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## Commentaries and Replies

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## Commentaries and Replies

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### On “Regionally Aligned Forces: Business *Not* as Usual”

Richard H. Sinnreich

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*This commentary is in response to the article, “Regionally Aligned Forces: Business Not as Usual” by Kimberly Field, James Learmont, and Jason Charland published in the Autumn 2013 issue of Parameters (vol. 43, no. 2).*

The authors of “Regionally Aligned Forces: Business *Not* as Usual” offer a comprehensive and forceful defense of the Army’s regional alignment concept, and much of what they write is both enlightening and persuasive.

Notwithstanding the familiar conceit of each successive generation of leaders that what they are proposing is A Really New Thing, there is nothing revolutionary about regionally aligned forces. On the contrary, for many who served during the Cold War, especially NCOs, and who spent a good part of their careers bouncing back and forth repeatedly between East Coast installations and Germany or West Coast installations and Korea, regional alignment was a fact of Army life.

But there is no question that both the scale of the effort described in the article and the manner in which the Army proposes to conduct it differ materially from that earlier experience. The biggest changes are in the diversity of the locations to which soldiers will deploy and the increments in which they will do so.

Thus, in contrast with the individual deployment practices of the Cold War and the more recent brigade-based rotations sustaining operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the RAF concept visualizes deployments of less than battalion or even company strength, more or less on the model of special forces teams. Indeed, the authors note, “While it is desirable to maintain habitual alignment at brigade combat team level, the realities of current defense missions make this aspirational rather than practicable,” adding, “Already in the first year of regionally aligned forces execution, the Army has realized numerous efficiencies by being able to identify when to send squads rather than platoons.”

There’s nothing intrinsically wrong with that, and it certainly limits budget costs. Moreover, putting aside marketing rhetoric and the absurd notion that spending a month or two in Mali, say, is going to make its visitors Africa specialists, there is much to be said for exposing soldiers to geography in which they might conceivably have to operate one day and to foreign forces with whom they might find themselves allied (or to whom, in the worst case, they might find themselves opposed). In addition, giving small unit leaders a periodic taste of operational independence certainly has merit.

The costs that really should concern us, however, are not RAF’s budgetary costs. They are its opportunity costs. The further the Army’s

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force structure shrinks—and right now, it looks as though we’ll be lucky to preserve the 490,000 previously budgeted—the more difficult it will be to satisfy all claimants for incremental commitments while sustaining even a modicum of combat readiness. Anyone who ever has commanded at battalion or brigade knows how difficult it is to achieve both materiel and training readiness in the face of routine local support decrements. Committing soldiers and junior leaders in penny-packets to repeated overseas deployments will only compound the difficulty.

The authors recognize the problem. “Meeting combatant commanders’ specific day-to-day needs potentially requires a lower level of collective training than do major combat operations,” they note, “yet those same forces must be ready for the toughest fight, particularly as the total number available for that fight decreases.”

For that reason, their all-too-correct lament that, “Balancing readiness for the most likely and most dangerous courses of action has never been more difficult” rings just a bit hollow. Whatever else it does or doesn’t do, the RAF concept as described will only make that challenge more difficult.

## The Authors Reply

Kimberly Field, James Learmont, and Jason Charland

**C**OL (ret) Rick Sinnreich put his finger on the central issue of implementing Regionally Aligned Forces. He writes that in a less-than-490K force, Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF) makes it more difficult to “. . . satisfy all claimants for incremental commitments while sustaining even a modicum of combat readiness.” RAF is largely driven and embraced by former battalion and brigade commanders, but the dialogue about this point continues, centered around sufficiency—sufficiency in achieving readiness levels to conduct major combat operations and sufficiency in sustaining active relevance as an all-volunteer service.

It is worth reemphasizing that Regionally Aligned Forces include those forces aligned for high intensity major combat operations and crisis response, and not simply security cooperation activities. Forces are aligned based on all needs of Combatant Commanders (and these needs exceed both the capacity and capabilities of Special Operations Forces and the Marines).

