

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

Jeong Lee

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

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

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

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

Mr. Jeong Lee is a freelance writer and a contributing analyst for Wikistrat’s Asia-Pacific Desk. Lee’s writings have appeared in multiple online publications, including *East Asia Forum*, the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, the *World Outline*, *CIMSEC*, the Naval Institute’s blog, *RealClearDefense*, and *Small Wars Journal*. He writes on US defense and foreign policy issues as well as inter-Korean affairs.

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

2 *Ibid.*, 78-9.

3 *Ibid.*, 82.

4 *Ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 Deni, 80.

8 Ibid., 81.

9 Ibid., 84.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

James D. Perry

© 2013 James D. Perry

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

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

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

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

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

Dr. James Perry received an MA in Security Policy Studies and a PhD in History from George Washington University. He was a Visiting Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. After completing his fellowship, he joined Science Applications International Corp, where he analyzed national security issues for US government and military clients. He is currently a Senior Analyst for a major aerospace corporation.

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

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

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

The Author Replies

John R. Deni

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

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

The global troops-to-task analysis that Dr. Perry is after is really outside the scope of a 4,000-word essay. His own brief effort to tally up the numbers was certainly not comprehensive, and hence not compelling as a basis for judging whether the active duty Army should be 490K strong or 300K strong, and what level of risk would accompany any chosen end strength. Indeed, a full scope troops-to-tasks analysis is the kind of thing the entire Department of Defense is currently engaged in as part of the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) report. That report should, among other things, outline the major missions or broad objectives the Department will use to size and structure the force. Although the QDR report is months from publication at the time of this writing, one thing that seems very clear is that if sequestration remains, the active-duty Army is likely to drop below 490,000 personnel and 33 brigade combat teams (BCTs), perhaps to about 420,000.¹⁵ Outside experts agree that sequestration will likely cause a major cut in active duty Army forces and consequently in the number of active duty BCTs.¹⁶ Obviously, and according to these same experts, this will make it more difficult for the Army to perform its many missions. Just *how* difficult—and how much risk is associated with a smaller, less capable forces—remains to be seen, but the fact remains that a smaller military necessarily increases risk. Currently, it appears the country may be quite willing to tolerate a great deal of risk, at least in the short run, when it comes to its land forces. If so, the Army will be a less effective strategic tool in achieving US objectives not simply in the Indo-Asia-Pacific but around the world.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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