

Asian Strategic Review 2014

US Pivot
and
Asian Security

Editors:
S D Muni | Vivek Chadha

ASIAN STRATEGIC REVIEW
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Editors

S.D. MUNI
VIVEK CHADHA



INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES & ANALYSES
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S.D. Muni, Vivek Chadha (Eds)

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Branch:

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Office #11
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Email: pentagonpresspune@gmail.com

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Foreword

The US 'pivot' policy, which was subsequently rechristened as a 'rebalance' is possibly the most important foreign policy guideline emanating from the power corridors of Washington in the recent past. It will undoubtedly influence the strategic contours of the Asia Pacific region in the coming decade. The policy, which is still evolving, despite having received most attention as a result of its military component, is a comprehensive plan to step up US engagement, influence and impact on economic, diplomatic, ideological and strategic affairs of the region.

There has been an attempt to play down the 'China' factor in the rebalance. However, China is and will remain a major factor in not only the military sphere, but also every other facet which defines the US rebalance. This reality becomes evident from the assessment of contributors of this year's Asian Strategic Review (ASR).

India is widely seen as a major constituent of the Asia Pacific region. The strategic flux being witnessed in the Asia Pacific accentuates the complexity involved in pursuing the country's interests. The readjustment to changing realities is fast exposing the redundancy of seemingly well established norms. India must therefore reaffirm its commitment to this important region and play a constructive role in shaping every aspect of the region's emergence as a peaceful, stable and economically dynamic region. It must not only reorient its outlook to the Asia Pacific region, but also evolve to the shifting dynamics.

The ASR takes a wide analytical sweep to bring together one of the most comprehensive assessments of the US rebalancing strategy. It not only assesses the origins of the strategy, but also its implications in every sphere of influence. The impact of rebalancing on the region is assessed in light of US drawdown from Iraq and Afghanistan, a simultaneous refocus on Asia Pacific and the ongoing sequestration policy. The volume connects these dots in an attempt to provide a cogent picture of the strategy as well as its implications.

The scholars of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) have contributed to this volume, under the guidance of Prof S.D. Muni, Distinguished Fellow, IDSA. I hope the papers in this volume will further the debate on US policy of rebalancing to Asia.

New Delhi
February 2014

Arvind Gupta
Director General, IDSA

List of Contributors

Cdr Abhijit Singh is a Research Fellow at the IDSA. He looks at maritime strategic issues in the broader Indo-Pacific region, and littoral security in the Indian Ocean.

Dr Arvind Gupta is the Director General IDSA. He specialises on a number of international and national security issues.

Brig Mandip Singh, VSM is a Senior Fellow and Centre Coordinator for East Asia Centre at IDSA. He lectures and writes extensively on security and defence matters related to Sino-Indian relations and the PLA.

Col P.K. Gautam (Retd) is a Research Fellow at IDSA. He has a number of books, chapters and articles on military matters, non-traditional security and Tibet to his credit.

Dr Prasanta Kumar Pradhan is an Associate Fellow at IDSA. His areas of research interests include domestic, foreign policy and security issues in the Gulf region and the Arab world.

Col Rajeev Agarwal is a Research Fellow at IDSA. His research focuses on foreign policy, regional security and strategic issues in West Asia.

Dr Rahul Mishra is a Research Fellow at Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi. He specialises on political, economic, foreign policy and security aspects of countries and regional groupings of Southeast Asia. He was a researcher at IDSA from 2009-2013.

Dr Rajiv Nayan is a Senior Research Associate at IDSA. He specialises in nuclear issues and export controls.

Ms Rukmani Gupta was formerly an associate fellow at the IDSA. She is currently the Armed Forces Analyst for APAC with IHS Jane's. The views expressed in this chapter are the author's alone and are not endorsed by IHS.

Dr Rup Narayan Das is a Senior Fellow at IDSA. He is presently on deputation from the Lok Sabha Secretariat of Indian Parliament, where he is the Director (Research).

Mr Sanjeev K. Shrivastav is a researcher at IDSA. He specialises in India-US strategic partnership, foreign policy as well as domestic politics in the US.

Cdr Sarabjeet Singh Parmar is a serving naval officer, presently working as a Research Fellow at IDSA. He looks at maritime security issues.