Readiness has, and will continue to be, a topic of concern to Army senior leadership. Indeed, RAF is predicated on the necessity for decisive action training (combined arms maneuver and wide area security) as the critical baseline in underpinning the Army’s ability to operate across the full spectrum of operations. Still, we ask, how much readiness is enough to meet the requirements of major combat operations requiring brigade level action, and also for the dispersed activity so in demand by Ground Component Commands? How much do these requirements reinforce each other? What specifically is the time required to move a sufficient number of units required for the most demanding operations plan, from

company through battalion to brigade collective training? What is the end strength threshold at which we do indeed have to protect almost the entire force for brigade level action? Most importantly, how do we better understand readiness in terms of risk, resourcing, and reporting given current and expected requirements? We need to plan the building of readiness that will, with minimal risk, include missions undertaken by regionally aligned forces. We write that RAF will be fully implemented by 2017. Getting well-tested answers to these questions is part of the reason why the full implementation will take time.

We assert that only by training in joint and coalition environments, in those areas of the world in which we will fight, will the force be able to adapt rapidly enough for future operations we cannot even envision—and certainly not from Fort Hood. As we stated previously, we see RAF as phase one of implementing the concept of Strategic Landpower. RAF are scouts, the Joint Force's best hope for being able to develop *decisive* outcomes in future fights. COL Sinnreich is right; RAF is not primarily about language and cultural expertise.

Finally, a 490K force is not the Total Army. The Reserve Component contributes another 520K. From the example of a single National Training Center rotation, we know that it takes about 90 days of hard training to turn a National Guard Brigade Combat Team into a unit equally capable as an active duty brigade. How fast can we add them to the fight—three every 90 days? More?

In any event, as the Chief of Staff has said, we do not currently have the service dollars to conduct the collective training we desire; better our units are using other dollars to make the gains we outlined in the article and again here.

## On “Strategic Landpower in the Indo-Asia-Pacific”

Jeong Lee

*This commentary is in response to the article, “Strategic Landpower in the Indo-Asia-Pacific” by John R. Deni published in the Autumn 2013 issue of Parameters (vol. 43, no. 3).*

In his *Parameters* article entitled “Strategic Landpower in the Indo-Asia-Pacific,” Professor John R. Deni attempts to make the case that the United States Army “has significant strategic roles to play in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region” which cannot be met alone by the United States Air Force and the Navy.<sup>1</sup> Among these roles, Deni avers that the Army can provide ballistic missile defense (BMD) in addition to the Army’s traditional role of providing defense and deterrence and Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities for South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan.<sup>2</sup> Most importantly, Deni believes that in the Pacific theater, the Army can foster “allied interoperability” and bolster the strength of “less-capable partner militaries” better than its Navy and Air Force counterparts, because the US Army can “speak ‘Army’” to its allies.<sup>3</sup>

The implication is clear. In the sequestration era, the Army needs to justify its relevance in pursuit of America’s geopolitical strategy in the Asia-Pacific. Although I agree to an extent with Deni’s proposal for the Army’s participation in what he refers to as “security and cooperation activities,” the premises underlying his argument may be flawed for several reasons.

First, by arguing that many allies view the United States’ presence positively because it “helps establish capabilities that support the rule of law, promotes security and stability domestically,” Deni assumes that America still can and must retain the mantle of global leadership even though its image abroad has weakened considerably.<sup>4</sup> According to the latest survey by the Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project, while the United States retained its favorable image over China at 63 percent, many countries are nevertheless perplexed by America’s unilateral actions on the world stage.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, security cooperation activities involving America’s Asian allies may potentially anger the Chinese in the same manner that the Air-Sea Battle (ASB) concept has led, and could lead to, greater tensions with China.<sup>6</sup>

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1 John R. Deni “Strategic Landpower in the Indo-Asia-Pacific,” *Parameters* 43, no. 3 (Autumn 2013): 77.

