

The Asia Pacific military balance

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The following speech was delivered at a conference Dec. 2-3 sponsored in Bangkok, Thailand, by EIR. The conference was attended by 100 Thai military, business, and government leaders.

The increasing Soviet and Warsaw Pact preponderance in strategic nuclear and European theater nuclear and "conventional" forces over United States and NATO forces, achieved during the 1970s and early 1980s, has been well publicized. Less attention has been paid to the equally significant strategic threat of dramatic post-1973 changes in the U.S.-Soviet military balance in the Asia-Pacific region. Despite warnings from our Asian allies, this threat has been obscured by two equally dangerous illusions.

1) The Kissinger-Brzezinski "China card" fantasies have fostered the assumption that the three-fold increase (from 17 to 52) of Soviet Far East divisions under the Far East High Command, re-established in 1979 under the direction of Marshal Ogarkov, is nothing to worry about. This increase was allegedly prompted by Soviet concern over the Chinese threat, and these 35 additional Soviet divisions will be taken care of by the Chinese on our behalf.

2) Since the 1973 withdrawal from Vietnam—however traumatic—and save for our commitment to South Korea, the United States has no mainland Asian military commitment or responsibility and is safe behind the Seventh Fleet screen patrolling the Pacific and Indian Ocean waters.

Let us not counter assumptions by other assumptions, but re-examine points 1 and 2 in light of the following tables, showing in detail the shifts in Asia-Pacific deployed military power between 1965 and 1985.

Reviewing the following tables, four things stand out:

1) Even counting two Soviet-type divisions as the equivalent of one U.S.-type division (in terms of fighting power, this will tend to overestimate U.S.-type forces' strength), we see that ground forces' strength has shifted in 1985 from a 2:1 U.S. (and allies) advantage. In addition, key Soviet supply and re-supply lines are one-third to one-fourth the distance of U.S. supply lines.

2) U.S. reduction of naval strength by one entire fleet since 1965 has led to a significant Soviet preponderance in surface combatants (in addition to the always existing submarine preponderance) by 1985. Increases in Japanese naval strength have not been sufficient to offset U.S. reductions.

U.S. supply lines are long and uncertain. Subic Bay, Hawaii, and Seattle do not add up to Vladivostok and Cam Ranh Bay.

3) A qualitatively new factor is the presence since 1978-79 of the Soviet SS-20 nuclear ballistic missile threat to all Pacific forward-based U.S. systems as well as to Guam. Forty percent of all SS-20s have likely Asia-Pacific region targets.

4) Since 1965, Japan has grown to become the OECD's second largest economy and an increasingly valuable Soviet target. In the same time period, Japanese energy and raw materials dependence on the Middle East and Southeast Asia has increased manyfold, multiplying the strategic importance of the Southeast Asian straits (Malacca, Sunda, Lombok, etc.) and the South China Sea.

In light of these developments, any belittling of Soviet Asia-Pacific military strength would be utter folly. With the expansion of base facilities around the Indian Ocean and



especially the acquisition since 1979 of large new bases in Vietnam (Cam Ranh, Danang) and Cambodia (Kompong Son), the Soviet Union has achieved strategic break-out from the Seas of Japan and Okhotsk—not only for its Pacific Fleet, but for its air and ground forces. Japan and U.S. ground and naval forces are now not only threatened by long-range ICBMs, but also by massive ground and air forces capable of taking and holding territory.

The latter capability in particular is the preferred Soviet threat deployment mode. While recognized in Europe, it has been largely overlooked by Western analysts—preoccupied and fascinated almost exclusively as they are with past matters of sea power, which has a much reduced significance in the present and future. The Soviet Union can be expected to bring its newly developed *all-around* Pacific military strength to bear much as in the case of Western Europe: not necessarily through military action and occupation of territory, but by threats and blackmail (especially of Japan) with the aim of bringing large portions of the Asian Pacific rim into its sphere of influence.

To drive home the point that we are facing a new strategic reality in Asia qualitatively different than in the pre-1979

period, we briefly examine two potential theaters of warfare—Northeast and Southeast Asia—and the U.S. position vis-à-vis these theaters.

