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Tropical Islands in the Pacific's Geopolitical Theater

Exploring the Factors Shaping U.S. Force
Deployment in the Western Pacific

Master's thesis in Political Science
Supervisor: Jo Jakobsen
June 2023

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Abstract

This master thesis examines the factors shaping U.S. force deployment in the Pacific. The research question focuses on understanding what influences the positioning of U.S. military forces in the region. Given the geopolitical significance of the Pacific and the U.S.-China relationship, this study aims to shed light on the subject. Understanding the dynamics of U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is crucial due to China's rise and its perceived threat to U.S. hegemony. The thesis draws upon the theoretical foundations of Nicholas J. Spykman's *America's Strategy in World Politics* (1942) and Alfred T. Mahan's *The Influence of Seapower upon History* (1890) to provide insight. Four hypotheses were developed and tested to address different aspects of force deployment, including the similarities with Spykman's proposed base network, the aim to limit regional hegemony, the projection of power and defense of maritime interests, and the changes in force deployment over the past decade. Empirical data was gathered from the U.S. Department of Defense *Base Structure Report* and the *Manpower Data Center*. The findings indicate that all of the hypotheses can be confirmed. The U.S. maintains control over the Western Pacific, limiting the influence of Rimland Powers and projecting power indirectly. The study highlights the significance of geopolitical factors, Spykman's and Mahan's theories, and the evolving dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region in shaping U.S. force deployment. In conclusion, this master thesis provides valuable insights into the factors shaping U.S. force deployment in the Pacific. The research contributes to understanding the complexities of the U.S.-China relationship and its implications for global dynamics.

Sammendrag

Denne masteroppgaven undersøker faktorene som former USAs militære utplassering i Stillehavet. Forskningsspørsmålet fokuserer på å forstå hva som former posisjonen av amerikanske militærstyrker i regionen. Gitt den geopolitiske betydningen av Stillehavet og USAs forhold til Kina, har denne studien som mål å belyse emnet. Å forstå dynamikken i USAs styrkeklassering i Stillehavet er avgjørende på grunn av Kinas vekst og den oppfattede trusselen mot USAs hegemoni. Oppgaven bygger på de teoretiske fundamentene til Nicholas J. Spykman *America's Strategy in World Politics* (1942) og Alfred T. Mahans *The Influence of Seapower upon History* (1890) for å gi innsikt. Fire hypoteser ble utviklet og testet for å adressere ulike aspekter ved styrkeklassering, inkludert likheter med Spykmans foreslåtte basenettverk, målet om å begrense en regional hegemon, utøvelsen av makt og forsvar av maritime interesser, og endringene i styrkeklasseringen de siste tiårene. Empiriske data ble samlet inn fra USAs forsvarsdepartements *Base Structure Report* og *Manpower Data Center*. Funnene indikerer at alle hypotesene kan bekreftes. USA opprettholder kontrollen over det vestlige Stillehavet, begrenser innflytelsen til Rimland-makten og utøver makt indirekte. Studien understreker betydningen av geopolitiske faktorer, Spykmans og Mahans teorier, og de utviklende dynamikkene i Stillehavsregionen for å forme USAs styrkeklassering. Konklusjonen er at denne masteroppgaven gir verdifulle innsikter i faktorene som former USAs styrkeklassering i Stillehavet. Forskningen bidrar til å forstå kompleksitetene i forholdet mellom USA og Kina og dets implikasjoner for den globale dynamikken.

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Chapter 1.

The New Pacific Ocean Theater

In recent years, the bilateral relationship between the United States and China has become a focal point in global affairs. The topic has received substantial media coverage, with nearly every news outlet writing articles on this subject. Despite the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this relationship has continued to attract significant attention on multiple occasions for various reasons (Ali & Stewart, 2023; Martina, 2022; Singleton, 2022). The mounting attention is due to the intensifying tension between the two superpowers, with China's increasing power posing a challenge to U.S. hegemony (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, pp. 1, 51-52; Goldstein, 2020, pp. 59-60; Yan, 2020, pp. 340-341). This is because the growth of the Chinese military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and the Chinese economy has outpaced that of the United States in the past decade (Congressional Research Service, 2022, p. 7; Holz, 2008, pp. 1665-1668; The World Bank, 2022; Østerud, 2021, pp. 129-130).

Both the Taiwan conflict and the South China Sea dispute can potentially escalate from a territorial dispute to an armed conflict (Center for Preventive Action, 2022; Hanssen, 2021; The Economist, 2023). Because of this, it is intriguing to see how the U.S. strives to contain a rising superpower and avert a potential conflict. However, the disadvantages of the U.S.' distance from China, Taiwan, and the South China Sea are frequently overlooked. The Pacific Ocean, the world's largest ocean, is located between the United States and China and has some of the world's largest economies and busy trade routes. The U.S. controls a large part of the ocean and has multiple bases in the Pacific, and they are a part of the U.S.' global base network (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Sustainment, 2012; U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). Given the Pacific Ocean's geopolitical, economic, and strategic significance, it holds a central position in global affairs. Understanding and navigating the complexities of this vast oceanic realm are of paramount importance for regional stability and international relations. U.S. policy-making institutions have advocated for an increased presence in the area (Carter et al., 2022; Woody, 2022). What influences U.S. military presence in the Pacific, and why is this region considered strategically significant? Has this changed because of China's rise? This development has elevated the academic interest in the U.S. military presence in the Pacific. Consequently, this thesis will provide an answer to these questions with the following research question:

What shapes U.S. force deployment in the Pacific?

The research question allows for a comprehensive investigation of the factors influencing U.S. military presence in the Pacific region. It is essential to consider numerous variables without disregarding any relevant ones. However, given the extensive range of factors that contribute to the decision-making process, it is not feasible to examine each element. This thesis will primarily concentrate on the geopolitical context and its impact on U.S. strategy, China's growing power and regional influence, and the U.S.' planned military development, force deployment, and political statements for the region. Moreover, "force deployment" is a multifaceted variable that can be interpreted in various ways. A commonly accepted definition of force deployment is "the movement of troops and material in response to a regional threat and the ability to sustain this force until the military objective is achieved" (RAND Corporation, n.d.). The term may also serve as a general characterization of a military establishment that can be used when it is needed (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Within this context, the expression "force deployment" can be better clarified by where the U.S. military has established troops and infrastructure on a permanent basis.

It is necessary to provide a precise definition of "the Pacific." The Pacific Ocean, recognized as the largest ocean globally, spans approximately 155 million square kilometers, surpassing the total landmasses of the World (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration & U.S. Department of Commerce, n.d.). The Pacific Ocean contains several sparsely populated landmasses but also highly populated regions that border the Pacific (UNFPA, n.d.). The Pacific is of great geopolitical significance as it connects various areas, including East Asia, North America, South America, and Oceania. The Pacific Ocean is home to some of the world's largest economies, including the United States, China, and Japan. It facilitates international trade and serves as a major shipping route, enabling the movement of goods, resources, and energy supplies. The ocean's resources, such as fish, oil, gas, and minerals, also contribute significantly to the global economy. Many of the world's busiest and most strategic maritime trade routes pass through the Pacific Ocean, such as the Trans-Pacific route between Asia and the Americas (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration & U.S. Department of Commerce, n.d.; Ocean Planet, n.d.). The importance of the Pacific Ocean reinforces the actuality of the research question. This thesis will solely concentrate on a segment of the Pacific identified as the Western Pacific (Map 1). The Western Pacific encompasses the region where the ocean connects with the Eurasian landmass and, as a result, is closer to China than to the U.S. This proximity to a significant potential Great Power challenger highlights the importance of examining why the U.S. has military forces and infrastructure in the region (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017).

Moreover, the Western Pacific is mainly uninhabited, and the available land area is limited. Given the scarcity of land and the isolation of its inhabitants, it may be difficult to understand why the U.S. considers the Western Pacific a strategically significant area. It is a combination of traditional geopolitical thinking and evolving Great Power balances that account for the U.S.’ strategic interest in this region.

Map 1 - The Western Pacific



The green area represents the Western Pacific. Created with ArcGIS

Even though the Western Pacific contains sparsely populated small landmasses, it also comprises highly populated regions that border the Pacific, according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, n.d.). Among these areas, the South China Sea holds significant importance and is subject to extensive academic analysis. As previously mentioned, the primary focus of this study is not this territory nor to explore the alliances the United States has forged in the region. This decision is rooted in the potential vastness of scope that such a pursuit entails. Instead, the research focuses on the factors that shape U.S. deployment in the region and the underlying rationale for such decisions. By limiting the inquiry to this specific aspect, the investigation is made more manageable, avoiding the risk of gathering an excessive amount of data and reaching imprecise conclusions. In particular, the study centers on the small islands that host U.S. military personnel, which also are a crucial element of the Island Chain Strategy (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022; Vorndick, 2018).

The Island Chain Strategy is an offshore balancing and a strategic maritime containment plan, mainly initiated by the U.S. but also by their allies (Layne, 1997, pp. 112-113; Mearsheimer, 2003/2014, pp. 257-261). The Island Chain strategy has been used by military and strategic planners to describe the strategic importance of a series of islands in the Western Pacific, often referred to as The First and Second Island Chains. This strategy is based on the notion that these islands create a natural barrier to the expansion of a potential adversary's naval and air power and can help defend against threats to U.S. security and interests in the region (Erickson & Wuthnow, 2016, pp. 1-5). The Island Chain strategy seeks to limit the ability of a potential adversary to operate freely in the waters and airspace around these islands, thus forcing them to confront U.S. forces in a more limited and constrained environment (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, p. 45; Erickson & Wuthnow, 2016, p. 6). The First Island Chain includes Japan, Okinawa (Japan), Taiwan, the Philippines, and the Malay Peninsula, and The Second Island Chain is situated roughly 1,200 nautical miles from China's coastline. It is comprised of a group of islands and archipelagos located in the Western Pacific Ocean (Map 2). Mainly the Bonin Islands (Japan), Guam (The U.S.), Palau, and the Marianas Islands (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, p. 45; Vorndick, 2018). Since the First Island Chain is situated in the South China Sea, it will not be expounded upon extensively. However, the Second Island Chain, which is positioned in the heart of the Western Pacific, bears significance for this research. Furthermore, as will be presented in the Data Section, the U.S. maintains several bases and troops in the islands comprising The Island Chain, which highlights their importance and relevance.

Map 2 - The First (red) and Second (yellow) Island Chain



Map of The First and Second Island Chain created with ArcGIS. Vorndick and Erickson & Wuthnow are used as references (Erickson & Wuthnow, 2016, p. 4; Vorndick, 2018).

Two theoretical groundworks are used to understand what shapes U.S. force Deployment in the Pacific. The first theory was presented in the book *America's Strategy in world politics* (1942) by Nicholas J. Spykman. The relevant ideas of Spykman for this thesis are his work on Rimland Power and how the U.S. can counteract its potential power. A Rimland Power is a state or a group of states that control the coastal areas of the Eurasian landmass (Map 3). Spykman argued that a Rimland Power would have the ability and resources to dominate the world. To prevent a Rimland hegemon and the U.S. from losing its control, Spykman created a proposal for what the U.S. should do to deter a Rimland Power. His proposal for the Pacific was that the U.S. should place military infrastructure and troops on several Pacific Islands to project power and prevent an attack. In addition, the force deployment would give the U.S. control over the Pacific, further preventing a regional Rimland Power from establishing (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 139-152, 413-423, 447-472).

The second theory was presented in the book *The Influence of Seapower upon History* (1890) By Alfred T. Mahan. Mahan argues that Seapower is essential for a state to obtain power and global influence. Mahan defined "Sea Power" as naval superiority based on (i) production, (ii) shipping, and (iii) foreign territorial acquisitions. He argued that a navy's primary purpose is to safeguard maritime trade routes and communication. Mahan highlighted the importance of foreign territorial acquisitions in deploying forces, protecting trade routes, establishing ports

for replenishment, and projecting maritime power during wartime. He identified six critical determinants of a state's maritime power: (i) geographic position, (ii) physical conformation, (iii) territorial extent, (iv) population size, (v) population characteristics, and (vi) institutional features of the state (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 22-25, 70-77).

Both these theories can be understood as realists. Realism views international relations as a struggle for power among self-interested states. It emphasizes the primacy of national interests, the competitive nature of international politics, and the importance of military capabilities. Realists believe that states act to maximize their own security and survival in an anarchic system. They argue that a rational calculation of power drives states and are willing to use force to protect their interests. Realism also highlights the role of balance of power dynamics, alliances, and the pursuit of national sovereignty in shaping state behavior (Mearsheimer, 2003/2014, pp. 17-22).

The empirical evidence used in the thesis is mainly two datasets gathered from the U.S. Department of Defense and the Defense Manpower Data Center. The first dataset is the *DoD Personnel, Workforce Reports & Publications*, which is presented quarterly every year. It shows the numbers of U.S. forward-deployed troops across the Pacific. The dataset includes all locations in the Western Pacific region listed in the Department of Defense's *Personnel, Workforce Reports & Publications* between 2011 and 2022 (The Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023). The table presents active-duty and reserve personnel, not temporary forces or civilian employees. The next dataset is the *Base Structure Report*, which is published yearly for the fiscal year. It presents the number of infrastructures the U.S. Department of Defense has worldwide that exceeds 10 acres or \$10 million in value (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021).

The conclusion of the thesis provides evidence in support of each hypothesis. It reveals that the current U.S. force deployment in the Pacific exhibits several similarities with Spykman's proposed base networks, albeit with some geographical deviations that extend the base network further westward. The primary objective of this force deployment is to contain China, the sole significant threat to American hegemony, confirming H3. Furthermore, the analysis confirms the increase in force deployment over time, aligning with the hypothesis (H4) that posits a growth in U.S. military presence in the last decade. The third hypothesis affirms that the U.S. force deployment serves the purpose of power projection and the defense of maritime interests. The presence of military bases and the strategic placement of troops inherently contribute to projecting power in the region while securing freedom of navigation further solidifies this role. Based on the hypotheses, relevant geopolitical theories, and

empirical evidence, the thesis concludes that U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is shaped by a combination of factors. These factors encompass geopolitical theories, the objective of limiting the emergence of a regional hegemon and Rimland Power, power projection, defense of maritime interests, and the evolving dynamics within the Asia-Pacific region.

