

THE END OF THE AMERICAN WAY OF WAR & THE PATH FOR THE UNITED STATES TO RECLAIM  
INFLUENCE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

by  
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# Abstract

In the past two decades the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has developed and implemented a strategy to nullify the United States' military influence in the Indo-Pacific region. By establishing a network of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) systems in the South China Sea, China has effectively neutralized the United States' most powerful and technologically-laden platforms. In doing so, they have degraded America's ability to project power in the air and at sea. As a result, the credibility of American conventional deterrence is in question in the region. The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps have designed a means of countering China's active defense in the South China Sea—Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO). However, the efficacy of EABO as a deterrent is closely linked to security cooperation relationships with partner nations throughout the Indo-Pacific. This study begins by examining the nature of the threat in the South China Sea, its effect on current U.S. strategy, and outlines the requirements to facilitate EABO. It then proceeds to evaluate the state of U.S. security cooperation relationships of eight critical countries in the region, which are necessary to effectively utilize EABO as means of deterrence against Chinese aggression in the South China Sea. The results of the study suggest that while the United States has varying degrees of security cooperation relationships, the vast majority fall short of what is necessary to implement EABO as a deterrent. The study concludes with policy suggestions and strategic considerations for the future.

**Keywords:** *Conventional deterrence, Anti Access/Area Denial, Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations*

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this research study to my wife Kara, for her enduring love, confidence, and support and to my three children: Adley, Darren, and Arya—their tenacity and enthusiasm for life is a boundless source of inspiration.

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## Introduction

In 1991 the world watched the United States military dominate Saddam Hussein's forces during the Gulf War. In its prosecution of that war, the United States incorporated all branches of its military along with coalition forces in the execution of joint operations. Advanced aircraft evaded detection from Iraqi radars and delivered precision-guided munitions that rapidly dismantled the Iraqi command and control network. The United States' air superiority allowed it to simultaneously strike targets across the battlefield, which effectively neutralized the Iraqi military's ability to exercise command and control of their forces. With the Iraqi military left in disarray, the United States ground forces easily defeated the remaining pockets of resistance.<sup>1</sup> The United States seemingly effortless take down of the Iraqi military, led regimes across the globe to question the efficacy of their own military organizations, equipment, and strategies—especially the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). China began to invest in, as well as use economic espionage, to develop technology that could offset the United States' asymmetrical advantage. Through the deliberate examination and analysis of the Gulf War, the Chinese realized that the United States' use of technologically advanced platforms provided it a distinct advantage on the battlefield.<sup>2</sup> To counter this advantage, China developed an “active defense” strategy facilitated by the militarization of the South China Sea. The CCP built a network of Anti-Access Area Denial (A2/AD) systems across the South China Sea, which could potentially render conventional U.S. military strategy obsolete.

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<sup>1</sup> Sloan, Elinor C. *Modern Military Strategy: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Fravel, M. Taylor. *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020: 187.



China's networked militarization of the South China Sea has rendered America's conventional deterrence strategies obsolete, and emergent strategies, will require increased U.S. engagement and improved relations with critical nations in the Indo-Pacific. To reclaim its ability to maneuver and deter Chinese aggression, the United States Navy and Marine Corps have introduced a new strategic means of countering China's "active defense" network in the South China Sea— Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO). These services maintain that EABO can be used as a means of deterrence or to dismantle China's A2/AD threat system in a conflict. In order to effectively counter China's network and provide an effective means of deterrence, the United States must have the ability to occupy key terrain throughout the Indo-Pacific Area of Responsibility (AOR). The more the United States can disperse and position its forces throughout the AOR, the greater the deterrent effect will be. Thus, the efficacy of EABO as a means of deterring Chinese aggression requires close multilateral security cooperation throughout the Indo-Pacific region. This study seeks to answer the question: are U.S. security cooperation relationships with Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan, Singapore and Indonesia sufficient to allow an effective implementation of EABO as a means of deterrence?

Prior to examining the state of U.S. security cooperation relationships throughout the Indo-Pacific region to determine if EABO can be executed as a deterrence, it is necessary to first discuss the nature of the threat that EABO was designed to counter. Furthermore, it is also necessary to discuss why the United States platform-centric strategy has lost its long-standing capacity to deter its strategic competitor, China. The following section will detail the key components of conventional deterrence and illustrate how China's militarization of the South China Sea has rendered the United States' platform-centric conventional deterrence strategy null

and void. It will then provide a brief overview of what EABO is, its critical components, and how it can be used to counter China's A2/AD network in the South China Sea.

## **Background**

### **Platform-Centric Warfare**

The United States has constructed its military around expensive platforms equipped with advanced sensors and weaponry that have given it a decisive military edge after World War II. For instance, the U.S. Navy is synonymous with aircraft carriers, amphibious assault ships, and submarines. The U.S. Air Force has dominated the skies with fighter jets, bombers, and more recently unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The U.S. Army conducts rapid maneuver and fire support with tanks, mobile artillery, and personnel carrying vehicles. The U.S. Marine Corps has provided rapid mobilization and forcible entry from the sea using amphibious assault vehicles as surface connectors and has its own supporting air power—fighter jets, air assault and attack helicopters, and troop transport planes. These platforms are equipped with advanced battlefield sensors used to rapidly identify and prosecute targets with great precision. Throughout the Cold War the United States further improved its military system with the integration of Command, Control, Communications, and Computer systems (C4). This combined with satellite communications and Global Positioning Systems allowed the United States military to conduct joint operations and was the foundation of its 'systems' approach to warfare, which went of full display during the 1991 Gulf War. These platforms have allowed the United States to conduct expeditionary operations and project power around the globe utilizing a high-tech small force.

The Gulf War was the first real-world display of the United States "system of systems" and through its dominance on the battlefield, it quickly became evident that it had asserted itself as an indomitable conventional warfare powerhouse. The message was clear, challenging the

United States to a conventional fight was a losing proposition. China, who possessed many of the same weapons and equipment as Iraq, was especially impacted by this reality, and sought to rebuild its military and revolutionize their military strategy. Although a myriad of new high-tech systems were on display during the Gulf War, the United States' revamped strategy was still heavily reliant upon platforms, as it had been since World War II. The majority of the United States' advanced weaponry was tied to platforms—aircraft carriers, fighter planes, bombers, tanks, and fighting vehicles. Technology had changed but the reliance on platforms and their inherent limitations on strategic employment had not.

### **Conventional Deterrence**

Deterring the nation's adversaries and preventing conflicts from escalating is a critical role of the U.S. government. Moreover, effective deterrence often requires all instruments of national power. Platforms have served as the foundation that has allowed the United States to project military power around the globe since it gained its superpower status. Furthermore, these platforms have provided the military means to actively deter aggressive adversaries. These platforms have been integrated into national strategy to provide both conventional and nuclear deterrence. Although nuclear deterrence is an important facet of U.S. national strategy, this study will focus primarily on conventional deterrence. Robert P. Haffa Jr. identifies the three components of conventional deterrence, which include, "the visibility of the military force, a documented record of willingness to use force in the past, and the rationality of the use of force once deterrence has failed."<sup>3</sup> Although somewhat obvious, an inherent requirement for conventional deterrence is possessing conventional military superiority in relation to the

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<sup>3</sup> Haffa, Robert P. 2018. "The Future of Conventional Deterrence: Strategies for Great Power Competition." *Strategic Studies Quarterly* : SSQ 12 (4): p. 99.

adversary. The conventional means of deterrence must present the enemy with a situation in which they are unable to contend with or would be too costly for them to endure. Michael J. Mazarr reinforces this observation, “[m]uch of classic deterrence theory can be boiled down to a simple proposition: the potential aggressor must believe that the defender has the capability and will to do what it threatens.”<sup>4</sup> At a minimum, a state must be able to project forces forward into contested spaces.

