

Arming Our Allies: The Case for Offensive Capabilities

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ABSTRACT: The desire of some US allies to rearm presents an opportunity to shore up a system of deterrence challenged by ambitious and disruptive powers. Given the nature of the threat (a limited war scenario) and the security environment of the region (A2/AD capabilities of the revisionists), frontline US allies should be armed with offensive arsenals capable of targeting our common rivals. Such a capability would strengthen not only the immediate deterrent of the individual states but also the effectiveness of American extended deterrence.

Some of the most vulnerable US allies, located near regional revisionists in Europe and Asia, are beginning to rethink their security strategies. A combination of obstreperous revisionist powers in their vicinity and a distracted and solipsistic United States far away is in fact awakening security fears dormant for decades. Poland and Japan, among others, are embarking on defense modernization plans and are adjusting their postures to reflect new regional realities. Most interestingly, some US allies are acquiring, or planning to acquire, weapons capable of striking inside their rival's territories.

The United States should encourage such rearming. Well-armed frontline states, capable of hitting a common rival on its own territory, are a source of stability in a US-led alliance. They develop a missing and necessary component of the deterrence that undergirds regional stability, strengthening local defense and enhancing US extended deterrence.

In particular, offensive capabilities in the hands of the most vulnerable allies address two sets of problems. First, they reinforce indigenous deterrent capabilities that are especially needed to deal with the threat of small, localized attacks by the nearby revisionist power. They also give the targeted small or medium-sized state the option to force the enemy either to escalate to an uncomfortable level or to continue a limited war under more difficult conditions. Second, offensive capabilities in the hands of frontline allies reinforce the credibility of American extended deterrence by breaking the hostile A2/AD bubble, thereby lowering the costs of projecting power to the battlefield.

The nature of the threat presented by regional revisionist powers – China and Russia – makes such offensive capabilities more necessary than in past decades. The Western alliance system in Europe and in Asia cannot rely on a defense in depth, trading space for the time required to activate the allies and to project their forces to the frontline. The rapacious regional powers may in fact pursue a limited war, striking quickly for narrowly defined geographic objectives: their goal is not the

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territorial conquest of whole states but a gradual revision of the regional order, and they have demonstrated an aversion to direct and large confrontations with the United States and its alliances. To respond to this threat, it is crucial to have some frontline states armed with offensive capabilities. Through such capabilities, the targeted states can steel their own deterrent, increasing their ability to deny the enemy's limited objectives. At the same time, they can make allied participation less costly and thus more credible, elevating the risk of the larger war the rival fears.

Defensive Mindsets, Offensive Capabilities

Before examining the strategic benefits of offensive capabilities, it is important to note frontline states such as Poland or Japan are interested in defending their independence, not in expanding their influence or control. They are status-quo powers, benefiting from the decades-old order underwritten by the United States and maintained by its system of alliances. Their mindset is defensive. The question they face concerns the most effective way of shoring up their defenses.

There are two basic ways in which exposed frontline states can defend themselves against an aggressive neighbor: they can develop a posture of territorial defense, blunting and slowing those forces that might penetrate their state – or they can also target the enemy's rear lines and bases and even strategic assets deep inside the rival's homeland. They can acquire exclusively defensive capabilities or they can field offensive weapons.

Defensive capabilities aim to hinder the aggressor's advance into, and retention of, the targeted state's territory through a mix of position defense, guerilla warfare, and rear-guard actions. Such capabilities strike the tip of the enemy's spear, trying to blunt and hamper the attack or, should the initial defenses fail, to destabilize and harass the lands that the enemy has already taken. A spectrum of weapons can be included in this category: landmines, anti-tank missiles, short-range anti-air missiles, small arms, fixed defensive lines, and local militias. Such capabilities can attempt to hold a front in the hope of maintaining a fixed defensive line but, because of the conventional disparity, the attacking great power is likely to punch through the protected front. Hence, the defending state will have to accept some form of defense-in-depth, trading space for time to allow the allies to mobilize and join the fight – combined with the continued harassment of the hostile forces already in control of newly conquered territory or seas.

