The U.S. Security Role in East Asia-- Not An Outdated Milestone, But A Cornerstone of America's Future

By

Richard L. Armitage
Assistant Secretary of Defense
(International Security Affairs)

[The following is a reprint of an address presented by Assistant Secretary Armitage before the National Defense University Pacific Symposium on "Patterns of Cooperation and Pacific Basin Security," at Ft. McNair, Washington DC on February 25, 1988.]

I feel very much at home here at the Pacific Symposium, not only because so many friends are here, but because I know that this is one audience which truly understands what the United States is about in its extensive East Asia security policies and defense relationships.

That is not empty flattery. Many people--important people, some of whom work not far from Fort McNair, just up the road on Capitol Hill--harbor serious misconceptions about what we do in East Asia, why we do it, and how it affects our national interest. The public is being told some misleading things about our security role in Asia which, if not corrected, could erode the foundation of the most successful regional policy the United States has today.

I have chosen the National Defense University, and this symposium, as a decidedly sympathetic audience to challenge and rebut this stream of negative thinking before it becomes accepted wisdom in this town. So, those of you who didn't get your coffee before we began this morning, fear not: I'll do my best to get your blood pumping.

Most of you will have heard of, or read, the new book by Yale historian Paul Kennedy entitled *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. A survey of the past five hundred years, it examines the states or coalitions of states which rose to economic greatness, how their economic power translated into political power and military strength, why they went to war, why the winners won and why the losers lost, and the consequences of their national policies--from the Ottomans to the Hapsburgs, to Napoleon, the British Empire, Hitler and the Axis powers, and to the United States in the post-war era.

What sets Professor Kennedy's book apart from other such histories is the pattern he claims to exist between the great power's economic position in the world and its prospects for maintaining its premier position of power against all challengers. His thesis is that states initially become great in the marketplace--by producing goods far more efficiently that anyone else. Success leads a state to look outward in search of bigger profits, which means acquiring territories or sailing to the far reaches of the globe to secure new resources and establish new markets.

He notes that economic power begets military power. A great power with economic tentacles reaching far and wide inevitably feels threatened as other producers catch up with, or even surpass it. At some point, Professor Kennedy says, great powers suffer a condition he calls "imperial overstretch," when they see their economic supremacy fading and fear new powers encroaching on their extensive networks of resources and markets. According to Kennedy, time and again the result has been a costly military buildup leading to war.

He contends that the victor in great power wars has consistently been the side with the bigger manufacturing base, more skilled workers, and more raw materials--in other words, the side with the most staying power. At times, the real long-term winner has been a bystander state, undamaged by conflict and unencumbered by excessive strategic commitment, with the emerging technology and resources necessary to surge ahead of the exhausted combatants and become the next great power and renew the cycle.

Professor Kennedy's lesson from history? For a great power to remain great, it must keep reinvesting in its manufacturing base, always looking ahead to the next generation of technology; *and* at the same time, it should resist the temptation to spend scarce national funds to hang on to far-flung military roles and missions that may have outlived their economic utility in a changing world.

It is a provocative thesis. Professor Kennedy has covered an enormous span of history and drawn some intriguing patterns and parallels connecting the dominant powers. His emphasis on the economic dimension is important, and his analysis of history's major military conflicts is worthy of one who served as a research assistant to Sir Basil Lindell Hart. [Editor's note. Sir Basil (Henry) Lindell Hart, 1895-1970, was a noted English military authority and writer whose works include: *The Decisive Wars of History* (1929); *The Future of Infantry* (1933); *A History of the World War* (1934); *Europe in Arms* (1937); *The Defence of Britain* (1939); *Dynamic Defence* (1940), *The Current of War* (1941); *The Strategy of Indirect Approach* (1941); and *This Expanding War* (1942).]