Haffa notes that since the end of the Cold War, the United States means of conventional deterrence has improved. “The development and deployment of survivable conventional delivery platforms and very precise munitions suggested that conventional force had become more punishing, more usable, and, therefore, more credible.”<sup>5</sup> Specifically with regard to the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, Haffa suggests that deterrence should come in the form of maintaining a forward presence in contested maritime environments. “Power projection, rather than sea lane protection and control, will become the mainstay of US naval forces in underwriting conventional deterrence, and its geographic focus will increasingly become the Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>6</sup> The advent of and proliferation of A2A/D systems has reduced the survivability of these platforms that U.S. conventional strategy is dependent upon. In order for a deterrent action to be taken seriously, it must be both “credible and capable.”<sup>7</sup> The Chinese militarization of the

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<sup>4</sup> Mazarr, Michael J., *Understanding Deterrence*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE295.html>, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Haffa, Robert P. 2018. "The Future of Conventional Deterrence: Strategies for Great Power Competition." *Strategic Studies Quarterly* : SSQ 12 (4): p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 112.

South China Sea has undermined both the credibility and capability of the United States to project power and influence throughout the region.

### **China's Strategy in the South China Sea**

People's Liberation Army (PLA) military leaders, CCP government officials, and scholars studied and examined the United States prosecution of the Gulf War in depth as they sought to devise a strategy that would enable their success in a future fight against the Americans.<sup>8</sup> After a series of meetings beginning in March of 1991 and ending in June of 1991, the CCP codified its study of the Gulf War in a report prepared by the General Logistics Department (GSP). The GSP report observed that from a technological standpoint, the United States was exponentially more advanced in every domain than Iraq. The CCP and PLA recognized that China shared many of the same technological military shortfalls as Iraq. According to a 2020 Rand Corporation report that analyzed the operational concepts of the PLA, "Jiang and his strategists observed U.S. operations in the first Gulf War and assessed that 'networked' precision strike capabilities represented a 'revolution in military affairs [RMA]' that China was ill-prepared to deal with in the context of potential conflict with the United States over Taiwan."<sup>9</sup> Beginning in 1993, China adopted a new military strategy that prioritized the development and acquisition of high-tech weaponry that would be necessary to offset China's position of disadvantage. Under the direction of the CCP the PLA shifted from its traditional

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<sup>8</sup> Fravel, M. Taylor. *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020: p. 188.

<sup>9</sup> Burke, Edmund J, Kristen Gunness, Cortez A. Cooper III, and Mark Coza. "People's Liberation Army Operational Concepts. Rand Corporation. RAND National Defense Research Institute (NDRI), 2020: p. 4.

operational strategy of massing large ground forces to the development of missiles, satellites, and a robust naval fleet.<sup>10</sup>

The CCP did not seek to gain an advantage from high-tech weaponry in itself but rather from the means in which they would employ it. Simply mimicking the United States and building platforms with state-of-the-art weaponry would not give them an advantage. The United States had far more advanced and capable platforms than they would be able to produce. It is apparent that the CCP identified that the critical vulnerability of the United States “system of systems” was the platforms themselves. This is evident as China has developed the means (DF-21 and DF-26 missiles) to neutralize the United States’ most powerful platforms. A well-placed missile could send an aircraft carrier, and all of its advanced weaponry, to the bottom of the ocean. While Chinese ships and aircraft would be unable to fight a carrier strike group in open water, the carrier’s advantage decreases in tight spaces. According to the 2013 report, *The Science of Military Strategy*, produced by the Academy of Military Science Military Strategy Studies, which was translated by the China Aerospace Studies Institute, “[i]n spatial respects, via wide-ranging infiltration and projection of locations, [we must] as much as possible expand the friendly activities space, and limit and decrease the enemy’s operational space, so as to gain the operational initiative.”<sup>11</sup> To expand its friendly operational space and constrict it for its adversaries, the Chinese military seized a network of islands and atolls spread across the South China Sea, and then installed A2/AD weapons and sensors on them.

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<sup>10</sup> Fravel, M. Taylor. *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020: p. 189.

<sup>11</sup> *Science of Strategy*/Academy of Military Science Military Strategy Studies Dept. Beijing: Military Science Press, December 2013: p. 134.

China's militarization of the South China Sea largely took the world by surprise. The United States had been engaged in two large counterinsurgency fights and had little time to pay attention to Chinese aggression. While the United States had its hands tied in the Middle East, China seized the opportunity to rapidly begin building a network of A2/AD weapons systems. According to *The Science of Military Strategy* report, the PLA must "progressively construct a large-area (zone) sea defense SoS [system of systems] backed by the mainland, relying on the islands and reefs and projection of forces, and so create a favorable posture for operations within the First Island Chain and radiating outward."<sup>12</sup> Clearly China has largely achieved this strategic objective, as it has constructed a network of missile silos, radar systems, communications facilities, electronic weapons, bases, and airstrips distributed across the Spratly and Parcel islands. This system China has distributed across the South China Sea, provide both offensive and defensive capabilities. The CCP achieved these ends through the integration of long-range radar systems, air defense missile systems capable of downing U.S. aircraft at increasingly greater distances, and jamming technology to disrupt communications.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the system incorporates hypersonic missiles capable of sinking America's most advanced naval vessels. In doing so, they built an extensive active defense system.

### **The Sudden Death of Platforms**

As previously demonstrated, the United States' ability to deter its adversaries is predicated on its capacity to deploy its platforms to project power. However, in constructing a web of A2/AD systems in the South China Sea, the PLA has effectively forced the United States

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 269.

<sup>13</sup> Brose, Christian. *The Kill Chain: Defending America in the Future of High-Tech Warfare*. New York, NY: Hachette Books, 2020, p.33.

military to alter its operational concept and has constrained the credibility and capability of the American power projection in the South Pacific. Thus, the CCP has disrupted the United States operational superiority, which it has enjoyed for the past four decades. The CCP has developed two types of missiles capable of sinking an aircraft carrier—the DF-21 and DF-26. In its development of the DF-21, China was the first nation in history to develop an anti-ship ballistic missile. The DF-21 missile has the capacity to sink an aircraft carrier, with an estimated range of over 1,000 miles.<sup>14</sup> The DF-26 travels even faster, has a larger warhead, and an extended range.<sup>15</sup> However, some experts argue that aircraft carriers are armed with anti-missile defense systems capable of defending against these threats. Navy Captain Henry J Hendrix contextualizes this argument as he explains “defenses would have to destroy every missile fired, a tough problem given the magazines of U.S. cruisers and destroyers, while China would need only one of its weapons to survive to effect a mission kill.”<sup>16</sup> In the event of an exchange and the carrier survived, it would be forced to flee the area, and return to friendly waters to resupply its magazines outside of the Chinese weapons engagement zone.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Hendrix, Henry J. “At What Cost a Carrier?” Center for a New American Security. Center for a New American Security, March 2013. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/at-what-cost-a-carrier>, p. 8.