While these defensive assets aim to hold the line on the defender's homeland, offensive capabilities project destruction into the rival's territory. They include a range of weapons that can strike the enemy's staging areas, airports, radar installations, sea and river ports, logistical nodes, used by the aggressor for offensive operations. In some cases, the defending state can also acquire and plan to use medium- and long-range weapons—for instance, cruise and ballistic missiles—to threaten targets deep inside the enemy's homeland, such as cities or military installations that are not directly involved in the conduct of military operations. There are of course important differences between tactical and strategic capabilities, ranging from financial and technical to political considerations. But given the geographic propinquity of the rival and

the contained area of the military clash, the effects of the two categories of offensive weapons – short-range to disrupt the enemy’s operations and longer-range to menace targets of economic and political value – will overlap: strategic targets (e.g., cities, railroad stations, or ports) are in fact within reach of short- and medium-range weapons.

These two sets of capabilities and associated doctrines are not mutually exclusive. The choice for the US ally is not either-or, and most US allies who may be strengthening their defenses (especially those with greater economic heft and more confident foreign policies) are likely to seek a mix of both capabilities. But there is a risk these states may be tempted, or pressured by domestic and international opinion, to contemplate the defensive-only approach. The United States as well as other, less exposed allies may fear, for example, a frontline ally acquiring offensive weapons capable of striking inside the enemy’s territory will destabilize regional dynamics. It may lead to the much dreaded “cult of the offensive,” creating a dangerous belief that whoever attacks first will win and exacerbating the local security dilemma.¹ As a result of these fears, there may be international pressures on the US ally to limit its military procurement and doctrine strictly to a passive and fixed territorial defense, and to avoid the acquisition of weapons capable of hitting beyond the narrow confines of the battlefield.

The rearming state, too, may be tempted to favor exclusively defensive capabilities because they are cheaper and thus can be acquired in greater numbers. Landmines and anti-tank rounds are easier to buy in large quantities than cruise missiles and stealth bombers. They also do not require the complex communications and intelligence systems associated with power-projection capabilities that impose additional costs and demand extensive training. A decision to specialize in territorial defense would also continue the *de facto* division of labor in the alliance: the frontline ally would conduct small-scale, low-intensity defensive actions while the alliance (or rather, the United States) would join in with its overwhelming forces and fight the high-intensity, long-range war.

This fear of offensive capabilities, however, is misplaced. As the nineteenth-century naval theorist Alfred T. Mahan noted in the context of maritime competition, an exclusively defensive posture such as coastal fortifications is not sufficient to deter the enemy or, if necessary, to win wars. “In war”, he wrote, “the defensive exists mainly that the offensive may act more freely.”² “Fortresses ... defend only in virtue of the offensive power contained behind their walls. A coast fortress defends the nation to which it belongs chiefly by the fleet it shelters.”³ This argument holds true for land warfare, too. Fortifications, or any other means to block the enemy’s assault, are effective only in so far as they protect the means to threaten the lines of communication and the logistics of the attacking force. The protection of a piece of real estate

1 Stephen Van Evera, “The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War,” *International Security* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1984): 58-107; and Robert Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 167-214.

2 Alfred T. Mahan, *Naval Strategy Compared and Contrasted with the Principles and Practice of Military Operations on Land* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1911), 150.

3 *Ibid.*, 433.

must therefore be accompanied by the ability to strike the rear of the advancing forces and to threaten not just the tip of the enemy's spear.

Most importantly, given today's security environment, the "temptation of the defensive" is not only misplaced but also dangerous. It allows revisionist powers to achieve their limited objectives without activating the larger alliances opposed to them. Russia or China may not be interested in a lengthy war of conquest but in quick and localized strikes against nearby states, conducted in ways to minimize the risk of having the target state's security patron (the United States) organize a response.⁴ The vulnerable frontline ally needs to possess the means both to inflict costs on the predatory neighbor in order to deter it and to create a relatively permissive environment for the distant ally (or allies) to send necessary reinforcements. In other words, the goal of frontline allies is to increase the enemy's costs and to decrease the costs of allied backing. To do so, they need to acquire some offensive weapons, capable of striking the enemy well beyond the frontline.