1.1 The U.S.-China Relations

Given the historical tendency that uneven growth in power leads to war, it is feared that the U.S.-China relationship could follow a similar path (Blackwill & Zelikow, 2021, p. 1; Kennedy, 1988, pp. xv-xvii). The territorial dispute in the South China Sea, involving China, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, Indonesia, and Taiwan, has also received extensive research attention. Maintaining the status quo is, for the U.S., seen as crucial in preventing China from becoming a regional hegemon (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, p. 45; Green, 2017, pp. 541-548; Ross, 2013, p. 21). There has been a growing concern about a Chinese invasion of Taiwan for several decades, and a fear of a war between the U.S. and China can be traced back to “the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act” (Blackwill & Zelikow, 2021, pp. 4, 53; Elleman, 2015, p. xiii). It promotes an agreement that in the case of an attack, the U.S. will aid Taiwan in defending itself. An invasion has become more concerning and anticipated in recent years. This is primarily due to China’s increasing power and the concern caused by the U.S. losing its hegemonic position. As a result, numerous academic publications about the Taiwan conflict have been published (Blackwill & Zelikow, 2021; Glaser, 2015; Taylor Fravel, 2010). Each tries to explain the disagreement or come up with new explanations. The dispute in the South China Sea is another subject that has received extensive research (Beckman, 2013; Yahuda, 2013).

The U.S.-China relationship is a highly researched topic and has been of increased popularity in the last decade. A large part is due to China’s rise in power and the U.S. Pivot to Asia. The Pivot to Asia is a term that refers to a strategic shift in the U.S. foreign policy towards Asia, particularly East Asia and the Pacific region. The concept gained importance during the Obama administration and aimed to rebalance U.S. diplomatic, economic, and military focus from other regions, particularly the Middle East, towards the Asia-Pacific region. The Pivot to Asia was put forward at the end of 2011 and took shape in 2012 and sets the timeline for the empirical evidence in this thesis (Campbell, 2016, pp. 1-10; Davidson, 2014, pp. 77-78; Lieberthal, 2011; Panda, 2014).

Some of the former published academic works on U.S.-China relations and geopolitics are *Asia’s New Geopolitics* (2020). It explains the overall geopolitical landscape in the Indo-

Pacific region and explores the history of American strategy in Asia from the 18th century through today (Auslin, 2020). While Auslin focuses on the American Strategy development, other texts explore the Pacific states and islands and their geopolitical consequences. *The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands* (2021) does exactly that, as the authors look at which implications the U.S.-China Relation has on the regional actors (Smith & Wesley-Smith, 2021). However, not only the Pacific Islands and their geopolitical consequences have been researched. The economic ties between the U.S., China, South Korea, and Vietnam have been explored in *Middle Power National Identity? South Korea and Vietnam in US-China Geopolitics* (2012). The article explains the geopolitical and economic implication that Vietnam and South Korea faces because of their geographical positioning between the U.S. and China (Easley, 2012). Other academic works that explore the economic effect in the region are *Motivation Behind China's One Belt, One Road Initiatives and Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank* (2017), which explains the “One Belt, One Road Initiative” and the Chinese competitor to the World Bank (Yu, 2017).

Perhaps the most researched topic within the U.S.-China relationship is power projection and military capabilities. *The Pivot Before the Pivot: U.S. Strategy to Preserve the Power Balance in Asia* (2016) develops an argument about how the Pivot to Asia has affected the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific (Silove, 2016). At the same time, *Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific China's Rise and the Future of U.S. Power Projection* (2014) explains how the U.S. has underestimated the Chinese military modernization (Montgomery, 2014). And finally, *Future Warfare in the Western Pacific: Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, U.S. AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia* (2016) argue how the military modernization of China can limit the U.S. influence in the Western Pacific (Biddle & Oelrich, 2016). All of the former research gives a deeper understanding of the geopolitical environment that the U.S.-China relationship creates. However, they do not explain what shapes the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific.

1.2 Thesis Outline and Conclusion

The structure of the thesis adheres to the standard academic structure. The following chapter begins with the presentation of the theories that are used. It is important to note that *The Influence of Seapower upon History* (1890) and *America's Strategy in world politics* (1942) are old works of political science. It's not intuitively that old works in an academic, professional field that's constantly developing still have relevance today. However, *The Influence of*

Seapower upon History (1890) can be used to explore the case at hand because it offers a historical analysis of the importance of Seapower. Mahan's work has frequently been cited and recognized as a significant theoretical contribution due to its generalizability (Østerud, 2021, p. 22). Much of the same can be said about *America's Strategy in world politics* (1942). Particularly as China is a Rimland Power and the only viable and rapidly growing threat to American hegemony (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, pp. 41-42; Goldstein, 2020, pp. 59-60; Yan, 2020, pp. 340-341). That's why one can argue that these old theories are as relevant today as they were when they were written.

The theories form the groundwork for developing the hypotheses presented in the final part before the thesis moves onwards. The first two hypotheses were inspired by Spykman and his proposal for a U.S. base network in the Pacific and its application. They are as follows: H1: *U.S. force deployment in the Pacific has several similarities with Spykman's proposal for base networks in the Pacific.* H2: *The U.S. force deployment in the Pacific aims to limit the potential establishment of a regional hegemon.* Both test whether the U.S. force deployment is shaped by the work of Spykman. The next Hypothesis, H3, is inspired by the work of Mahan. It is: *The U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is used by the U.S. to project power and defend maritime interests.* It is interesting to understand if the U.S. also sees the factors shaping Sea Power as important. Especially Mahan's "foreign territorial acquisitions will be important" since this thesis focuses on the Pacific Islands. The final hypothesis tests if the U.S. force deployment has increased in the last decade: H4: *U.S. force deployment in the Pacific has increased in the last decade.* It is important to understand if the U.S. has increased its force deployment as China has gained more power and influence, and thereby the force deployment can give an indication if the U.S. is trying to deter and prevent China from becoming more powerful and gaining more influence in the region.

Following the presentation of the theoretical framework and the hypotheses, this thesis reviews the methodology employed for the research. Specifically, it begins with an exposition of the research method used, which is a case study. In addition, document analysis is used to gather data. Both are widely available and commonly utilized in political science and other professional research. The ensuing discussion outlines both the strengths and limitations of the methods mentioned above in order to provide insight into how and where the data was collected. It is imperative to acknowledge any methodological shortcomings to enable readers to evaluate the robustness of the research findings. In so doing, this thesis strives to achieve transparency and high-quality research standards.

The concluding section of the thesis comprises the analysis, discussion, and conclusion. The analysis involves linking the data with the theories and hypotheses. This process elucidates the relevance of the data to the research question and how the theories can account for the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific. Subsequently, the discussion will determine whether the data can effectively address the research question. After the discussion, a conclusion will be drawn, providing an answer to the research question and identifying areas that require further research in the future. Finally, a reference list containing the sources cited in the text will be included alphabetically.

Chapter 2.

Theoretical Foundation

In 1904 Halford John Mackinder published the paper *The Geographical Pivot of History*, in which he first mentioned the Heartland theory and further developed it in the book *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (Mackinder, 2004, 2012). A comprehensive understanding of Mackinder's geopolitical theory is crucial for understanding Spykman's theory, as the two theories are deeply interconnected. Spykman drew significant inspiration from Mackinder's concepts and further expanded upon them to provide a more comprehensive geopolitical framework. Mackinder's emphasis on the significance of the Heartland and the dominance of land power serves as a foundational element for comprehending Spykman's focus on the Rimland and the necessity of balancing land and sea power. Mackinder argued that land power had gained dominance over sea power in recent centuries because of the extensive technological advancements during the industrial revolution, which led him to argue that it had regained its geopolitical superiority. This transformation was primarily attributed to the advent of railways, enabling efficient transportation of land forces and goods across vast distances (Mackinder, 2012, pp. 93-146).

In the event of a land power's successful domination of the Eurasian continent, referred to as "World Island," Mackinder argued that it would gain access to an extensive reservoir of resources, rendering Britain, whose resource base relied on a smaller island, incapable of defending its position as a maritime power. Consequently, Britain depended on the absence of a superpower capable of achieving this feat. Grounded on this premise, Mackinder formulated the Heartland theory, which posited that certain regions possess inherent advantages in terms of natural defense geography while others are more susceptible to attack. Specific geographic areas are endowed with greater resource abundance, thereby augmenting a state's potential power (Østerud, 2021, pp. 22-28). Derived from these considerations, Mackinder defined a territory as "the Heartland" (initially termed the Pivot Area in 1904) as the region with the highest potential for exerting dominance over the Eurasian continent (Mackinder, 2004, pp. 311-314). This expanse extends from Hungary to the Gobi Desert in Manchuria (Map 3). It boasts formidable natural barriers in all directions, except for the western plains, which serve as the primary entry point during the war. Furthermore, sea powers are unable to access the Heartland due to the presence of ice in the north and the buffer zone between maritime and terrestrial forces along the coastal region adjacent to the Heartland. While initially named the

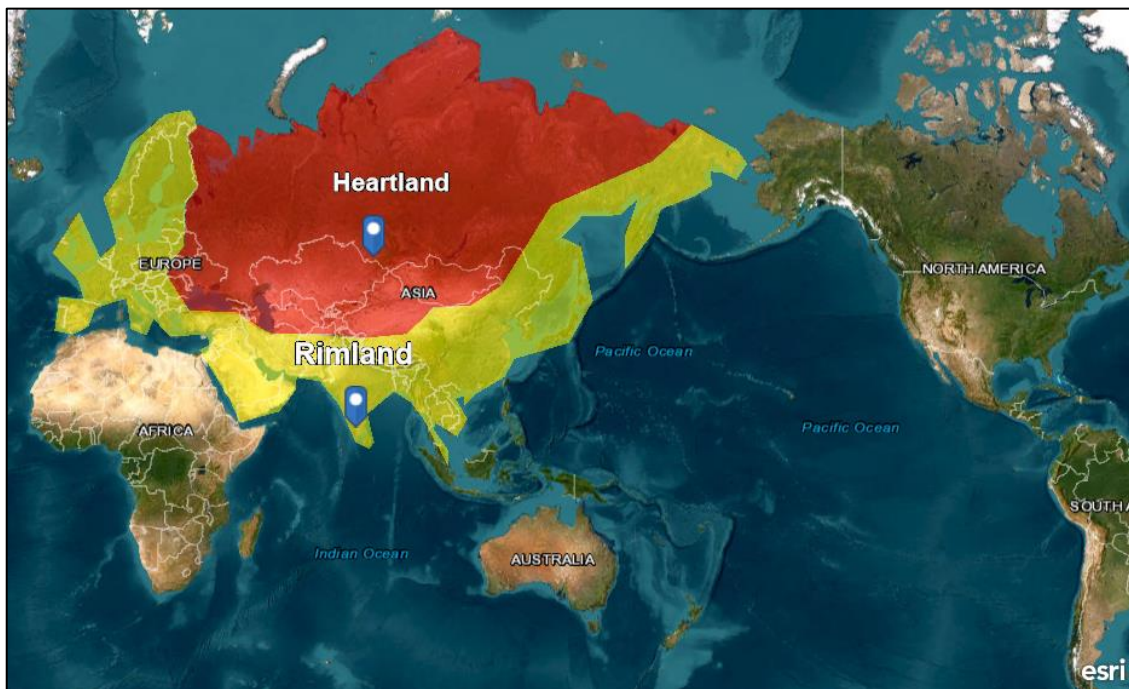
“inner crescent” by Mackinder, this area was later defined by Spykman as “the Rimland” (Spykman, 1944, pp. 40-43; Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 133-139, 296-300). In essence, Mackinder argued that the Heartland, given the prevailing state of the world and technological advancements, was impregnable (Mackinder, 2012, pp. 93-146).

In addition to being impregnable, the “World Island’s” interconnectivity with the Arabian Peninsula links the three continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. This geographical characteristic makes the region a natural focal point for trade. In essence, asserting control over the Heartland gives natural control over the entirety of the Eurasian and African landmass. However, this control depends upon the land power’s dominion over the Eastern European territory, characterized by its expansive flat plains. This region, which harbors abundant resources, was considered by Mackinder as the machinery of the Heartland. Simultaneously, it represents the most vulnerable aspect of the Heartland’s defenses. Consequently, maintaining control over this critical area becomes paramount for preserving dominion over the Heartland, which, in turn, paves the way for commanding the “World Island.” By securing control over the vast expanse of the Eurasian landmass, a state attains an unparalleled wealth of resources and an extraordinary potential for power, rendering it unyielding to challenges from other powers. Mackinder eloquently encapsulated this notion in his famous quote: “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island: Who rules the World Island commands the world” (Mackinder, 2012, p. 194).

2.1 Nicholas J. Spykman – *America’s Strategy in World Politics* (1942)

During World War II, Nicholas J. Spykman published *America’s Strategy in World Politics* (1942), taking inspiration from the works of Halford Mackinder and his “Heartland” theory (Østerud, 2021, p. 31). Where Mackinder argued that the Eurasian Heartland (Map 3) was the world’s powerhouse and the region most likely to take control of the world, Spykman focused on the coastal area (Mackinder, 2004, pp. 311-314; Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 178-187). The Eurasian continent is often referred to as the “World Island,” and the coastline of the Eurasian Continent is referred to as “Rimland” by Spykman. Because of its advantageous location, Spykman believed that the Rimland was the area most likely to capture control of the Heartland (Spykman, 1944, pp. 40-43; Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 133-139, 296-300). The Rimland is defined as the coastal area of Western Europe, the Middle East, Southwest Asia, China, the Far East, and the Islands of Britain and Japan (Map 3) (Spykman, 1944, pp. 40-41).

Map 3 - Heartland (red) and Rimland (Yellow)



Map of Heartland (red) and Rimland (yellow) created with ArcGIS. Spykman, Mackinder, and thestrategybridge.org are used as references (Gilchrist, 2019; Mackinder, 2004, p. 312; Spykman, 1944, p. 53; Spykman, 1942/1970, p. 180).

Spykman claimed that America's main security worries were situated in the "Rimland" of Eurasia. This region contained the majority of the world's population and natural resources. A single power or coalition of powers controlling the Rimland would pose the greatest threat to the global balance of power. Thanks to its access to massive resources and personnel, the Rimland Power would be able to develop a war industry unlike any other (Spykman, 1942/1970, p. 291). Spykman emphasizes that having a significant industrial capacity is essential for success in modern warfare (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 26-40). The Rimland Power could then close off communication between the Heartland and the offshore islands and continents, above all, the United States. By cutting off the offshore states from Eurasia, the Rimland Power could dominate the Heartland, control the resources of the World Island, and present a real possibility of global hegemony (Spykman, 1944, pp. 40-43; Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 133-139, 296-300). When Spykman wrote *America's Strategy in World Politics*, China wasn't a Great Power, but he still feared its enormous war potential because of its large population, favorable geography, and advantageous resource availability (thou not as accessible as Europe and the U.S.) (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 134, 468). A balance of power realist, Spykman maintained that keeping a hostile state or coalition of powers from gaining control of the "Old World" (the Eurasian continent) was crucial to preserving American security. Therefore, the most important strategical task for the U.S. was to prevent a regional hegemon

from establishing and maintaining the balance of power (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 179-180; Østerud, 2021, pp. 31-32). The combined resources of the Americas would be easily surpassed by those of the “World Island.” Instead of serving as a barrier against invasion from abroad, the ocean would serve as a highway for an economic blockade, political pressure, and subversion (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 179-180, 296-300, 389-390). This can be summed up in Spykman’s famous quote: “Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world” (Spykman, 1944, p. 43).