THREAT DISTANCE FROM WOODY ISLAND AND FIERY CROSS REEF

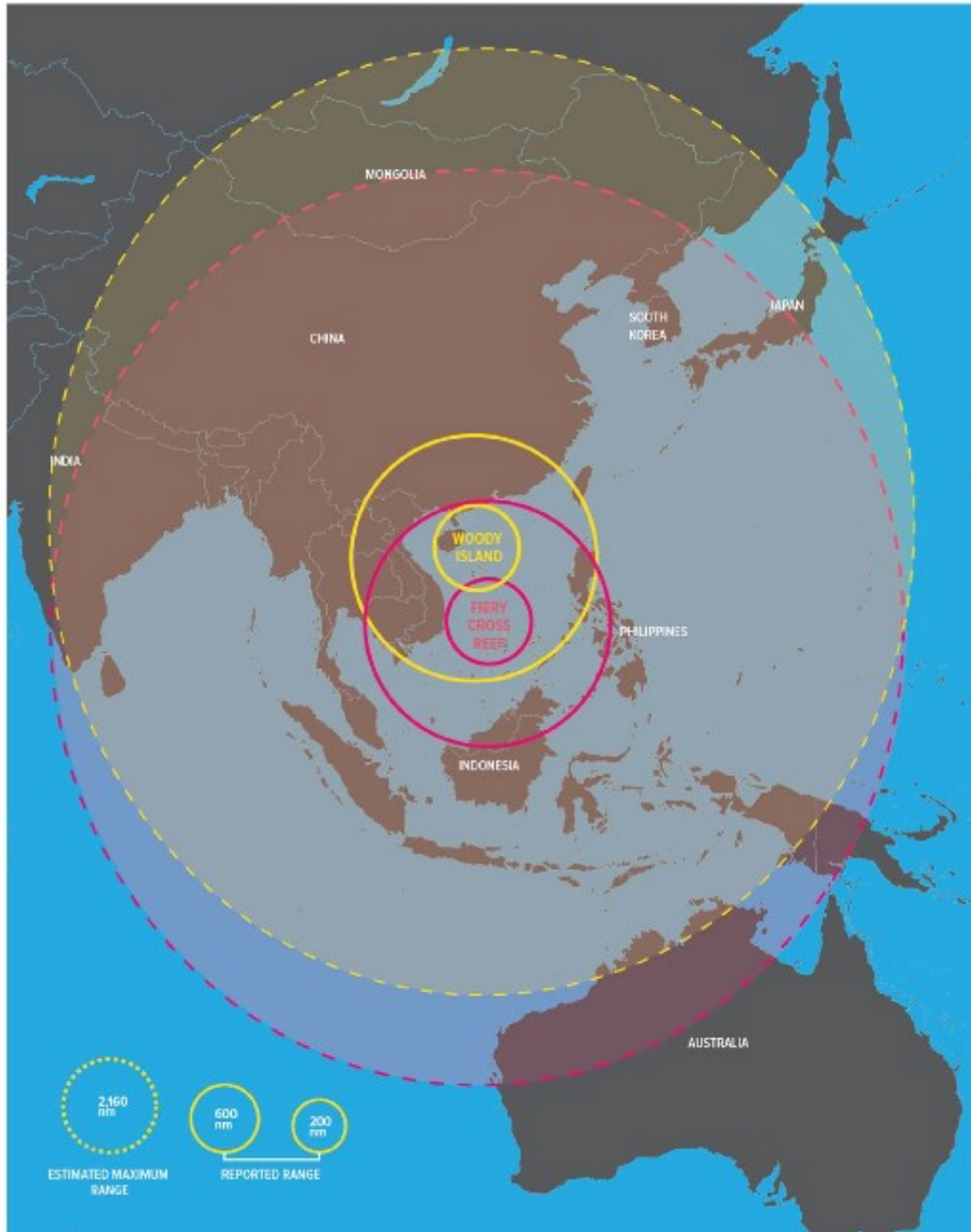


Figure 2.1 Chinese Weapons Engagement Zone. <sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Saylor, Kelley. "Red Alert: the Growing Threat to U.S. Aircraft Carriers." Center for a New American Security (en-US), February 2016. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/red-alert-the-growing-threat-to-u-s-aircraft-carriers>, p. 7.

China's network strategy gains a decisive advantage by deploying its missile launchers and other threat weapons and sensors in a disaggregated manner on islands and on its coastal shores. Because these weapons are deployed on land, they can be quickly moved around, which makes them difficult to target. Despite the United States' success during the Gulf War, it struggled immensely to effectively locate and target Saddam Hussein's Scud missile transporter-erector-launchers (TELs). Advanced U.S. aircraft had great difficulty locating the TELs prior to their launching, due to a combination of less than ideal weather conditions and Iraqi deception tactics.<sup>18</sup> China has mimicked the Iraqi deployment of TELs with its positioning of anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM). The ASBMs are loaded on vehicle-mounted platforms that are easy to camouflage and can rapidly maneuver in austere locations on the battlefield.<sup>19</sup> In doing so, China has presented the U.S. with the same targeting problem it encountered during the Gulf War. Moreover, during the Gulf War the United States was able to fly sorties to search and destroy the TELs; however, the DF-21 has a far greater range than a F-35B-II Joint Strike Fighter. The DF-21D has an estimated range of 1,087 nautical miles; whereas, a F-35B-II Joint Strike Fighter has an unfueled range of 690 nautical miles.<sup>20</sup> Thus, in order to deploy strike fighters on missions to search and destroy the DF-21Bs, the carrier would need to be within the missiles weapon engagement zone. In addition to being highly mobile and deployable in a disaggregated and networked fashion, the deadly missile is only a fraction of the cost of a U.S. aircraft carrier. For instance, analysts have estimated that DF-21 missiles cost roughly \$11

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<sup>18</sup> Rosenau, William. 2001. "Coalition Scud-Hunting in Iraq, 1991." In 1st ed., 29: RAND Corporation.

<sup>19</sup> Sayler, Kelley. "Red Alert: the Growing Threat to U.S. Aircraft Carriers." Center for a New American Security (en-US), February 2016. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/red-alert-the-growing-threat-to-u-s-aircraft-carriers>, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Hendrix, Henry J. "At What Cost a Carrier?" Center for a New American Security. Center for a New American Security, March 2013. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/at-what-cost-a-carrier>, p. 8.

million, whereas a single U.S. aircraft carrier costs in excess of \$13 billion. Thus, China could build over one thousand DF-21 missiles for what the United States pays for a single aircraft carrier.<sup>21</sup> China does possess a robust Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Targeting (ISRT) network that is a prerequisite required to target mobile platforms.<sup>22</sup> China's ISRT network is vulnerable to counter-ISRT systems; however, the U.S. Navy's capacity to conduct counter-ISRT is limited. Effective counter-ISRT operations are largely dependent upon the production of unmanned systems that are still in developmental stages.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, it is important to note that the United States does possess other strategic assets that could be deployed to attrite the A2/AD system, such as long-range land based bombers capable of delivering extended range precision munitions such as the AGM-183A Air-launched Rapid Response Weapon. However, these munitions are still in the developmental stages. It is quite clear that China has gained an asymmetric advantage over the United States, in its development of the DF-21 and DF-26 missiles.

### **Additional Vulnerabilities**

U.S. naval vessels are not the only platform vulnerable to the A2/AD threat. In addition to projecting power at sea, via carrier strike groups, the United States maintains a forward presence overseas through the deployment of forces to military bases in foreign countries, with Japan and Guam being the most important in the South Pacific. Prior to China's development of

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<sup>21</sup> Hendrix, Henry J. "At What Cost a Carrier?" Center for a New American Security. Center for a New American Security, March 2013. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/at-what-cost-a-carrier>, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Bosbotinis, James. "US Maritime Strategy and the South China Sea." SCSPI. South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative, February 6, 2021. <http://www.scspi.org/en/dtfx/us-maritime-strategy-and-south-china-sea-1>.

