

STRATEGIC ASIA 2010–11

ASIA'S RISING POWER *and America's Continued Purpose*

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Security and the Global Commons

Asia's Security and the Contested Global Commons

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter examines the importance of the global commons to the Asia-Pacific region and U.S. interests, and analyzes the implications of the emergence of new Asian powers in the global commons.

MAIN ARGUMENT:

Asia's rise and America's geopolitical preeminence have been dependent on the physical openness of the global commons—the seas, air, space, and cyberspace—which has been sustained by U.S. military dominance since the end of World War II. Yet the emergence of new Asian military powers is creating pivotal states—states with a significant degree of influence over the security of the commons. The emergence of these pivotal states is simultaneously driving both cooperation and competition throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Shared interest in the openness and stability of the global commons will compel like-minded states to cooperate in security operations and diplomatic initiatives. Yet uncertainty about China's rise, combined with distrust over the region's many simmering territorial disputes, will also drive the region's new powers to compete militarily with one another.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS:

- Given the rise of pivotal Asian states, Washington's ability to build a regional consensus on sustaining the openness and security of the global commons will largely determine if regional security is to be defined by cooperation or competition.
- If Washington fails to respond to the fundamental challenges posed by adversarial capabilities within the global commons, U.S. access to the Asia-Pacific during times of conflict will be in doubt. The presence of the U.S. in the region, and regional confidence in its will and ability to act, will be central to the maintenance of peace and stability.

Security and the Global Commons

Asia's Security and the Contested Global Commons

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The rise of Asia has been enabled by the region's ability to access and utilize the global commons. Since the end of World War II, and especially since the end of the Cold War, the openness and security of the global commons has been sustained by U.S. military dominance. Yet the Asia-Pacific's emerging economic powers are beginning to translate their newfound prosperity into military power, with profound implications both for regional stability and for military balances within the global commons. This chapter will explore these implications and suggest a way for the United States to preserve the security of the global commons and the stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

The global commons are an essential, though often overlooked, component of today's globalized international system. Free trade agreements and liberal exchange arrangements would be largely useless without the ability to freely access and utilize the world's common spaces for commercial, informational, and personal interactions. Open commons allow large container ships to connect manufacturers to customers all over the world, like-minded individuals to share information and ideas, and global militaries to coordinate movements over vast distances. These capabilities did not happen by accident; rather, they are the result of decades of effort by governments and private corporations to build a "system of systems" allowing for global commerce. These systems exist within and between the global commons: the seas, air, space, and cyberspace.

The U.S. military's ability to utilize the global commons is similarly fundamental to its global dominance. Geography made the United States

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a natural sea power, and the successful exploitation of air and space, along with U.S. technological prowess, made the United States a power in the air, space, and cyber commons as well. The commons, in turn, serve as a key enabler of the U.S. military and its ability to project power globally. U.S. armed forces demonstrated their conventional military dominance in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the 1994 air war over Yugoslavia, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The utilization of satellites and advanced communications technologies empowered the U.S. military to operate with overwhelming speed, coordination, efficiency, and destructiveness. For example, as former secretary of the Air Force Michael Wynne explained, “in World War II, it took 1,500 B-17s dropping 9,000 bombs to destroy a given target. Today, one B-2 can strike and destroy 80 different targets on a single mission using weapons guided by space-based USAF global positioning system signals.”¹ Today, the world’s largest corporate intranet is operated by the U.S. Navy.²

The open and stable commons previously guaranteed by U.S. military dominance have been a tremendous benefit to Asia’s rising powers. Instead of the competition that defined previous ages in the region, U.S. military dominance allowed states to peacefully compete economically and politically.

The rise of Asia’s economic powers has gradually enabled the emergence of new Asian military powers, some of whom will become pivotal states—states with a significant degree of influence over the security of a commons. The emergence of these pivotal states within the global commons will simultaneously drive two countervailing trends: cooperation and competition. Shared interest in the openness and stability of the global commons will compel like-minded states to cooperate in security operations and diplomatic initiatives. Yet uncertainty about China’s rise, combined with distrust over the region’s many simmering territorial disputes, will drive the region’s new powers to compete militarily with one another.

Pivotal states wielding newfound military capabilities within the global commons will signal the end of long-standing U.S. dominance of the global commons in the Asia-Pacific. The status quo, in which the United States ensures the stability of the global commons and other states enjoy a free ride, is unsustainable. This chapter will advocate that the United States adopt a proactive strategy to lead a cooperative effort among like-minded states to

¹ Michael Wynne, “Space: The Ultimate High Ground Creating Strategic and Tactical Conditions for Victory,” *High Frontier* 3, no. 4 (August 2007): 4.

² Carrol Chandler, “Contested Commons: The Future of American Power in a Multipolar World” (presentation at the Center for a New American Security, Washington, D.C., January 26, 2010), available at <http://www.cnas.org/node/3864>.

preserve the openness of the global commons. At the same time, the United States must adjust its regional basing structure to account for emerging challenges within the commons. Sustaining a credible U.S. military presence in the region will not only ensure U.S. access during a time of conflict; it will also maintain the country's long-standing role as a maritime balancer and preserver of regional stability.

The chapter will begin with a discussion of Asia's economic expansion and the importance of the global commons in enabling that rise. The next section will then describe how the military investments of Asia's new powers will fundamentally change military balances within the global commons, followed by discussions of the implications of this phenomenon for the Asia-Pacific and the United States. The chapter will conclude by offering policy recommendations for the United States to adjust to these new realities.

Asia's Rise and the Global Commons

Ongoing shifts in geopolitical power from West to East have made the Asia-Pacific region increasingly important to U.S. interests. The region's rise over the past 30 years has been nothing short of miraculous and will define the dynamics of the emerging multipolar world. The region is already an engine of the global economy, accounting for 33% of the world economy in 2007 (compared to 21% and 23% for the United States and Western Europe, respectively). Asian countries are also becoming global political and military actors, playing decisive roles in issues such as climate change, nonproliferation, and counter-piracy. This rise has led several adroit strategic observers to opine that the 21st century will be Asian, just as the 20th century was supposedly American and the 19th century was British.³

Economic data and trends at the beginning of this young century support the hypothesis of a rising Asia. Asia-Pacific economies⁴ generated 24% of global GDP in 1992, which rose to 33% in 2007 and is projected by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to account for almost 37% of

³ See, for example, Jeffrey Sachs, "Welcome to the Asian Century," *Fortune*, January 12, 2004, http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/2004/01/12/357912/index.htm; Doug Bandow, "The Asian Century," *National Interest*, February 17, 2009, <http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=20844>; and H.D.S. Greenway, "An Asian Century," *New York Times*, January 29, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/29/opinion/29iht-edgreenway.1.9574945.html>.

⁴ In this case, the Asia-Pacific economies are defined as a combination of developing Asian states (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Kiribati, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Vietnam), newly industrialized states (Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan Province of China), and developed states (Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand). Definitions derived from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Economic Outlook Database, October 2009.