Japan, the United States, and the Pacific Since 1945: An Overview

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"The U.S.-Japan relationship is the most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none" is a famous phrase; it is such a great favorite with the U.S. Ambassador to Japan, Mr. Mike Mansfield, that the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo is sometimes referred to as the "Bar None Ranch".1 A statement to that effect could be easily challenged by, say, Canadian friends who would correctly argue that the U.S.-Canada trade is larger in volume than the U.S.-Japan trade.2 However, we should remember that today's U.S.-Japan trade is probably larger than any other bilateral trading relationship that has ever been carried out across an ocean. In this sense we can legitimately emphasize with Ambassador Mansfield the particular importance of the "bonds of the Pacific" that tie the United States and Japan.3 In other words, what matters is not just the sheer size of economic transactions taking place between the United States and Japan, but the manner in which these transactions are conducted. It is this manner that makes the bonds between the United States and Japan uniquely important economically, militarily, politically, and culturally. In all respects, the attributes of the Pacific need our special attention.

Economically, the U.S.-Japanese relationship is greatly favored by the very nature of seaborne trade, which has a considerable advantage over overland trade in transport cost. It is not without good reason that the two economically vigorous peoples on both sides of the Pacific have developed a close historical relationship during the past century. What the Pacific means for Japan in this respect can be easily imagined by

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2. See CANADIAN-JAPANESE ECONOMIC RELATIONS IN A TRIANGULAR PERSPECTIVE 38 (W. Dobson ed. 1987). For example, the United States imported Can$ 82.8 billion from Canada and Can$ 60.5 billion from Japan in 1984. The U.S. exports to Canada for the same year (Can$ 68.5 billion) also exceeded its exports to Japan (Can$ 27.0 billion).

looking at the indices comparing the various major trading countries’ economic dependence on seaborne trade. (See Table 1.) Japan is by far the top while the U.S. is not very much behind on the list.

If a principal function of a navy is protection of commerce, the countries listed in the above table are bound to be seriously interested in the naval balance of power. What is noteworthy is that the Soviet Union is also significantly dependent on seaborne trade. More broadly, one must note the increasing competition in recent years between the American and Soviet navies in the Pacific Ocean. This competition has ominous implications for all countries in the Asia-Pacific region, including, of course, Japan.

Politically speaking, the importance of the Pacific derives from the fact that it contains a great number of island countries, small and large. This makes for a sharp contrast with the Atlantic. Apart from the direct military implications for the naval strategies of the powers concerned, the existence of many countries, most of which are relative newcomers to international politics, gives a uniquely intricate and intractable character to the political management of the region, including the ocean, among the Pacific countries. In addition to the proliferation and youth of the political entities in the region, the Pacific is also characterized, especially in recent years, by the dynamic growth of Asian developing economies. As a result we are now witnessing “relocation of industrial production on a global scale” with a westward shift of the center of gravity. It seems inevitable that the United States will accordingly shift its political attention more towards the Pacific.

The vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean that lies between America and Asia symbolically suggests a great distance in culture and psychology between the two civilizations. Admittedly Asia is not a unity. Nevertheless, one cannot deny a certain common cultural trait that distinguishes East from West. Bonds of the Pacific implies, therefore, a meeting of two different civilizations—East and West. Cultural difference itself does not necessarily predicate a conflict, but it certainly requires a greater amount of energy and imagination than otherwise would be needed for a new harmony to be reached.

All in all, what is meant by bonds of the Pacific transcends the mere bilateral relationship between the United States and Japan and signifies a much broader phenomenon of regional and even of global importance. In fact this is another proposition that has been frequently expressed by Ambassador Mansfield during his assignment as the U.S. Ambassador in Japan. In the same address as quoted above, he stated that “the next

Table 1

Indices of National Interest in Seaborne Trade for Selected Countries

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<th>Country</th>
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<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<td>USSR</td>
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The indices are derived from the following factors: (1) total seaborne trade (import and export); (2) seaborne trade as a percentage of gross national product; and (3) total merchant fleet including the country’s flag-of-convenience ships.