<sup>23</sup> Clark, Bryan, and Timothy Walton. "Taking Back the Seas: Transforming the U.S. Surface Fleet for Decision-Centric Warfare." CSBA. The Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2019, p. 63. <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/taking-back-the-seas-transforming-the-u.s-surface-fleet-for-decision-centric-warfare>.

hypersonic missiles, the United States strategy was predicated on the belief that its global bases in the Indo-Pacific resided outside of the weapons engagement zone.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the United States way of war requires a large buildup of personnel, logistics, weapons, and equipment. Historically, this has occurred in close proximity to the theatre of operations but outside of enemy striking distance. According to former U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee staff director Christian Brose, “China knew that Washington assumed all of this, and it built larger and larger quantities of increasingly capable missiles, to wipe out America’s critical warfighting infrastructure in Asia.”<sup>25</sup>

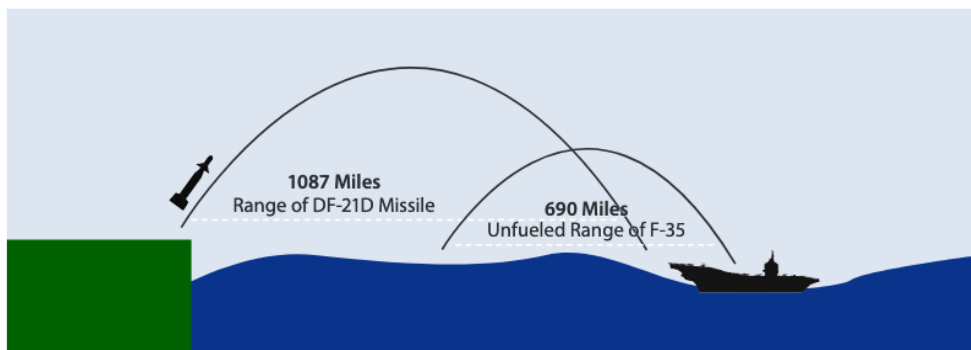


Figure 2.2 DF-21D Range vs. F-35 Range<sup>26</sup>

In addition to threatening the United States ability to logistically support a future war in the South Pacific, many of the nation’s most capable and advanced aircraft, such as the F-35B Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter are forward deployed on installations such as the U.S. Air Force’s Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan and U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni located

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<sup>24</sup> Brose, Christian. *The Kill Chain: Defending America in the Future of High-Tech Warfare*. New York, NY: Hachette Books, 2020, p.32.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>26</sup> Hendrix, Henry J. “At What Cost a Carrier?” Center for a New American Security. Center for a New American Security, March 2013. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/at-what-cost-a-carrier>, p. 10.

in mainland Japan. American dominance in war has traditionally been predicated on its ability to gain and maintain air superiority. However, China has the ability to strike these bases and the hangars that house the United States most capable air assets, before they have even left the ground. Although designed to attack aircraft carriers, the hypersonic DF-26 missile has provided China with the capacity to strike targets extending into the second island chain, including Guam and the Bay of Bengal.<sup>27</sup> In addition, aircraft carriers and their affiliated strike group ships require frequent logistical resupply and maintenance, which often occurs at ports around the globe. Like the locations of the U.S. military's large forward bases, ports are easily targetable by precision guided missiles.

### **EABO**

It is quite evident that the CCP has created a *fait accompli* situation for the United States in the South China Sea, and potentially throughout the region. It has established a network of A2/AD weapons system that greatly threatens the maneuverability and survivability of even the United States' most prestigious and capable platforms. In doing so, the Chinese have made strides to solve the riddle of U.S. military dominance and has presented it with a serious strategic dilemma. The United States is losing influence in the region as China continues to expand its control across throughout the Indo-Pacific.<sup>28</sup> In establishing its A2/AD network, it has reduced both the United States credibility and capability to project power in the South Pacific. Although the Chinese are unlikely to attack American warships, the CCP will not take any U.S. naval show of force seriously, as they are keenly aware that they have gained the upper-hand. However,

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<sup>27</sup> Saylor, Kelley. "Red Alert: the Growing Threat to U.S. Aircraft Carriers." Center for a New American Security (en-US), February 2016. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/red-alert-the-growing-threat-to-u-s-aircraft-carriers>, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Denmark, Abraham. *U.S. Strategy in the Asian Century: Empowering Allies and Partners*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020: p.23.

American military planners and strategists have not been sitting idle as China continues to further advance its active defense strategy. The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps have taken the lead in developing a counterstrategy with the capacity to undue the advantage China has recently gained. Although, not widely publicized, the Department of Navy has developed a concept known as Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO), which has the potential to reclaim America's ability to both deter Chinese aggression and attrite its network of weapons in the event of a war or conflict.

EABO incorporates an inside and outside force. The inside force operates within the weapon engagement area of the enemy's A2/AD systems, distributing forces that are equipped with "sensors" and "shooters" that can mass combat power while being greatly distributed.<sup>29</sup> The concept involves inside forces establishing a distributed network of sensors, kinetic and non-kinetic weapons, logistic nodes, communication nodes, and other offensive capabilities inside of the enemy A2/AD system. According to the *EABO Handbook*, "The inside force sets and maintains conditions of sea control and denial from key maritime terrain adjacent to contested straits and waters, and provides continuous situational awareness so that the outside force never need advance into a situation where the risks are unknown."<sup>30</sup> The outside force is comprised of traditional naval platforms such as carriers, battleships, and submarines. The inside force is able to collect on and attack the enemy A2/AD network in order to allow the outside force to maneuver and penetrate the enemy system at decisive points and times. Thus, EABO could be

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<sup>29</sup> U.S. Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory. "Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) Handbook: Considerations for Force Development and Employment." Marine Corps Association. United States Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, June 1, 2018. <https://mca-marines.org/wp-content/uploads/Expeditionary-Advanced-Base-Operations-EABO-handbook-1.1.pdf>, p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 26.

used to neutralize an enemy system in a kinetic conflict or as a means of conventional deterrence.

## **Literature Review**

EABO is an emergent, and in many ways, a revolutionary concept that has generated a variety of opinions from scholars and United States Marine Corps and naval officers. Many scholars, defense professionals, and military officers have focused on the necessity to develop advanced weapon systems that will support the concept. Others have focused on the need for increased Navy and Marine Corps integration to generate the synergistic effort required of the concept. Some analysts and officers are vehemently opposed to the concept due to its departure from long standing Marine Corps doctrine. Nearly all of the literature on the concept has evaluated it through the lens of an actual war with China. Only one author has focused on the deterrent aspect of EABO. The following will examine these opinions and arguments in greater detail.

Some analysts have described the technological requirements for the successful implementation of EABO. The preponderance of literature written about EABO has focused on its application in the event that the United States and China go to war with one another. Lieutenant Colonel John Berry, USMC (Ret) has proposed that the Navy and Marine Corps team must work to develop and deploy new technology to facilitate EABO and defeat China's network of A2/AD systems.<sup>31</sup> To achieve these ends, he argues for the development of new sensors, weapons, UAVs, information warfare assets, new naval vessels and logistical capabilities. Berry explains that through developing and fielding these new assets, they will allow the United States

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<sup>31</sup> Berry, John. "Forward to a New Future: The Marine Corps at an Institutional Inflection Point." *Marine Corps Gazette*. February 2019: p. 13.

to succeed and win in a “high end” kinetic engagement with China.<sup>32</sup> He also argues that the Marine Corps must alter the way it organizes itself for war, if it is to effectively execute distributed operations conducted across the Indo-Pacific AOR.<sup>33</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Brand Bailey (USMC) echoes many of Berry’s assertions regarding the need for new technology to support the EABO concept. However, while Berry’s recommendations are somewhat vague, Bailey outlines many specific weapons and sensors that are required to conduct EABO. Bailey argues for the development and procurement of directed energy weapon systems that can be powered using solar or wind, in order to be self-sustaining when deployed to austere environments.<sup>34</sup> He also calls for the development of laser weapon systems that can neutralize missiles, UAS, and various ground targets. In a similar vein, he advocates for the development of microwave weapons capable of defeating enemy UAS.<sup>35</sup> However, in Bailey’s assessment, the most needed technology is autonomous systems. He explains that autonomous systems will provide the United States a distinct advantage on the battlefield. These weapons have the potential to reduce casualties, protect the force, increase situational awareness for commanders, and induce tremendous pressure on the enemy system.<sup>36</sup>

Others have emphasized the necessity for the Navy and Marine Corps to become a more integrated and cohesive unit to execute EABO. Major Andrew Roberts believes that the Navy

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Bailey, Branden. “Offsetting Tomorrow’s Adversary in a Contested Environment: Defending Expeditionary Advance Bases in 2025 and Beyond.” Air War College. Air University. 2017: p.11.