Northeast Asia

On the Korean peninsula, 1.5 million troops (including a U.S. infantry division in the South) and an additional 23 ready reserve divisions face each other across the 18th parallel, probably making this the area with the highest concentration of military power in the world. Consider also that a circle of 500 miles radius around a hypothetical point in the middle of the Sea of Japan would include all major Japanese cities, the major naval base at Yokohama, all of the Koreans, much of Manchuria and Soviet Pacific Fleet headquarters in Vladivostok, and it would almost reach to the Chinese capital of Beijing. Next to Central Europe (Germany), this is the most important theater for potential U.S.-Soviet conflict. But even moreso than in Europe, U.S. and allied forces are badly outgunned in this region. U.S. forces—even including the Marine division on Okinawa—are only of token character. Japanese forces remain inadequate. And there is no credible defense for South Korea or Japan (including U.S. bases there)

TABLE 1
1965 Pacific Rim deployment of forces

	U.S.A	S. Korea	Japan	Taiwan	Philippines	S. Vietnam
Total armed forces	n.a.	604,000	246,000	524,000	36,500	565,350
Army						
Total strength		540,000	172,000	380,000	25,500	280,000
Active divisions	6	18	13	23	1	4 corps
Independent						132,000 US 15,000 SK 1,500 AUS 350 NZ
Brigades/regiments/battalion	1 airborne brigade	57 battalions		1 airborne brigade	4 training divisions	
Reserve strength			24,000		120,000	280,000
Divisions/brigades		10 divisions				
Navy						
Total strength	1st & 7th fleets	17,000	35,000	35,000	4,000	15,350
Aircraft carrier						no large vessels
Battleship/cruiser						
Destroyer		1	19	5		
Submarine		6	6			
Frigate		16	28	8		
Other vessels		53	280	216	69	
Air Force						
Total strength	Hq 5th & 13th	20,000	39,000	82,000	7,000	10,000
Total combat aircraft			500	900	200	400
Tactical fighters	8 squadrons	4 squadrons	17 squadrons	8 squadrons	4 squadrons	
Tactical bombers	2 squadrons	4 squadrons		3 squadrons		
Transport/reconnaissance	7 TC squadrons 2 squadrons	19	35 squadrons			
Misc. aircraft		90	400			
Marine						
		27,000		27,000		5,000
Divisions	2					
Marine/airwing	2					

against the Soviet SS-20 threat.

There are essentially two possible Northeast Asia conflict scenarios.

First, a North Korean attack on South Korea not backed up by Soviet (or Chinese forces). Reasonable estimates are that South Korea, properly resupplied and after some initial losses, could probably stay its ground. In the longer run, superior South Korean industrial and population potential should further improve their relative position. Of the two possible Northeast Asian theater scenarios, this one is more palatable to U.S. war planners and—perhaps for that reason—considered the more likely of the two.

In the context of global U.S.-Soviet conflict, the limited Korea war scenario becomes largely irrelevant—except as a possible trigger point. South Korean forces will be out-flanked; resupply will become impossible. Soviet efforts will be aimed at achieving break-out from the Sea of Japan. The first target—with North Korean flanking protection—will be northern Hokkaido. Should Chinese involvement appear likely, North Korean and Soviet forces will have Liaoning peninsula port facilities as a primary target, and Tianjin and Beijing as a secondary target. Combined U.S. and Japanese

forces—including Seventh Fleet support—will be found grossly inadequate to offer effective resistance beyond the very initial phase of the conflict if it remains confined to non-nuclear means. Given the regional value disparity of nuclear targets (threat to Japanese population centers versus principally military targets on the Soviet side), a decision to go to a nuclear denial of Soviet break-out is if anything even more problematical than in Europe. On the other hand, if denial of Soviet aims by nuclear means becomes a plausible option, an almost complete reversal of the strategic situation ensues. Soviet break-out to be effective requires high concentration of forces creating ideal targets for nuclear attack. The principal regional strategic question thus is the possibility of shielding Japanese cities against nuclear annihilation. SDI-type of defensive systems provide the only available answer.

The South China Sea and Southeast Asia

In the case of global U.S.-Soviet conflict (or even short of that as the result of gross U.S. foreign policy failures), the South China Sea, crucial link between the Pacific and Indian Ocean basins, is in danger of becoming a Soviet lake. This threat, much as the strategic threat in Northeast Asia, has