But Paul Kennedy has gone a step further in his book, beyond history into the realm of political prescriptions, by applying his view of the past to the present and the future. He sees the United States today clinging to a network of military alliances formed at the end of the Second World War, when American supremacy in the international economy was at its peak. He warns that other powers are catching up, growing faster by spending less on defense and more on technologies that may push them past the United States in the years ahead. Professor Kennedy's analysis suggests that we are making the wrong investments as a nation, choosing "guns" when we really need more "butter."

For example, in East Asia, he sees the United States borrowing Japan's money to pay for an elaborate and obsolete defense posture that allows Japan and its neighbors to get richer still by investing in advanced manufacturing techniques which, in turn, are driving American producers out of business. Kennedy suggests that American's continued underwriting of a decades-old defense posture, as in East Asia, is accelerating our fall from preeminence and subsidizing the rise of others, including Japan, China, and the newly-industrialized countries such as Korea.

This is a frightening message to many American, one that, unfortunately, has caught the attention of influential people, in Congress and elsewhere, who are eager to shrug off much of the security burden the U.S. has borne around the world for so many years. I think it's the wrong message to be sending to the American people, our allies, and our adversaries. Indeed, I question whether Professor Kennedy's historical theory is relevant to the modern world. The era of Imperial Wars which he describes so well appears to have *ended* in 1945, when nuclear deterrence imposed a truce on the prospect of all-out conventional war between the strongest powers.

The United States which assumed such a leading international role after World War II was a powerful and great country--a superpower. It was not, however, a "great power" in the Paul Kennedy sense. Where Napoleon, Queen Victoria, Nicholas I, and Hitler each mobilized an ethnic nation to seize the territories and exploit the resources of weaker peoples, the U.S. did no such thing. We could have conquered Japan and West Germany, and shackled them politically and economically, as the Russian elite running the Soviet Union did with the areas they occupied.

Instead, we helped put Japan and Germany on their feet, and left them to govern themselves--and yes, to prosper. Today, we worry about how best to compete with them economically; but whom among us would trade these challenges for the ominous problems the Soviets now face with their unproductive and increasingly resentful satellites? *There* is an overstretched empire that may fit Professor Kennedy's model.

Why is the United States so different? There are many reasons. We are not English, or French, or German, or Russian: we are *all* these, and more. People around the world see a little of their own blood in the American lineage, and this is a great source of our strength and legitimacy. When the American people declared their independence from the British crown, we chose to govern no one but ourselves; and we have forsaken the role of hegemonic power when the chance arose. Just ask the people of Japan, the Philippines, the Pacific Trust Territories, and Grenada.

Moreover, our Constitution prevents power from being concentrated in one place, limits the term of the president, and regularly subjects legislators to the electorate. This is the biggest difference of all. I doubt you will ever see the long-term grand strategy that Paul Kennedy says we need; nor will the bureaucratic infighting and political paralysis he laments ever subside in Washington. What you *will* see, however, is a country which can adapt to change and challenge better than any great power in history.

This is why I reject the current wave of pessimism about America's future. And this is why I feel compelled to speak out as forcefully as I can before misguided ideas lead to destructive actions. Paul Kennedy is *wrong* about the Untied States, and so are the people who have seized upon his great power theory as a rallying cry to bash our allies and roll back our overseas defense posture in the mistaken belief that this will make America more competitive and increase America's wealth and influence.

Time does not permit me to challenge the critics point-by-point around the world, explaining why we must sustain our force posture in Europe post-INF, our successful naval escort policy in the vitally-important Persian Gulf, and our efforts to support democratic governments and peoples in Central America.

However, the Pacific Basin offers perhaps the best example of how the Kennedy thesis is contributing to a profound misreading of American interests abroad. Secretary [of Defense] Carlucci recently received a letter from a member of Congress which said the following: "A growing number of the American people feel abused by our allies. They feel that we spend a much greater portion of our wealth on the common defense; that we have too large a number of soldiers stationed on their territory; and that the allies use the money they save on defense to subsidize their trade, creating our enormous trade deficit."