It seems nowadays almost commonplace to speak of the coming of the Pacific Era or the Pacific Century. A recent issue of Newsweek titled its cover story “The Pacific Century.” The Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) sponsored an international conference on “The Pacific Century: Problems and Prospects” in Tokyo in March 1988, while in the same month the National Taiwan University organized a conference on “The Impact of the Pacific Century on Euro-Asian Relations” in Taipei.

In fact, it has already been many decades since various individuals began to speak of the Pacific century. Perhaps one of the earliest examples is Theodore Roosevelt’s prophecy of 1905 that “[t]he 20th century will be the century of the Pacific.” In a book published in 1891, a Japanese scholar-diplomat, Inagaki Manjiro, also predicted that “the Pacific will become the main theater of world politics and trade in the coming century.” A student of the Cambridge historian Professor Sir John R. Seeley, Inagaki based this prediction on his teacher’s theory of “migration of centres of commercial and industrial energies of the world.” According to that theory, economic activities of mankind grew first along rivers, then through the routes on inland or coastal seas, and finally along ocean routes.

5. Mansfield Address, supra note 3.
7. I had an opportunity to participate in both the JIIA and the Taipei conference.
Interestingly enough, this old theory of 'migration of centres' resembles the modern theory, propounded by Modelski, of the 'spatial sequence of the headquarters zone of the world system.' The former visualized an eastward movement, whereas the latter, which explains world political dominance as shifting in long cycles, predicts a westward movement. However, both agree on the increasing importance of the Pacific region. Hence the following prediction of Inagaki: "In view of geography, commerce and industry Japan's future prosperity is quite predictable, because she is surrounded by the greatest commercial countries of the world: the United States to the East, China to the West, Russia to the North and Australia to the South."

It is easy to discern similar features between Inagaki's vision of the Pacific century and the more modern visions of a Pacific community. One need not subscribe to any theory of international systemic change to recognize the increasing importance of "bonds of the Pacific" in international politics and economy in the years to come. These observations raise many questions: Why the delay in the realization of the dream which is almost one century old? Is it really time now to realize at long last that dream? To answer these questions one has to look back over the past several decades, especially at the years since the end of the Pacific War.

An article on "Pacific Ocean" in a recent edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica concluded that "there can be no doubt that the recent devastating wars in Korea and the Indochina peninsula have retarded economic and social progress and have far-reaching effects in the whole of the Pacific region. Were it not for these hostilities, Theodore Roosevelt's prophecy of 1905 might well already have come to pass."

Before discussing the problems related to the wars in Korea and Indochina, however, we must first consider the bearing of the Second World War on our subject. This is not just because it preceded the other two wars in Asia but, more importantly, because it had far more powerful effects on international relations in this part of the globe.

One of the most important characteristics of the Second World War, as far as the Asia/Pacific region is concerned, is related to the very name of the war. The war was officially known in Japan as the Greater East


Asia War while it was actually being fought. After the defeat that name was forgotten (or forbidden) and replaced by a new one—the Pacific War.\(^\text{12}\)

This difference in terminology had a subtle but profound effect on Japanese thinking about the past war. To put it briefly, the Japanese war had two interrelated but in many ways separate aspects: the war in Asia and the war in the Pacific. Although it was only after Pearl Harbor that the Japanese authorities officially and retrospectively admitted that they had been at war with China ever since the outbreak of the “China Incident” in 1937, they regarded the hostilities as part of the Greater East Asia War.\(^\text{13}\) As this terminology suggests, the war with the United States and the United Kingdom and later others was considered by the Japanese as an extension of their prolonged war with China. The emphasis was laid not on the Pacific but on Asia. It may well be that the Japanese authorities adopted this designation without much thought, but it does reflect the inveterate Japanese attitude that Asian affairs should be settled among Asians themselves.

Despite the insular character of their nation, the Japanese remained inactive in oceanic activities until relatively recently. The Black Current, or the Japan current, a strong warm sea current originating north of the Philippines and running northward along the Pacific coast of the Japanese archipelagoes, sets the extreme limits for their activities. The Pacific beyond their coastal waters remained for a long time quite unknown to the Japanese. Apart from sporadic launching out into commercial and piratical activities on the South Seas, they accustomed themselves to living within a narrowly confined space; no systematic efforts were made to develop deep-sea fishing, ocean navigation, or a navy.