The fundamental argument of Spykman was that American security depended on ensuring that the states of the Rimland remained independent from a potential hegemon (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 154-155, 446-472). Not only because of the war potential of a Rimland Power but also to maintain U.S. power. Spykman noted that a Rimland Power could have serious repercussions on U.S.’ power position in the Western hemisphere (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 154-155). The United States could no longer afford to hang back and see how events developed. The United States had to become actively engaged across the oceans during peacetime through alliances and military bases that maintained air and maritime access to the Rimland and that preserved the security of the marginal seas (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 32, 140-141, 154-155, 397, 414). According to Spykman (1944, pp. 58-61), the preservation of American independence is reliant on foreign policy that precludes any dominant power in Europe and the Far East from emerging in the Eurasian landmass. To achieve this, he posits that the restraint of land-based powers in the Rimland is necessary to prevent any one nation from dominating the region. To this end, Spykman recommends the implementation of an “offshore balancing policy” by the United States (Spykman, 1944, pp. 58-61; Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 446-449).

To prevent a possible hegemon in the Eurasian Rimland and obtain a powerful military presence in the region, Spykman argued that the U.S. should expand its military presence in the Pacific (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 192-194, 414). A substantial U.S. military presence in the Pacific would pose a threat to any Eurasian Rimland Power. The U.S. Navy could be dominating the Western Pacific by having military bases and marine harbors in the region. The infrastructure would also serve as a steppingstone for posing as a threat to a Rimland hegemon’s dominance over the Asian Mediterranean (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 145-147). The geopolitical and geostrategic important Pacific Island was, according to Spykman, the Hawaii Islands, American Samoa, Guam, Midway, Wake Island, Aleutian Islands, and other larger atolls which could be used as naval air bases, mainly the Howler and Baker Islands (Map 4) (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 140-141). According to Spykman, the strategic position of the islands in the

Western Pacific was significant due to their ability to control a large part of the Pacific, as well as providing access to large harbors and potential air bases for support (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 140-141). The islands' proximity to Asia made them a threat to the Eurasian mainland, and Spykman argued that control over these islands would give the U.S. military infrastructure near Japan, while Japan had no bases close to the U.S. Without the islands, the U.S. would be at a disadvantage in a war with a Rimland Power (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 146, 159-161). Furthermore, Spykman argued that having an island base between your opponent would be advantageous because of the impact of air power on a fleet. The U.S. could use airbases on these islands to take out the enemy fleet while defending its own, which in return would give control over the region (Spykman, 1942/1970, p. 397).

Map 4 – Spykman’s Proposal for U.S. Base Network in the Pacific



Map showing which Pacific Islands Spykman believed were important for controlling the Pacific. Created with ArcGIS (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 414-415, Endpapers).

These particular islands are important for several reasons. The islands, as already indicated, are in a favorable geostrategic and geopolitical location (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 140-141). It's argued that having control over the Pacific Islands reduces the possibility of an attack from the Western Pacific because it creates a defensive line in the middle of the Pacific Ocean (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 413-417). The Pacific is an enormous area, and the islands create the opportunity to cut off, counterattack, or circumvent an enemy attacking the U.S. (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 397-413). Spykman finds value in more than just the U.S.' ability

to project power through control over the Pacific Islands. If the U.S. has control over the Pacific Islands, it will have control over the Pacific Ocean. Control of the Pacific leaves the U.S. at a great distance from any potential Rimland Power. This will reduce, if not prevent, a potential strike on the U.S. mainland (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 411-417).

2.1.1 Hypothesis Developed from Spykman

The islands Spykman deemed important for the U.S. military have a beneficial geostrategic and geopolitical position because of their ability to control a large part of the Pacific, their proximity to Asia, as well as providing access to large harbors and potential air bases for support and control, which Spykman deemed crucial (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 140-141, 159-161, 397). In addition, Spykman argued that control over these islands gave control over the Pacific. Based on these arguments, it is interesting to investigate if there are any similarities between Spykman's proposal and the U.S. force deployment. Therefore, the first hypothesis will test whether U.S. force deployment matches Spykman's proposal:

H1: U.S. force deployment in the Pacific has several similarities with Spykman's proposal for base networks in the Pacific.

H1 aims to reveal whether there are any resemblances between Spykman's proposals and the current U.S. force deployment in the Pacific without explaining the underlying reasons behind the deployment. However, it is important to understand why there are or are not any similarities between them. If they appear the same, it is possible to assume that the U.S. wants to limit the establishment of a Rimland hegemon, as Spykman seemed crucial. H2 draws on Spykman's argument that the most important strategical task for the U.S. was to prevent a regional hegemon from establishing and maintaining the balance of power (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 179-180; Østerud, 2021, pp. 31-32). Therefore, to shed light on the motivations behind U.S. force deployment in the region, Hypothesis 2 is formulated as follows:

H2: The U.S. force deployment in the Pacific aims to limit the potential establishment of a regional hegemon.

Both these hypotheses can contribute to insight if the U.S. force deployment is shaped by the geopolitical theory that Spykman published in 1942. It would also explain why the U.S. has several troops and infrastructure throughout the small islands in the Pacific Ocean.

2.2 Alfred T. Mahan – *the Influence of Seapower upon History (1890)*

Before Mackinder and Spykman, perhaps the most influential geopolitical theory was *the Influence of Seapower upon History* (Østerud, 2021, pp. 15-16, 22-23). With *the Influence of Seapower upon History* (1890), Mahan created a historical argument for naval expansion and power. According to Mahan, “Sea Power” should be understood as naval superiority based on (i) production, (ii) shipping, and (iii) foreign territorial acquisitions. *The Influence of Seapower upon History* stated that Sea Power was the key for a state to obtain national power and global influence (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 1-25, 70-77). Mahan points out that a navy’s primary purpose is to protect maritime trade routes and seaborne communication between several points. Mahan was interested in the connection between national primacy and the sea on a more fundamental level. Naval predominance is unsustainable without trade, territorial infrastructure, and political will. A fleeting advantage in tonnage or deployable vessels frequently hides a more serious deficiency. Without those elements of Sea Power, pure military or naval strength has an enormous weakness (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 60-76). That is why, when reading Mahan, it is important to separate between “sea power” and “Sea Power” (Capital “S” and “P”). The term “sea power” can be interpreted as military command of the sea. However, Mahan only uses the term “Sea Power” in *Influence of Seapower upon History*, referring to the three above-mentioned connecting factors (i) production, (ii) shipping, and (iii) foreign territorial acquisitions (Jamison, 2022; Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 1-25, 70-77).

The third factor, foreign territorial acquisitions, is particularly important for the research question in this thesis. This is because, to deploy forces in the Pacific, the U.S. needs foreign territorial acquisitions. Furthermore, Mahan argued that it is important to protect its trade routes at sea, both in peacetime and in wartime. The establishment of ports capable of providing sanctuary and replenishing supplies emerges as a critical imperative in ensuring the protection of these routes (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 23-25). The more foreign territorial acquisitions, the safer the ships and trades are. Mahan also points out that if war breaks out, these harbors can arm ships and project the maritime power of a nation. They can be used to control areas of the sea and hinder the opponent from gaining access (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 23-25). Consequently, Mahan argues that foreign territorial acquisitions constitute a vital component of Sea Power.

Mahan identifies six critical determinants of a state’s maritime power, namely: (i) geographic position, (ii) physical conformation, (iii) territorial extent, (iv) population size, (v)

population characteristics, and (vi) institutional features of the state (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 22-25). These factors collectively shape a state's ability to project and maintain naval power, thereby influencing its strategic position vis-à-vis other maritime powers. (i) Geographical position is a crucial determinant of a state's ability to focus on Sea Power. If a state is required to defend itself against neighboring countries on land, it may limit its capacity to invest in Sea Power. Conversely, a concentrated coastline can provide opportunities for controlling maritime forces and challenging other states through strategic positioning (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 25-30). (ii) Physical conformation, which includes factors such as port access, ocean depth, distance to open water, and geographic separation by sea, further influences a state's capacity for sea access (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 30-37). (iii) Territorial extent, or the length of a state's coastline and the number and characteristics of its ports, requires a sufficiently large population to operate the ports and control the coastline effectively (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 37-39). (iv) Population size, in turn, impacts a state's maritime capacity by providing the necessary labor force for maritime work such as shipbuilding, port control, and maritime combat (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 39-43). Additionally, (v) the characteristics of a population, such as a trading instinct and a desire for profit, play a significant role in determining a state's ability to become a maritime power (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 43-50). Finally, (vi) the characteristics of a government and its institutions can influence a state's maritime power through its will and capacity to develop a strong merchant fleet and navy. In peacetime, a government may focus on sea trade, while in wartime, a strong navy may be essential (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 50-77).

The works of Both Mahan and Spykman revolve around the concept of geopolitics and its impact on the world. They analyze the strategic significance of geographical factors and the distribution of power in shaping global affairs. Both recognize the importance of sea power in international relations. However, there are some differences between Mahan and Spykman. Mahan's book is a historical analysis of the influence of Sea Power on major conflicts and empires throughout history. It focuses on maritime dominance as a key factor in the rise and fall of nations. In contrast, Spykman's work is more contemporary and focuses on American foreign policy and its strategic interests. Mahan's analysis primarily revolves around the importance of maritime power for individual nations and their interactions. He focuses on the role of specific sea routes and the control of key naval bases. Spykman, on the other hand, adopts a broader global perspective, emphasizing the strategic significance of various regions, particularly the Eurasian "Rimland," and the competition for influence in those areas. Lastly, Mahan primarily offers historical analysis and lessons. While Spykman provides more explicit policy proposals for American foreign policy, advocating for containment and active

engagement to counter potential threats. Overall, while both Mahan and Spykman explore the geopolitical significance of sea power in world politics, their works differ in terms of scope and the specific context in which they analyze strategic dynamics.

2.2.1 Hypotheses Drawn from Mahan

Mahan advocates offshore balancing and maritime power. The third hypothesis draws inspiration from Mahan's theory of Sea Power. As mentioned, Mahan argues that the key for a state to obtain national power and global influence is Sea Power, which is, according to Mahan, "naval superiority based on (i) production, (ii) shipping, and (iii) foreign territorial acquisitions" (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 1-25, 70-77). The U.S.' Sea Power is interesting to understand as both Spykman and Mahan argued its importance and that it can be a powerful tool to keep the hegemony. In this instance, it will be interesting to investigate if the U.S. also sees the factors shaping Sea Power as important. Since this thesis focuses on the Western Pacific Islands, the most interesting of Mahan's factors shaping Sea Power is "foreign territorial acquisitions." Is the U.S. using its force deployment as power projection and to defend its maritime interests? Inspired by this, the 3 hypothesis is:

H3: The U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is used by the U.S. to project power and defend maritime interests.

The third hypothesis, "to project power," and the second hypothesis, "aim to limit the establishment of a regional hegemon," are both drawing on the growing concern for China's fast rise to power, which has risen considerably in the last decade (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, pp. 41-42). China is a Rimland Power and the only real possible threat to U.S. hegemony (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, pp. 41-42; Goldstein, 2020, pp. 59-60; Yan, 2020, pp. 340-341). Power projection is often understood as direct military capabilities. In that essence, the U.S. force deployment is a form of power projection. However, power projection can also be seen as a nation's ability to extend its influence beyond its own borders, not just military might (O'Neill, 2019, pp. 13-19). The Chinese threat and rise to power will be explained more in Chapter 4. Because of the fear of China as a regional hegemon and how that fits in with Spykman's theory of a Rimland Power, it is necessary to investigate whether China's rise in the last decade has influenced U.S. force deployment, leading to the fourth and final hypothesis:

H4: U.S. force deployment in the Pacific has increased in the last decade.

The confirmation or denial of these hypotheses will present well-considered arguments to answer the research question: *What shapes U.S. force deployment in the Pacific?* But before they are tested, the research method and data will be presented.

Chapter 3.

Research Method

3.1 Case Study

This thesis utilizes a qualitative research method to examine the factors influencing the deployment of U.S. forces in the Pacific. To achieve this goal, a case study approach is adopted. A case study is an investigation that uses an existing phenomenon or event to study its implications in relation to a theory (David, 2006a, pp. xxvi-xxvii; Moses & Knutsen, 2019, pp. 133-134). While a case can refer to different objects (Tjora, 2017, pp. 41-42), the present study focuses on U.S. policy for the Western Pacific and the small islands that are housing U.S. Force deployment. The U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is chosen as the case to investigate, as it can have significant implications for the international system's development because of the relationship between the two superpowers in the world today, the U.S. and China (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, pp. 39-40).

The research design entails testing theories against empirical data. Case studies have some advantages and disadvantages in this regard. They allow for a detailed exploration of a specific situation, phenomenon, or problem. They provide a rich and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The method provides a contextually rich analysis by considering various factors and variables that influence the subject under investigation. Case studies are often based on real-world situations, making them highly applicable to practical settings. The findings and insights derived from case studies can be directly applied to similar scenarios, offering practical solutions and recommendations (David, 2006a, pp. 1-30). Some of the disadvantages of Case Studies is that the findings of a case study may not be easily generalizable to a broader population or other contexts. Since case studies typically focus on specific individuals, phenomena, or situations. Case studies heavily rely on the researcher's interpretation and subjective analysis. The selection of cases, data collection methods, and data analysis can be influenced by personal biases, potentially impacting the objectivity of the study. Depending on the availability and access to data sources, case studies may suffer from incomplete information. Researchers may face challenges in gathering comprehensive and accurate data, leading to potential gaps or limitations in the study (David, 2006a, pp. 1-30).