Dr Shamshad A. Khan is a Research Fellow at the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi. He focuses on various aspects of Japanese affairs. Previously, he was a researcher at IDSA.

Col Vivek Chadha (Retd) is a Research Fellow at IDSA. His research areas include defence studies, countering the finance of terrorism and Indo-US relations.

US PIVOT AND
ASIAN SECURITY

1

Introduction

S.D. Muni

There are two significant developments in Asia that are recasting Asia's strategic contours and its security concerns. One is China's rise and its strategic assertion in the Asia-Pacific region, and the other is the US response to that in Asia under the Obama administration. The Obama administration took two landmark strategic policy decisions that may radically recast not only the US engagement with Asia but also the Asian strategic dynamics. The first decision was the withdrawal from Afghanistan by July 2014, and the second was the US strategic "pivot" to the Asia-Pacific region. Both these policy moves are related: the latter, in many significant ways, conditioned by the former. They will evolve and unfold in the due course of time depending upon a number of related variables.

The "Pivot" Strategy

The announcement of the "pivot to Asia" strategy was such that it qualifies to be called Obama Doctrine: a part of Obama's "grand strategy".¹ President Obama in his address to the Australian Parliament on November 17, 2011 termed it as a "broader shift" for the US. He said: "After a decade in which we fought two wars that cost us dearly, in blood and treasure, the United States is turning our attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region...As the world's fastest-growing region—and home to more than half the global economy—the Asia Pacific is critical to achieving my highest priority and that is creating jobs and opportunity for the American people. With most of the world's nuclear powers and some half of humanity, Asia will largely define whether the century ahead will be marked by conflict or cooperation, needless suffering or human progress. As president, I have therefore made a deliberate and strategic decision—as a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future, by upholding core principles and in close partnership with allies and friends....As we end today's wars, I have directed my national security team to make our presence and mission in Asia Pacific a top priority."²

The "pivot to Asia" strategy has been elaborately explained and articulated

by a number of President Obama's former associates, including the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Defence Secretary Panetta and the National Security Adviser to the President Tom Donilon. Almost at the time when President Obama was announcing his Asia doctrine in the Australian Parliament, Hillary Clinton wrote in *Foreign Policy*: "As the war in Iraq winds down and America begins to withdraw from Afghanistan, the United States stands at a pivot point. Over the last 10 years, we have allocated immense resources to those two theatres. In the next 10 years, we need to be smart and systematic about where we invest time and energy, so that we put ourselves in the best position to sustain our leadership, secure our interests and advance our values. One of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will therefore be to lock in a substantially increased investment—diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise—in the Asia-Pacific region."³

Not through words alone, Secretary Clinton started throwing indications from early on, even before the formal announcement of the "pivot" strategy by the President, through her actions. Her very first foreign visit was to the Asia-Pacific region undertaken in the second month of her assuming office. The significance of her diplomatic movements so described was noted by the US foreign policy analysts and commentators outside the administration. Rodger Baker writing for *Stratfor* said: "U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is making her first official overseas visit with scheduled stops in Tokyo; Jakarta, Indonesia; Seoul, South Korea; and Beijing. The choice of Asia as her first destination is intended to signal a more global focus for U.S. President Barack Obama's administration, as opposed to the heavy emphasis on the Middle East and South Asia seen in the last years of the Bush administration."⁴

Preparing for the "Asia Pivot"

The Asia-Pacific pivot strategy was announced by President Obama towards the end of the third year of his first term in office, but the work for crafting this strategy had already begun during his election campaign in 2008. Anthony Lake, who served as former President Clinton's National Security Adviser during 1993-1997, and Susan Rice, an academic at the Brookings Institution, who later on was appointed US Permanent Representative at the UN and now has taken charge as President Obama's National Security Adviser in his second term, led his foreign policy campaign team.

