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A CLIMATE-SECURITY PLAN FOR THE ASIA-PACIFIC REBALANCE: LESSONS FROM THE MARSHALL PLAN

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The United States is a Pacific nation, and a Pacific power. Stability in the Pacific is therefore inherently linked to U.S. security and foreign policy interests. Despite high-profile international security crises in Europe and the Middle East, including Russia’s revanchist actions in eastern Ukraine and the rise of ISIS, the United States remains committed to placing a greater strategic emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region, closing down some military bases in Europe, redeploying soldiers to bases in Australia and the Philippines, moving combat ships to Singapore, bolstering commitments to allied and partner nations in the region, and placing the region front and center in its strategic documents.¹²³⁴ As stated in the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance note, “while the U.S. military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity re-balance toward the Asia-Pacific region.”⁵ This commitment was reaffirmed in the DoD’s 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review, with the centerpiece of the rebalance being described by the DoD as “efforts to modernize and enhance our security alliances with Australia, Japan, the ROK, the Philippines, and Thailand.”

However, in order for this strategic shift to translate into lasting influence, the United States needs a comprehensive diplomatic, defense and development agenda for building the region’s resilience to key emerging threats – including climate change.

The Pacific Rebalance in Historical Context

In very broad strokes, the reasons for this so-called “Pacific Rebalance” are not necessarily far removed from the reasons for the United States’ Eurocentric posture after the Second World War.⁶ In both cases, strategic significance is key. U.S. strategy after the Second World War was designed

to ensure the defense of Western Europe against internal war, economic disaster and a rising Soviet Union, with Berlin serving as the strategic convergence point of the superpower competition. Over six decades later, a number of factors have contributed to a new strategic focus on the Asia-Pacific: a rising China; rapid economic and population growth in the broader Asia-Pacific; the proliferation of nuclear weapons and materials (five of the world's nuclear powers are in the Indo-Asia-Pacific); increased economic activity and political tensions in the strategic convergence point of the South China Sea;⁷ military buildups (the area boasts seven out of ten of the world's largest standing militaries); and the opening of previously impassable sea lanes by a melting Arctic.⁸ The difference today is that the United States does not quite have the Asia-Pacific equivalent of a Marshall Plan to set this new posture on a stable, resilient and prosperous footing.

Cooperation and Competition with China

In the absence of robust U.S. engagement and investments that help address the core needs of Asia-Pacific nations, including those needs that are challenged by a changing climate, nations in the region may ultimately find it more practical to accept the reality of a regionally dominant China, and the economic and political consequences of that reality. Indeed, many nations in the region, in the face of an uncertain level of U.S. engagement, have been slowly reorienting their foreign and domestic policies to accommodate an increasingly powerful Beijing,⁹ while others, such as Cambodia, seem to be hedging their bets.¹⁰ While a number of nations in the region are engaged in disputes with China over contested areas of the South China Sea, China's influence is increasing on both the economic and military front.¹¹ China remains the largest trading partner for Southeast Asian nations, and is increasing its military force significantly in relation to other countries in its neighborhood, including through the deployment of a "blue-water navy" that has ventured as far from home as the Straits of Hormuz.¹⁷² China has also begun development of a regional Free Trade Zone, which could compete with U.S.-led objectives in the regional trade arena.¹⁸³

In this context, the United States will need to develop more expansive approaches to relations with China if it wishes to maintain and enhance its regional influence, and support the interests of its allies and partners in the Asia-Pacific.¹⁹⁴ More robustly addressing the region's climate challenges offers one such opportunity.

The Climate Reality in the Asia-Pacific

The U.S. enjoys a strong relationship with key Asia-Pacific allies, such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, India and the Philippines. But there are a host of other nations, from Indonesia to East Timor to Vietnam, that have traditionally had a more difficult relationship with Washington. These nations also happen to be very vulnerable to natural disasters. According to UNISDR: "The

Asia-Pacific region is the most disaster-prone area of the world and it is also the most seriously affected one. Almost 2 million people were killed in disasters between 1970 and 2011, representing 75 percent of all disaster fatalities globally. The most frequent hazards in the region are hydro-meteorological, which also affect the most people.”¹⁵



Children play in flood waters after torrential rains in Kampung Melayu, South Jakarta, Indonesia, January 17, 2013.
VOICE OF AMERICA/KATE LAMB