<sup>35</sup> Bailey, Branden. “Offsetting Tomorrow’s Adversary in a Contested Environment: Defending Expeditionary Advance Bases in 2025 and Beyond.” Air War College. Air University. 2017:Ibid, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 17-18.



and Marine Corps are currently not integrated to the degree necessary to effectively conduct EABO. Despite the fact that the Marine Corps falls under the department of the Navy, the force has largely acted independently over the past two decades due to its involvement in two ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Conducting EABO is a highly complex endeavor that involves deploying Marines and Sailors across the AO in a highly distributed fashion. This will require unprecedented coordination between the Navy and Marine Corps. In his assessment, Marine Corps officers must study and become more familiar with naval doctrine to increase integration and interoperability. Another major hurdle he outlines is that command relationships must be developed that support and delineate when the Navy is in command of an operation and when that control transfers to the Marine Corps.<sup>37</sup> In his estimation, failure to work out the details of these relationships will result in certain disaster.

Some scholars and military professionals are not enthusiastic about the Marine Corps embracing EABO. Dr. Heather Venable and Lieutenant Colonel Nate Lauterbach have heavily criticized the Marine Corps' EABO plans. In their critique of the Marine Corps' outward support for EABO, they argue it is abandoning the principles espoused in its foundational doctrinal publication, MCDP 1 *Warfighting*. The two argue that EABO is antithetical to maneuver warfare, which has been the bedrock of Marine Corps operations since the practice was adopted in the mid-1980s. In their assessment the Marine Corps risks becoming a "long range artillery force," on a fool's errand attempting to target and sink Chinese naval vessels, rather than closing with and destroying the enemy by fire and maneuver.<sup>38</sup> The authors argue that the Marine Corps

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<sup>37</sup> Roberts, Andrew. "Closing the Seams on naval Integration: Actual Action or More Spilled Ink?" *Marine Corps Gazette*. February, 2019: p. 24.

<sup>38</sup> Lauterbach, Nate and Heather Venable. "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: MCDP 1, Warfighting, and Force Design 2030." *Marine Corps Gazette*. January, 2021.

is abandoning its “foundational theory and doctrine” in its quest to innovate and remain relevant in future battles. They believe that by embracing EABO, the Marine Corps actually will decrease its employability and operational relevance.

Although the *EABO Handbook* repeatedly emphasizes the use of EABO as deterrent, there is very little literature addressing the diplomatic dimension required to facilitate the concept. Colonel George J. David (USMC) addresses this glaring and largely ignored gap, which could impose serious constraints on the efficacy of EABO as a deterrent. George praises the strategic rationale beyond EABO but contends that it suffers from a single major flaw—physical access to key terrain that the United States has no claim to. He notes that in order for the United States military to effectively conduct EABO as a deterrent, it requires physical access to numerous countries sovereign territory throughout the Indo-Pacific region. He admits that in a total war scenario, invading other nations’ sovereign territory may be an option to establish Expeditionary Advanced Bases; however, is not feasible in any other situation. Therefore, EABO cannot be effectively instituted as a deterrent without the political support and authorization of foreign nations. The United States military and in the case of EABO—the Marine Corps and Navy—cannot gain access to other nations on their own. Rather, “[g]aining political access requires review of roles and missions across *Title 50, U.S. Code* (War and the National Defense) and then coordination with the agency that addresses diplomatic concerns—the State Department.”<sup>39</sup> To overcome this limiting factor, George proposes that the Marine Corps develop a “supporting concept for international affairs,” that works by with and through the state department to gain the necessary access to key terrain in the Indo-Pacific.

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<sup>39</sup> George, David. “Making it Work: Force Design 2030 and Access.” *Marine Corps Gazette*. October, 2020: p. 48.

Much of the literature examining the efficacy of EABO has focused on the application of the concept in war between the United States and China. A plethora of military leaders and planners have argued that the Navy and Marine Corps need to develop and field new weapons systems and sensing capabilities.<sup>40</sup> Others have focused on the need to synergize naval and Marine Corps integration. Dissidents such as Lauterbach and Venable have argued the Marine Corps' embrace of EABO is antithetic to the Marine Corps foundational doctrine. However, Colonel George has been the only naval officer or scholar who have critiqued the concept in its most likely application—as a means of deterrence. While George identified the critical shortfall of the concept as deterrent, he stopped short of examining the current state of U.S. security cooperation relationships with nations critical to the concept. This study will proceed to examine the state of security cooperation relationships between the United States and Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan, Singapore and Indonesia to determine if they are in their current state, sufficient to allow an effective implementation of EABO as a means of deterrence against Chinese aggression in the South China Sea.

### **EABO as a Means of Deterrence**

The previous literature review illustrated the great emphasis that has been placed on the wartime application of EABO and highlighted the lack of discussion on its application as a means of deterrence. The United States must demonstrate that the operational concept is both credible and capable. Demonstrating the credibility and capability of EABO requires close partnerships with other nations in the South Pacific. To establish an EABO system as a

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<sup>40</sup> See Berry, John. "Forward to a New Future: The Marine Corps at an Institutional Inflection Point." *Marine Corps Gazette*. February 2019 and Bailey, Branden. "Offsetting Tomorrow's Adversary in a Contested Environment: Defending Expeditionary Advance Bases in 2025 and Beyond." Air War College. Air University. 2017.

conventional deterrence, the United States would need to be able to rapidly establish an expeditionary network of ‘sensors’ and ‘shooters’ across many nations in and around the South China Sea. If the United States does not first establish strong bilateral and multilateral relations in the Indo-Pacific, EABO will not be capable of producing the desired deterrent effect. It is important to note, that access is just a prerequisite for EABO to be used as a means of deterrence. Access in and of itself will not generate deterrence. Moreover, there are many other factors that require further evaluation to determine the efficacy of EABO. Establishing a robust expeditionary network of ‘sensors’ and ‘shooters’ will require the support of critical nations to access their coastlines and islands. The targeting dilemma China faces is amplified as the distribution and dispersion of U.S. forces increases. Therefore, the deterrent effect increases with the number of nations that partner with the United States and allow it to establish Expeditionary Advanced Bases. Indeed, the efficacy of EABO is directly linked to the security cooperation relationships between the United States and a multitude of nations across the South Pacific.

In order to achieve its desired deterrent effect and demonstrate that the United States is capable of dismantling the Chinese’ A2/AD network, the United States must be able to establish Expeditionary Advanced Bases on key terrain. As depicted in figure 1, the Chinese weapons engagement zone extends across most of the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, key terrain pertinent to an EABO centric strategy within the Chinese weapons engagement zone includes: Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia and Singapore. In order to facilitate an EABO network of sensors and shooters, the United States will need access to the previously discussed key terrain. The analysis section will examine and evaluate the state of

United States security cooperation with these states in detail. However, before proceeding it is necessary to examine the criterion for evaluating these relationships.