To prepare the ground for his foreign policy strategy, President Obama ordered a thorough review of the prevailing situation and the strategic assets and liabilities that his government inherited. Thomas Donilon, former National Security Adviser, disclosed that the process of formulating the strategy started right after Obama's election. The strategy was the outcome of a cool and careful assessment of the US presence in the world and its strategic assets and liabilities. "The assessment", Donilon said, "Resulted in a set of key determinations. It was clear to us that there was an imbalance in the projection of focus of America's power around the

world...As a result of these determinations, the president ended the war in Iraq, refocused and re-energized [*sic*] our counter-terrorism efforts and has charted a path for transition in Afghanistan. In doing so—and this is an important strategic concept as well—in doing so, the president had dramatically improved America's strategic freedom of maneuver [*sic*] so that our troops posture aligns with our interests in a changing world...and a dynamic region...As a part of this and geographic aspect of this, the president made a critical decision...to increase our focus on the Asia-Pacific in terms of resources, diplomatic effort, engagement both with nations and with regional institutions, and in terms of policy.”⁵

In a number of initial official statements made, there was some confusion about the terms used—between “pivot” and “rebalancing”. The word “pivot” was used by Clinton and her associates in the Department of State like Kurt Campbell, Assistant secretary for East Asia and the Pacific. However, President Obama and other US officials generally used the word “rebalancing”. This was to avoid the impression that the US was “pivoting” or shifting away from its traditional regions of stakes in Europe and the “Middle East” (West Asia) and fixating itself in the Asia-Pacific region, much to the irritation of China. “Rebalancing” connotes just a readjustment and repositioning of the US presence and interests.⁶ Therefore, “rebalancing” has firmed up in official discourse, while “pivot” continues to remain more attractive to media and policy analysts.

“Pivot” as Continuity and Change

The statements of Clinton, Donilon and others suggest that the policy of “pivot to Asia” was a well-considered, thoughtful move and not just a knee-jerk reaction to the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. This policy move in fact is a continuation of America's long-term strategic and economic stakes in the Asia-Pacific region. Explaining the “pivot” strategy, the then National Security Adviser Donilon publicly accepted that the Asia-Pacific region supported some 2.4 million US jobs through trade.⁷ Besides economic stakes, the previous administrations of Clinton and Bush had also started getting concerned about the rise and assertion of China in the Asia-Pacific region and its implications for the US leadership and security. The concern arising out of China was also a bipartisan issue though the Republicans and the Democrats differed on dealing with this concern.

By the time the George H.W. Bush (I) administration was concluding its term, the indications of China's rise had started emerging unmistakably. In its last National Security Strategy statement in 1993, the Bush-I administration wondered if the US should “support, contain or balance” China's rise.⁸ Clinton administration answered this question by seeking and encouraging China's integration and active participation in “regional security mechanisms to reassure its neighbours and assuage its own security concerns”. For this, the Clinton administration aimed at building a “New Pacific Community” based on strong US presence in the region, capable of deterring “regional aggression”.⁹ Clinton's succeeding

administration, led by George W. Bush (II) identified a “broad arc of instability that stretches from the Middle East to Northeast Asia, the region contains a volatile mix of rising and declining regional powers”.¹⁰ The active regional security role brought the Bush-II administration in direct conflict with China on the question of a mid-air standoff between the US spy plane EP-3E ARIES-II with a Chinese fighter (J-811) over the Chinese Hainan province in April 2001. Both the preceding administrations could not afford to ignore the Asia-Pacific region. The Taiwan Strait crisis in 1996 during the Clinton administration and the Korean crisis during the Bush administration may be recalled. The underlying fact for both the administrations was that the US presence and role in the Asia-Pacific region was shaped by the increasing realisation of China’s rise as a formidable power and the challenge it posed to the US interests and stakes in the region. In its second term, President Bush’s (II) Secretary of state Condoleezza Rice envisaged creating a regional balance in the Asia-Pacific based on the prospects of major Asian players being supported by the US to deter China from playing a “negative role”. Rice in her answer to a question on China at Sophia University in Japan in March 2005 said: “So knowing that China is a new factor, knowing that China has the potential for good or for bad, knowing that it will one way or the other be an influence, it is our responsibility to try and push and prod and persuade China towards the more positive course...So as we look to China’s life, I really do believe that the U.S.-Japan relationship, the U.S.-South Korean relationship, the U.S.-Indian relationship all are important in creating an environment in which China more likely to play a positive than a negative role.”¹¹

The two critical issues underlined in the above-mentioned statement, and many others with a similar tone, were, first, China must be handled carefully and, second, through a regional balance in the Asia-Pacific region, based on mobilisation of US allies and strategic partners, it could be done. These issues also echoed strongly in Obama’s “pivot” strategy.