Table 1 (continued)
1965 Pacific Rim deployment of forces

	Australia	New Zealand	U.S.S.R.	N. Korea	N. Vietnam
Total armed forces	69,000	12,900	n.a.	353,000	240,000
Army					
Total strength	37,500	5,400	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Active divisions	1		17	18	11
Independent			600 tank		
Brigades/regiments/battalions	3 regiments	1 brigade		1,300 artillery	
Reserve strength	29,000	9,000		30-50% nuclear capability	
Divisions/brigades				5 brigades	
Navy					
Total strength	14,000	3,000	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Aircraft carrier	1 TRP 1 ASW	1			
Battleship/cruiser					
Destroyer	5			3-4	
Submarine			120 conventional 20 nuclear	1	
Frigate	4	3 ASW			
Other vessels	28	4	150	135	80
Air Force					
Total strength	17,720	4,500			
Total combat aircraft				500	FE10/MiG-15
Tactical fighters	6 squadrons	1 squadron	MiG-15, 17 IL-28	MiG-15	MiG-17
Tactical bombers	3 squadrons	1 squadron	20 bisons 10 bears	MiG-17 IL-28	
Transport/reconnaissance	3 squadrons	4 squadrons			
Misc. aircraft					
Marine					
Divisions					
Marine/airwing					

been largely ignored or underestimated, because U.S. military planners prefer to view all Asia-related matters almost entirely in naval (sea power) terms. However, acquisition by the Soviet Union of large and modern bases in Vietnam and Cambodia (under development) does not only provide new operational capabilities for the Soviet Pacific Fleet and attached air wings. Landing operations conducted out of Kompong Son (Cambodia) against the Kra Isthmus area can lock in Thailand and achieve control of the Malacca Strait (recall Japanese World War II strategy). And highly capable Vietnamese divisions provided with Soviet logistical, airlift and landing craft back-up will find no great difficulty in gaining an immediate foothold in the Philippines. (Of course, present U.S. State Department policy toward the Philippines may spare them the military effort.) The South China Sea will then be surrounded and entirely controlled by Soviet and Soviet-allied forces—a feat no more difficult and with present force constellations no more likely to be effectively resisted than comparable Japanese World War II operations.

(Where was the mighty combined British-Dutch fleet when the Japanese landed at Kota Bharn? Largely at the bottom of the ocean, hit by *land-based* bombers.)

We have drawn attention without going into greater detail to the Northeast and Southeast Asian theater problems to force consideration of the very large combined Soviet, North Korean, and Vietnamese ground forces superiority in Asia over U.S. and allied forces. Therein, at least as much as in the rapid growth of the Soviet Pacific Fleet, lies the most important strategic threat.

In the beginning phase of World War II in the Pacific (after Pearl Harbor), Admiral Yamamoto had proposed and designed a combined arms (navy, army, air force) Asian rim and Southeast Asian offensive to be carried into India and the Indian Ocean rim. Only when this was abandoned for political reasons we cannot explain here, did Yamamoto agree to the Midway alternative which would prove to be the early turnaround of the Pacific War. The Russians will have no more reason or incentive to go island-hopping in the South Pacific. Once they control the rim they can safely leave the wild blue yonder to us. We remark in conclusion of this section that detailed joint Japanese-U.S. war planning in the Asia-Pacific region drawing deliberately on relevant World War II experiences could go a long way toward redressing the present Asia-Pacific strategic impasse.

Table 2
1975 Pacific Rim deployment of forces

	U.S.A	S. Korea	Japan	Taiwan	Philippines	S. Vietnam
Total armed forces	n.a.	625,000	233,000	491,000	55,000	565,000
Army						
Total strength		560,000	154,000	340,000	35,500	450,000
Active divisions	1-SK	23	12	20	2	12
Independent	1-Ha.					2 regiments
Brigades/regiments/battalions		2 brigades	2 brigades	4 special forces 2 regiments 2 airborne brigades	3 brigades	48 battalions
Reserve strength		1,000,000		750,000	218,500	
Divisions/brigades						
Navy						
Total strength	7th fleet	20,000	38,100	36,000	11,000	40,000
Aircraft carrier	3					
Battleship/cruiser	25					
Destroyer		6	27	18	1 IDE	
Submarine		14	2		2	
Frigate		3	27			9
Other vessels		122	109	91	68	901
Air Force						
Total strength	48,600	25,000	40,900	80,000	9,000	80,000
Total combat aircraft	11 squadrons	210	385	206	36	509
Tactical fighters	11 squadrons	11 squadrons	14 squadrons	5 squadrons	3 squadrons	4 squadrons
Tactical bombers	5th AF 13th AF 7th AF	5 squadrons	3 squadrons	6 squadrons		14 squadrons
Transport/reconnaissance			3 squadrons	3 squadrons	5 squadrons	13 squadrons
Misc. aircraft		350	113			
Marine						
Marine/airwing	1	1				15,000



Table 2 (continued)