A US ally who can strike the aggressive neighboring power not only at the front of its attacking forces but in its rear, including the enemy's homeland, may contribute to a more stable region: such capacity increases the ally's indigenous deterrent as well as the credibility of the extended deterrent provided by the United States. The fact the exposed ally may have an incentive to use its offensive capabilities in case of a conflict is a strategic asset for the alliance, not a risk that must be avoided at all costs.

There two sets of benefits of offensive capabilities in the hands of frontline states: first, they steel those states against an attack, and second, they strengthen the extended deterrence supplied by a distant security patron.

Benefits for the Vulnerable Ally

For vulnerable US allies, such as Poland or Japan, the benefits of offensive capabilities are twofold: they mitigate the fear of being attacked by a hostile neighbor as well as the fear of being abandoned by security patrons who are distant and focused on multiple theaters.

First, relatively small states naturally fear the proximate rival power (e.g., Russia and China) may attack them, thereby creating the pressing need to shore up their indigenous deterrent capability. An ability to strike the enemy's logistical lines or the staging areas hinders the aggressor's advance, enhancing the defender's ability to deny, or at least to increase the costs of achieving the objective sought by the aggressor (deterrence by denial). Such a capacity can also threaten the enemy's more valuable targets not directly involved in the offensive operations, creating an incipient but credible capacity to punish him in case of an attack. In brief, a defender that can strike outside of his borders improves his capacity to deter by denial and begins to deter by punishment.⁵

4 Jakub Grygiel and A. Wess Mitchell, "Limited War Is Back," *The National Interest*, no. 133 (September/October 2014).

5 The classic distinction between deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment is in Glenn Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

Because of the small or medium size of frontline states, such capabilities will remain limited, far from reaching parity with the regional proto-imperial powers. China or Russia will maintain escalation dominance in one-on-one confrontations with their weaker neighbors. Given the small number of offensive weapons the defending states can field, it is natural to wonder whether both small US allies and revisionist states may have an incentive to strike first: the latter will want to deprive its target state of its minor capacity to hurt, while the former may fall into “use it or lose it” logic.

This is one of the fears that cautions against the acquisition of offensive weapons. But the fear is overblown. Smaller states with offensive capabilities would commit political suicide were they to start wars simply out of fear of losing their limited stock of weapons. Estonia or Poland will not assault Russia, and Japan will not invade China because they have no intention of attacking and will not acquire the necessary conventional (not to mention nuclear) superiority to do so. Moreover, the wider alliance systems of which they are members is explicitly defensive in purpose, and the United States and its allies would not back a war of aggression initiated by one of their own. Both the unbalance of military power and the nature of the Western alliance system create, therefore, strong incentives for frontline states not to start wars against their predatory neighbors.

Regional imperial aspirants will also exercise caution because a surprise attack to deprive smaller opponents of their strike capabilities may not be fully successful and, as argued later, is likely to ignite larger conflagrations by unequivocally activating the security guarantees of the protector (the United States). The offensively armed small state, after all, is anchored in a larger defensive bilateral or multilateral alliance regional revisionists are eager to sidestep. It is unlikely, therefore, that offensive capabilities in the hands of frontline states will result by themselves in a dramatic destabilization of the region.

The second fear of US allies, and in general of all allies who are the weaker and more dependent party, is that of abandonment. There is always a level of doubt about the commitment a security guarantor extends to an ally. Distance, lack of capabilities, and above all the possibility the alliance may fail to activate once a conflict begins, weaken the credibility of the commitment. Unwilling to risk its own narrowly defined security, the more powerful but distant ally may deem it too costly to come to the aid of its weaker partner.⁶

There are various time-tested ways in which the stronger ally can mitigate such anxieties by increasing its own credibility in the eyes of the weaker partner (as well as in those of the geopolitical rival). Public commitments to mutual defense, for instance, increase the reputational costs of abandoning an ally. Placing troops in permanent bases on the ally's territory, thereby making them vulnerable to an attack, is perhaps the most effective way of shoring up the credibility of the security guarantees extended to an ally.