3.2 Document Analysis

The data collection for the study was conducted through document analysis. The use of document analysis has been a common approach for collecting empirical data. Document analysis involves a systematic process of finding, selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing data from various types of documents. Document analysis provides researchers with valuable data that can be utilized in the analysis of a research question (Labuschagne, 2003, pp. 100-102). Typically, document studies use documents that were not created for research purposes but rather for other intentions (Tjora, 2017, pp. 182-183). These documents may include books, political documents, media outlets such as newspapers, and research documents. The significance of documents lies in the fact that they provide specific information about a particular subject, including time and place (Tjora, 2017, p. 183). According to Glenn Bowen, document analysis is “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents - both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Thus, document analysis is a research method that involves the careful evaluation and assessment of various types of documents to determine their usefulness for research purposes (Bowen, 2009, p. 27).

Document analysis is a well-established research method within the social sciences. The practice of document analysis has several advantages that make it a valuable research method. One of its primary advantages is its efficiency in data collection. By relying on pre-existing documents, researchers can bypass the time and resources needed to generate new data (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). Furthermore, many documents are easily accessible, and the development of digital archives has further expanded the availability of relevant documents (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). Another advantage is its cost-effectiveness, as document studies require minimal funding and resources compared to other research methods (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). Moreover, document analysis has the advantage of being free from researcher bias, as the documents are created independently of the research process, thereby minimizing the possibility of external influence (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). In addition, documents have the benefit of being able to provide precise and reliable data, which can be revisited and studied multiple times (Bowen, 2009, p. 31). Lastly, the wide range of documents available allows researchers to study a broad spectrum of events and time periods (Bowen, 2009, p. 31).

However, document analysis is not without its limitations. One of the most significant challenges is that the documents were not created for research purposes, and thus their ability to answer specific research questions is limited (Bowen, 2009, pp. 31-32). Additionally, some

documents may not be accessible to researchers due to various factors such as limited availability or restrictions on access (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). Another potential drawback is that researchers must rely on their judgment to select relevant documents, which may lead to the omission of important information or documents (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). Lastly, the researcher's selection process may introduce bias into the study, as certain documents may be prioritized over others, potentially affecting the accuracy of the study (Bowen, 2009, p. 32).

3.3 The Quality of the Research

One way to assess the quality of research is through its reliability, validity, and if it can be generalized (Tjora, 2017, pp. 231-232). Reliability refers to the researcher's ability to account for their personal stance and clarify the extent to which it may influence the research (Tjora, 2017, p. 235). In this case, the author is from a Western democratic country that is allied with the U.S. This may affect the perspective on what shapes the U.S. deployment in the Pacific and how this impacts the international system. Validity involves a logical connection between the research project and the findings (Tjora, 2017, p. 232). Therefore, the answers presented in the conclusion of the thesis are directed toward the research question and are based on the theories and data presented in the text. Generalizability refers to whether the research is relevant to other topics beyond what has been examined (Tjora, 2017, pp. 231-232). A case pertains to a specific phenomenon and therefore is more difficult to generalize. However, it does not mean that it cannot be generalized (David, 2006b, pp. 12-13). At first glance, it may seem that the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is not generalizable. However, as the U.S. has significant force deployments in the Pacific and controls vast areas, the U.S. is using this control to limit China, as China is the only real threat to U.S. global dominance (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, pp. 41-42). Nevertheless, it can be argued that the research question is generalizable because the focus is on classical geopolitics and Great Power rivalry. Both theories were developed before China emerged as a real challenger to the U.S. and before the U.S. began to deploy forces in the Pacific on such a large scale as it does now. Based on the more general theme of the thesis, what influences a Great Power's deployment of forces, rather than the U.S. as a unit, it can be asserted that the research is generalizable.

3.4 U.S. Force Deployment

In order to explain the factors influencing U.S. force deployment in the Pacific, it is essential to provide an overview of the actual U.S. force deployment. The data that is used is gathered

from the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and the Pentagon's Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) and are open to the public. Two sources of data were used to gather information on U.S. force deployment, each with distinct recording capabilities. The two sources are split into what they record and can be used for. The first source, produced by the Pentagon's Defense Manpower Data Center, reports the number of active-duty forward-deployed U.S. troops in any location as of the end of March (Q1), June (Q2), September (Q3), and December (Q4) (Jakobsen, 2022, p. 175; The Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023). The second source shows the infrastructure the U.S. military has around the world. It was created by the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (OASD) for the U.S. Department of Defense and is published yearly and serves as the baseline for the start of the next fiscal year (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017, p. 2).

The selected data was chosen for its ability to showcase the number of active-duty forward-deployed U.S. troops and the infrastructure of the U.S. military in the relevant area for this thesis. Moreover, the data covers several years, allowing for an examination of changes in force deployment after the implementation of the Pivot to Asia. As mentioned previously, the Pivot to Asia set the timeline for the thesis and was put forward at the end of 2011 and really took shape in 2012 by the Obama administration (Lieberthal, 2011; Panda, 2014). The data obtained from the Defense Manpower Data Center includes all active-duty servicing troops in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, National Guard, and Reserve forces who are assigned for duty. Consequently, this includes a larger number of areas than other American overseas territories, thereby highlighting the true capabilities of the U.S. in the small islands with deployed forces in the Pacific, which typically consist of reserves and the National Guard (Jakobsen, 2022, pp. 175-176). The data concerning the U.S. military infrastructure does not show all relevant information. To be included in the *Base Structure Report* (BSR), a Department of Defense site in a foreign country must be larger than 10 acres or have a Property Record Value greater than \$10 million (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017, p. 3). This may result in certain areas on small islands in the Pacific not being represented in the data. For this reason, the data includes *Lists of U.S. Military Bases Abroad, 1776-2020*, which is a comprehensive list of every U.S. military base around the world using several sources (Vine, 2020). Finally, it is worth noting that although most of the data is expected to be accurate, there are some concerns about their reliability. For instance, the tables exclude some specific categories of U.S. troops, such as Temporary staff and soldiers on contingency missions, while troops stationed at sea are recorded in their home port and not their actual location (Kane, 2006,

pp. 1-11). In addition, the *Base Structure Report* is notoriously inconsistent and sometimes inaccurate (Vine, 2020).

3.4.1 U.S. Troops in the Pacific

Table 1 presents data on the numbers of U.S. forward-deployed troops across various Pacific Islands. The dataset includes all locations in the Western Pacific region listed in the *Department of Defense's Personnel, Workforce Reports & Publications* between 2011 and 2022 (The Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023). It should be noted that both Japan and Hawaii are included in the dataset, despite not being considered small Western Pacific Islands. This is because of their significance in the Pacific defense and due to the presence of some force deployments on small islands in Japan that cannot be identified within the data. The table shows the trend in the number of troops over the specified time period and encompasses active-duty and reserve personnel, but not temporary forces or civilian employees.

Table 1 provides an overview of the U.S. forward-deployed troops in the Pacific Islands, including Guam, American Samoa, Fiji, Japan, the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Wake Island, and Hawaii. Their geographical position is visualized after the tables in Map 5. While the tables presented are not exhaustive, they offer insight into the evolution of force deployment in the Western Pacific. Guam, American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands are American unincorporated territories. Guam and American Samoa experienced a minor decline in the number of troops after registering an increase between 2011 and 2017 for American Samoa and 2021 for Guam. Specifically, Guam downsized its troop presence by nearly 1,500, from 11,258 in 2021 to 9,783 in 2022, while American Samoa decreased its numbers by just over 50, from 320 in 2017 to 252 in 2022. The Northern Mariana Islands displayed a relatively large increase from 5 in 2011 to 83 in 2022. (The Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023).

Wake Island is an unorganized unincorporated territory of the United States, which means the island belongs to the U.S. but is not part of it had a small number of troops, and as a consequence, Wake Island did not show any significant growth (The Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023).

Fiji, Japan, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau, and Papua New Guinea are sovereign states. Fiji and Papua New Guinea had a relatively stable number, reaching their peak in 2022 with 5 and 12 troops, respectively. Similar to Wake Island, both Fiji and Papua New Guinea it has a small number of forward-deployed troops. Japan, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau demonstrated a rise in the number of troops

between 2011 and 2022. Japan recorded its highest numbers in 2015 and then decreased its numbers, but still had an increase of 9,000 troops (from 55,278 in 2011 to 64,270 in 2022). The Marshall Islands experienced growth from 60 in 2011 to 83 in 2022, with its highest number in 2020 at 96. Finally, Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia had no troops in 2011, but by September 2022, Micronesia had 3, and Palau had 57 (The Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023). (The Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023).

Hawaii is a state in the U.S., and The Armed Forces Pacific column represents the commanding division for the U.S. military in the Indo-Pacific region (U.S. Army Pacific, 2023). Hawaii and Armed Forces Pacific showed either no or insignificant changes in the number of troops. Hawaii decreased its numbers from 2011 to 2016 but returned to its 2011 level in 2022. Armed Forces Pacific witnessed remarkable growth in 2016 and 2017 but reverted to normal numbers in 2018 (The Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023). The total number of troops has increased from 136,746 in 2011 to 145,728 in 2022.

Total U.S. Forces in the Western Pacific and Hawaii													
Year	Guam	American Samoa	Fiji	Japan	Marshall Islands	Federated States of Micronesia	Northern Mariana Islands	Palau	Papua New Guinea	Wake Island	Hawaii	Armed Forces Pacific	SUM
	2011	10,123	304	3	55,278	60	ND	5	ND	ND	4	70,581	388
2012	9,876	330	3	56,383	58	ND	7	ND	1	4	75,203	464	142,332
2013	10,125	344	3	60,798	53	ND	5	ND	2	5	75,501	278	147,114
2014	10,583	362	3	60,383	65	ND	6	ND	1	3	78,674	285	150,365
2015	9,384	347	ND	78,092	69	ND	93	ND	ND	4	71,413	1,255	160,657
2016	7,726	13	3	46,334	72	ND	5	ND	ND	4	65,746	57,876	177,779
2017	8,083	1,074	2	51,755	85	ND	6	ND	ND	5	66,130	51,508	178,648
2018	10,948	320	3	63,365	89	ND	79	ND	3	4	71,792	397	147,000
2019	11,166	314	3	64,404	86	1	86	ND	2	4	71,604	411	148,081
2020	11,295	309	1	63,690	96	1	45	ND	2	5	70,590	401	146,435
2021	11,258	264	3	63,923	93	1	86	10	3	2	72,133	406	148,182
2022*	9,783	252	5	64,270	83	3	81	57	12	3	70,342	387	145,728

Table 1 – Data from DMDC showing how many U.S. troops are deployed in the different islands in the Western Pacific (The Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023).

*The Army was converting its Integrated Personnel and Pay System (IPPS-A), so the Army did not provide military personnel data for end-of-December 2022. Therefore, the data is from September 2022.

3.4.2 The U.S. Department of Defense's Infrastructure in the Western Pacific

The Second Table (Table 2) presents an overview of the infrastructures controlled by the United States Department of Defense in the Western Pacific. The data is extracted from the *Base Structure Report* (BSR) and *Lists of U.S. Military Bases Abroad, 1776-2020* (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021; Vine, 2020). Department of Defense sites in a foreign country are required to meet certain criteria, such as a land area larger than 10 acres or a Property Record Value exceeding \$10 million, to be included (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017, p. 3). *Lists of U.S. Military Bases Abroad, 1776-2020* lists several other bases that are not in the Base Structure Report as it is “notoriously incomplete and, at times, inaccurate” (Vine, 2020). The absence of Base Structure Reports from 2015 and 2020, which are not included in the data, does not diminish its credibility, as the underlying structures of military bases are known to experience little change over relatively short periods. The bases are categorized after the Base Structure Report standard: large, medium, small, and other. Large bases have a plant replacement value (PRV) greater than or equal to \$2,415B. The medium bases have to have a PRV between \$2.415B and \$1.288B. The small bases lie between \$1.288B and \$0. Other sites often refer to primarily land records (U.S. Department of Defense, 2021). Table 3 presents a detailed list of the number of buildings and total acres that the Department of Defense has in each territory in the Western Pacific in 2011 and in 2021. It should be noted that the data under the column “Japan” does not encompass every single base and infrastructure owned by the Department of Defense in Japan. The table only includes the most relevant bases for this study, primarily the infrastructure in Okinawa and Iwo Jima. A more comprehensive list of specific bases in Japan that are included in Tables 2 and 3 is available in Appendix 1.

Table 2 presents the distribution of large, medium, and small bases across several Pacific Islands. Large bases are found only in Guam, Japan, the Marshall Islands, and Hawaii, with the Marshall Islands and Guam having fewer such installations. This trend can be attributed to the larger land area of these islands compared to others in the region. Medium bases are more widely dispersed, although the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, and American Samoa lack such facilities. It is worth noting that Johnston Atoll and Midway Island, despite their small size, have medium-sized bases and are the only islands with no small bases. Furthermore, other sites are present in Guam, Japan, the Northern Mariana Islands, and Hawaii, with the highest number found in Guam. While such sites may only have land records, they still hold potential

for future utility. Table 2 does not feature an annual breakdown of the number of bases, as the infrastructure of these facilities does not undergo significant changes on a yearly basis. As such, the data presented represents the most current and accurate information available.

Total U.S. Military Bases in the Western Pacific 2021											
	Guam	American Samoa	Japan*	Marshall Islands	Northern Mariana Islands	Palau	Wake Island	Hawaii	Midway Island**	Johnston Atoll	SUM
Large Bases	2	0	5	1	0	0	0	9	0	0	17
Medium Bases	2	0	4	1	0	0	1	7	1	1	17
Small Bases	25	1	6	9	3	2	0	91	0	0	137
Other Sites	51	0	19	0	10	0	0	33	0	0	113
Total Bases	80	1	34	11	13	2	1	141	1	1	285

Table 2 – Data from Base Structure Report and Vine 2020 showing how many bases are located in the Western Pacific (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021; Vine, 2020).

*The selection of military bases in Japan is selected with the criteria associated with the First and Second Island Chain and not the mainland.

**The base at Midway Island, “Naval Air Facility Midway Island,” closed in 1993 and reopened as a civilian airport under the name “Henderson Field.” Meaning it still has the potential to be used as a military airfield if needed.