The author [of the above cited letter] is addressing the topical issue of *burdensharing*, and undoubtedly has Japan in mind, among others. So let me address this criticism head-on, defending our posture in Asia and the Pacific commitment-by-commitment, beginning with Japan, which is at the center of the firestorm.

The United States and Japan are two dynamic democracies with the two largest national economies in the history of the world. Cooperating together, the U.S. and Japan economically dwarf the communist world, and militarily give great pause to the Soviet Union. Given the dynamism and competitiveness of our economies, trade frictions between America and Japan are not surprising. What is not logical, and is increasingly worrisome, is criticism of the U.S.-Japan defense relationship, which is more favorable to us than it has ever been before.

The critics talk about fairness when they raise the subject of burdensharing. Their simplistic arguments sound reasonable. It is well known that Japan spends only a fraction over one percent

of its gross national product for defense, while the United States spends about six percent. Japan could obviously afford to spend more. But let's review the facts before drawing the wrong conclusions.

In 1980, the Carter Administration strongly and publicly criticized Japan's defense spending. In January 1981, the Reagan Administration stated emphatically that it would not criticize its allies in public, and would discuss defense frankly in private, based upon *roles and missions* rather than static indicators such as budgetary real growth or the ratio of defense spending to GNP [Gross National Product]. For its part, in 1981 the United States pledged that in the Northwest Pacific it would provide a nuclear umbrella, offensive projection of forces as necessary, and a continued presence in the Republic of Korea. In the Southwest Pacific and Indian Oceans, the United States said it would maintain the nuclear umbrella, projection forces as necessary, and sea-lane protection forces.

Within two months, the Japanese replied that they could, within the limits of their Constitution, defend their own territory, air and sea-lanes to a distance of 1000 miles. The Administration *and Congress* supported Japan's statement of its roles and encouraged Japanese leaders to achieve the requisite level of capability within this decade. From 1983 to 1985, Prime Minister Nakasone obtained five percent annual real growth in defense spending while holding all other Japanese Ministries to *negative* real growth. He fought for and won approval of a defense plan for 1986 to 1990 designed to achieve the defense goals established in 1981. Japan has continued to support annual defense spending increases of over five percent, breaking the psychologically sensitive barrier of one percent of GNP in 1987 for the first time in twenty years. Japan's 1988 defense budget, the first under Prime Minister Takeshita, is on the verge of surpassing the British, French, and German levels, which will make it the world's third largest.

What is truly important, though, is capability. Japan lies immediately due east of the key Soviet naval port of Vladivostok, and sits astride naval and air approaches to Taiwan and the Korean peninsula as well. Japan's self-defense missions, which are being fulfilled in the 1986 to 1990 defense program, deny Soviet ships and aircraft undetected access to the Pacific and even the Indian Ocean, when Soviet forces come from the Vladivostok area.

To deal with a formidable Soviet presence in the Far East, the Japanese have more than fifty Destroyers in the Maritime Self-Defense Force--more than twice as many as we do in the Seventh Fleet, which covers all of the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans. By 1990, the Japanese total on-hand or on-order will increase to sixty Destroyers, including two with the "AEGIS" air defense system. In the case of anti-submarine aircraft, we have about twenty-three P-3Cs in the Seventh Fleet; the Japanese will deploy one hundred at their bases located in proximity to Vladivostok. The Japanese Air Self-Defense Force has one hundred F-4 "Phantoms," and will have approximately two hundred F-15 "Eagles" by 1990--three hundred is about the number of tactical aircraft we have *defending the continental United States*. In the 1990s, they will begin deploying over one hundred F-16s enhanced with advanced Japanese avionics and other improvements, the technology from which they will share with us if we so desire.

Thus, Japan will meet its basic defense goals by 1990, as promised. In its defense plan for 1991 to 1995, Japan will likely obtain a more comprehensive capability by acquiring an over-the-horizon radar system, long-range early-warning aircraft, and tanker aircraft. These systems will make undetected Soviet aircraft or shipping access to the Pacific or to Japanese territory across the Sea of Japan severely complicated, if not impossible. Japan's projected capability, complemented by U.S. strategic and enhanced conventional weapons capability, presents a very favorable scenario for Pacific deterrence.