1975 Pacific Rim deployment of forces

	Australia	New Zealand	U.S.S.R.	N. Korea	N. Vietnam
Total armed forces	68,851	12,630	n.a.	467,000	583,000
Army					
Total strength	31,185	5,553	n.a.	410,000	570,000
Active divisions	1		45	23	19
Independent	3 regiments	1 brigade			
Brigades/regiments/battalions	6 battalions	1 battalion		3 brigades 7 regiments	
Reserve strength	20,200	2,664		250,000	
Divisions/brigades					
Navy					
Total strength	16,115	2,845		17,000	3,000
Aircraft carrier	1	1			
Battleship/cruiser			60	4	
Destroyer	3		10		
Submarine			40	1	
Frigate	6	4			
Other vessels	40	18	55	150	80
Air Force					
Total strength	21,551	4,232	100,000	40,000	10,000
Total combat aircraft	151	29	1,725	598	203
Tactical fighters	6 squadrons	2 squadrons	1,100	500	6 squadrons
Tactical bombers	1 squadron		225 Iraf	98	7 squadrons
Transport/reconnaissance	2 squadrons	5 squadrons	400		
Misc. aircraft		85			
Marine					
Divisions					
Marine/airwing					



Table 3
1985 Pacific Rim deployment of forces

	U.S.A	S. Korea	Japan	Taiwan	Philippines	Thailand
Total armed forces		622,000	241,000	484,000	104,800	235,300
Army						
Total strength		540,000	156,000	330,000	60,500	160,000
Active divisions	1-SK 1-Ha.	23	13	18	5	9
Independent Brigades/regiments/battalions		3 airborne brigades 8 brigades	2 brigades	3 airborne brigades 6 brigades	1 special warfare 1 regiment	1 special warfare 8 infantry brigades
Reserve strength		1,400,000	41,000	1,500,000	20,000	500,000
Divisions/brigades		23 divisions		9 divisions	18 divisions	4 division hq
Navy						
Total strength		49,000	42,000		28,000	32,000
Aircraft carrier	2 heli					
Battleship/cruiser	5					
Destroyer	8	11	31			
Submarine	8	14				
Frigate	7	8	17		7	6
Other vessels	115	14				142
Air Force						
Total strength	Hq 5th & 13th 3 MA Div SAC	33,000	43,000		16,800	43,100
Total combat aircraft		450	280		42	188
Tactical fighters		19 squadrons	14 squadrons		2 squadrons	3 squadrons
Tactical bombers		4 squadrons	6 squadrons			7 coin squadrons
Transport/reconnaissance	2 squadrons	19	1 rec		3 squadrons	3 squadrons
Misc. aircraft						
Marine						
Divisions	12	20,000			96,000	13,000
Marine/airwing	12	2 divisions 1 brigade plus 11,000 naval, air 43 combat aircraft, 62 combat heli		3 brigades	3 brigades 2 brigades 2 infantry battalions	2 brigades



Table 3 (continued)
1985 Pacific Rim deployment of forces

	Indonesia	Malaysia	Singapore	Australia	New Zealand	U.S.S.R.
Total armed forces	281,000	124,500	55,500	72,345	12,690	n.a.
Army						
Total strength	210,000	100,500	45,000	32,680	5,540	n.a.
Active divisions		4 division hq	1			52
Independent	4 special warfare	1 special force brigade	4 brigades	3 regiments	2 battalions	4 airborne brigades
Brigades/regiments/battalions	16 brigades 37 battalions	12 infantry brigades				
Reserve strength		45,000	150,000	30,300	1,410	
Divisions/brigades			2 divisions 6 brigades			
Navy						
Total strength	42,000	11,000	4,500	16,988	2,827	
Aircraft carrier						2
Battleship/cruiser						16
Destroyer				3		16
Submarine	3 non-nuclear			6		133
Frigate	9	2		10	4	11
Other vessels	18	55	34		13	186
Air Force						
Total strength	29,000	13,000	6,000	22,677	4,317	
Total combat aircraft	68	34	167	133	33	3,090
Tactical fighters	15 F-5s 1 coin squadron	1 squadron	4 squadrons	5 squadrons	2 squadrons	1,700
Tactical bombers		2 coin squadron				560
Transport/reconnaissance		3 squadrons	3 squadrons	7 squadrons/3 squadrons	2 squadrons/1 squadron	200
Misc. aircraft						
Marine						
Divisions	2 regiments			1,310 fleet		1 division
Marine/airwing						3 regiments