To visualize the development of the number of buildings and total acres from 2011 to 2021, Table 3 was created. Table 3 lists the number of buildings and total acres the U.S. Department of Defense has in the Western Pacific. It utilizes the same data as Table 2 but in more detail. The Table compares 2011 and 2021 and does not showcase every year. This approach is justified by the relatively minor year-to-year changes observed in the data and the potential unreliability of such granular information (Vine, 2020). Instead, the emphasis is placed on examining the broader evolution of the number of buildings and total acres from the inception of the Pivot to Asia policy until the present day. By taking this longer-term perspective, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the trends and developments that have shaped the U.S. military presence in the region, providing valuable insights into the strategic implications of the Pivot to Asia and its subsequent impact on force deployment in the Western Pacific. As can be seen in Table 3, the total number of buildings and acres has increased. American Samoa gained 1 installation, and the Northern Mariana Islands 11. Guam decreased with 1,000, Japan with 1,200, the Marshall Islands with 14, Wake Island with 2, and Hawaii with 700. Johnston Atoll has the same number of buildings. Total Acres in Guam increased by 25 000, and the Northern Mariana Islands increased by 300 acres. Hawaii and Japan were the only areas that decreased the total acres, with 32,000 for Hawaii and 11,000 for Japan. American Samoa, the Marshall Islands, Wake Island, and Johnston Atoll had the same total acres in 2011 and in 2021 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021).

The Total U.S. Department of Defense Infrastructure in the Western Pacific

		Build.	Total Acres	Build.	Total Acres	Build.	Total Acres	Build.	Total Acres	Build.	Total Acres	Build.	Total Acres	Build.	Total Acres	Build.	Total Acres	Build.	Total Acres	Build.	Total Acres	Build.	Total Acres	Build.	Total Acres
	Guam																								
	American Samoa																								
	Japan																								
	Marshall Islands																								
	Northern Mariana Islands																								
	Wake Island																								
	Hawaii																								
	Johnston Atoll																								
	SUM																								
2011		3,861	37,112	8	110	7,834	57,085	738	1,361	5	15,735	109	2,600	14,079	230,929	72	684	26,706	345,616						
2021		2,811	62,572	9	110	6,660	46,317	724	1,361	16	16,060	107	2,600	13,368	198,944	72	684	23,767	328,543						

Table 3 – Number of buildings and total acres the U.S. Department of Defense owns and administrates in the Western Pacific (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021).

To end the empirical explanation of the current U.S. force deployment in the Pacific, it is beneficial to visualize the position of forces and bases on a map. Map 5 gives a clear picture of where the U.S. has forward-deployed troops and bases in the Western Pacific. The red markers are placed on geographical positions where the Defense Manpower Data Center has data on where U.S. personnel are situated. The yellow markers showcase where the U.S. has bases and infrastructure. As can be seen, the U.S. Department of Defense has bases in areas where there are no troops registered and troops where they have no infrastructure. This applies to Papua New Guinea and Fiji, which do not have any infrastructure but some forward-deployed troops, and Midway Island and Johnston Atoll. Johnston Atoll is a base but does not have active-duty personnel, but probably has temporary staff on rotation. Midway Island was a U.S. Air Force base but has been turned into a civil airport, meaning it still has the potential to be used as a military airfield if needed (Vine, 2020).

Map 5 - U.S. Forward-Deployed Troops (red) and Bases (yellow)



The map showcases where the U.S. has forward-deployed troops (red) and bases (yellow). Map created with ArcGIS with sources from DMDC and BSR (The Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023; U.S. Department of Defense, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021).

Chapter 4.

The Factors Influencing U.S. Force Deployment in the Pacific

4.1 Aligning Strategies?

The theoretical framework and empirical data have established a solid groundwork for testing and validating the hypotheses, which in return will allow for promoting an answer to the research question. The first Hypothesis, H1, is as follows: *U.S. force deployment in the Pacific has several similarities with Spykman's proposal for base networks in the Pacific.* To test H1, it is necessary to examine Spykman's base network proposal in the Pacific and compare it with the current U.S. base positions. As explained in the chapter clarifying Spykman's theory: *America's Strategy in World Politics* (1942), Spykman argued that the U.S. should have military infrastructure in several different locations. Mainly Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, Midway, Wake Island, the Aleutian Islands in Alaska, Howler Island, and Baker Island (Map 4) (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 140-141). Having bases or other military infrastructure in these positions would provide adequate protection in the Western Pacific, thus reducing the risk of an attack (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 140-141, 397).

The existing U.S. bases in the Western Pacific offer insight into the areas where the U.S. intends to and have established control. Based on the collected data, it is evident that the U.S. has established bases in several locations, including Guam, American Samoa, the Marshall Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Wake Island, Japan, Hawaii, and Johnston Atoll. Furthermore, the U.S. has forward-deployed troops in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and the Federated States of Micronesia (Map 5) (The Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023; U.S. Department of Defense, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021). To facilitate a more straightforward comparison between the existing U.S. military infrastructure, the forward-deployed troops, and Spykman's proposed base network, Map 6 was created for a visual representation.

Map 6 – Spykman’s Base Network (red) and U.S. Force Deployment (yellow)



Map comparing both Spykman’s proposal for bases (red) and present U.S. bases and forward-deployed troops (yellow). Created with ArcGIS. (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 414-415; The Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023; U.S. Department of Defense, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021)

As can be seen, there are several similarities between Spykman’s base network proposal (red) and the actual U.S. force deployment (yellow). However, it is not identical. The Aleutian Islands in Alaska and the Howland and Baker Islands north of American Samoa deviate from Spykman’s proposal as the U.S. has no force deployment there. These deviations may challenge the validity of H1, which claims that U.S. force deployment in the Pacific shares similarities with Spykman’s proposal for base networks in the Pacific. Especially if one considers the vital position of the Aleutian Islands, which are positioned both near the U.S. and the Eurasian mainland. The absence of the Howland and Baker Islands creates a significant gap between U.S. bases, nullifying the idea of a defensive line in the middle of the Pacific and leaving the U.S. vulnerable to attacks from both the North and South of the Pacific (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 413-417). Making Spykman’s proposed base network useless. Since the U.S. has some bases in the same area as Spykman argued, but not every position, thereby making the idea behind the defensive line not work, one can argue that H1 has to be debunked.

The argument that H1 must be dismissed due to the absence of U.S. bases in the Aleutian Islands and Howler and Baker Islands has some flaws. Spykman’s proposal stemmed from concerns regarding Japan’s military capabilities (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 154-155, 192-194). But this is diminished, primarily because Japan no longer poses a threat to U.S. hegemony. It

also overlooks the fact that the U.S. is not necessarily in a weaker position to defend itself without these bases. In fact, one could argue that the U.S. is in a stronger position with its existing base network. The U.S. has established multiple bases in the Western Pacific, far more than what Spykman originally proposed (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 140-141, 414-415; U.S. Department of Defense, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021). Bases and troops in the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia have filled the void created by the absence of military infrastructure on the Howler and Baker Islands. This indicates that the defensive line proposed by Spykman has shifted further westward, running from Japan, the Mariana Islands, Guam, and Palau. Additionally, the bases located outside this defensive line can be viewed as strengthening and supporting military bases, thereby bolstering U.S. power projection in the Western Pacific and remaining consistent with Spykman's principles. Consequently, one can claim that H1 Should be confirmed.

To assess the validity of H1, it is necessary to examine both the location and number of bases the U.S. has similar to Spykman, but also the intention behind their existence. As with any military, they give control over an area, and the Pacific Islands are no different. The U.S. has a total of 285 bases and 145,728 forward-deployed troops in the Western Pacific. As mentioned, this does not include temporary soldiers or soldiers that are stationed on ships. According to the United States Indo-Pacific Command, about 375,000 U.S. military and civilian personnel are assigned to the Indo-Pacific region (United States Indo-Pacific Command, n.d.). This move aligns with the U.S. objective to strengthen its political, economic, and military position in the Indo-Pacific, the Pivot to Asia, which was first introduced by the Obama administration in 2011 and has been followed by the Trump and Biden administrations to varying degrees (Campbell, 2016, pp. 11-32; Cossa & Glosserman, 2022, pp. 1-2; Sutter, 2020, pp. 143-151). The military power that the U.S. has in the Pacific is enormous and gives them a lot of control over the region. The U.S. presence aligns with its objective to strengthen its political and military position and collaboration and alliances in the Indo-Pacific due to its concerns regarding China's power and influence, fearing it may become a regional hegemon (The White House, 2022a, pp. 4-18). Spykman considered the Pacific Islands important military resources because they have a favorable geostrategic location, reduce the possibility of an attack because they create a defensive line, and give control over the Pacific Islands, which in return provides control over the Pacific Ocean. Control of the Pacific leaves the U.S. at a great distance from any potential Rimland Power. This will reduce, if not prevent, a possible strike on the U.S. mainland (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 140-141, 411-417). Thereby supporting the hypothesis.

The proposal by Spykman for a defensive line in the middle of the Pacific Ocean was based on the threat of Japan's might (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 154-155, 192-194). However, the similarities between the U.S. force deployment and Spykman's proposal are limited since Japan is no longer a threat to the U.S. hegemony. This is because the U.S. and Japan are now allies, with the U.S. having established several bases and troops in Japan to control the region. This contradicts Spykman's intention to counter Japanese dominance in the Western Pacific. However, it is important to understand Spykman's concern about Japan's geopolitical position as a Rimland Power. Control over the Pacific Islands would mean control over the Pacific, which was crucial to counteract the Rimland Power (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 192-194, 414). This is in line with the current U.S. intention to control the islands in the Western Pacific and maintain a substantial force deployment to limit China's influence as a Rimland Power. Thus, the Aleutian Islands are not as important for the current U.S. force deployment. When Japan was a threat, they could attack from the north, but now Japan prevents the possibility of a Rimland Power doing the same.

Therefore, it is crucial to examine China's policy in the Western Pacific, given its status as a significant challenge to U.S. hegemony and its potential to impact the U.S. force deployment. As China's power and influence in the region have grown, it has demonstrated a more assertive approach towards Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, and other countries in the area, as evidenced by its increased activity in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea (Chubb, 2021, pp. 79-93; Xie, 2021). China sent one of its two aircraft carriers through the Taiwan Strait in May of 2023 (Reuters, 2023). Moreover, China has pursued a dual approach of both aggressive and cooperative behavior in the region. China has invested heavily in the Solomon Islands, resulting in the Solomon Islands shifting its diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China (Deutsche Welle, 2019; Liu, 2022; Miller, 2022). Additionally, China has constructed artificial islands, which it has used to reinforce its territorial claims and project its military power in the South China Sea, gaining more control and leading to the U.S. losing more and more control (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, p. 45; Center for Strategic & International Studies, n.d.; Power, 2020). Furthermore, China currently has the largest navy in the world in terms of the number of ships (Congressional Research Service, 2022, pp. 1-2). Since it is possible to argue that the U.S. uses force deployment in the Pacific to control the region and prevent China, a Rimland Power, from gaining regional hegemony as China's power and influence have grown significantly. In addition, the U.S. has bases and forward-deployed troops in nearly all of Spykman's proposed islands, and even more islands, H1 can be confirmed.

4.2 Containing a Rimland Power

The confirmation of H1 gives a natural transition to H2. Since one can argue that the U.S. has several similarities with Spykman's proposal for a base network in the Pacific and the intention behind said network is to limit a Rimland Power's influence, it is natural to assume that H2 also can be confirmed. H2 is *The U.S. force deployment in the Pacific aims to limit the potential establishment of a regional hegemon*. As previously argued, the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific with both the bases and the forward-deployed troops gives the U.S. control over the Western Pacific. The U.S. gains control with the force deployment in the Pacific Islands by having a strong presence which it can use to limit the Rimland Power's influence.

However, given China's rise as a Rimland Power and a potential challenger to American hegemony, the question arises as to whether the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is sufficient to contain China's growing influence in the region (The White House, 2022a, pp. 4-6). The newly published strategical evaluation of Australia's defensive capabilities *National Defense* Concluded that the U.S. no longer has domination over the Pacific, and China has taken a stronger position (Australian Government, 2023). China has recently increased its control over its near sea areas through various means, such as the construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea and diplomatic agreements with other states like the Solomon Islands (Center for Strategic & International Studies, n.d.; Deutsche Welle, 2019; Liu, 2022; Miller, 2022). Moreover, China has modernized its military, including its navy, which gives it greater control over the Western Pacific, given its geographical proximity to the region. (Congressional Research Service, 2022). Naturally, this gives China more control over the Western Pacific, as it borders it. Therefore, it is pertinent to examine whether the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is capable of limiting China's potential establishment of a regional hegemon, as claimed in H2.

Despite China's growing influence in the Western Pacific, the United States maintains a stronger presence and control in the region through its force deployment. The force deployment establishes two defensive lines, the First and Second Island Chain, with some bases located outside these lines, such as the Marshall Islands, Wake Island, Johnston Atoll, and Hawaii (Erickson & Wuthnow, 2016, pp. 1-5; Layne, 1997, pp. 112-113; Mearsheimer, 2003/2014, pp. 257-261). The network of bases and military infrastructure threatens to lock China in and create a blockade, thus preventing Chinese ships from entering or leaving the area. Moreover, the U.S. bases on small islands enable the U.S. to position itself within striking distance of China, creating an illusion that any aggressive or destabilizing moves by China

could result in retaliation. This, in turn, may discourage China from pursuing further regional hegemony. Therefore, the combination of the U.S.' control over the Western Pacific and the threat of its force deployment project can be argued to limit China's efforts to establish itself as a regional power, thus confirming H2.

The validity of H2 is called into question upon examining the evolution of U.S. force deployment in the Western Pacific throughout the past decade. Given China's rising power and influence in the region, one might expect the dominant power to respond with increased force deployment in order to maintain control and influence. This is particularly pertinent for a global hegemon like the U.S., which does not wish to concede its authority to a regional hegemon such as China. Yet, an analysis of the data reveals that this expectation has not been met. From 2011 to 2022, the total number of forward-deployed troops increased by a modest 8,982, from 136,746 to 145,728. Moreover, when Japan is excluded from the analysis, the overall increase in forces is negative since the number of troops in Japan increased by 9,442. Similar trends are evident in military infrastructure, as Table 3 indicates a decrease in the total number of buildings from 18,872 to 17,107 (excluding Japan). In addition, the total acres managed by the U.S. Department of Defense reveal a decrease when Japan is not considered. The recorded figures indicate a reduction of 6,305 acres, with the total land area utilized by the department declining from 288,531 acres in 2011 to 282,226 acres in 2021. As these number shows, the U.S. force deployment has not increased as would be expected. Therefore, one would assume that H2 must be rejected.