But the smaller ally is not a passive recipient of alliance credibility. It too can alleviate its own fears of being abandoned by anchoring

6 On deterrence and the “art of commitment,” see Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 35-91.

itself more firmly in the alliance. One way to do so is, paradoxically, by developing the ability to escalate the conflict. This is alliance credibility through escalation.

The small ally has an incentive to entangle – or to use a term with more negative connotations because it assumes an exaggerated unwillingness on the part of the distant ally, to entrap – its security patron.⁷ The ability to draw in a distant and more powerful protector can mitigate the small ally's fear of being abandoned. Such fears, and the corresponding desire to entangle, become particularly acute when the hostile power is likely to engage in a low-intensity attack, limited in geographic scope, violence, and time. Such a limited assault may tempt the defending alliance not to mobilize, *de facto* abandoning the attacked state.⁸ The distant security provider, the United States, may choose to accept a small territorial and political revision (at the immediate expense of its ally) in order to avoid a military escalation and war (at a future cost to itself).⁹ As Roman historian Tacitus presented it, the choice is between an “uncertain war and a dishonorable peace:” the appeal of the latter can trump the necessity of the former.¹⁰

Russia's conflict in Ukraine is an exemplar of such a limited war approach, aiming to deprive the targeted state of outside support. But Russia is applying analogous and (for now) less violent tactics elsewhere, in particular toward the Baltic states and Poland. Moscow is carefully pursuing a gradual, small, low-intensity revision of the status quo with actions under the threshold of violence that would elicit a more assertive response of the powers overtly or tacitly behind the attacked state. In Ukraine, Russia pursues a limited war that avoids the activation of a wider alliance and thus attempts to achieve low-cost changes to the geopolitical status quo. A similar attack may take place in the future against a NATO ally (e.g., the Baltic states), testing the credibility of Article 5 of the North Atlantic alliance. And even if the distant security patron, the United States, places small numbers of weapons and soldiers to serve as “tripwires,” a limited war will likely avoid targeting them and therefore will not trigger an automatic response from the wider alliance. The end

7 On entrapment and abandonment in alliances, see Michael Mandelbaum, *The Nuclear Revolution: International Politics Before and After Hiroshima* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chapter 6; and Glenn Snyder, “The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics,” *World Politics* 36, no. 4 (July 1984): 461-495.

8 This is an inherent problem of conventional deterrence because every aggressor seeks a quick victory. On conventional deterrence, see John Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

9 The temptation to abandon an ally may be particularly acute for a maritime power, such as the United States. The safety offered by the oceans (or any body of water, such as the Channel for Great Britain) creates perverse incentives to treat allies as disposable. The working assumption is in fact that land borders are more threatening than maritime ones, and thus as long as the sea separates one from a rival, allies are a strategic luxury and not a necessity. Nicholas Spykman, for instance, observed “All the invasions into Egypt have come through the hundred miles of desert on the Sinai Peninsula, and all the land invasions into India have come over the Hindu Kush, one of the highest and most difficult mountain chains in the world.” Nicholas Spykman, “Frontiers, Security, and International Organization,” *Geographical Review* 32, no. 3 (July 1942): 438. Harold Sprout made a similar point, writing, “it is still axiomatic that sea frontiers can be, and are, defended more securely, with less outlay and effort, than land frontiers. A country thus removed from other centers of military power and ambition enjoys a measure of security and a freedom of action and choice denied to less favored countries with powerful and dangerous neighbors and vulnerable land frontiers.” Harold Sprout, “Frontiers of Defense,” *Military Affairs* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1941): 218.

10 “Bellum anceps an pax inhonesta.” Tacitus, *Annals* (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1937), LCL 322, Book 15, #25, p. 254.

result is that frontline allies fear abandonment and call for renewed and greater reassurances.