## **Method**

The Department of Defense (DoD) has established three doctrinal principles associated with security cooperation. Joint Publication 3-20, Security Cooperation, notes that, “DoD policy supports SC [Security Cooperation] activities that enable building security relationships, building partner capacity, and gaining/maintaining access.”<sup>41</sup> An effective security relationship requires the development of a long-term defense-oriented relationship with a partner nation. The second aspect, building partner capabilities involves taking action to strengthen the military capabilities of a partner nation. This can be achieved through bilateral training exercises, military education, selling equipment and weaponry, or providing military assistance to achieve shared strategic objectives. Joint Publication 3-20 identifies that, “[b]uilding partner capacity requires a long-term, mutual commitment to improve capacity, interoperability, and when necessary, the employment of that PN [partner nation] capacity in support of USG strategic objectives.”<sup>42</sup>

In relation to EABO, “gaining and maintain access” is the most important aspect of security cooperation. Gaining and maintaining access includes the authorization from a partner nation to physically access its territory. This can be in the form of port visits, access to airfields, and the authorization to forward-deploy U.S. military forces on its soil. “It provides USG forces with peacetime and contingency access to permanent or temporary forward staging or basing facilities, airports, or seaports; the ability to obtain over flight rights, passage through territorial

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<sup>41</sup> Joint Publication 3-20, Security Cooperation. Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, May 2017: p. II-1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, II-2.

waters, shared information, intelligence, or other resources; and opportunities for forward stationing of forces.”<sup>43</sup>

These three categories: building security relationships, building partner capacity, and gaining/maintaining access, will be used as a lens to evaluate the current state of U.S. bilateral relationships with Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan, Singapore and Indonesia. As previously illustrated, not all aspects of security cooperation are of equal importance to EABO. While security relationships and partner capabilities are important to defense strategy, without access to airfields, ports, and most importantly the authorization to deploy or forward stage forces to a partner nation, the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps cannot effectively employ EABO. However, building security relationships and increasing partner capabilities are in most cases, a prerequisite to gaining and maintaining access. Yet China is keenly aware of the geographic importance of the previously mentioned countries and has sought to increase its influence throughout the region. The more China’s influence grows amongst other nations in the region, the less likely a U.S. EABO concept will be to succeed. If the preponderance of nations occupying key terrain in the Indo-Pacific region are unwilling to partner with the United States, the concept is doomed to fail—it is very much a zero sum game. The subsequent section will include all of these aspects in the evaluation.

### **Data**

To determine the state of security cooperation relationships between the United States and Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan, Singapore and Indonesia, this study will review a variety of materials. The supporting information used in this assessment was derived from the U.S. State Department, scholarly peer reviewed journal articles, professional

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<sup>43</sup> Joint Publication 3-20, Security Cooperation. Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, May 2017: p. II-3.

journals, country reports, and various military publications. The information utilized in this study is qualitative and to a degree, open to interpretation. However, the parameters —building security relationships, building partner capacity, and gaining/maintaining access limit the scope and potential subjectivity of the subsequent analysis. A similar approach will be taken to evaluate the level of China’s influence over critical nations in the region. Specifically, the relationships will be evaluated to determine whether China’s level of influence is increasing, is neutral, or is in decline. Conversely, the fluidity of U.S. relations will also be evaluated to determine if they are improving, constant, or in decline. Assessing the fluidity of these relationships will provide much needed insight to determine the efficacy of EABO in the future. There are inherent risks associated with nations partnering with the United States and allowing it to implement the EABO concept on their soil. Doing so may cause China to economically punish those who help facilitate EABO. Conversely, supporting the United States in implementing EABO could be advantageous if it successfully deterred Chinese expansion and aggression in the South China Sea.

## **Analysis**

### **Japan**

Historically, the United States has maintained a strong security cooperation relationship with Japan. The United States maintains a large forward deployed presence in Japan. Twenty-three U.S. military bases are located in Japan and the prefecture of Okinawa, with representation from all branches of its military, populated with over 50,000 U.S. service members. The United States and Japan routinely conduct a multitude of bilateral training engagements and exercises. According to the U.S. Department of State, “[f]or over 60 years the United States-Japan Alliance has served as the cornerstone of peace, stability, and freedom in the Indo-Pacific region.” In

addition, the United States has deployed its most advanced platforms to Japan, such as the F35 Joint Strike Fighter and the U.S.S. Ronald Reagan carrier strike group.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Japan is the United States' closest and most active partner in the Indo-Pacific region. Currently, the United States has the necessary access in Japan to support EABO. Despite a history of U.S.-Japanese security cooperation, there are constitution and legal constraints associated with the relationship that may impede the implementation of EABO. Article 9 of the Japanese constitution limits its ability to conduct military operations. Japan has been allowed to maintain a security defense force but is prohibited from participating in “direct combat” operations.<sup>45</sup>

### **Republic of Korea**

Similar to Japan, the United States has maintained a long-term security cooperation relationship with the Republic of Korea, in large part because of the threat posed by North Korea. The U.S. Department of State asserts that the U.S.—Republic of Korea security relationship was “[f]orged during the Korean War and codified with the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty” and “evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership serving as a linchpin for security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.”<sup>46</sup> The United States has provided the Republic of Korea with some its most advanced weaponry and equipment, to include the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, various Unmanned Aerial Surveillance (UAS) platforms, missile systems, radar detection, and attack helicopters. “The U.S. has more than \$30 billion in active government to government

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<sup>44</sup> “U.S. Security Cooperation With Japan - United States Department of State.” U.S. Department of State. U.S. Department of State, January 14, 2021. <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-japan/>.

<sup>45</sup> The U.S.-Japan Alliance. Congressional Research Service, June 13, 2019: p. 7. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33740/22>.

<sup>46</sup> “U.S. Security Cooperation With Korea - United States Department of State.” U.S. Department of State. U.S. Department of State, January 14, 2021. <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-korea/>.



sales cases with the ROK under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system.”<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the United States has enhanced the Republic of Korea’s military capability through continuous bilateral training exercises. The United States also maintains 15 forward military bases in the Republic of Korea populated with over 28,000 U.S. service members. Despite the strong historical security relationship revolves around the threat posed by North Korea. Although the United States has sought to advance trilateral cooperation between itself, Japan, and South Korea little progress has been made due to poor Japan-South Korea relations.<sup>48</sup>

### **Philippines**

Historically, the United States and the Philippines have maintained a strong security cooperation relationship. In addition to bilateral military training the United States, “provided the Philippines with various military hardware from 2002 to 2004, including a C-130 transport aircraft, two Point-class cutters, a Cyclone-class special-forces landing craft, 28 UH-1H Huey helicopters, and 30,000 M-16 assault rifles.”<sup>49</sup> However, due to Chinese influence the relationship has become strained. Philippines’ President Duterte briefly cut ties with the United States in an attempt to court China, as he was enticed by the potential economic benefits that could be gained by strengthening its relationship with Beijing.<sup>50</sup> Although Duterte signaled an end to the United States—Philippines security relationship, he later reversed course.<sup>51</sup> Currently,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> “U.S.-South Korea Alliance: Issues for Congress.” Congressional Research Service. Congressional Research Service, June 23, 2020. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11388>.