My question, then, is this: what more do the critics want Japan to do? Both the Senate and the House voted overwhelmingly in 1987 that Japan should spend three percent of its GNP on

defense, despite the fact that all of the capability I have just described can be had for less than two percent. What would the additional funds be used for? A nuclear capability? Offensive projection forces? Professor Kennedy speaks of Japanese carrier task forces and long-range missiles--is that what Congress wants? Will that enhance stability in East Asia?

The critics are unclear, and at times, contradictory. While demanding that Japan buy advanced U.S. defensive systems so that it can relieve us of military roles in the area, they warn that Japan will steal our technologies for other uses. Bashing a key friend and ally in this manner is, to say the least, not an edifying spectacle, viewed from either Washington to Tokyo.

Some of the new apostles of burdensharing say that if Japan won't take over roles and missions from U.S. forces in East Asia, they should pay for the American presence. The fact is, they *are* carrying an impressive share of the burden. In fiscal year 1988, Japan will spend 2.5 billion dollars in support of the fifty-five thousand U.S. military personnel stationed in Japan. That amounts to forty-five thousand dollars per person--*the most generous host nation support the United States enjoys anywhere in the world.*

Let me make it very clear that the Administration believes Japan can and should do more in defense, in order to achieve its full capability to defend the 1000-mile radius as soon as possible. But Japan knows that as well as the U.S. does, and is increasingly taking the initiative in these important efforts.

The fact is that a positive, well-reasoned, and supportive U.S. approach to Japan on defense issues since 1981 has produced excellent results. If the optimal defense posture for Japan amounts to a relative small drain on its wealth, then why not encourage Japan to increase its foreign economic assistance, as the Administration and Senators Nunn (D-GA) and McCain (D-AZ) have done? Greater united and strategically targeted Japanese aid programs will have an immensely beneficial impact on regional and global stability without causing political friction between our two great countries. Rather than snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, let's encourage Japan to continue steady progress in its defense effort and to build upon its strategic economic aid effort. Let us appreciate the positive benefits of Japan's defense efforts, and stop the uninformed, illogical, and damaging criticism.

With all due respect for Mr. Kennedy, one thing should be clear from this discussion: The U.S.-Japan defense relationship is not an outmoded vestige of the postwar ear, but a dynamic, symbiotic, up-to-date effort that contributes greatly to the continued security of both countries. I emphasize this because the same can be said for the rest of our defense posture in the Pacific region. Let's turn to the second-most-misunderstood pillar of our security role in ASIA: Korea.

American forces, along with other member states of the United Nations, rushed to the aid of South Korea in 1950, and have never left. Thirty-eight years later, the Republic of Korea (ROK) has developed into a rising star in the international marketplace. It is running a trade surplus with the United States. That leads some American to conclude that it's time for the 40,000 American forces to come home from Korea. To those people, I say: open your eyes.

Today, as I stand here before this group, the South Korean people are inaugurating Roh Tae Woo as their President--the first democratically-elected leader in seventeen years. Ask yourself whether this would be happening if a previous Administration had carried through its intention to reduce America's deterrent on the Korean peninsula. Instead of being intimidated and possibly attacked by North Korea--one of the most militarized, despotic, and terroristic regimes in the world today--the ROK is prospering as a free country.

Korea's remarkable progress as a nation has earned it international prestige. This summer, the Olympic Games will take place in Seoul. Instead of destabilizing the region by pulling our

forces out of Korea, the U.S. continues to make an important difference. This summer, the United States will do everything it can to assure a *successful* and *peaceful* Olympics, *free of North Korean interference*, in cooperation with our allies on the peninsula.