While the faraway power may prefer a great power compromise to a war (or at a minimum, it can be perceived by its allies and rivals to favor compromise, decreasing in any case its credibility), the calculation is likely to be very different for the attacked state. For it, the uncertainty of a wider and larger war may be preferable to the certainty of territorial dismemberment or of loss of political independence. Consequently, the exposed frontline state has a strong interest in escalating the limited war waged against it because by doing so it can elevate the conflict to a level that unequivocally demands the intervention of its allies. The clear incentive of the vulnerable US ally to escalate – and trade short-term risks (a destructive escalation of war) for long-term advantages (activation of the alliance and the intervention of the security patron) – makes the threat of such an escalation more credible. And the result is that deterrence is stronger.

To be able to escalate, the attacked state cannot rely exclusively on defensive capabilities that can “hold the line.” It needs to bring the war to the aggressor by targeting the enemy’s territory. Such a course of action carries serious risks because the defending state is the weaker side and does not possess escalation dominance. Any escalatory step it undertakes is more than likely to be matched by the enemy. But the purpose of the defender’s potential escalation is to increase the likelihood his allies will intervene on his side, and not to engage alone in an escalatory duel he is destined to lose. The small offensive force of the frontline state, in other words, can serve as a trigger for the alliance, akin to one of the roles played by British nuclear forces during the Cold War.¹¹ It introduces an additional risk in the strategic interaction with the revisionist rival, a risk he may be unwilling to accept.¹²

By projecting power unto the enemy’s territory, the defender puts the aggressor in front of an uncomfortable choice: either it responds by escalating and risking a larger war than initially desired, or it ignores the strikes and continues to fight its limited war but under much more arduous operational conditions. In either case, the defender increases the chances the war will expand in scope, size and time, allowing the allies to mobilize and come to his aid. The goal is to threaten, in Schelling’s words, “a discontinuous jump from limited war to general war, and we hope to confront them [the rival] with that choice.”¹³

Given the inherent dangers of such an escalation, a defending state will have to think carefully about what to target in order to limit the enemy’s response. For instance, it should avoid targets (e.g., early warning radars, nuclear reactors) the destruction of which may trigger a nuclear or otherwise disproportionate response. The frontline state seeking to balance the short-term costs of war with the long-term benefits of an

11 Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 362.

12 As Robert Jervis put it, the threat of using a limited level of force, such as an offensive strike by the attacked state, may be deemed too risky and an “adversary can find this prospect sufficiently daunting that it will retreat or refrain from a challenge even if it has sufficient military force to be able to prevail at reasonable costs if the war is kept limited.” Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 94.

13 Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 190.

allied response must be vigilant to avoid the risk of incurring immediate retaliatory devastation of its own territory.

An additional danger frontline states need to take into consideration is that of being perceived as overly aggressive, engaging in actions that may be considered unduly provocative by their own allies. The United States might deem offensive actions of the frontline state as unwarranted given the regional revisionist's limited attack. Should Poland or Japan experience a below-the-threshold attack, each must tailor its response carefully. Hence, for example, "little green men" or a Russian "motorcycle gang" in a border town, or Chinese "fishing trawlers" occupying a small island, may not call for an escalatory response from the targeted state – one targeting enemy ports or airports, or other high-value places. There is, however, no clear threshold of violence the crossing of which, by the revisionist power, would be widely accepted as justifying a reaction in the form of an in-depth attack. It simply depends on a variety of factors, such as the risk aversion of the distant allies (the United States in particular), the immediate threat to the forward deployed forces of those allies, or the specifics of the offensive reaction of the frontline state. But the uncertainty surrounding the diplomatic and military effects of an offensive volley from the targeted state is again a source of additional risk; it creates doubt in the mind of the revisionist power, that might suffice to deter him.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind frontline states are likely to be very careful in how they respond to limited or hybrid wars waged against them. Even were Japan or Poland to become more nationalistic and aggressive, neither would seek to provoke its stronger regional rival and or employ their offensive assets in preventive or even preemptive strikes. By doing so, they would undermine their security, grounded in the support of their allies. The greater danger is such states may become desperate if they perceive the alliance and the security guarantees of the United States as untrustworthy. Such desperation, born out of an intense fear of abandonment, may then lead to risky and destabilizing behaviors. A well armed but desperate ally may decide to use its relatively small arsenal to lash out against the regional revanchist power in a last-hope attempt to defend its independence (but it also may simply fold, switching its strategic allegiance and putting an end to an alliance, in order to limit the risks and costs that it is likely to incur). To avoid these risks, vulnerable and fearful allies must be firmly and credibly anchored in the alliance. Trusting in the security provided by the alliance, they will maintain a defensive mindset even when wielding offensive capabilities. Another way to put this is the main source of destabilization is not the possession of offensive capabilities by US allies, but the credibility of the American commitment to the region.¹⁴