The decrease in U.S. forward-deployed troops and the number of buildings the U.S. Department of Defense has in the Western Pacific does not give us the whole picture. As previously mentioned, the number of forward-deployed troops does not show the actual number of U.S. military personnel in the region. Since it is an unreliable list, the only other data is the alleged number spoken by the United States Indo-Pacific Command, which is 375 000 (United States Indo-Pacific Command, n.d.). However, the positioning of U.S. troops and infrastructure has increased, with the establishment of military personnel and infrastructure on previously untouched islands, including the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau. The primary U.S. policy that bears significance for the Western Pacific region is the future expansion plans for U.S. bases. The U.S. plans to build more bases in Guam, the Philippines, Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia. In addition, the U.S. has just gained access to four new military locations in the Philippines. Signed new strategic pacts with Palau, Papua New Guinea, Micronesia, and soon the Marshall Islands to strengthen support among Pacific Island states to counter competition from China (Brunnstrom, 2023; Lendon, 2023). This means the U.S. base

network and force deployment will increase further (The Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, 2021; Wee, 2023; Westerman, 2019; Youssef, 2023).

The plan for future bases is a clear statement of the U.S. policy for the Western Pacific. A closer look at the U.S. Policy for the region establishes a stronger argument. The Pivot to Asia, introduced in 2011, has as a goal to strengthen the U.S. political, economic, and military position in the Indo-Pacific (Cossa & Glosserman, 2022, pp. 1-2; Sutter, 2020, pp. 143-151). Some refer to it as a policy to decrease the rapid growth of China and hinder them from becoming a regional hegemon (Blackwill, n.d.). Another clear statement of the importance of the Western Pacific for the U.S. is the U.S. National Security Strategy from 2022. There the U.S. states, “Third, this strategy recognizes that the PRC presents America’s most consequential geopolitical challenge” (The White House, 2022b, p. 11). With this empirical background, it is clear that the U.S. has used its force deployment in the Pacific as a tool to limit and contain the establishment of a Chinese regional hegemon, thereby confirming the Hypothesis.

Although it can be argued that the U.S. has used its force deployment to contain China as a regional hegemon, it is crucial to consider China’s relative power. The rise of China as a global power and its growing influence in the Western Pacific have reached a critical juncture where U.S. force deployment alone may not be sufficient to limit China or counterbalance its aspirations effectively. China has made significant advancements in modernizing its military capabilities, particularly its navy, and has undertaken assertive actions in expanding its territorial claims in the South China Sea (Center for Strategic & International Studies, n.d.; Congressional Research Service, 2022, pp. 1-5). These actions, coupled with its diplomatic efforts to build partnerships in the region, have bolstered China’s regional standing and challenged the effect of U.S. force deployment as a deterrence. Furthermore, China is arguably pushing the U.S. out of the South China Sea to the outskirts of the first island chain (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, p. 45; Power, 2020). Given these factors, it is conceivable that the U.S. force deployment alone may not be enough to limit China’s potential regional hegemony effectively.

Despite the challenges posed by China’s rise and its relative power, it is not too late for U.S. force deployment in the Pacific to continue playing a significant role in limiting the establishment of a regional hegemon. China’s territorial claims, maritime presence, and military buildup give China increasing control in the Western Pacific, especially the South China Sea. China’s relative Power is closer to the U.S. than ever, which is why some argue that the U.S. is being pushed out of the First Island Chain (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, p. 45). However, The U.S. maintains a robust military presence and alliances in the region, including longstanding

partnerships with Japan, South Korea, and Australia. These alliances serve as a deterrent against any aggressive actions by China and demonstrate the U.S. commitment to regional security, which increased with the incorporation of the Pivot to Asia (Campbell, 2016, pp. 251-266; Cossa & Glosserman, 2022). Additionally, the U.S. possesses advanced military capabilities, most notably the forward-deployed troops and the bases in the Western Pacific, which contributes to its power projection and ability to counter any potential threats. Furthermore, the U.S. has demonstrated a willingness to adapt its force deployment strategy in response to evolving geopolitical dynamics, such as the shifting balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. As the empirical evidence suggests, the U.S. has planned to build more bases and send more military personnel to the region (The Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, 2021; Wee, 2023; Westerman, 2019; Youssef, 2023). This adaptability allows the U.S. to maintain a credible presence and respond effectively to emerging challenges. Therefore, while China's rise and relative power present formidable obstacles, the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific can still exert significant influence and contribute to limiting and containing the establishment of China as a regional hegemon, which is why H2 can be confirmed.

4.3 Maritime Control in the Pacific

The U.S. force deployment in the Western Pacific has several similarities with Spykman's proposal and limits the potential establishment of a regional hegemon in the Eurasian rimland. Does this mean that H3, which states that *the U.S. uses its force deployment in the Pacific to project power and defend maritime interests*, can be confirmed? As has been previously stated, the enormous military power that the U.S. possesses in the Pacific region undoubtedly grants them significant control over the area. This presence aligns with the U.S. objective to strengthen its political and military position in the Indo-Pacific, particularly considering concerns regarding China's power and influence. China's rise as a potential regional hegemon has sparked distress among U.S. policymakers and maintaining a strong force deployment in the Pacific Islands becomes crucial in limiting China's expanding influence (The White House, 2022a, pp. 4-18). By exerting control over the Pacific Islands, the U.S. can counteract the Rimland Power and ensure its continued dominance in the region. While China's growing influence is undeniable, the United States maintains a strong presence and control in the region through its force deployment. The U.S. possesses advanced military capabilities, including forward-deployed troops and bases in the Western Pacific, which significantly contribute to its power projection and ability to counter any potential threats. Additionally, the U.S. has shown

a willingness to adapt its force deployment strategy to effectively respond to evolving geopolitical dynamics, such as the shifting balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. These arguments support the claim that the U.S. is using its force deployment in the Western Pacific to project power and defend its maritime interests.

The U.S. is arguably not using its force deployment in the Western Pacific to project power as it does not necessarily mean military strength. Power projection can be understood as a nation's ability to extend its influence beyond its own borders (O'Neill, 2019, pp. 13-19). Despite having a significant military presence in the region, the U.S. seems to exercise restraint in directly projecting its power since they have not actively been threatening to increase its force deployment. Several factors may contribute to this. Firstly, the U.S. seems to prioritize regional stability and diplomatic relations over power projection (Campbell, 2016, pp. 11-32). The U.S. aims to avoid regional tensions and potential conflicts by adopting a more restrained approach. This cautious strategy aligns with the broader objective of maintaining a peaceful and cooperative environment, which is crucial for economic cooperation and the stability of global maritime trade routes. Secondly, the U.S. faces limitations in terms of China's growing influence, and several states in the region depend heavily on China. The U.S. seeks to limit China's growth, but China has gained enough power to limit the U.S.' influence in the Western Pacific. China is almost forcing the U.S. to retreat behind the first island chain since China has established control in the South China Sea with its larger navy, more modern military, and building of artificial islands (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, p. 45; Center for Strategic & International Studies, n.d.; Congressional Research Service, 2022, pp. 1-2). Thereby, the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is not used actively for power projection but rather to maintain control and stability, dismissing the hypothesis.

The U.S. force deployment in the Western Pacific can still be considered a power projection, despite the absence of active measures to project power. This is primarily due to the U.S. military presence's inherent capability and deterrence. The forward-deployed troops and strategically positioned bases serve as a clear demonstration of its military strength and a stabilizing factor in the region. This visible presence and readiness act as a deterrence to potential adversaries and can influence their behavior. By maintaining a significant force deployment, the U.S. sends a strong message that it possesses the capacity and willingness to protect its interests and respond to any threats to regional stability, maintaining the balance of power and preventing the emergence of a regional hegemon, particularly China. The U.S. plays a crucial role in upholding maritime security, ensuring freedom of navigation, and promoting international norms and rules. By exerting influence and providing security guarantees, the U.S.

force deployment indirectly projects power and influences the behavior of other regional actors. Therefore, even though the U.S. may not actively use its force deployment to project power in an overt manner, the mere existence of its military presence and its role in maintaining stability and deterrence can be regarded as a form of power projection, confirming H3.

Maintaining maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation are crucial components of the U.S.' geopolitical position and essential for securing its hegemonic position and global influence (The White House, 2022a, p. 4). As previously discussed, the greatest threat to U.S. hegemony is the establishment of a regional hegemon in the Eurasian Rimland. Currently, China is the most likely Rimland Power and the greatest threat to the U.S. Several scholars have raised the argument that maritime power is an important part of a Great Power's means of power (Cole, 2010, pp. xiii-xv; Modelski, 1987, pp. 15, 53-54; Ross, 2018, p. 11; Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 458-460). One of the most important works on maritime power was *The Influence of Seapower upon History* by Mahan, who argued that Sea Power was the key for a state to obtain national power and global influence (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 1-25, 70-77). The Pacific Islands offer advantageous positions for power projection, providing the U.S. with forward operating locations from which it can monitor and respond to potential threats. Mahan emphasized the importance of naval bases as strategic outposts (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 20-25, 70-77). These bases enhance the U.S. military's ability to maintain regional stability. Furthermore, Mahan's theory highlights the significance of controlling key chokepoints and strategic locations. Small islands in the Western Pacific can serve as gateways to important sea passages, such as the South China Sea. By establishing military bases on these islands, the U.S. can exert influence over these critical areas, ensuring freedom of navigation and deterring any attempts to restrict access to international waters. As has been witnessed when the U.S. Navy has carried out several freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) in the South China Sea, which it justifies by claiming freedom of navigation for all nations as a principle, testing China's stand on the matter (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2017; U.S. Navy, 2022). Thereby confirming the hypothesis by using its force deployment to project power and defend maritime interests.

This gains further confirmation by the factors Mahan argues determine a state's maritime power. Geographical position, physical conformation, and territorial extent are dependent on the geographical characteristics and position of the harbors and coastline (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 22-25). Which outlines that the total number, extent, and function of the maritime capabilities make up Sea Power (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 22-25). The Western Pacific Islands provide the United States with a significant number of marine bases. They create an

extensive area of control for the U.S. and give the possibility to project Power and defend maritime interests. Especially since the U.S. has 17 large bases in the Pacific, which presumably have significant functions and utility. Mahan's two next factors shaping a state's Sea Power are population size and population characteristics (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 22-25). As the third most populous country in the world and with 145 728 forward-deployed troops, the U.S. has more than enough people to be a maritime power but not to dominate the Western Pacific (The Defense Manpower Data Center, 2023; World Population review, 2023). This is because China, the second most populous country, is also trying to obtain control (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, p. 45; World Population review, 2023). Which further highlights the importance of the U.S. bases on the Pacific Islands.

But Mahan points out that a navy's primary purpose is to protect maritime trade routes and seaborne communication between several points. He was interested in the connection between national primacy and the sea on a more fundamental level. Naval predominance is unsustainable without trade, territorial infrastructure, and political will. "Freedom of the Seas" through a strong navy and a vast archipelago of overseas bases has remained a consistent feature for the U.S. (Lundesgaard, 2016, pp. 2-4). Those commitments are not-so-distant descendants of Mahan's insistence on overseas trade and logistical stations as a means of securing Sea Power and, with it, national strength. They show that the U.S. has "institutional features of the state," supporting Mahan's remaining factor that shapes a state's Sea Power (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 22-25). Only a fleeting advantage in tonnage or deployable vessels frequently hides a more serious deficiency. Without those elements of Sea Power, pure military or naval strength has an enormous weakness (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 60-76). The Bases in the Pacific Islands arguably create several offshore territorial infrastructures. These bases have been used to protect their maritime interest when the U.S. Navy has carried out freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) in the South China Sea (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2017; U.S. Navy, 2022).

To sum up the analysis of H3: *The U.S. force deployment is used by the U.S. to project power and defend maritime interests.* It is possible to argue that H3 must be dismissed due to the fact that the U.S. does not actively use force deployment to threaten or project power. The U.S. prioritizes regional stability and diplomatic relations over power projection (Campbell, 2016, pp. 11-32). In addition, China has increasingly exerted control, constraining the U.S.' ability to project power. Nevertheless, the U.S. force deployment in the Western Pacific plays a critical role in power projection and safeguarding maritime interests. By establishing military bases, deploying troops, and deploying naval assets, the U.S. showcases its presence and

capacity to exert influence in strategically important maritime areas. The mere presence of troops and the existence of bases in the region send a clear message that the U.S. possesses the capability and willingness to safeguard its interests and respond to any threats to regional stability, thereby preserving the balance of power. Consequently, one can argue that the U.S. force deployment indirectly projects power and shapes the behavior of other actors in the region. Finally, the U.S. has arguably adopted Mahan's theory for Sea Power. Without their maritime might, the U.S. would have no opportunity to defend its maritime interests. This is where the force deployment really shines. The force deployment gives the U.S. maritime power to defend its trade routes and the principle of freedom of navigation. Therefore, hypothesis H3 needs to be confirmed as the U.S. project power by the presence of the force deployment, even though they do not actively use it as a threat. They use their force deployment to obtain and preserve control and their maritime interests in the Western Pacific.

4.4 Rising Force Deployment

Since the U.S. uses its force deployment to maintain control and defend its maritime interests, it becomes imperative to examine the evolution of force deployment over the past decade and evaluate if the force deployment in the Pacific has increased (H4). This analysis is crucial for understanding the evolving dynamics of power projection associated with the U.S. presence in the region. By investigating whether there has been an increase in force deployment, we can gain insights into the extent to which the U.S. has sought to strengthen its military capabilities and influence in the Western Pacific. Previously the development of the number of bases and troops has been explained. The analysis of the data reveals that from 2011 to 2022, the total number of forward-deployed troops increased by a modest 8,982, from 136,746 to 145,728. Moreover, when Japan is excluded from the analysis, as might be understandable since the thesis focuses on the Western Pacific Islands, the overall increase in forces is actually negative since the number of troops in Japan increased by 9,442. The analysis of military infrastructure reveals notable patterns, as presented in Table 3. The data highlights an overall decrease in the total number of buildings from 26,706 in 2011 to 23,767 in 2021. Furthermore, a closer examination of land usage by the U.S. Department of Defense reveals a decrease in total acres. The recorded figures indicate a reduction of 17,073 acres, with the total land area utilized by the department declining from 345,616 acres in 2011 to 328,543 acres in 2021. However, the geographical position of U.S. troops and bases has increased, with the establishment of military personnel and infrastructure on previously untouched islands, including the Federated States of

Micronesia and Palau. The U.S. plans to build more bases in Guam, the Philippines, Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia. This means the U.S. force deployment is likely to increase further (The Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, 2021; Wee, 2023; Westerman, 2019; Youssef, 2023).