Even after the arrival of Commodore M. Perry’s black ships on their shore, the Japanese continued to cast their eyes upon Asian rather than Pacific affairs. It is quite symbolic that Komura Jutaro, Japanese foreign minister during the Russo-Japanese War, counseled his government in 1905 to divert the flow of Japanese emigration away from America and direct it towards Asia—exactly when Theodore Roosevelt had a dream about the Pacific century. Contrary to Komura’s expectations, the two countries failed to ward off a collision with each other.

After the defeat there took place a sudden and thorough turnover in Japanese thinking about the war. The Pacific as opposed to the Asiatic aspect of the war began to loom large. This new intellectual trend might

\(^\text{12}\) Most of the standard Japanese dictionaries adopt this terminology (taiheiyo senso) with reference to the Japanese War (1941-45). See, e.g., NIHON KINDAISHI JITEN 355 (1958); SEIJIGAKU JITEN 866 (1954).

\(^\text{13}\) TAIHEIYO SENSO E NO MICHI (The Road to the Pacific War) 613 suppl. vol. (M. Inaba ed. 1963). This decision was made by the Liaison Council (an ad hoc decisionmaking body during the war) at its meeting on December 10, 1941.
have been an inevitable consequence of the predominant role played by
the United States during the war. After Pearl Harbor, and especially
after Midway, battles on the sea and on the chain of strategic islands in
the Pacific preoccupied the Japanese, while those on the Asiatic contin-
ent receded in importance to them. The postwar developments in and
around Japan only fostered this predisposition.

The crucial point is that the Japanese had never been systematically
interested in Pacific affairs until after the Pacific War. Asia rather than
America had been a matter of national concern to Japan. Things looked
quite differently to the Americans. It would have been almost impossible
for them to draw a distinction between Asian and Pacific affairs. This
being the case, the American victory over the Japanese thus signified that
the fundamental difference in international perspectives was finally re-
solved in favor of the American view. It is only within this framework
that the various developments in the U.S.-Japanese relationship during
the past four decades or so can be fully appreciated.

Monuments of a reconciliation of the two different political tradi-
tions were the 1947 constitution and the twin treaties signed in San Fran-
cisco in September 1951. The spiritual father of the first document was
the concept of collective security that was behind the League of Nations
and its related international arrangements, including the 1928 treaty for
the renunciation of war (the Kellogg-Briand Pact). It was the irony of
fate that the Japanese subscribed to the Wilsonian view of international
society at a time when the Americans were becoming more and more
reserved about that view in the face of emerging Russo-American compe-
tition for supremacy. Thus there was an undeniable gap between the
spirit of the 1947 Constitution and the underlying assumptions of the
1951 Treaties, namely the Japanese Peace Treaty and the U.S.-Japan Se-
curity Treaty.14

Perplexed at these ideological ambiguities, the Japanese concen-
trated their thoughts on a single goal: the economic rehabilitation of
their country. This goal served the interests of international peace as
well as the interest of the Americans. In fact, the Americans encouraged
the Japanese to regain their place in the international community
through peaceful (i.e., economic) means. As far as U.S.-Japanese rela-
tions were concerned, therefore, it looked as if the Wilsonian ideal of
harmonious international relations triumphed over Realpolitik. The tre-
mendous economic achievements of postwar Japan were certainly
brought about, to a great extent, by the collaborative partnership be-
tween the United States and Japan.

This is not to say that having survived the period of its contentious-

14. SAN FURANSHISUKO KOWA [The San Francisco Peace Treaty] 17-56 (A. Watanabe
& S. Miyasato eds. 1986).
ness, the Pacific has become once and for all a "peaceful sea." If we remember the above-mentioned thesis of Inagaki about Japan's future prosperity, we have to deal with three remaining factors, in addition to the United States: Russia, China, and Australia.