Obama’s pivot or rebalancing strategy may also be seen primarily as an attempt to address the China challenge, or call it the China dilemma. This dilemma is built around the fact that on the one hand, China could play a critical role in a number of global issues of importance to the US, such as nuclear non-proliferation involving North Korea and Iran, global economic recovery and climate change, and countering terrorism and rebellion in places like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sudan (Darfur rebels).¹² On the other, China’s fast growing military modernisation was causing concern and discomfort not only among its Asia-Pacific neighbours but also in the US strategic community. China’s fast and formidable rise as an economic and military power in the Asia-Pacific region, is also invoking mixed, and at times mutually conflicting responses, from the countries of the region. Towards addressing this dilemma, Obama’s Asia team tried to learn from the mistakes of their predecessors and avoid downturns in relations with China. Accordingly, the Obama administration evolved a broad framework of dealing with China based on three premises, namely:

1. “First China should not be considered an inevitable adversary, but rather potential partner in resolving critical global issues...there were competitive elements in its (China’s) relationship with the United States—some quite significant—in both economic and security areas, but...cooperative elements could and should outweigh those. Washington did not seek the containment of China...because of the hopelessness of pursuing such a policy towards a country that was much more profoundly integrated into the global system...
2. Second, while welcoming China’s rise...it was essential that it occur within the context of international law and norms. That meant China should not resort to force or intimidation in resolving international disputes...
3. Third, the administration sought to ensure that China’s rise served to stabilize, not destabilize, the Asia-Pacific region which included five US allies and other partners in whose security Americans had an interest.”¹³

Obama’s “pivot to Asia” strategy distinguishes itself in two notable ways, from the approaches of the two previous administrations, towards the Asia-Pacific region. First, it has been packaged comprehensively and has all the necessary components of a strategy, namely military, political, economic and ideological. (The key components of the strategy have been identified in the subsequent paras.)

The second distinguishing feature of the pivot strategy is that it encompasses a much wider geo-strategic space: what is traditionally known as the Asia-Pacific region comprising of East and Southeast Asia. There is an attempt to see the Pacific (especially western Pacific) and Indian Oceans linked as one region by the inclusion of South Asia, particularly India, as one single strategic theatre. In the US official articulation of the “pivot” policy, the concept of “Indo-Pacific” was first used by Secretary Clinton in 2010 as an imperative of emerging geo-strategic reality of the region. Explaining “America’s Engagement in the Asia-Pacific” at Honolulu, Hawaii, on October 28, 2010, she said: “Our military presence must evolve to reflect an evolving world. The Pentagon is now engaged in a comprehensive Global Posture Review, which will lay out a plan for the continued forward presence of US forces in the region. That plan will reflect three principles: Our defense [*sic*] posture will become more politically sustainable, operationally resilient, and geographically dispersed...And we are expanding our work with the Indian navy in the Pacific, because we understand how important the *Indo-Pacific* basin is to the global trade and commerce.”¹⁴ (Emphasis added).

Explaining the salience of an integrated view of the Indian and Pacific Oceans and redefining the Asia-Pacific in the Indo-Pacific terms, she again wrote in her *Foreign Policy* article: “Asia-pacific has become a key driver of global politics. Stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the western shores of the Americas, the region spans two oceans—the Pacific and Indian—that are increasingly linked by shipping and strategy. It boasts almost half of the world’s population. It includes many of the key engines of the global economy, as well as the largest emitters of

greenhouse gases. It is home to several of our key allies and important emerging powers like China, India and Indonesia.”

The idea of Indo-Pacific has a long and interesting background and a complex evolution. Space and time constraints do not permit us to digress into explaining it here. The extended regional strategic perspective has led the US to bring in countries like India as significant players in the “rebalance strategy”.