That's the kind of role we are playing in Korea today--a role model, a friend and a partner--and no one should doubt that it is a necessary role and a successful role. The ROK should take care that its host nation support represents a fair share of the burden; and we welcome progress in this area. But loose talk about abrogating our defense role in Korea is irresponsible and potentially harmful, and does not represent the view of the U.S. Government.

The logistic gateway supporting our defense posture in East Asia is, of course, the Philippines, where were we have the use of Philippine air and naval bases. U.S. access to facilities at Subic Bay and Clark Air Base provides a security umbrella for the Western Pacific, and a necessary counter to the major Soviet presence across the South China Sea at Cam Rahn Bay. Furthermore, the American presence provides an external defense guarantee for the Philippines which enables the Philippine Government to focus its energies and resources on internal development.

The United States has an important historic and cultural stake in the Philippines. Filipino Americans account for the largest group of Asian Americans in the United States. In the last two years, we have witnessed a democratic transformation in the Philippines that has touched the hearts of all Americans. Since Corazon Aquino became President, the Filipino people have adopted a constitution, empowered a legislature, and elected local officials. By any measure, we should be impressed. All this has been achieved despite a major communist insurgency which preys upon social and economic problems that are the product of years of mismanagement and neglect under the previous regime. We strongly support the Philippine Government's efforts to prevent the communists from undoing the great strides made so far.

In 1988, the Philippines and the United States will review the agreement that provides for our access to the facilities and Subic and Clark. Voices on both sides may say things which do not help the process. I hope that political figures in both countries will keep in mind the security interests of the Philippines and the entire Pacific region when they talk about the American presence. They should ask themselves whether the recent dramatic turn to democracy, and the future economic growth necessary to sustain it, would be possible without the continued security cooperation between the U.S. and the Philippines. As with the other key elements of our defense posture in the Pacific region, the status quo---whatever its problems and shortcoming--looks a whole lot better than any alternative, to *both* the U.S. and the Philippines.

The same can be said for our alliance with Thailand, which has stood for thirty-four years. The 1954 Manila Pact and the 1962 Rusk-Thanat Bilateral Communique have been reaffirmed by every U.S. President since John Kennedy. Our close and cooperative defense relations with Thailand continue to deter external aggression against Thailand--a country that has never been dominated by a neighboring people in over 600 years. With well over 100,000 Vietnamese troops occupying Cambodia and, from time to time, threatening Thailand's border with Cambodia, the U.S.-Thailand alliance relationship is anything but obsolete. It remains a source of strength to a free people holding their own against a communist Indochina dominated by the militaristic and hegemonic government in Hanoi.

We have stood by our Thai friends in the face of the oppressive occupation of Cambodia by Vietnam and the threat this poses to Thailand. We were also the first to speak out in support of Thailand during the recent fighting on the border with Laos. No one should underestimate the benefit both countries derive from our continued alliance relationship. Our staying power as Thailand's ally offers the best hope that Vietnam will abide by its pledge to remove its forces from Cambodia in 1990, and that the political and economic miracle of ASEAN [Association of

Southeast Asian Nations] can begin to be shared by the war-ravaged and destitute peoples of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

The United States maintains important defense ties with the countries of Southeast Asia. This strengthens our overall relationship with countries that are exploring more democratic and open forms of government. It also enhances our security as the armed forces of Asia modernize with American equipment in ways which are compatible with our own forces. Through joint training and exercises, officer exchanges, military education programs, and arms transfers, we are participating in the development of professional armed forces, military establishments that share our respect for human rights and the people's will, and understand that security against external aggression is a key to internal development and prosperity.

The trilateral ANZUS [Australia, New Zealand, United States] Treaty has, since the early 1950s, contributed greatly to regional security in the Pacific. The unfortunate implementation of New Zealand's anti-nuclear ship policy prevented normal alliance cooperation and left the U.S. with no acceptable alternative but to suspend our security obligations to New Zealand under ANZUS. Nevertheless, the ANZUS Treaty continues to provide the framework for bilateral security cooperation between the United States and Australia. Both countries have reaffirmed that their mutual rights and obligations under the treaty remain in place and will provide the basis for a resumption of trilateral security cooperation should that become feasible.