The new American-dominated formulation of Pacific affairs suffered from an emerging schism between the East and West. Consequently, not Asia as a whole (whatever is meant by that), but only a relatively small portion of Asia was incorporated in that new formulation. To put it concretely, once China was communized, there gradually emerged a new configuration of power among the United States, Japan, and Southeast Asia. One may say that, instead of Greater East Asia, a smaller East Asia (i.e., East Asia minus China) was coopted to the U.S.-dominated Pacific Alliance. Consolidation of this new alliance was accompanied not only by the Cold War between the two superpowers but also by wars in Korea and Indochina.

As for the Pacific Ocean itself, the U.S. leaders could afford, at least for a while, to boast that it was now virtually "an Anglo-Saxon lake."

Pax Americana was indeed something real in this part of the world where freighters and tankers plying among the commercial centers of the Pacific basin were not denied free traffic. Such countries as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand were brought into closer contact with other countries in the region, especially with Japan and the United States. To that extent, one could say, Inagaki's dream has already been fulfilled.

Looking back on the course of events in the Pacific, it is evident that the relationship between the United States and Japan has been of pivotal importance throughout its history. The first four decades after Roosevelt's prophecy witnessed a fierce political competition among the two nations, culminating in Japan's defeat in the Pacific War. The ensuing four decades have seen a gradual but unmistakable shift of balance of economic power in Japan's favor. Various people, including the American writer Gore Vidal, would choose the year of 1985 as a turning point in history of the U.S.-Japan relations or, for that matter, even of the international system itself. According to Vidal, "America's brief, happy run as an empire was over" in the fall of 1985, when it became a net debtor nation. He urged his countrymen, seriously or not, to make peace with the Russians so that they would be able to gird themselves for the "Sino-Japanese axis that will dominate the future." Although in an entirely different spirit, some Japanese analysts agree with him at least

18. Id.
about one point—1985 as the turning point in history. According to these analysts, various measures taken in September of that year by the U.S. Government, such as its agreement with other members of the Conference of Ministers and Governors of the Groups of Five Countries (G5) at the Plaza meeting in New York, and the enactment the following December of the so-called GRH Act, signified U.S. recognition that, with the loss of its economic supremacy, the strong dollar and the deficit budget could no longer be sustained. It is inevitable, they argue, that the rules of the international trade game should change, reflecting the new position of the U.S. economy. It seems, therefore, that the time has already arrived when we would think about the next phase of Pacific affairs in general and U.S.-Japanese relations in particular. After all, whether the Pacific century comes around depends upon how the countries concerned—especially the United States and Japan—would manage the problems standing in their way.

There are three problem areas that are, in my view, likely to grow in importance. First, we must consider what I would like to call the problems of “new Asia.” When the Pacific War ended there existed only a handful of independent nations in Asia. In the following decade, one country after another gained independence. There are now fifteen independent political entities in Asia (excluding South and West Asia), in addition to Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Economically, they fared badly in the early postwar years, even as compared with other underdeveloped countries. Politically, as one seasoned journalist wrote in 1947, “there is no peace in Asia. From one end of the vast continent to the other, it has seldom been possible since Japan’s collapse to escape the sound of continuing gunfire. In every country aggravated political and social pressures collide and tangle in pain and anger and frustration.”

Given the economic and political conditions that existed in East Asia in the early postwar years, and in view of the fact that East Asia has experienced since then two “hot wars” (in Korea and Indochina), the dynamic growth of the regional economy and the political modernization of many of the region’s countries (including some Socialist regimes) are more than impressive. According to an expert on developing economies in Asia, Japan, the four newly industrialized countries (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan), and the four emerging ASEAN

members (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand), which contributed only about 10% of the world's manufactured exports in the mid-1960's, have by now enlarged their share to about 25% of the world total.\(^{22}\)