The development of the U.S. force deployment has arguably increased even if the number of troops in the Pacific Islands has decreased without Japan included, but the total location number has increased. Since the data only shows the number of active-duty and reserve personnel and not temporary forces or civilian employees, it is necessary to analyze the reason behind the development to understand if the force deployment has increased, decreased, or is unchanged. Given China's rising power and influence in the last decade, one might expect the U.S. to respond with increased force deployment to maintain control and influence. However, is it possible to determine that the changed force deployment is because of China's rising power? The observed reduction in the number of forward-deployed troops and the extent of military infrastructure, including buildings and land utilization by the U.S. Department of Defense in the Pacific Islands, strongly suggests a decrease in force deployment. While it may be contended that the total number of geographical positions has increased, the decline in the presence of soldiers, buildings, and available areas indicates a decrease in force deployment. These empirical findings provide compelling evidence that undermines the proposition outlined in H4, which posits an increase in force deployment.

This argument excludes force deployment in Japan. This might be understandable since this thesis focuses on the Western Pacific Islands. However, Japan must be included in the analysis as it is a part of the First and Second Island Chain, and only the Japanese Pacific Islands the U.S. has force deployment on are included in the data (Appendix 1). The Island Chains are considered essential for the U.S. It is regarded as a crucial part of this strategy as it forms a barrier between China and the open Pacific Ocean. Through a robust military presence in the region and support for the military capabilities of key allies like Japan and Taiwan, the United States can help deter potential aggression from China and other potential adversaries. With the U.S. force deployment in Japan included, the numbers are precise, and the forward-deployed troops have increased since 2011. However, the infrastructure has still declined. It is difficult to determine where the forward-deployed troops have increased. Still, it is reasonable to assume that a large part of the forward-deployed troops has been deployed in Okinawa because of the importance of the First Island Chain (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, p. 45; Erickson & Wuthnow, 2016, p. 6). Likewise, the U.S.'s deepened presence and promises of more bases in the Western Pacific provide compelling evidence of an amplified U.S. force deployment in the Pacific over the past decade. This expanded presence aligns with the objective to bolster the U.S. political

and military position in the Indo-Pacific region, driven by concerns regarding China's growing power and influence and the potential emergence of regional hegemon (The White House, 2022a, pp. 4-18). In addition, the U.S. has promoted a policy of closer and stronger presence with the Pacific Island nations, with the first Pacific partnership strategy. The strategy promises more support and more substantial commitment (U.S. Embassy in Canberra, 2022). The increase in base locations, the total number of forward-deployed troops, and the promise of tighter cooperation with the Pacific Islands mean the hypothesis: *U.S. force deployment in the Pacific has increased in the last decade* (H4) can be confirmed.

Chapter 5.

What shapes U.S. Force Deployment in the Western Pacific?

Based on the findings of the analysis, it is evident that the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific exhibits notable parallels with Spykman's proposition, thereby limiting the likelihood of a regional hegemon emerging. Furthermore, there has been an increase in force deployment over the past decade. This combination confirms the U.S.' use of force deployment to project power and defend maritime interests. In essence, the analysis confirms the validity of the four hypotheses. This brings forward the discussion of how these hypotheses can offer an answer to the research question: *What shapes U.S. force deployment in the Pacific?*

The presumption that Spykman's theory, *America's Strategy in World Politics* (1942), shapes the U.S. force deployment in the Western Pacific is natural, given the similarities between Spykman's proposal and the current U.S. force deployment. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these similarities do not automatically imply a direct influence of Spykman's theory on U.S. force deployment. It is important to keep in mind that *America's Strategy in World Politics* was written in 1942, during World War II. Spykman had a different enemy in focus when he concretized his geopolitical theory. Spykman feared both the German and Japanese power, and their capabilities, especially if they were to be combined (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 296-300). However, the geopolitical landscape has significantly evolved since Spykman's time. Japan and Germany are allied with the U.S., and new power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region have emerged, notably the U.S.-China relation. While there are similarities between the current U.S. force deployment in the Western Pacific and Spykman's theory, it should not be concluded that Spykman directly shapes the U.S. force deployment because the geopolitical landscape has evolved, with changes in alliances and the emergence of new power dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region.

The significance of the similarities between Spykman's proposal on base placement and the current U.S. force deployment in the Pacific can be questioned. This is primarily due to the limited availability of suitable islands in the Pacific Ocean that can accommodate large-scale military infrastructure necessary for effective power projection and defense. Regardless of Spykman's proposal, the U.S. would likely have utilized many of the same islands to establish military infrastructure and station troops, as few viable alternatives meet the required criteria.

The U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is influenced by a complex array of factors, including economic interests, regional security concerns, and strategic partnerships like the Pivot to Asia represents, which go beyond the scope of Spykman's theory. Therefore, while Spykman's proposition offers valuable insights into geopolitical analysis, it does not provide a comprehensive explanation for the complexity of the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific.

These arguments do not provide the essence of Spykman's theory, which can present an answer to how it shapes U.S. force deployment in the Pacific. Even if Spykman focused on the Japanese threat in the Pacific, his main argument was that a Rimland Power on the Eurasian landmass could outmatch the U.S. and dominate the world (Spykman, 1942/1970, p. 291). Spykman's theory emphasizes the importance of establishing military bases and maintaining a strong presence in strategic locations to secure geopolitical interests and prevent the rise of a regional hegemon. According to Spykman, controlling critical maritime regions and establishing military bases in the Pacific allows for power projection and the defense of maritime interests. The presence of U.S. troops and bases serves as a demonstration of capability and a deterrent to potential threats, contributing to regional stability and maintaining the balance of power. The U.S. may not have force deployment in all the same positions as Spykman proposed. Instead, they have more positions and are closer to the Eurasian Rimland, arguably creating a greater deterrence. Therefore, one can argue that Spykman has shaped U.S. force deployment in the Western Pacific by creating a geopolitical strategy to prevent a Rimland Power and regional hegemon on the Eurasian continent from establishing itself.

America's Strategy in World Politics (1942) does not fully explain what shapes U.S. force deployment in the Pacific. With control over the Pacific, the U.S. can use its force deployment to limit the establishment of a regional hegemon. However, China's regional power and influence have grown immensely in the last decade. Therefore, since the U.S. has not been able to limit China's rise, the U.S. force deployment is arguably not shaped by the policy of limiting a regional hegemon. The argument is that China would not have become as powerful as it is now if the U.S. were trying to limit China. Some would argue that China is a regional hegemon already as its influence and more assertive approach is more prominent (Chubb, 2021, pp. 79-93; Xie, 2021). As has been seen in recent years, China seems to be in more control in the South China Sea than the U.S. and its allies (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, p. 45). Since China has gained more power, influence, and control in the South China Sea, it is hard to dismiss the argument that limiting the establishment of a regional hegemon has shaped the U.S. force deployment.

However, one can dismiss this argument by considering the strategic placement of troops and bases, as well as the future plans of the U.S. in the region, in light of China's growing power. It is worth noting that a fleeting advantage in tonnage, as China has, can hide a more severe deficiency without the elements of Sea Power (production, shipping, and foreign territorial acquisitions), pure military or naval strength has an enormous weakness (Mahan, 1890/1957, pp. 60-76). But China has in large part also these factors under control as they, in recent years, have been building artificial islands in the South China Sea to gain more control (Center for Strategic & International Studies, n.d.). In addition, the U.S. has significantly expanded its base network in recent years and has outlined plans to further enhance its force deployment through the establishment of several new bases. (The Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, 2021; Wee, 2023; Westerman, 2019; Youssef, 2023). The recently expanded force deployment is strategically positioned on the First and Second Island Chains. The Island Chain strategy is based on the notion that the islands create a natural barrier to a potential adversary's power and can help defend against threats to U.S. security and interests in the region (Erickson & Wuthnow, 2016, pp. 1-5). The Island Chain strategy seeks to limit the ability of a potential adversary to operate freely in the waters and airspace around these islands (Bekkevold & Tunsjø, 2022, p. 45; Erickson & Wuthnow, 2016, p. 6). The expansion of force deployment in the Pacific region, within the First and Second Island Chains, demonstrates the intention to restrict potential adversaries. This indicates that the shaping of U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is also shaped by the objective of limiting the establishment of a regional hegemon and China's power growth.

Spykman's theory and the aim to limit the establishment of a hegemon are not the only factors that have shaped U.S. force deployment in the Pacific. Power projection and the defense of maritime interests have significantly shaped the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific. The U.S. has strategically positioned military bases and established forward-deployed troops in key locations throughout the Pacific to deter potential threats and limit the possibility of conflicts. The focus on maritime interests and demonstrating power has led to the deployment of freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) in the South China Sea (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2017; U.S. Navy, 2022). The presence of these operations and the force deployment not only enables the U.S. to respond to regional security challenges but also serves as a deterrent to potential adversaries. Furthermore, the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is shaped by the need to maintain regional stability and safeguard its economic and geopolitical interests. The Pacific region holds immense strategic importance due to its vital trade routes, access to resources, and the presence of potential regional competitors. By actively deploying

forces and maintaining a robust military posture, the U.S. maintains a favorable balance of power. Therefore, the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is arguably shaped by the need to project power, defend maritime interests, and maintain regional stability.

The importance of maritime power and control for shaping U.S. force deployment needs a theoretical explanation to be valid. This makes it relevant to assume that the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is shaped by Mahan's theory, *the Influence of Seapower upon History* (1890). Mahan's emphasis on the strategic importance of sea lanes, naval bases, and maritime dominance influenced the U.S. approach to force deployment in the Pacific. One of Mahan's key concepts was the control of trade routes and lines of transportation across the sea. With the FONOPS, Pivot to Asia, increased collaboration with several countries, and the expansion of force deployment on the Pacific Islands, the U.S. has recognized the importance of maintaining control and protecting these sea lanes to ensure the flow of goods, resources, and military reinforcements. Mahan also advocated for the establishment of forward naval bases and the projection of naval power to secure maritime interests. In summary, Mahan's concepts of Sea Power, control of sea lanes, forward naval bases, and the projection of maritime power are in accordance with U.S. force deployment. They are confirming that Mahan's theory of Sea Power shapes the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific.

To sum up the chapter discussing how the hypothesis can explain what shapes U.S. force deployment in the Pacific, the most prominent arguments will be repeated. There are several factors shaping U.S. force deployment in the Western Pacific. The first and maybe one of the most notable is the theory developed by Spykman, which aims to prevent a Rimland Power on the Eurasian landmass from becoming a regional hegemon (Spykman, 1942/1970, pp. 154-155, 446-472). The U.S. force deployment has several similarities with Spykman's proposal, and with China as a rising threat to U.S. hegemony, it is more relevant than ever. Through the force deployment and the fear of a Rimland Power hegemon, the U.S. is actively limiting China from becoming one. One can argue that limiting a regional hegemon from establishing itself is also shaping the U.S. force deployment. It is empirically proven that the U.S. has expanded its force deployment on the First and Second Island Chains, which supports the argument. In addition, it demonstrates that China's growing power and influence is shaping the U.S. force deployment. The last factors explored in this thesis that shaped the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific are the theory of Mahan, *the Influence of Seapower upon History* (1890), power projection, and defending maritime interests. The U.S. deter potential threats and aims to limit the possibility of conflicts with its maritime power and force deployment, which are both based on Mahan, who proposed the establishment of forward naval bases and the projection of naval power to

secure maritime interests. The U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is influenced by geopolitical theories, the need to project power, defend maritime interests, China's rise, and limit the establishment of a regional Rimland hegemon.

Chapter 6.

Unraveling the Factors Shaping U.S. Force Deployment

To sum up and conclude the thesis, it is necessary to understand what the purpose of it was. It aimed to understand and put forward an answer to the research question: *What shapes U.S. force deployment in the Pacific?* Given the importance of the Pacific and the U.S.-China relationship, the research question was chosen. The Pacific is of great geopolitical significance as it connects various areas and is home to some of the world's largest economies. It facilitates international trade and serves as a major shipping route, enabling the movement of goods, resources, and energy supplies. Many of the world's busiest and most strategic maritime trade routes pass through the Pacific Ocean. The U.S.-China relationship has evolved into the most important one in the present time. China is seen as the only real threat to U.S. hegemony, and how the U.S. counteracts China's rise can have large implications. It is a combination of traditional geopolitical thinking and evolving Great Power balances that account for the U.S.' strategic interest in this region. Force Deployment is a general characterization of the U.S. military establishment. A commonly accepted definition of force deployment is "the movement of troops and material in response to a regional threat and the ability to sustain this force until the military objective is achieved" (RAND corporation, n.d.).

The theoretical foundation of the Thesis was the geopolitical theories from Spykman's *America's Strategy in World Politics* (1942) and Mahan's *The Influence of Seapower upon History* (1890). These classical geopolitical works were chosen because of their ability to contribute to an answer to the research question. Spykman's book describes how the U.S. can counter a Rimland Power on the Eurasian landmass and where the U.S. should position its forces and infrastructure. This is highly relevant as China is the only real threat to U.S. hegemony, a Rimland Power, and the U.S. has force deployment on several similar positions as Spykman proposed. Mahan's Work explains the significance of Seapower for a Great Power. The most relevant for this thesis is the establishment of territorial acquisitions that can be used to defend maritime interests and project power.

From the theories, four hypotheses were developed and tested to create empirical and theoretical arguments for answering the research question. The Hypotheses were: H1: *U.S. force deployment in the Pacific has several similarities with Spykman's proposal for base*

networks in the Pacific. H2: The U.S. force deployment in the Pacific aims to limit the potential establishment of a regional hegemon. H3: The U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is used by the U.S. to project power and defend maritime interests. H4: U.S. force deployment in the Pacific has increased in the last decade. The empirical data that was used came from the U.S. Department of Defense Base Structure Report and the Manpower Data Center. They gave information about the infrastructure and forward-deployed troops in the Pacific from 2011 to 2022. However, it is worth remembering that the data can be unreliable and does not present every infrastructure and temporary troops in the region (Vine, 2020). The weakness of the data is justifiable since it is the most detailed data that can be found about U.S. force deployment, and the data are only used to give an indication of how the force deployment has developed.

The first hypothesis suggested that the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific shares several similarities with Spykman's proposal for base networks. The comparison revealed that while there are indeed many similarities between the two, there are also some deviations. The absence of U.S. bases in the Aleutian Islands and the Howler and Baker Islands challenges the validity of H1. However, it is important to consider the changing geopolitical landscape and the shift in the nature of threats. Spykman's proposal was primarily concerned with countering Japan's military capabilities, but Japan is no longer a threat to U.S. hegemony. Furthermore, the absence of certain bases does not necessarily weaken the U.S. position in the Pacific. The U.S. has established multiple bases beyond Spykman's proposed locations, extending the defensive line further westward and creating the First and Second Island Chains. The U.S. force deployment demonstrates substantial military power and control over the Western Pacific. Although H1 may not fully correspond to Spykman's original proposal, it can be confirmed since the U.S. force deployment aims to counter China as a potential Rimland Power and prevent it from achieving regional hegemony.