A key element in the overall U.S. role in Asia, today and for years to come, is our evolving defense relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC). At a steady pace consistent with American and Chinese interests, and which takes into consideration the sensitivities of others in the region, we are working with China to help modernize its armed forces. This a significant facet of our overall relation with the PRC. It reflects not only China's obvious historical importance to the region, which will only become greater in future decades, but also a recognition that China is coming out of a terribly destructive period in its history and is moving toward a much more constructive and beneficial role. I might also point out that China has paid for all the assistance and equipment we have provided to date.

Along with China and other friendly states in the area, the United States shares a strategic interest in deterring Soviet ambitions in Asia. The buildup of Soviet forces in Asia and the Pacific is universally looked upon with great caution. Now, however, there is a new look to Soviet foreign policy, a less menacing face promoting *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* at home and pledging peace and cooperation abroad. The United States supports any genuine steps to increase stability, such as removing the occupations of Cambodia and Afghanistan, and recognizes that the Soviets are an Asian power with interests of their own to pursue.

This is no time to lower our guard, however. What is required on our part, no less than ever before, is sophistication and vigilance that goes beyond maintaining our military deterrent. Congress must learn that whenever it produces a piece of restrictive trade legislation that threatens to disrupt the small Asian economies, like clockwork, smooth-talking Soviet trade delegations swoop right into those countries with concessional trade terms and a host of enticing bilateral initiatives. The only "protectionism" we should be practicing is to *protect* our long-term relationships abroad.

It is no secret that Asia is the region to watch in the years ahead, as China becomes a modern power, Japan continues its remarkable economic progress, and others ascend the ladder of political and economic development. India, the world's largest democracy, can play a role in fostering stability and progress in South Asia. How the Soviet Union chooses to read the lessons of recent history will be a major factor in this process. Indeed, the USSR is the one contemporary power that would be well-advised to take a hard look at Paul Kennedy's book.

The United States has a central role to play in Asia and the Pacific Region, as a security partner and economic partner, but also as a trusted friend and mediator between these many peoples and societies reaching for the brass ring of progress. Soviet military power casts a dark shadow over the Pacific, as do the repressive and backward regimes of North Korea and Vietnam, and the communist insurgents in the Philippines. The United States needs a stable Pacific region and we believe our Pacific partners need us. As the second millennium draws to a close and "the Pacific Century" dawns, America's defense role in the region will be *not* a millstone, but a *cornerstone* of our own future as an economic superpower.

And as we wrestle with budgetary and trade problems, let us remember one immutable fact: The outbreak of democratic governance and market economies around the world is a flourishing garden that *we* planted, and that *we* have nourished and guarded against the elements for many, many years. After all the challenges and setbacks we have braved in defense of freedom from totalitarian domination, success is coming to pass, at long last--particularly in Asia and the Pacific. The United States will not have a free ride into the next century, but when you recognize the consequences of *not* paying the price of deterrence, and recall the terrible cost to us when non-democratic forces have triumphed in Asia, these new challenges to American's greatness don't look so bad at all. We should be very relieved that our skills are bring tested in the workplace and marketplace, not on the battle field, and that differences can be worked out peacefully and intelligently with our partners in Asia.

There is every reason for excitement in the United States as we look forward to the twenty-first century. For economic, political, social and geographic reasons, the U.S. will play a major role in Asia and the Pacific. For strategic reasons, *we must.*

I predict that a generation or two from now, a future Paul Kennedy will look back on this period, and this region, and these relationships; and he will recognize that the United States tried something new that kept it at the forefront of influence and innovation among nations: in place of the power of coercion, we used the power of persuasion; where others exploited and dominated less-developed societies, we helped them, encouraged them, protected them when necessary, and respected their decisions about their own destiny.

He will remark that not only did the United States beat the odds stacked against the great powers: we changed the rules of the game.