However, there is a significant gap between East Asia's economic might and its relatively weak voice in the field of international diplomacy. Take for example the International Monetary Fund. The voting power of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, and Japan in particular, does not reflect their relative economic strength. Using what is called the reflection index, a Korean economist calculated that in 1960, Japan's voting power in that international organization was, as compared to that of the United States, more or less commensurate with its economic power (92.7%). During the following two decades Japan's economy grew dramatically, yet its voting power did not grow proportionately. As a result, the comparable indices for 1970 and 1980 deteriorated to 53.7% and 53.9% respectively.\(^{23}\)

The discrepancy between Japan's economic power and its political power has been somewhat lessened by its recent participation in various ad hoc international arrangements such as the Seven Power Economic Summit, G5, and others. What is becoming important today is how to reflect the growing economic importance of the four Asian Newly Industrializing Economies (ANIE's) in the international economic decision-making body. This is all the more important because these countries are in particularly vulnerable diplomatic positions. The Taiwan authorities have indicated their interest in participating in the coming economic summit where they expect that problems related to the ANIE's will be on the agenda. As an alternative, they are also considering the creation of a separate forum consisting of the four ANIE's and the United States to discuss problems of mutual interest.\(^{24}\)

The future of an emerging network of economic interdependence among the major industrial centers in the Pacific basin depends largely on the uninterrupted traffic of cargoes in the sea lane. The heavy traffic of Japanese freighters and tankers on the Pacific-Indian sea lanes is amply documented.\(^{25}\)


\(^{23}\) Han Seung-Soo, *The Asia/Pacific and the World Economic System*, JAPAN ASS'N OF INT'L RELATIONS (JAIR) 30TH ANNIVERSARY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: THEIR PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE 450 (1986). The reflection index is defined as \(\frac{JV}{IMFV} \times \frac{USV}{IMFV} \times \frac{JGNP}{USGNP} \times 100\), where JV and USV refer to Japan's and the United States' votes respectively, IMFV to total IMF votes, JGNP and USGNP to Japan's and the United States' GNPs respectively.

\(^{24}\) This was reported in Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Mar. 12, 1988.

Given similar data for other countries in the region, the importance of the safety of sea lanes to all the trading nations in the Pacific basin becomes apparent. It seems inevitable that they would become increasingly interested in protection of commerce. We shall come back to this issue shortly. In economic terms, with Japan still the leading shipping nation in the world, some other countries would likely emerge as competitors. Some of them, like Korea, are already surpassing Japan in the shipbuilding industry (Table 2).

As for ocean politics, the proliferation of independent political entities and their growth in economic and technical capabilities imply a growing complexity in the political management of marine resources, especially fisheries. What used to be regarded as inexhaustible deposits of marine resources in the deep waters of the Pacific have begun to be a bone of contention among the nations. In addition to the familiar competition among the Big Four in the northern Pacific (the United States, Canada, the Soviet Union, and Japan), Japanese fishing interests have now to deal with North and South Korea, the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, and other East Asian countries, especially Indonesia.

Japan's policy toward the emerging ocean regime during the 1960's and 1970's was strongly influenced by the political considerations favoring the traditional interests of high-seas fishing. It was only after a change in world opinion from a narrow to a wide view of territorial seas and contiguous zones seemed inevitable that the Japanese Government finally abandoned its long-held commitments to the three-mile ocean regime and adopted the freedom of the seas as its cardinal principle. The discrepancy between Japan as a country that is interested in the freedom of the high seas, and Korea, for example, was demonstrated in the lengthy dispute over the issue of the fishing zone in the difficult negotiations between these two countries preceding the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1985.26

The question of fishing leads us to the second emerging problem area in Pacific affairs, the difficulties of the small island countries. For long a forgotten region in the realm of international politics, the South Pacific (here let us include Micronesian islands north of the equator) is at last emerging as an area capable of expressing its own interests internationally. There now exist nine independent states of Polynesia and Melanesia, plus three groups of Micronesian islands (Belau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands), which have chosen to become independent under special arrangements with the United States (known as Free Association Compacts).