2 *Ibid.*, 78-9.

3 *Ibid.*, 82.

4 *Ibid.*

5 “America’s Global Image Remains More Positive than China’s But Many See China Becoming World’s Leading Power,” *Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project*, July 18, 2013, <http://www.pew-global.org/2013/07/18/americas-global-image-remains-more-positive-than-chinas>

6 Amitai Etzioni “Air-Sea Battle: A Dangerous Way to Deal with China,” *The Diplomat*, September 3, 2013 <http://thediplomat.com/2013/09/03/air-sea-battle-a-dangerous-way-to-deal-with-china/>

Second, by advocating that the Army also undertake an active role in BMD to “assure” our allies in the Pacific of our commitment as well as to “deter [potential] aggressors,” Deni deliberately overlooks the fact that the Air Force and the Navy are already performing missile defense and, for this reason, undertaking such missions would prove redundant.<sup>7</sup>

This leads to the third point. Deni’s argument that the Army is better suited for fostering “allied interoperability” because it “can speak Army” trivializes the fact other services have proven equally adept at or outmatched the Army in fostering interoperability among our Asian allies.<sup>8</sup> One example is that of the annual Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercises hosted by the Pacific Fleet.

Fourth, he correctly argues that “confidence- and security-building measures will be critical” to reverse Chinese perception that it is being encircled by America’s “pivot” to Asia; however, such activities are not without risk, especially given China’s growing cyber capabilities.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as Larry M. Wortzel, the president of Asia Strategies and Risks, testified before Congress in July, China “is using its advanced cyber capabilities to conduct large-scale cyber espionage [against the United States].”<sup>10</sup>

For the Army to adapt better to fluid strategic dynamics in the Asia Pacific, it should speak jointness (rather than “Army”) because sharing ideas and resources with other services and Asian allies guarantees efficient warfighting. One such example is the creation of the Strategic Landpower Task Force composed of the Army, the Marine Corps, and the Special Operations Command (SOCOM).<sup>11</sup>

Because recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have proven that the line between state actors and nonstate actors has blurred, the Army should selectively target and neutralize threats as they arise. To that end, the Army could expand its Special Operations Forces (SOF). Applied within the context of its Asia-Pacific strategy, the Army should, in tandem with the Navy and the Marine Corps, operate from remote staging areas “to project power in areas in which our access and freedom to operate are challenged” without constraints.<sup>12</sup> Surgical SOF strikes may ensure that the scope of America’s involvement in the Asia Pacific will remain limited without escalating.

Lastly, the Army must also do what it can to defend the homeland from cyberattacks emanating from China. However, as retired Admiral James Stavridis argues, “Cyber threats cannot be dealt with in isolation;

7 Deni, 80.

8 Ibid., 81.

9 Ibid., 84.

10 Larry M. Wortzel, *Cyber Espionage and the Theft of U.S. Intellectual Property and Technology*, Testimony Before the House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, July 9, 2013, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/IF/IF02/20130709/101104/HRG-113-IF02-Wstate-WortzelL-20130709-U1.pdf>

11 Raymond T. Odierno, James F. Amos, and William H. McRaven, *Strategic Landpower: Winning the Clash of Wills*, Strategic Landpower Task Force, Washington, DC 2013, <http://www.ansa.org/news/2013/Documents/Strategic%20Landpower%20White%20Paper%20May%202013.pdf>

12 *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, Washington, DC: Department of Defense, January 2012, 4, [http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense\\_Strategic\\_Guidance.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf)

combating them requires full cooperation of the private sector [and other federal agencies].”<sup>13</sup>

The Army has a critical role to play in the Asia Pacific. But in the sequestration era where a leaner and smarter military must offer a wide range of options for the nation, the Army cannot just “speak Army” to stay relevant. Instead, it must speak jointness to become truly effective