Climate change will significantly multiply this vulnerability to natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific.¹⁶ Nations of the region have already recognized the gravity of the threat. For example, the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific has identified climate change as an ever-present existential threat to its members.¹⁷ The American Security Project’s “Global Security and Defense Index for Climate Change” shows that Asia-Pacific nations overwhelmingly perceive climate change as a threat to their national security.¹⁸ For the United States, this has been confirmed by a series of intelligence assessments and studies,^{19 20 21} and war games conducted by the Department of Defense, which demonstrate that South and Southeast Asia face a number of security challenges driven by climate change in the next few decades, including food shortages, water crises, catastrophic flooding, greater frequency and intensity of hydro-meteorological disasters, population displacement, and increased public health issues.²²

If the U.S. is serious about successfully pursuing the broad range of U.S. security and economic interests in the region, it will need to find a way to build and maintain a much broader and more resilient coalition of Asia-Pacific allies. The U.S. must offer key countries in the region the opportunities they need to both grow their economies, and combat significant transnational threats to their well-being. In this context, taking a page out of George C. Marshall's book might make a lot of sense.

Lessons from the Marshall Plan

In 1949, the United States made a decision that its national security depended on the maintenance of a broad coalition of strong European allies to contain, and compete with, a rising Soviet Union. The Marshall Plan, a \$13 billion package of development assistance tied explicitly to diplomatic, development and defense priorities (the “3 Ds”), was the first and most important step in that process – designed, as it was, to maintain a Europe stable and secure enough to resist Soviet aggression, both covert and otherwise.²³

The robust nature of the Marshall Plan, which effectively combined all 3 Ds of U.S. foreign policy – connecting economic and development assistance to Europe with diplomatic and security objectives – quickly elevated Western Europe from devastated to developed, and has since been recognized as one of the single most important elements of that grand strategy. The Marshall Plan helped to lay the foundations for a vital European Union, a strong European defense structure – the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – and the economic, political and military defense against the spread of Soviet-style communism. It stands to reason that such a broadly-successful strategy and plan be mined for ideas on how to flesh out a new U.S. strategy in the Asia-Pacific – a region that is very vulnerable to climate change threats, and grappling with the risks and benefits of a rising China.

In this context the U.S. requires the modern equivalent of the Marshall Plan for the region to assist nations in addressing climate-related threats, and to complement its current military and economic engagement in the area. In short, the U.S. needs a *Climate-Security Plan for the Asia-Pacific*.

Why a Climate-Security Plan?

Addressing climate change risks in the Asia-Pacific will help the United States bolster its influence in the region through enhancing stability, broadening and deepening alliances and trust, and protecting U.S. economic, trade and commercial interests.

Enhancing stability:

A core purpose of the U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific is to provide stability. Without climate investments in the region, the likelihood of instability, conflict and disaster may increase, with great cost to the region and the United States.²⁴ Fragile governments and economies, already strained, will experience further stresses. Some island states, for example, could literally cease to exist – a possibility that may soon become irreversible fact.²⁵ If significant and sustained climate adaptation investments and programs are not forthcoming, this picture will only be the tip of the proverbial iceberg. A 2009 security review by Australia's Defense Force (ADF) stated that rising sea levels may lead to increased refugee flows from vulnerable Pacific islands, and subsequent disputes over land and scarce food resources.²⁶ The ADF concluded this might compel them to heighten their naval presence north of the country. With such dire security projections, significant investments in climate-sensitive disaster prevention and response systems, financing to increase government capacity to provide essential services, and more robust military-military and civilian-military programs for building climate resilience will be vital for preventing disaster, keeping nations out of conflicts and disputes, and avoiding the necessity of high-cost emergency and military solutions. Such investments will have the added benefit of alleviating the burden on U.S. military operations and readiness, and freeing up those resources to conduct other critical missions.

Broadening and deepening alliances and trust:

Recent commitments to climate resilience through USAID's Pacific-American Climate Fund, the ADAPT Asia-Pacific program, and robust and swift support from the U.S. military and partner civilian agencies after significant natural disasters, such as Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, have been welcome. However, the Asia Development Bank notes that the region requires about \$40 billion annually until 2050 in order to "neutralize" the effects of climate change.²⁷ In this context, U.S. contributions to climate resilience in the region have been very small relative to the threat. This could be problematic as the U.S. seeks to broaden its partnerships in the region beyond its traditional allies, including with strategically-significant and extremely climate-vulnerable countries²⁸ such as Vietnam²⁹ and Indonesia.³⁰ While the broader diplomatic repercussions of this gap between need for climate resilience and U.S. support remain unclear, growing frustration with the United States over its inability to marshal additional investments in climate resilience has been expressed among the Pacific Island states.³¹ In concert with the advancement of other regional trade and investment initiatives, meeting the region's climate needs could provide the opportunity for economic and political stability; build trust and goodwill towards the United States; make it easier for the U.S. military and civilian agencies to cooperate with nations on security, humanitarian and disaster relief missions; and serve as a non-threatening way of competing with China for regional influence.³²