<sup>49</sup> Chao, Wen-Chih. "The Philippines' Perception and Strategy for China's Belt and Road Initiative Expansion: Hedging with Balancing." *The Chinese Economy* 54, no. 1 (2021): 52.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>51</sup> "Philippines Backtracks to Keep Security Agreement with US." *Country Report. Philippines* (2020).

the Philippines provide the United States with access to its ports, airfields, and allow U.S. troops to conduct exercises within the confines of its borders. The islands of the Philippines offer tremendous opportunity for the United States to conduct EABO and present China with an exceptionally complex targeting dilemma. However, the current uncertain security relationship jeopardizes the United States ability to conduct EABO in the Philippines.

### **Malaysia**

Malaysia has maintained little semblance of a security cooperation relationship with the United States. This has been largely driven by Malaysia's desire to not upset its powerful neighbor, China. "Malaysia has carefully avoided public criticism or confrontation regarding China's activities in the South China Sea."<sup>52</sup> Despite Malaysia's propensity avoid taking any action that may upset Beijing, it has historically participated in bilateral training with U.S. military forces. The United States conducts force on force airborne training exercises with the Royal Malaysian Air Force. The U.S. Navy SEALs conduct biannual training exercises in Malaysia. Moreover, the U.S. Navy conducts annual ship visits and makes routine port calls in Malaysia.<sup>53</sup> Despite its desire to not anger China, Malaysia does provide the United States a degree of access. However, this access falls short of conventional troop deployments, which is necessary to conduct EABO.

### **Indonesia**

Indonesia does maintain a security cooperation relationship with the United States; however, it largely revolves around the threat of terrorism and maritime issues. Indonesia

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<sup>52</sup> Ott, Marvin and Derek Maseloff. "The U.S.-Malaysia Security Connection." *Asia Pacific Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.) no. 335 (2016): p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Permal, Sumathy. "Maritime Cooperation with United States and China: Examination on the Contemporary Issues and Challenges for Malaysia." *The Journal of Defence and Security* 5, no. 1 (2014): p. 74.

participates in several bilateral programs with the United States. U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and special operations units routinely conduct bilateral training exercises with Indonesia; however, the focus of these engagements is generally limited to counterterrorism training. In addition to bilateral training, the United States has also provided Indonesia with military hardware. In 2013, under the leadership of Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, the United States sold Indonesia a fleet of AH-64E Apache attack helicopters.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the United States engagement with Indonesia and similar security objectives, its security cooperation relationship is quite narrow in scope. The limited extent of U.S.—Indonesia cooperation can be attributed to a combination of domestic politics in the United States that is opposed to its system of capital punishment and its prerogative to remain a neutral power in the Sino-U.S. competition.<sup>55</sup> As a result, the United States' access to Indonesia is greatly restricted. This is quite evident as Indonesia has historically rejected the prospect of U.S. deployments to Indonesia.<sup>56</sup> Indonesia does not facilitate the requisite U.S. military deployments on its soil to facilitate EABO.

### **Vietnam**

The development of U.S. Vietnam relationship is largely in its infancy, as these relations were extremely strained by the Vietnam War. However, beginning in the early 2000s the United States increasingly took action to improve the relationship. In 2014, the United States eased the restrictions of the 1975 embargo on weapons sales to Vietnam. However, the relaxation of

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<sup>54</sup> Muhibat, Shafiah F. "Indonesia-U.S. Security Collaboration: Still Under the Radar?" *Asian Politics & Policy* 8, no. 1 (2016): p. 145.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 151.

<sup>56</sup> Muhibat, Shafiah F. "Indonesia-U.S. Security Collaboration: Still Under the Radar?" *Asian Politics & Policy* 8, no. 1 (2016): p. 152.

restrictions primarily focused on maritime capabilities.<sup>57</sup> Vietnam does participate in security cooperation with the United States; however, it is also quite limited in scope. The relationship was further strengthened with the 2011 U.S. – Vietnam Bilateral Defense Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding.<sup>58</sup> Vietnam’s security relationship with the United States is most characterized by non-combat bilateral training. The preponderance of U.S.—Vietnam security cooperation revolves around peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. This is evident, as the majority of bilateral engagements have involved non-combat training actions. Specifically, the U.S. and Vietnamese Navy have conducted annual bilateral training exercises they have focused primarily on, “on military medicine, search and rescue, and shipboard damage control.”

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Although Vietnam and the U.S. maintain a security relationship, it lacks partner capacity due to the limited scope. Moreover, the current U.S.—Vietnam security relationship lacks meaningful access. U.S. military access in Vietnam is restricted to port visits and humanitarian operations. The largest obstacle for the United States is Vietnam’s “three no’s policy” that prohibits the development of military alliances, allows for no foreign military bases to be constructed or occupied on its soil and the prohibition of relationships seeking to affect a third party.<sup>60</sup> Although Vietnam maintains the “three no’s policy,” it has recently demonstrated a degree of flexibility. Until 2016, Vietnam had denied the United States port access for its naval

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<sup>57</sup> Meijer, Hugo and Luis Simon. “Cover Balancing: Great Powers, Secondary States and US Balancing Strategies Against China.” *International Affairs* 97: 2, 2021: p. 474.

<sup>58</sup> Tuan, Hoang Anh and Do Thi Thuy. "U.S.-Vietnam Security Cooperation: Catalysts and Constraints: U.S.-Vietnam Security Cooperation." *Asian Politics & Policy* 8, no. 1 (2016): 183.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

<sup>60</sup> Meijer, Hugo and Luis Simon. “Cover Balancing: Great Powers, Secondary States and US Balancing Strategies Against China.” *International Affairs* 97: 2, 2021: p. 474.

warships. However, the Obama administration negotiated with Vietnam to ease this constraint and gained limited but expanding access to its naval ports and facilities.<sup>61</sup> However, the greatly constrained level of access does not support the implementation of EABO.

### **Taiwan**

The United States security relationship with Taiwan is highly nuanced, due to the geopolitics underpinning the situation. The Taiwanese Security Act (TSA) outlines the parameters of the U.S.—Taiwan security relationship. It specifically identifies the “stability” of Taiwan as a U.S. national security interest. It also requires the United States to provide Taiwan with the means to maintain defense capabilities. Furthermore, it outlines the United States role if Taiwan were to be ensnared in a conflict with China. In the past, U.S. military support for Taiwan has been predominately restricted to limited arms sales. However, the Trump administration took a much more aggressive approach, “characterized by the increased frequency of sales of front-line combat platforms, a more active congressional role in guiding U.S.-Taiwan security ties, and inclusion of Taiwan as a part of the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy.”<sup>62</sup> Despite its arming of Taiwan with advanced platforms, the United States military bilateral engagements with Taiwanese forces are greatly limited. Taiwan officers have participated in training and military education programs in the United States and U.S. military leaders have observed Taiwanese military training exercises.<sup>63</sup> However, large bilateral training exercises have not been conducted. Despite the lack of bilateral training, the requirements associated with

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 475.

<sup>62</sup> Dickey, Lauren. "Change and Continuity in U.S.-Taiwan Security Ties." *Asia Policy* 14, no. 4 (10, 2019): p. 20.

<sup>63</sup> Chase, Michael S. "U.S.—Taiwan Security Cooperation: Enhancing an Unofficial Relationship." In, edited by Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, p. 177-178: Columbia University Press, 2005.

the TSA, suggest that the United States has been granted the authority to conduct EABO in the event Taiwan was threatened by China.