14 This is also why a US strategy relying on a long-term cost imposition on the aggressor, through for instance a blockade or sanctions, is dangerous. Not only might it not succeed and in fact generate further aggressiveness on the part of the targeted rival, it is also likely to exacerbate fears of abandonment among US allies. For a discussion of the challenges of such indirect approaches, see Aaron L. Friedberg, *Beyond Air-Sea Battle* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2014), Chapter 4, 105-132; and Elbridge Colby, "The War over the War with China," *The National Interest*, August 14, 2013.

Strengthening Extended Deterrence

The second set of benefits of a frontline ally with offensive capability is related to the credibility of external security guarantees. In brief, a vulnerable ally with offensive capabilities strengthens the credibility of the alliance by decreasing the costs of intervention of a distant security patron.

The US challenge of extending deterrence to an ally located near the rival and potential aggressor is partly related to the distance at which it has to project power: the farther the theater of operations, the more power the United States needs.¹⁵ This historic problem of a “power gradient” is compounded by the growing capacity of the rival states, whether China or Russia, to deny access to American forces in the theater. The A2/AD (anti-access/area denial) threat means the United States cannot operate freely near, or even on, the territory of its frontline ally. The frontline ally’s air, sea, and land are no longer permissive environments.¹⁶ The assumption that the United States can maintain a credible extended deterrent by promising to project forces to the conflict zone once hostilities have started is simply no longer valid.

Russia’s integrated air defense system, for example, covers every Baltic state and one third of Poland, all NATO members.¹⁷ Similarly, Russian land-based missiles and naval assets may make Western maritime operations in the Baltic and Black seas very difficult.¹⁸ Without first weakening Russia’s access denial capabilities, any projection of US power by air to those countries would likely result in high costs in terms of lost US airplanes and manpower. An analogous problem exists in Asia, where US ships would not be able to come near the ally in need of defense (South Korea, Japan, or Taiwan) without meeting a growing array of Chinese A2/AD capabilities. By increasing the costs of extended deterrence, US geopolitical competitors are aiming to decouple nearby states from their ally, Washington. The greater the costs of extending deterrence, the smaller its credibility.

Some argue, correctly, the United States should develop and plan for capabilities that would allow it to enter the area of conflict by first degrading the opponent’s A2/AD systems. This would require striking into the rival’s territory in order to blind him and to diminish the effectiveness and the quantity of his anti-ship and anti-air weapons.¹⁹ The problem is such offensive operations are less credible if only a single power, the United States, is capable of engaging in them. Any attempt to counter the enemy’s A2/AD capabilities would lead to a serious escalation of the

15 Kenneth Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper, 1962). For a slightly contrarian perspective, see Albert Wohlstetter, “Illusions of Distance,” *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 2 (January 1968): 248-249.

16 Andrew Krepinevich, Barry Watts, and Robert Work, *Meeting the Anti-Access and Area-Denial Challenge* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2003); and Andrew Krepinevich, “The Pentagon’s Wasting Assets,” *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 4 (July/August 2009): 18-33.

17 Frank Gorenc, “USAFE-AFAFRICA Update,” AFA-Air & Space Conference and Technology Exposition, September 15, 2014, <http://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/aP%20events/Speeches/15SEP2014-GenFrankGorenc-USAFE-AFAFRICA%20Update%20at%20AFA.pdf>.