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13 James Stavridis “The Dark Side of Globalization,” *The Washington Post*, May 31, 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-terrorists-can-exploit-globalization/2013/05/31/a91b8f64-c93a-11e2-9245-773c0123c027\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-terrorists-can-exploit-globalization/2013/05/31/a91b8f64-c93a-11e2-9245-773c0123c027_story.html)

## On "Strategic Landpower in the Indo-Asia-Pacific"

James D. Perry

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*This commentary is in response to the article, "Strategic Landpower in the Indo-Asia-Pacific" by John R. Deni published in the Autumn 2013 issue of Parameters (vol. 43, no. 3).*

In "Strategic Landpower in the Indo-Asia-Pacific," John R. Deni argued quite correctly that the Army has a significant strategic role to play in this region beyond deterring war on the Korean Peninsula. He noted the Army must prepare to conduct disaster relief operations, engage in security cooperation activities, address transnational security challenges, and build relationships with foreign militaries. Furthermore, he stated the Army may have to engage in confidence-building measures with China akin to those conducted with Russia in connection with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, and other agreements.

Deni contended that the above "strategic missions" would be jeopardized if Army end strength were significantly cut. Unfortunately, he did not make a convincing analytical case, as he did not even try to assess the current demands that such missions place on the Army. I believe these demands are not large, and am rather skeptical that these missions can justify sustaining a high number of Army personnel or any specific number of Army brigades or divisions.

The number of soldiers currently doing "security cooperation" missions does not appear large if Afghanistan is excluded. Disaster relief in any given year might require a few hundred to a thousand personnel per disaster. Moreover, disaster relief often employs airlift and sea-based assets, but rarely involves large ground forces. Indeed, the insertion of ground forces during disaster relief is often regarded as counterproductive for many reasons. The number of Army Foreign Area Officers is barely more than a thousand; how many more do we really need in order to "speak Army" to foreign militaries? Another important "military to military" program, the Military Personnel Exchange Program, stations under 500 US troops with foreign militaries. The number of military personnel assigned to the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) for on-site inspections and treaty compliance is approximately one thousand. The DTRA would not need a great many more to monitor any agreements concluded with China. Thus, the Army would be on shaky ground attempting to justify a large force structure on the basis of any of the above missions.

The various elements of the US foreign military training program undoubtedly foster good relationships with foreign militaries and provide the United States with access and influence in foreign countries. Nonetheless, these programs do not provide a convincing justification

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for a large Army end strength. The Air Force, Navy, and Defense agencies conduct many of these programs, and many others take place in Army training and educational facilities that will exist even if the Army shrinks significantly. For example, foreign students will still be able to attend the Army War College when end strength falls to 490,000. Finally, the dollar value of foreign military training programs is a small fraction of the Defense Department budget, which suggests that these programs cannot support an argument for keeping the Army budget particularly high.

As for large-scale advisory efforts, in 2007 Dr. John Nagl recommended creating a permanent Army Advisor Corps of 20,000 personnel for this purpose. Even such a considerable force would be less than five percent of an Army of 490,000, and would not necessarily preclude further reductions in end strength (although perhaps at the expense of traditional combat forces). More importantly, Congress and the public are unlikely, after twelve years in Afghanistan, to accept the argument that we must maintain a large Army so that we can do yet another long, exhausting advisory effort sometime in the future.

In sum, Deni made a good case that strategic landpower can advance the nation's interests in the "Indo-Asia-Pacific" region. He did not prove, however, that the nation could not realize the advantages of strategic landpower with a smaller Army. If the Army can conduct security cooperation missions effectively with a smaller end strength, then that is a win for the nation as a whole.