### **Singapore**

Although the city-state of Singapore and the United States do not have a formal alliance, the two nations have maintained a strong security cooperation partnership. This partnership became more entrenched as the United States and Singapore collaborated in the fight against terrorism. Since 1990, Singapore has provided the United States military with access to its air bases, ports and facilities as outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding Regarding United States Use of Facilities in Singapore. The level of access was further expanded when it was amended in 1998.<sup>64</sup> Despite maintaining positive security cooperation relations with the United States, Singapore has remained neutral, as tension between Washington and Beijing has increased. “[W]hile rising tensions in the South China Sea have understandably led some states to pursue closer defense ties with Washington as a counterbalance to Chinese territorial claims and power, nonclaimant states like Singapore have refrained from taking sides while urging for restraint from all concerned parties.”<sup>65</sup> This illustrates the fact that a history of positive security cooperation does not guarantee it will remain so in the future.

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<sup>64</sup> Tan, See Seng. "America the Indispensable Power: Singapore's Perspective of America as a Security Partner." *Asian Politics & Policy* 8, no. 1 (2016): p. 127.

<sup>65</sup> Tan, See Seng. "America the Indispensable Power: Singapore's Perspective of America as a Security Partner." *Asian Politics & Policy* 8, no. 1 (2016): p. 131.

**Figure 5.1 Status of U.S. Security Cooperation in Indo-Pacific**

Country	Security Relationship	Partner Capabilities	Requisite Access	Existing Alliance	Formal Agreements	Status of Relationship with U.S. (consistent growing stronger, declining)	Status of Relationship with China (consistent, growing stronger, declining)
Japan	X	X	X	X	X	-	↓
South Korea	X	X	X	X	X	-	-
Philippines	X	X	X	X	X	↓	↑
Malaysia	X					-	↑
Vietnam	X					↑	-
Taiwan	X	X			X	↑	↓
Indonesia	X	X				-	-
Singapore	X	X	X			-	-

**Policy Recommendations**

With the implementation of its active defense strategy, China has effectively neutralized the United States’ once most capable and technologically laden platforms. At its current juncture, the United States must adopt a new form of deterrence to reestablish its credibility and capacity to counter Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific region. The advent of EABO appears to be the most effective means of doing so. Clearly, the U.S. needs to strengthen its security cooperation relationships in the Indo-Pacific region if it is to employ EABO as a credible means of deterrence to Chinese aggression. Unfortunately, the United States has over last four years taken measures that have alienated it on the world stage.

As previously illustrated, many of the United States’ long-term strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific area are in decline. Furthermore, even many strong existing relationships do not provide the level of access needed to employ EABO. Prior to China militarizing the South China Sea, U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific region relied on platforms, especially carrier strike groups, to provide deterrence. Consequently, security cooperation with partner nations in the region was oriented to facilitate this particular means of deterrence. In all of the countries examined in this

study, the United States has gained and maintained the necessary access to ports, which are required to logistically support its naval platforms. In many cases, the United States also has access to airfields in these partner nations. However, outside of Japan and the Republic of Korea, the United States has not been granted the authority to deploy large formations of troops to these nations. Moreover, not all these security cooperation agreements can be expected to carry over in the event of a conflict between the United States and China.

Although the Trump administration focused much attention on the Indo-Pacific region and took measures to strengthen the United States position there, it also harmed relations with several critical countries whose support is vital to the implementation of EABO. The Trump administration repeatedly sent signals of a wavering commitment to many of its closest allies across the globe, which negatively impacted its ability to generate support in the Indo-Pacific region to counterbalance Chinese influence.<sup>66</sup> President Trump's attacks against the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), created a high degree of uncertainty amongst the United States security partners. He repeatedly admonished multilateral and global liberal institutions, which harmed the United States credibility on the world stage. Moreover, President Trump's nationalistic America first policy undermined foreign policy efforts. He repeatedly criticized the liberal international system and questioned the disproportionate cost the United States has paid to maintain these institutions and the value of the benefits they have produced.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, this sentiment was not only felt in Europe, it extended to the Indo-Pacific region as well.

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<sup>66</sup> Tellis, Ashley J. "Waylaid by Contradictions: Evaluating Trump's Indo-Pacific Strategy." *The Washington Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2020): p. 130.

<sup>67</sup> Tellis, Ashley J. "Waylaid by Contradictions: Evaluating Trump's Indo-Pacific Strategy." *The Washington Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (2020): p. 131.



Very few if any country in the Indo-Pacific region is capable of contesting a disproportionately powerful China. Thus, strong bilateral and multilateral security cooperation is essential to the not just the ability of the United States to conduct EABO but to the general stability of the region. However, the former president failed to empower liberal institutions which were vital to his own administrations' Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy.<sup>68</sup> As previously demonstrated, the implementation of EABO requires the support and confidence of partner nations. Yet, President Trump's nationalistic agenda served to erode the trust and confidence of the United States much needed partners in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, as Ashley J. Tellis observes, "No balancing strategy toward China can succeed if the United States is unwilling to protect the order it has created at great costs to itself."<sup>69</sup>

As previously discussed, there is much work that needs to be done, if the United States is going to use EABO to deter further Chinese aggression. For EABO to be effective, the United States must deepen its security cooperation efforts with its partners in the Indo-Pacific region and move beyond relationship building and capability building, to gaining and maintaining access in as many of the eight countries surveyed as possible. Although the United States has improved bilateral relations with nations throughout the Indo-Pacific, more effort is still required.<sup>70</sup> To accomplish this, the United States will need to commit an even greater investment in the region. While the preponderance literature written on EABO has focused on the development of futuristic capabilities, they will offer little advantage if the United States does not build and expand the necessary security cooperation relationships and meaningful access it requires. The

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 145.

United States needs to prove to these nations, that it is committed to the security of the region. To gain this trust the United States should expand the materiel and training support it offers, especially to those countries and that are leaning towards severing ties with the United States.

## **Conclusion**

In the past two decades China has positioned itself to contest the United States primacy in the Indo-Pacific region. Through the implementation of an active defense strategy, the CCP has reduced the operational relevance of the United States most capable platforms. As a result, the United States' ability to use conventional deterrence in the face of Chinese aggression has been degraded. To be effective, conventional deterrence must both be credible and capable—and the United States' capacity to do so is now in question. However, the advent of EABO seems to promise the United States a means to counter the Chinese A2/AD network. If the United States wishes to be successful, it will require increased levels of partner nation security cooperation. Unfortunately, in their current state, these relationships fall short of the requirements of an EABO centric strategy. The greatest limiting-factor is the United States military's lack of meaningful and enduring access to many nations in the Indo-Pacific region. Port access was a necessity to project power afloat; however, physical access to terrain is a required prerequisite to conduct EABO. However, access in itself does not guarantee that the concept will be a viable means of deterrence. If it wishes to pursue the EABO concept the United States must take the necessary action to enhance its relationships in the region and gain physical access to key terrain. Doing so will require greater military investment in its partners throughout the region, especially those states that are considering abandoning the United States or have expanded relations with China. However, failure to do so will result in China expanding its already growing influence in the region. Furthermore, American leadership must demonstrate and back its commitment to the

nations of the region. Doing so requires support for existing liberal institutions and the forging of new ones if necessary.

This study focused on the security cooperation necessary to facilitate EABO; however, this is merely the first step and a single requirement. There are many other considerations required to implement EABO, such as the development of more capable sensors and shooters, as well as the means to logistically support highly distributed operations across the Pacific Region. However, if the basic security cooperation prerequisites are not first met, EABO is doomed to fail. As Colonel George observed, implementing EABO as an effective deterrent requires a significant diplomatic effort. The United States Navy and Marine Corps cannot effectively solve this problem alone. It will require a synergistic effort between the Department of Defense and the Department of State. This study has demonstrated that U.S. security cooperation relationships in the Indo-Pacific region are not commensurate to the implementation of EABO as a deterrent. It is clear that the United States strategy must evolve and cease relying on its exquisite platforms. If it does not, the United States will lose so much influence in the Indo-Pacific that China will become the regional hegemon.

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