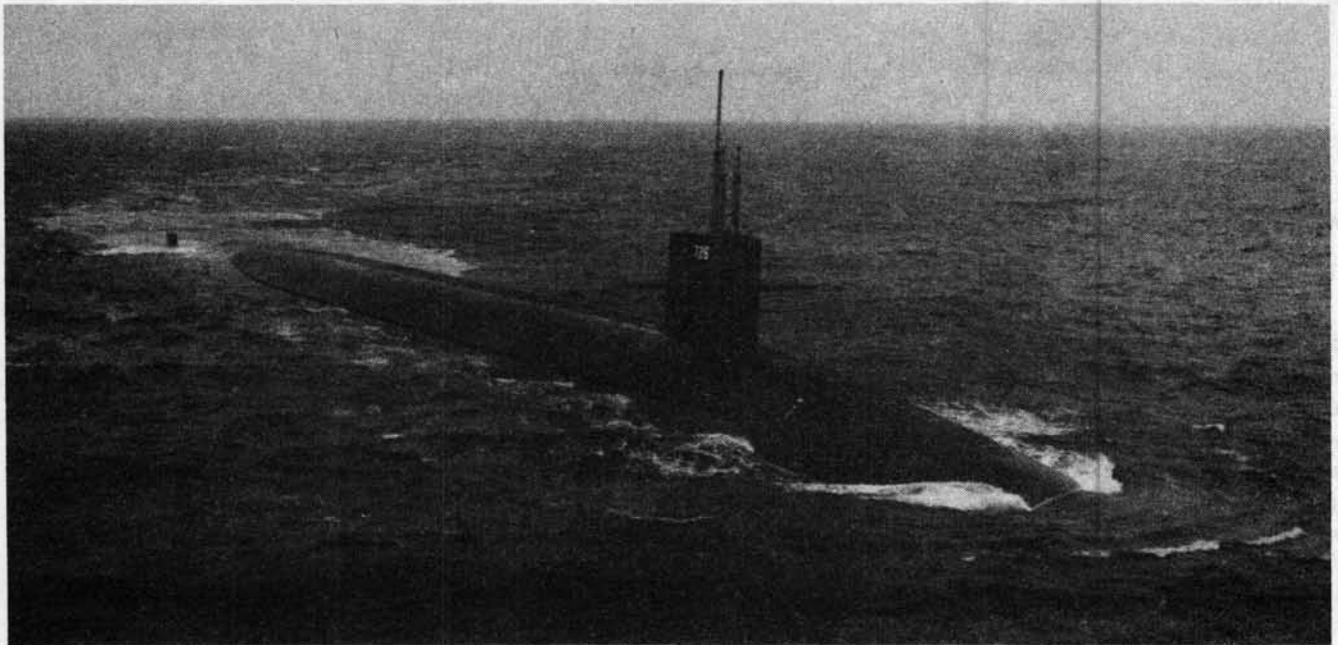


Table 3 (continued)

1985 Pacific Rim deployment of forces

	N. Korea	N. Vietnam	India	Bangladesh	Pakistan	China
Total armed forces	784,500	1,029,000	1,120,000	81,300	478,600	4,000,000
Army						
Total strength	700,000	1,000,000	960,000	73,000	450,000	3,160,000
Active divisions	36	58	31	5	18	131
Independent	14 brigades 6 regiments 5 river crossing regiments	6 regiments		12 infantry brigades	9 brigades	local forces 73 divisions
Brigades/regiments/battalions	3 brigades 7 regiments		13 brigades	2 regiments		
Reserve strength	260,000		200,000		500,000	5,000,000
Divisions/brigades	23 divisions					
Navy						
Total strength	33,500	4,000	47,000	5,300	11,000	350,000
Aircraft carrier			1			
Battleship/cruiser			1			
Destroyer			3		8	14
Submarine	21 non-nuclear	4 U.S.S.R.	8		11	100 non-nuclear 2 nuclear
Frigate	4	5	23	3		22
Other vessels	427	76	46	32	48	
Air Force						
Total strength	51,000	15,000	113,000	3,000	17,600	490,000
Total combat aircraft	740	290	920	27	314	5,300
Tactical fighters	25 squadrons	7 regiments	36 squadrons	3 squadrons	18 squadrons	4,500
Tactical bombers	3 squadrons		3 squadrons			620
Transport/reconnaissance	250	6 regiments	9 squadrons/2 squadrons	1 squadron	2 squadron/1 squadron	550/130
Misc. aircraft	280					
Marine						
Divisions		2 divisions				
Marine/airwing						