## The Author Replies

John R. Deni

James D. Perry is certainly correct that my article does not include a detailed, worldwide troops-to-task analysis for the US Army. However, such a detailed analysis seems unnecessary to justify one of my central contentions that Perry appears to disagree with—specifically, that the Army's ability to perform its strategic role in the Indo-Asia-Pacific theater, as well as its missions elsewhere around the world, faces greater risk if the Army is forced via unconstrained sequestration to cut personnel precipitously. The very recent history of the Army's experience in Iraq and Afghanistan seems to have proved this point, when the necessity of generating enough combat units forced DOD to remove US Army units from their deterrence and assurance missions in South Korea, cancel or downsize countless security cooperation events around the world, and even dip into the so-called "seed corn" by deploying training units based at the National Training Center in California and the Joint Multinational Training Center in Germany. Looking ahead, Dr. Perry may believe it will be easier for a dramatically smaller Army to meet the needs of the all combatant commanders around the world for security cooperation, assurance, deterrence, disaster response, cyber defense, homeland defense, ballistic missile defense, counterterrorism, and the

myriad other operations and missions the Army is responsible for, but that would appear to fly in the face of recent events.<sup>14</sup>

The global troops-to-task analysis that Dr. Perry is after is really outside the scope of a 4,000-word essay. His own brief effort to tally up the numbers was certainly not comprehensive, and hence not compelling as a basis for judging whether the active duty Army should be 490K strong or 300K strong, and what level of risk would accompany any chosen end strength. Indeed, a full scope troops-to-tasks analysis is the kind of thing the entire Department of Defense is currently engaged in as part of the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) report. That report should, among other things, outline the major missions or broad objectives the Department will use to size and structure the force. Although the QDR report is months from publication at the time of this writing, one thing that seems very clear is that if sequestration remains, the active-duty Army is likely to drop below 490,000 personnel and 33 brigade combat teams (BCTs), perhaps to about 420,000.<sup>15</sup> Outside experts agree that sequestration will likely cause a major cut in active duty Army forces and consequently in the number of active duty BCTs.<sup>16</sup> Obviously, and according to these same experts, this will make it more difficult for the Army to perform its many missions. Just *how* difficult—and how much risk is associated with a smaller, less capable forces—remains to be seen, but the fact remains that a smaller military necessarily increases risk. Currently, it appears the country may be quite willing to tolerate a great deal of risk, at least in the short run, when it comes to its land forces. If so, the Army will be a less effective strategic tool in achieving US objectives not simply in the Indo-Asia-Pacific but around the world.

Meanwhile, Jeong Lee's critique is interesting, although not terribly compelling. At the heart of his commentary lies the mistaken view that I argue the Army is "better" at building interoperability than its sister services. In fact, I recognized in the article that, "air and naval exercises can build allied interoperability" as well, and I used the shorthand "speak Army" to encompass interoperability in the tactics, techniques, and procedures of *land forces*, vice those of air or naval forces. The issue is not whether the Air Force or the Navy can build interoperability with allied or partner military forces, or even whether they do it "better" (his word, not mine). Instead, the issue is whether those sister services can do so in the specific skill sets of the US Army. The answer to that question is most clearly *no*, just as the Army clearly cannot build interoperability in tactical fixed wing operations, mid-air refueling, or search-and-rescue missions at sea.

This distinction matters because land forces dominate the military structures of most Indo-Asia-Pacific countries. If the United States

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14 Moreover, for a case—ballistic missile defense—in which the Army cannot meet today's combatant commander need even at active duty levels of well over 500K personnel, see Steven Whitmore and John R. Deni, *NATO Missile Defense and the European Phased Adaptive Approach: The Implications of Burden-Sharing and the Underappreciated Role of the U.S. Army* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2013), [www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1172](http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1172)

15 Lance M. Bacon, "Chief, Congress and DoD hammer out Army's future manning levels," *The Army Times*, October 7, 2013, [www.armytimes.com/article/20131007/NEWS/310070003](http://www.armytimes.com/article/20131007/NEWS/310070003).

