Union did in the Global War Game in 1980. China might attempt to neutralize Japan by taking the population in Okinawa hostage, for example. Fear of entrapment remains strong in Japan. According to the public opinion poll conducted by the *Asahi Shimbun* last year, while only 32 percent of Japanese respondents thought that the new proactive security legislation enacted in 2015 would strengthen deterrence, 64 percent of them answered that it would make it more likely for Japan to get entrapped in foreign wars.<sup>19</sup> According to another poll, 70 percent of respondents disagreed with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's comment that Japan would not get drawn into wars by the United States even if the new security legislation was enacted.<sup>20</sup> Keeping the isolationist Japan committed to global security will remain a challenge.

Japan is also facing new challenges. During the Cold War, major challenges for Japan's Self-Defense Forces included the lack of aircraft shelters for its air bases as well as the absence of emergency laws regulating its military operations during wartime. While aircraft shelters were made available and emergency laws were enacted, a new problem emerged. In 1990, the Self-Defense Force's rank and age structure looked more or less like that of the U.S. and British armed forces. Since then, the number of enlisted men has dramatically shrunk while the number of non-commissioned officers increased, casting doubts on the Self-Defense Force's vitality as a combat force. Given the aging population in Japan, it will not be easy to reverse this trend.

One positive element in the political process in Japan which made it possible for the country to adopt a more proactive security policy was enhanced democratic accountability. Unlike the Cold War when Japanese politicians were not making real decisions, Prime Minister Abe clearly took initiative in bringing about the important change in Japan's security policy orientation. Moreover, the U.S.-Japan alliance remains strong, and the U.S. and Japanese armed forces operate much more closely together today than ever before.

### ***Importance of At-Sea Exercises and War Games***

**Swartz:** At-sea exercises and war games have been extremely important in developing, practicing and signaling U.S. strategy. In the 1920s and 1930s, both the United States and Japan used war games and exercises to develop their plans, including deception. Both of them became so good that in Japan's case, its fleet could reach Pearl Harbor without getting noticed. With war games, you can gain war-fighting insights without getting noticed by your potential adversaries. In the 1980s, the United States also conducted a massive series of global forward at-sea exercises and global war games. Many of these exercises included America's allies. The Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force participated with the U.S. Navy in ANNUALEX (annual exercises) at sea off Japan as well as biennial RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific) exercises off Hawaii and other smaller exercises.

When the United States and Maritime Self-Defense Force conducted exercises, the Soviets were watching them with intelligence-gathering ships, submarines, reconnaissance aircraft, and satellites, at sea and in the air. The United States did the same with the Soviet exercises. If the United States did something, the Soviets would know what kind of capabilities and plans that it had. Therefore, in exercises, neither side could do everything that it would actually do in war. In fact, there were Japanese intelligence ships and Norwegian intelligence ships, and the Norwegians were particularly good at this. In war games, we could test all different kind of things without revealing our capabilities and intentions.

At-sea exercises and war games will play the same important roles in the future.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was made possible by the generous support from the Sasakawa Peace Foundation in Tokyo. The authors would also like to express heartfelt gratitude to Shihoko Goto, Mary Ratliff, Joshua Spooner, and Channa Yu for their support. This study has also benefitted from the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (No. 23530184) of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

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