18 Julian Barnes, “Top US Admiral Says NATO Should Rework Maritime Strategy,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 22, 2015, <http://blogs.wsj.com/brussels/2015/10/22/top-u-s-admiral-says-nato-should-rework-maritime-strategy>.

19 Friedberg, *Beyond Air-Sea Battle*.

conflict, an outcome not necessarily in the interest of the distant United States for the reasons suggested earlier.

Threatened US frontline allies, on the other hand, have clear incentives and thus the credibility to engage in such anti-A2/AD actions. They have very strong enticements to keep the theater of operations open to the expeditionary support of their security guarantor, without which they cannot survive the onslaught of the stronger aggressor. An offensive volley could scrub the opponent's territory of radar sensors, command and control centers, and a few weapon platforms, opening a small and brief window in which allies could position their forces closer to the battlefields. The frontline US ally is willing to incur the associated risks of escalation not only because its offensive actions may transform a "hybrid" or limited war into a larger and clear conventional conflict (as described earlier) but also because it will decrease the threat coming from hostile A2/AD assets – increasing the likelihood of allied military support.

Due to the costs associated with rearming and the military balance favoring the neighboring rival, US frontline allies are highly unlikely to be able to develop an arsenal of medium-range missiles or bombers large enough to conduct a prolonged offensive. They are also unable to establish and maintain dominance over air and sea by themselves. But they could wield sufficient power to create a moment in which the theater of operations becomes adequately permissive for the allies to send reinforcements and restore the military equilibrium. They can burst the enemy's A2/AD bubble long enough for their own allies to join the fight.

The regional revanchist power is likely to respond to offensively armed US allies by increasing its own capabilities so as to maintain the balance in his favor. But there are strategic benefits in such an arms race, and it is important to direct it toward a more defensive posture of the revisionist state. Any move by US frontline allies to rearm, even the most defensive in nature, will generate some response from their domineering neighbors. And the most desirable response is a forced reorientation of the rival toward defense, something that can be achieved most effectively by having US allies capable of conducting strikes inside enemy territory. China or Russia, in fact, will have to allocate resources to protect their own bases and other assets from the menace of newly acquired capabilities of smaller states. Every yuan or ruble devoted to their own defense reduces the aspiring imperial powers' budgets for conducting more aggressive and expansionistic policies.

Moreover, the alternative to an arms race is not a stable status quo. Regional balances have been changing for a while, and the resilience of the existing geopolitical order in Europe and Asia is being tested with increasing frequency. Russia is aggressively modernizing its military forces while China has been pursuing an ambitious defense buildup. And they have been revising the territorial status quo of the region (Russia in Ukraine, China in the South China Sea) gradually but assertively. Even if frontline states aligned with the United States do nothing, the challenge presented by revisionist powers will not abate and will continue to destabilize the respective regions.

A restoration of stability is possible only with a steadfast investment of US resources and attention, and ultimately with the active participation of allies in deterring aggressive challengers of regional orders.²⁰ Those allies willing to pick up some overdue security provision should be encouraged and helped to acquire the most effective tools to deter rivals or defend against their attacks. Some offensive capabilities in the hands of these allies will not only strengthen extended deterrence but will redirect the ongoing arming of revisionists toward more defensive efforts. We should fear less the potential rearming of our allies and the strategic repercussions of it than the current military aggrandizement and territorial expansion of our rivals.

The nascent desire of some US allies to rearm presents thus a great opportunity to shore up a system of deterrence challenged by ambitious and disruptive powers. Given the nature of the threat (a limited war scenario) and the security environment of the region (A2/AD capabilities of the revisionists), frontline US allies should be armed with offensive arsenals capable of targeting the common rival's strategic and military assets. Such a capability will strengthen not only the immediate deterrent of the individual states but also the effectiveness of American extended deterrence. By ringing the Western alliance with offensively-armed, and yet still vulnerable states, we can restore increasingly more fragile regional military balances and geopolitical orders.

20 Jim Thomas, "From Protectorates to Partnerships," *The American Interest* 6, no. 5 (May 2011).