16 "Comparison of Team Choices," briefing delivered on May 29, 2013 at the Center for Budgetary and Strategic Assessments, [www.csbaonline.org/publications/2013/05/strategic-choices-exercise-outbrief/](http://www.csbaonline.org/publications/2013/05/strategic-choices-exercise-outbrief/).

proves unable or unwilling to engage those dominant bureaucracies and organizations within allied and partner defense establishments, it will undoubtedly be choosing to go down a less effective, less efficient path to fulfill its goals across the region.

Lee also contends that because the United States Air Force and United States Navy are performing air and ballistic missile defense operations in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, Army efforts in this sphere are or will be redundant. Unfortunately, this view reflects a misunderstanding of the basic roles and missions of the United States military. Per US law, the Army is broadly responsible for defense from the land, so air and missile defense of assets or potential targets on land—the kind of thing the road-mobile Patriot system or the road-mobile Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system were built for—are Army missions. If Lee finds the Army’s fulfillment of these missions in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region problematic, he must assume there are no targets on land that need defending from ballistic missile threats, or his argument is really with Title 10 of the US Code, not my article.

Finally, Lee implies that my proposal for the Army to tap into its strong record of implementing confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) to ameliorate the Chinese security dilemma is naive for not recognizing the risk of Chinese espionage occurring during CSBM activities. In fact, I made this exact point in my article. Certainly Chinese espionage, including through cyberspace, is a risk that must be carefully managed when it comes to CSBM implementation, but as I went on to argue, if the Chinese use CSBM activities to collect intelligence on the United States military, so what? At least in part, that is the very point of CSBMs. The same occurred during the Cold War and its aftermath between US and Soviet/Russian arms control inspectors, observers, and specialists—each side “collected” on the other during exercise observer missions, authorized overflights, and intrusive on-site inspections. The anecdote I relayed in the article—in which Chinese military officials were literally incredulous when shown data on the paltry array of U.S. forward-based military forces and bi- and multilateral security agreements in the Indo-Asia-Pacific theater today relative to that arrayed against the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War—underscores the notion that greater transparency with China is necessary to avoid any Sino-American conflict borne of misunderstanding.

In sum, Lee is certainly correct that the US Army needs to maintain and build on the jointness it shares with its sister services, particularly in an era of austerity. By the same token, US policymakers need to take advantage of *all* the tools at their disposal in pursuing American interests in the Indo-Asia-Pacific theater, not simply the ones that fit neatly into preexisting paradigms.

## On “Imbalance in the Taiwan Strait”

David Lai

*This commentary is in response to the article, “Imbalance in the Taiwan Strait” by Dennis V. Hickey published in the Autumn 2013 issue of Parameters (vol. 43, no. 2).*

This is a timely discussion of US arms sales to Taiwan. The author has done a great job drawing attention to the evolving security situation across the Taiwan Strait and placing the debates in the US policy and analyst circles about America’s options on this thorny issue in perspective.

While well presented, this article would have been better had the author been more straightforward on Option 1 and included recommendations for Chinese policymakers regarding predicaments with the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 (TRA) and US arms sales to Taiwan. With respect to this option, the author should have stated that though it is worthwhile to call for the United States to terminate arms sales to Taiwan, there is practically no chance of this happening as long as the Taiwan issue remains unresolved.

As for recommendations, the author could have pointed out that the main driver for US arms sales to Taiwan comes not from the alleged American ill intent and economic interests, as many Chinese analysts have long charged, but from Taiwan’s need for security. The reason is as simple as Business 101: if Taiwan wants more weapons, the United States is obliged to sell, although not unconditionally; if Taiwan does not want more arms, the United States cannot force Taiwan to buy. The fact is that the Taiwan government, whether under the administration of the pro-independence party (the Democratic Progressive Party) or the pro-eventual unification one (the Kuomintang or Nationalist Party), has repeatedly asked for more arms from the United States.