The second hypothesis tested the role of U.S. force deployment in the Pacific and its aims in limiting the potential establishment of a regional hegemon. The analysis confirms that the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific grants the U.S. control over the Western Pacific. This control allows the U.S. to limit the influence of Rimland Powers, as proposed by Spykman. However, the rise of China as a Rimland Power and its increasing influence in the region challenge the effectiveness of U.S. force deployment in containing China's growing power. The thesis argues that the U.S. maintains a stronger presence and control in the Western Pacific through its force deployment despite China's growing influence. The establishment of defensive lines, such as the First and Second Island Chains, and the positioning of bases on small islands enable the U.S. to create a potential blockade and present a credible threat to

China. However, the validity of H2 is called into question when examining the evolution of U.S. force deployment over the past decade. The data reveals an overall increase in forward-deployed troops but a decrease in military infrastructure, suggesting that force deployment has not increased as would be expected. Nevertheless, a closer examination of the data reveals that the decrease in infrastructure does not provide an accurate representation of the actual U.S. military presence in the region. The U.S. has a large base network with 285 bases in the Western Pacific. It has increased its positioning of troops and infrastructure on previously untouched islands, indicating a planned expansion of the base network. The U.S. policy for the Western Pacific, including the Pivot to Asia and the U.S. National Security Strategy, further emphasizes the importance of the region and the intent to limit China's regional hegemony.

H3 stated that the U.S. uses its force deployment in the Pacific to project power and defend maritime interests. Despite not actively threatening or projecting power in the region, the U.S. force deployment indirectly projects power through its military presence and strategic positioning. The presence of forward-deployed troops and strategically positioned bases contributes to regional stability and acts as a counterbalance to the growing influence of China. The U.S. ensures freedom of navigation and power projection by maintaining control over the Pacific Islands and key maritime points. The strategic importance of the Western Pacific Islands, as highlighted by Mahan's theory, cannot be understated. The U.S. prioritizes regional stability and diplomatic relations while also adapting its force deployment strategy to respond to evolving geopolitical dynamics. In conclusion, the U.S. force deployment in the Western Pacific serves as a crucial element in projecting power and defending maritime interests. It indirectly influences the behavior of other actors in the region, safeguards freedom of navigation, maintains the balance of power, and aligns with Mahan's theory of maritime power, emphasizing the importance of naval bases, control over strategic locations, and the protection of maritime trade routes.

The analysis of the development of force deployment in the Pacific over the past decade provides valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of power projection associated with the U.S. presence in the region. The examination of data on troop numbers and military infrastructure reveals a complex picture, indicating both increases and decreases in different aspects of force deployment. However, it is important to note that the geographical position of U.S. troops and bases has expanded with the establishment of military personnel and infrastructure on previously untouched islands. This expansion, along with plans to build more bases in strategic locations, indicates a likely increase in force deployment in the future. The argument that the changed force deployment is a response to China's rising power is

strengthened by the empirical findings. This expansion aligns with the objective of bolstering the U.S. political and military position in the Indo-Pacific region, driven by concerns about China's growing power and influence. In light of the increase in base locations, the total number of forward-deployed troops, and the promise of stronger cooperation with Pacific Island nations, it can be concluded that the hypothesis stating that U.S. force deployment in the Pacific has increased in the last decade (H4) is confirmed.

Examining various factors shaping U.S. force deployment in the Pacific provides valuable insights into understanding the complex dynamics at play. The findings indicate that Spykman's proposal for a base network holds relevance in the current U.S. force deployment strategy. The observed similarities between the U.S. force deployment and Spykman's theory suggest that the U.S. leverages its military presence to limit the rise of a dominant Rimland Power. It is crucial to acknowledge that Spykman's theory does not solely influence the shaping of U.S. force deployment in the Pacific. The strategic positioning of force deployment demonstrates the U.S.' objective to maintain regional stability and safeguard its economic, maritime, and geopolitical interests. Furthermore, the U.S. force deployment aligns with Mahan's theory of Sea Power, emphasizing the control of sea lanes, naval bases, and maritime dominance. The U.S. recognizes the strategic significance of maintaining control over trade routes, securing sea lanes, and projecting maritime power in the Pacific. The geopolitical landscape and China's growing power also contribute to shaping the U.S. force deployment strategy. These multifaceted factors go beyond the scope of a single theory and highlight the need for a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between various elements influencing U.S. force deployment. In conclusion, the shaping of U.S. force deployment in the Pacific is influenced by a combination of factors, including geopolitical theories, the aim to limit the establishment of a regional hegemon and Rimland Power, the projection of power, the defense of maritime interests, and the evolving dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region, especially China. Understanding these factors and their interconnections is crucial to understand the complex structure of U.S. force deployment and its implications for regional stability and Great Power dynamics.

The factors discussed above do not cover all factors shaping the U.S. force deployment in the Pacific. This thesis primarily focused on examining geopolitical factors that shape U.S. force deployment, as attempting to encompass all influencing factors within a master thesis would be an overwhelming and unfeasible task. Nonetheless, this research allows further investigation. One area of future research could explore the role of U.S. alliances in the region and how they contribute to force deployment, specifically examining the extent to which

alliances provide the U.S. with enhanced power projection capabilities and the ability to safeguard its maritime interests. Additionally, a deeper analysis could investigate the significance of economic interests in determining the placement of force deployment and the impact of military technological advancements on shaping force deployment strategies. Furthermore, exploring the influence of public opinion in the Pacific Islands, as well as within the United States and China, would provide valuable insights into the dynamics surrounding force deployment decisions. Understanding the perceptions and attitudes could shed light on their impact on shaping the deployment of U.S. forces in the region. Lastly, given the rising tensions between the U.S. and China, a crucial area for further research would be an examination of China's response to the increasing U.S. force deployment and closer engagement in the Western Pacific. Investigating how China perceives and reacts to the growing U.S. presence could provide valuable insights into the evolving power dynamics in the region.

The next decade will undoubtedly be of great significance in shaping the trajectory of the U.S.-China relationship and its implications for the rest of the world. Whether China will emerge as a regional Rimland hegemon or if the United States and its allies will maintain their influential position remains uncertain. The outcomes of this evolving relationship will significantly impact global dynamics. Therefore, studying these developments and their ramifications will be of utmost importance.

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Appendix 1

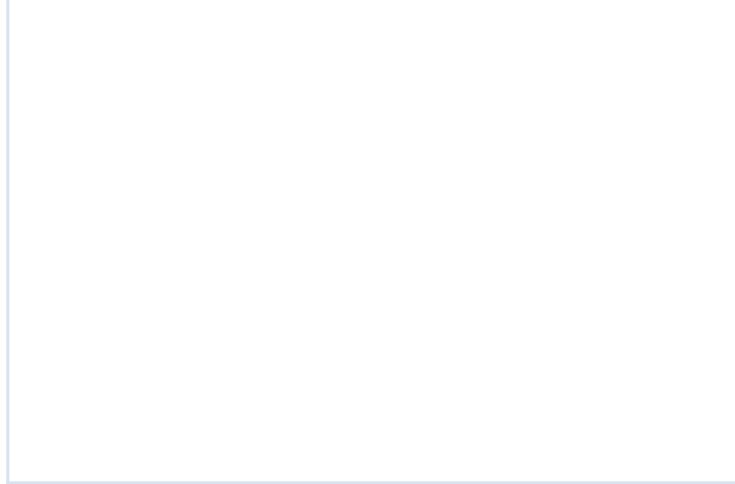
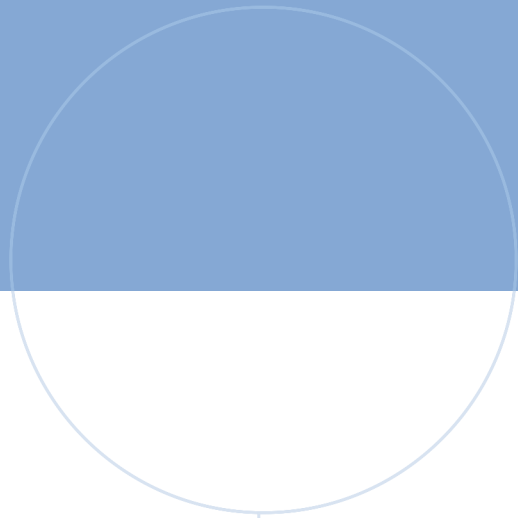
U.S. Infrastructure in Japan included in Tables 2 and 3

2011

Base	Department	Nearest City	Building Owned	Building Leased	Building Other	Total Acres
Awase	Navy Active	Kadena Air Base Okinawa	8	0	0	118
Camp Courtney FH Annex	AF Active	Camp Courtney Okinawa N	82	0	0	65
Camp Courtney-6029	MC Active	Tengan	88	0	130	331
Camp Foster FH Annex	AF Active	Camp Foster Okinawa	1013	0	0	453
Camp Foster-6044	MC Active	Zukeran	1183	0	340	1472
Camp Gonsalves	MC Active	Henoko Okinawa	23	0	2	19356
Camp Hansen-6011	MC Active	Onna Okinawa	139	0	163	12647
Camp Kinser	AF Active	Makiminato Okinawa	44	0	0	135
Camp Kinser-6056	MC Active	Makiminato Okinawa	160	9	119	676
Camp Kuwae FH Annex	AF Active	Chatan Okinawa	158	0	0	70
Camp Lester-6043	MC Active	Chatan Okinawa	164	0	75	167
Camp McTureous-6031	MC Active	Tengan	7	0	91	94
Camp McTureous FH Annex	AF Active	Camp Courtney Okinawa N	80	0	0	64
Camp Schwab-6009	MC Active	Henoko Okinawa	136	0	53	5397
Camp Shields FH Annex	AF Active	Camp Shields Okinawa	8	0	89	89
Camp Shields-6032	Navy Active	Camp Shields Okinawa	43	0	19	88
COMFLEACT Kadena Okinawa	Navy Active	Kadena Air Base Okinawa	162	0	1	120
Idesuna Jima Air Range	AF Active	Okinawa Island	0	0	0	61
Ie Jima Aux Airfield	MC Active	Henoko Okinawa	13	0	5	1981
Iwo Jima-3181	Navy Active	Iwo Jima Island	0	0	46	243
Kachin Hanto Area	Army Active	White Beach	6	0	6	32
Kadena AB	AF Active	Kadena Air Base Okinawa	1462	0	751	4914
Kadena Ammo Storage Annex	AF Active	Kadena Air Base Okinawa	366	0	85	6077
Kin Blue Beach-6020	MC Active	Onna Okinawa	0	0	0	94
Kobi Sho Range-6084	Navy Active	Okinawa Island	0	0	0	216
MCAS Futenma	MC Active	Futemma Okinawa	225	0	53	1187
Naha Port	Army Active	Naha	44	0	3	139
Okidaito Jima Rng-6088	Navy Active	Okinawa Island	0	0	0	283
Okuma Recreation Annex	AF Active	Okuma Okinawa	43	0	2	135
Sekibi Sho Range-6085	Navy Active	Okinawa Island	0	0	0	10
Tengan Pier-6028	Navy Active	Tengan	6	0	0	8
Tori Shima Air Range	AF Active	Okinawa Island	0	0	0	10
Ulibaru	MC Active	White Beach	0	0	0	63
White Beach	Navy Active	White Beach	119	0	10	290
SUM			5782	9	2043	57085
SUM Building			7834			

2021

Base	Department	Nearest City	Building Owned	Building Leased	Building Other	Total Acres
Awase	Navy Active	Kadena Air Base Okinawa	6	0	0	117,60
Camp Courtney	Marine Corps Active	Camp Courtney Okinawa	85	0	119	330,97
Camp Courtney FH Annex	Air Force Active	Camp Courtney Okinawa	13	0	61	65,00
Camp Foster	Marine Corps Active	Camp Foster Okinawa	879	0	353	1323,73
Camp Foster FH Annex	Air Force Active	Camp Foster Okinawa	562	0	133	453,00
Camp Gonsalves	Marine Corps Active	Henoko Okinawa	18	0	5	9041,58
Camp Hansen	Marine Corps Active	Onna Okinawa	128	0	164	12037,09
Camp Kinser	Air Force Active	Makiminato Okinawa	9	0	33	135,00
Camp Kinser	Marine Corps Active	Makiminato Okinawa	132	0	126	662,78
Camp Kuwae FH Annex	Air Force Active	Chatan	56	0	101	70,00
Camp Lester	Marine Corps Active	Chatan	164	0	75	166,84
Camp McTureous	Marine Corps Active	Tengan	5	0	90	93,61
Camp McTureous FH Annex	Air Force Active	Camp Courtney Okinawa	2	0	78	64,00
Camp Schwab	Marine Corps Active	Henoko Okinawa	88	0	73	5396,64
Camp Shields	Navy Active	Camp Shields Okinawa	30	0	21	88,21
Camp Shields FH Annex	Air Force Active	Camp Shields Okinawa	3	0	92	89,00
Idesuna Jima Air Range	Air Force Active	Okinawa Island	0	0	0	61,00
IE Jima Aux Airfield	Marine Corps Active	Henoko Okinawa	7	0	13	1980,67
Iwo Jima-3181	Navy Active	Iwo-Jima	0	0	44	242,67
Kadena AB	Air Force Active	Kadena Air Base Okinawa	1279	0	766	4906,00
Kadena Ammo Storage Annex	Air Force Active	Kadena Air Base Okinawa	331	0	84	6077,00
Kin Blue Beach - 6020	Marine Corps Active	Onna Okinawa	0	0	0	94,23
Kobi Sho Range 6084	Navy Active	Okinawa Island	0	0	0	216,01
MCAS Futenma	Marine Corps Active	Futenma Marine Corps Air Station	186	0	55	1176,04
MCB Camp S D Butler ASP	Marine Corps Active	Koza	0	0	4	491,20
Naha Port	Army Active	Okinawa Island	39	0	10	138,96
Okidaito Jima Rng 6088	Navy Active	Okinawa Island	0	0	0	283,00
Okuma Recreation Annex	Air Force Active	Okuma Okinawa	44	0	2	135,00
Sekibi Sho Range 6085	Navy Active	Okinawa Island	0	0	0	10,00
Tengan Pier 6028	Navy Active	Tengan	9	0	0	7,68
Tori Shima Air Range	Air Force Active	Okinawa Island	0	0	0	10,00
Ulibaru	Marine Corps Active	White Beach Nav Inst	0	0	0	62,86
White Beach	Navy Active	White Beach Nav Inst	72	0	11	290,08
SUM			4147	0	2513	46317
Sum Building			6660			



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