Protecting U.S. economic, commercial and trade interests in the region:

The resilience of the Asia-Pacific as a whole is also good for U.S. commercial interests in the region. As Admiral Samuel J. Locklear III, former U.S. Pacific Commander, noted, the Indo-Asia-Pacific boasts “two of the three largest economies of the world...the busiest sea lanes in the world with over 8 trillion dollars of two-way trade with half the world’s container cargo and 70 percent of shipborne energy passing through the Pacific every day.”³³ The U.S. State Department estimates that in 2012, U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in this fast-growing region amounted to \$622 billion, “reflecting a 35 percent increase since the beginning of the Obama Administration.”³⁴ The effects of climate change, including sea level rise that will significantly impact large coastal cities and ports, rainfall variability that can damage critical supply chains, and the potentially destabilizing effect of migrating fish stocks in the volatile South China Sea,³⁵ could jeopardize a significant portion of these U.S. investments. In this context, investments in climate adaptation for vulnerable countries would help increase the capacity of critical economic partners in the area to cope with extreme weather events, and other climate impacts. For example, a quarter of the world’s “sliders,” an essential component of hard disk drives, are manufactured in one Thai plant in Bang Pa-In.³⁶ In 2010, that plant was inundated by floods that were the result of wild rainfall variability – increasingly attributed to climate change.³⁷ Regional investments in climate-proofed flood and water management systems, among other adaptation projects, could serve to avoid these supply chain disruptions, and thus strengthen the stability of U.S. economic interests in the region.

What Would a Climate-Security Plan Look Like?

The good news is that the foundation for a Climate-Security Plan has already been laid. The bad news is that it will require political will to build on this foundation to meaningfully address the scale of the threat. Nonetheless, there are existing programs, funds, strategies and structures that can form a strong basis for such a plan, and that collectively address the “3 Ds” in the U.S. foreign policy toolkit: defense, diplomacy and development. With the right scale of investment, and with coordination across these three traditionally-distinct silos, a Climate-Security Plan which includes, but is not limited to, the components listed below could play a significant role in helping to address the region’s vulnerabilities.

Defense:

The U.S. military can play a fundamental role in helping maintain stability in climate-vulnerable nations in the Asia-Pacific region, through both military-military (mil-mil) and civilian-military (civ-mil) engagement designed to bolster preparedness for climate-related threats and response capacity. Indeed, some of this engagement is already happening, including mil-mil cooperation on disaster risk reduction (DRR) with key partner nations such as Malaysia;³⁸ large-scale joint exercises such as Pacific Angel;³⁹ regional security dialogues on climate change and security

at forums such as Shangri-La⁴⁰ and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting,⁴¹ and military-led diplomacy through the Pacific Outreach Directorate of US Pacific Command (USPACOM),⁴² which has been very receptive to regional concerns over climate change. However, a much more robust program is needed.

The U.S. can do much to build climate resilience in the region by simply expanding mil-mil and civ-mil engagement programs led by USPACOM. This includes ensuring that the U.S. Department of Defense broadens its strategic guidance to USPACOM to allow for the integration of climate change risks into its deliberate and contingency planning processes, strategic analyses, joint exercises and cooperative security programs. This would give USPACOM the space to coordinate with its counterparts in the diplomatic and development agencies to address climate change as a strategic security risk in its Area of Responsibility (AOR), a vast expanse ranging from India to the easternmost Pacific island. Such coordination should emphasize the stabilizing and “conflict avoidance” benefits of climate change adaptation, water security and disaster risk reduction efforts in key countries. The U.S. Department of Defense can also expand the scale and scope of USPACOM’s resources to address climate security risks through mechanisms such as the Combatant Commander Initiative Fund – funds that could go a long way towards limiting the number and size of costly humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR) missions in the future.⁴³ The U.S. could also encourage more robust participation from the Joint Staff on addressing the strategic security implications of climate change in the region, which could significantly elevate U.S. attention to the issue, and prevent climate concerns from being limited to the “low politics” doldrums of environmental hazards. Lastly, the U.S. could explore minor reforms to security assistance to the region, scrutinizing outdated programs, and elevating programs designed to mitigate the security risks of a changing climate, among other emerging transnational security risks.