Nations seek arms when they are concerned with the specter of war; they lay down arms when peace is secured. China should see that the solution to the issue of US arms sales to Taiwan lies in cross-Taiwan Strait relations. China should have a better chance to affect the arms sale business with its efforts on cross-Taiwan Strait relations. Demanding the United States to abandon this business is like putting the cart before the horse—the efforts are not going anywhere. China’s insistence on terminating US arms sales to Taiwan as one of the three preconditions for improving United States-China military-to-military relationship is a prime example (the other two preconditions are stopping US military reconnaissance operations in the Chinese-claimed maritime exclusive economic zones and removing US restrictions on military exchange and technology transfers to China). The setbacks following each US authorization of arms sales to Taiwan (i.e., Chinese suspension of military-to-military contacts with the United States) have been counterproductive and dangerous at a time when the two nations have a high “trust deficit” regarding each other’s strategic intent, and a low

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understanding of each other's operational rules of engagement. It is time to make adjustments.

## The Author Replies

Dennis V. Hickey

A number of interesting points are raised in this commentary; however, I disagree with others. Let me explain.

First, with respect to Option 1 (terminating arms sales to Taiwan), Dr. Lai suggests that I should have noted there is “practically no chance of this happening.” But some do not share this opinion. In fact, in 2011, Representative Ros-Lehtinen (R.-Florida) claimed she had organized Congressional hearings in the US House of Representatives because “some politicians” had begun to pressure the Obama administration to “abandon” Taiwan. Let's remember that many Americans were stunned by President Richard Nixon's announcement in 1971 that he would journey to China to meet Chairman Mao Zedong. Millions were also surprised when the Reagan administration announced on August 17, 1982, that the United States would reduce its arms sales to Taiwan and eventually terminate arms transfers. Such episodes help remind us that anything is possible in international politics.

Second, Lai appears to quarrel with the assertion that economic considerations may serve as a “driver” for US arms sales to Taiwan. He should carefully review the wording of those studies supporting arms sales and the petitions submitted to President Obama. In fact, when commenting on the sale of new warplanes to Taiwan, the September/October 2011 edition of *The Taiwan Communiqué*, a publication financed by Taiwan separatists based in America, contends that it is “the economic argument that will be the main reason why Congress will attempt to override the decision and force the administration to go ahead with the [F-16] sale.”

Third, Lai claims that both major political parties in Taiwan always support US arms sales. This is incorrect. During the 1990s, the DPP opposed massive arms purchases (party documents described them as a waste of money). The DPP only changed its position after capturing the presidency in 2000. Not surprisingly, the KMT then did a complete reversal and opposed such purchases. This explains why a massive arms sales package offered by the Bush administration in 2001 was not purchased by Taiwan. Domestic politics always plays a big role in Taiwan's arms purchases.

Finally, Lai suggests that “the solution to the issue of US arms sales to Taiwan lies in cross-strait relations.” He is correct. In an article entitled “Wake Up to Reality: Taiwan, the Chinese Mainland and Peace Across the Taiwan Strait,” (*The Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Volume 18, No. 1, Spring 2013, pages 1-20), I argued that “it will be difficult for the two sides to sustain the momentum in cross-strait relations unless Beijing—and to some extent Taipei—begin to recalibrate their relationship in a more pragmatic way and adopt some new thinking on the

concepts of sovereignty and the political status of the ROC. In short, they need to figure out a way to acknowledge the fact that both the ROC and PRC exist.” To be sure, it is time for Beijing to “wake up to reality.”

## On “US Options in Syria”

Nathan K. Finney

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*This commentary is in response to the article “US Options in Syria” by David S. Sorenson published in the Autumn 2013 issue of Parameters (vol. 43, no. 3).*

In a time when interservice rivalries seem to be only growing (see the Autumn issue’s Commentaries and Replies between Major General Charles Dunlap and Dr. Conrad Crane, for instance), I was pleased to read the thoughtful and balanced article by the Air War College’s Professor David Sorenson, “US Options in Syria.” His realistic and knowledgeable approach to the region and its largest internal conflict was refreshing.