As the recent coup d'etat in Fiji indicates, the politics of the South Pacific cannot escape internal troubles. This is especially the case with

the islands that had been until recently, or still are, under French rule. If mishandled, these islands might well become another Algeria or Indo-
china, this time with the possible complication of Libyan involvement. The fragile economies of most of the regional states aggravate the cir-
cumstances. But even more important is the psychological factor. Peo-
ple in the far away, small islands tend to be very sensitive to how people in metropolitan areas are forgetful of their fate. Fortunately for them—
perhaps—the United States and other major countries in the Pacific are
bound to be interested in the strategic importance of these islands. It is
in this context that they have achieved some success in arousing the great
powers' interest by adopting a non-nuclear policy. The signing of the
South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty (the Raratonga Treaty)\(^2\) in Au-
gust 1985 should be viewed in this light. The Treaty, which awaits ratifi-
cation by more countries, prohibits signatories from developing, produ-
cing, or handling nuclear testing equipment, but it does not restrict
members from allowing nuclear vessels of other nations to visit their
ports.

Marine resources are obviously the single most important economic

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\(^{27}\) South Pacific Forum: The South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, Aug. 6, 1985, 24
asset that the mini-states in the Pacific may use to advance their interests. In view of the politically delicate, economically fragile, and psychologically sensitive characteristics of these mini-states, more than ordinary care should be taken in devising a regional fishing regime for the South Pacific. In view of the obvious disadvantages on the part of the small island countries in diplomatic negotiations, highly political considerations rather than the immediate interests of the fishing industries of major powers (especially those of the United States and Japan), should prevail in dealing with these mini-states. A small diplomatic setback that the United States has recently suffered in relations with Kiribati and Vanuatu vis-a-vis the Soviet Union is instructive.28

Similar care is required in economic assistance programs for this region. Because of the smallness of their economies, not a great amount of money would be necessary. Instead, a long term, almost semipermanent, commitment would be required of the donor nations. For this reason it would be best to avoid one single donor country establishing exclusive relations with a particular recipient country. Economic assistance to the South Pacific is something congenial to collective responsibility of all the larger countries in the Asia-Pacific region.29

The third and final problem area concerns the Soviet Union. Quo Vadis for the Soviets is a great issue today, bearing upon many aspects of their international relations all over the world. The Pacific is no exception to this rule. As pointed out earlier, Soviet dependence on seaborne trade is quite substantial, which implies their increasing interests in the shipping world. The Soviet merchant fleet had by the late 1960's grown to be the fifth largest in the world. They carried cargoes at extraordinarily reduced prices, sometimes even 40% cheaper than the standard rate, thus threatening the shipping interests of the Western countries (including Japan), especially during the 1970's, although their activities seem to have reached a lull in recent years. The Soviet interest in fishing in the Pacific is well established. Apart from its traditional activities in the North Pacific, its fishing vessels frequent the waters off New Zealand, Kiribati, Vanuatu, and other islands in the South Pacific. In addition to their economic significance, one cannot overlook the strategic implications of Soviet activities in the region.

The advent of nuclear-powered submarines has brought about a fundamental change in the nature of naval strategies, as well as in scientific knowledge about the sea. This change has the effect of adding a third dimension to human maritime activities. The science of the sea has developed from hydrography into oceanography; that is, from a survey of


the water surface into a systematic gathering and analysis of geological data about seabeds, thermal distribution of sea currents, and the like. Because detailed and accurate information about the deep sea is essential for submarine and anti-submarine warfare, it is difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between peaceful and military use of the sea. It is thus quite significant that in the study of oceans the Soviets have taken the lead in recent years.\textsuperscript{30} The growing scientific knowledge of the oceans also has implications for environmental protection because it will inevitably lead to fiercer than ever competition for the use of seabed and deep-sea resources among the nations.

It is still too early to predict the future shape of the politics of oceans in this part of the globe. One thing, however, is certain. The Pacific is no longer an Anglo-Saxon lake, although the United States maintains its superior position in naval competition vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. It is very significant that the beginning of the end of the traditional ocean regime in the 1950's and 1960's coincided with the advent of the Soviet Union as a naval power on a global scale. Whether the Pacific will become a Russo-American lake or an American-Japanese lake or anything else, no one knows. It is certain, however, that the fate of a Pacific century depends on this crucial question.

\textsuperscript{30} See generally id.