Aftermath of Typhoon Ondoy (Ketsana), Philippines 2009. AusAID



Diplomacy:

Diplomatic efforts to enhance cooperation with allied, partner and prospective partner nations on addressing climate-related threats will be critical for the success of any such plan. Again, the U.S. will not be starting from scratch. In 2013, the U.S. supported the Majuro Declaration at the Pacific Islands Forum,⁴⁴ which called on countries to create a fund to address climate risks in Pacific islands. In 2014, the U.S. concluded a historic deal on climate change with China, which included a major pledge from both countries to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.⁴⁵ However, a much greater emphasis on bi-lateral and multi-lateral partnerships for addressing climate change in the region is needed.

With important U.S. backing, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) may have room to expand its mandate beyond energy, and into climate change adaptation⁴⁶. In 2012, the U.S. launched a high-level engagement process in the region that included “coping with climate change, and rising sea levels,”⁴⁷ which can serve as the basis for more robust further engagement on the issue. The U.S.-led Trans-Pacific Partnership, a “regulatory and investment treaty” for the region, can be leveraged to drive strategic investments in climate resilience.⁴⁸ And just as the U.S., in concert with Brunei and Indonesia, launched the \$6 billion “Asia Pacific Comprehensive Partnership for a Sustainable Energy” in 2012,⁴⁹ a similar effort could be launched to support climate change adaptation efforts.

Lastly, more expansive U.S. support for climate-sensitive disaster risk reduction (DRR) in the region – which requires close coordination across the 3Ds – could have important, long-lasting diplomatic benefits that go well beyond the often short-lived diplomatic benefits of successful disaster response efforts.

Development:

Development support, including increases in financing for climate change adaptation projects and building climate-resilient infrastructure, will also be of critical importance – particularly support that addresses potential drivers of instability and conflict. Until now, such financing has been minuscule relative to the threat.⁵⁰ While recent U.S. commitments, such as its pledged \$3 billion to the Green Climate Fund, USAID’s ADAPT Asia-Pacific program,⁵¹ the Pacific-American Climate Fund,⁵² and the Lower Mekong Initiative,⁵³ will help in this regard, it may not be enough – especially given China’s recent announcement of an alternative “South-South” climate fund.⁵⁴

Once again, the foundation for expanding these programs exists. On top of financial channels with long-standing support from the United States across Administrations, such as the Global Environment Facility⁵⁵ and the Climate Investment Funds,⁵⁶ the Green Climate Fund⁵⁷ has the potential to provide a significant amount of climate adaptation support, provided the U.S. is able to make good on its commitments, increase them over time, and direct a significant portion of

the funds to the most strategically important and vulnerable countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The U.S. has also created a five-year Pacific-American Climate Fund,⁵⁸ which can be renewed and expanded upon. There are other less obvious funding mechanisms that can be deployed and enhanced as well. For example, the U.S. could broaden the mandate and scope of the Global Security Contingency Fund,⁵⁹ a unique fund jointly administered by the U.S. Department of Defense and Department of State, to emphasize the commitment of resources for addressing the security implications of climate change in the Asia-Pacific. Entities like the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), the Export-Import Bank (Ex-Im Bank) and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) can also be mobilized for this purpose.

If the U.S. were to lead now with the delivery and expansion of these investments and programs, it could bolster its efforts to remain an indispensable nation in the Asia-Pacific region, and potentially do so in a way that makes a very small dent in the federal budget.⁶⁰ If not, the U.S. stands to either cede that ground to a rising China, or in the absence of China assuming a leadership role, acting as a bystander to growing instability and economic disruption.

An Asia-Pacific Rebalance Needs a Climate-Security Plan

Times have obviously changed since the Marshall Plan was implemented, and there are many ways in which modern investment programs and strategic engagement strategies are different. But the key positive lesson of the Marshall Plan is relevant today. To be successful, national security strategies must be complemented by defense, diplomatic and development support for our current and prospective allies to combat emerging threats. If the United States wants to be successful in the Asia-Pacific, it will need to invest in combating the great threat multiplier in the region – climate change.⁶¹ Indeed, addressing the needs of Asia-Pacific nations that are vulnerable to the effects of climate change may be the U.S. foreign policy imperative of the 21st century – a policy that will shore up and sustain U.S. leadership in both the Asia-Pacific and the world. Failing to play such a leadership role may ultimately result in other nations either assuming that leadership mantle, or being left without the capacity to prevent and respond to instability and conflict. The U.S. has that capacity, if it chooses to seize the opportunity at hand. A Climate-Security Plan for the Asia-Pacific may be the 21st century equivalent of the Marshall Plan for Europe, and U.S. global leadership may depend on it.

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