Professor Sorenson’s analysis and description in this article reflects well on the war colleges. He begins by detailing American interests in Syria and the region, including ending the civil war, reducing the Shi’a-Sunni divide, addressing WMD issues, and containing the adverse effects of the civil war on allies in the region. While these are all admirable interests, Sorenson does not discuss whether these interests are vital, important, or only peripheral. He does state that our interests in the region are important and Syria is a pivotal country, but he does not elaborate. Additionally, Sorenson states that, “It is also in America’s interest to terminate major internal wars in the region if it has the means and ability to do so, and at an acceptable cost.” Why is this the case? I would argue (and did in a recent article in the *Infinity Journal* on Syria) that our interests in Syria are peripheral at best and that it is not always in our interest to meddle in internal wars, whether they are in the Middle East or other less strategically important areas like Africa.

After describing American interests in Syria, Sorenson discusses US options developed to date by our national security apparatus, most clearly articulated in the memo by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dempsey to Senator Carl Levin. These options are the anticipated ways available to the United States, including everything from training the opposition in Syria to establishing a no-fly zone and punitive strikes by stand-off weaponry.

Using these options as a framework, Sorenson describes end-state conditions that could be achieved in both winding down the civil war and preventing its violence affecting neighboring countries. His analysis is a great elaboration on the obstacles that face the development of options to address Syria. In ending the civil war, Sorenson recognizes many truths, to include the fact that the Assad regime is fighting an unlimited war for its own survival, while the United States is fighting a limited war to achieve the best outcome in a bad situation. He also recognizes the view that American support is not designed to bring the conflict to a conclusion, but rather to prolong the fighting to exhaust all parties. Why is this a bad approach? As strategist Edward Luttwak stated

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in *The New York Times* in August, “There is only one outcome that the United States can possibly favor: an indefinite draw.”

Discussing the obstacles to contain violence to prevent affecting neighboring countries, Sorenson approves of a containment of Syria, recognizing the differences between the Cold War era containment, which was focused on keeping the USSR (and to some extent China) out, while containment for Syria would require keeping the actors in. This aim would typically call for sealing Syria’s borders, threatening the regime by air, assassinating regime officials, or inflicting damage to regime supporters. Sorenson admirably acknowledges that this kind of coercion by punishment would be too costly and difficult—largely given the asymmetric value of a peaceful solution, and providing Assad little incentive to give up power.

This brings Sorenson to his solution: containment of the violence in Syria through the support of neighboring countries. His ideal approach would be to support neighbor militaries, share info, maintain air and naval forces proximate to Syria, and threaten Assad for any moves outside of Syria. A part of this approach would be to stop the flow of weapons to both sides of the conflict. Even if it were feasible, stopping the flow of weapons to Syria removes one of the few points of leverage we have in the region. In order to create a balance between the belligerents, our support, or lack thereof, can help ensure each party is balanced, ultimately exhausting all parties—from Assad to Iran, or Hezbollah to Sunni extremists. This was the core argument made by Luttwak in *The New York Times* op-ed referenced earlier.

Finally, while Sorenson postulates that our best approach is through the support of neighboring states, he barely addresses one of our most potent military capabilities—security force assistance. He does mention military assistance to Lebanon, but does not address what we should do to ensure the ability of Turkey, Jordan, Israel, and Iraq to contain Syria. Granted, most of these nations already have security assistance programs with the United States and possess some capacity to secure their borders, but this is an aspect I think could have used more elaboration.

Overall, I was very impressed with “US Options in Syria.” Sorenson’s realistic approach to an intractable problem was reinforced with expert analysis. Despite a few disagreements on the value of our interest in the region and ways to achieve them, I agree that “Containment is in the interests of all countries bordering Syria, and the White House must stress and build on that point in its own policy.” This policy should be focused on containing instability and violence from leaving Syria through support to its neighboring states. On this, the author and I are in violent agreement.