Principal Drivers of the Pivot

One of the core motives of the US policy in the post-Second World War period has been to preserve and promote its global hegemony. A key precondition to preserving this hegemony is to ensure that there is no other hegemon emerging anywhere in the world. The well-known US neo-realist John Mearsheimer writing in a newspaper article says: “My theory of international politics says that the mightiest states attempt to establish hegemony in their own region while making sure that no rival great power dominates another region. The ultimate goal of every great power is to maximize [*sic*] its share of world power and eventually dominate the system.”¹⁵

The play of this motive of preserving and promoting its global leadership can be clearly discerned behind the Obama administration’s “Pivot to Asia” strategy. The message of leadership was clearly underlined by President Obama in his Canberra address announcing the “rebalancing strategy” when he said: “The United States will play a larger and a long-term role in shaping this region and its future...A secure and peaceful Asia is the foundation for the second area in which America is leading again—and that’s advancing our shared prosperity...This is the future we seek in the Asia-pacific security, prosperity and dignity for all. That’s what we stand for. That’s who we are. That’s the future we will pursue, in partnership with allies and friends, and with every element of American power. So let there be no doubt; in the Asia-pacific in the 21st century, the United States of America is all in.”¹⁶

The reassertion of leadership through the articulation of pivot strategy was in some ways a conscious effort to address the questions raised both within the US and from outside. Within the US, there was criticism that the prevailing extensive involvement of the US in world affairs, symbolised by wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, was unsustainable and unnecessary in view of its domestic economic and social costs. Outside the US, there were questions hanging on America’s willingness and capabilities to continue to play its leading role. Answering these questions, Secretary Clinton wrote in her *Foreign Policy* article, “America’s Pacific Century”: With Iraq and Afghanistan still in transition and serious economic challenges in our own country, there are those...who are calling for us not to reposition, but to come home. They seek a downsizing of our foreign policy engagement in favor [*sic*] of our pressing domestic priorities. These impulses are understandable, but they are misguided. Those who say that we can no longer afford to engage with the world have it exactly backward—we cannot afford not

to. Beyond our borders, people are also wondering about America's intentions—our willingness to remain engaged and to lead. In Asia they ask whether we are really there to stay, whether we are likely to be distracted again by events elsewhere, whether we can make—and keep—credible economic and strategic commitments, and whether we can back those commitments with action. The answer is: We can and we will.”

In view of this, the US leadership felt that “the region is eager for our leadership and our business—perhaps more so at any time in modern history”.¹⁷ In former National Security Adviser Thomas Donilon's perception, “Our renewed commitment to Asia—and this is an important point—also flows from the demand for US leadership from nations across the region. There are a lot of reasons for this and this could take a long discussion as well. But the fact is today is (sick) that there is tremendous demand and expectation of US leadership in the region. Indeed the demand signals, I think, at this point today are unprecedented.”¹⁸

The rise and assertion of China was a factor not only behind the region's welcome to the US leadership, but also behind the US concern for preserving and reinforcing its leadership. While the US has been trying to come to terms with China's economic rise during the previous Bush and Clinton administrations, as already noted, the faster pace of its military modernisation witnessed during the early years of the Obama administration was making Pentagon and US security community feel increasingly uneasy. The gradually building up perception that the US engagement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and availability of abundance of economic resources was making China emerge as a challenge to US security and leadership was getting reinforced by the strides made by China in military modernisation and its assertion of territorial claims in relation to Japan and South China Sea neighbours. The concern for the Chinese challenge was adequately reflected in a series of Pentagon documents and studies. It was in the 2010 Annual Report to Congress of the Department of Defence that sounded a serious alert on the security implications of military modernisation of China for the US. The Report underlined China's strategy of “Offense as Defense [*sic*]” and drew attention to its “Anti-Access/Area Denial Capabilities” enabling it “to counter third party intervention, including by the United States, in any future cross-Strait crisis”.

Commenting on the military dimension of the “pivot” in the context of “China's military rise”, *The Economist* (London) wrote on April 07, 2012: “According to senior American diplomats, China has the ambition—and increasingly the power—to become regional hegemon; it is engaged in a determined effort to lock America out of a region that has been declared a vital security interest by every administration since Teddy Roosevelt's; and it is pulling countries in South-east Asia into its orbit of influence ‘by default’. America has to respond. As an early sign of that response. Mr. Obama announced on November 11 that 2500 US marines would soon be stationed in Australia. Talks about an increased American military presence in the Philippines began in February this year.”¹⁹

The challenge to American leadership in the Asia-Pacific from China was not limited to the military field, howsoever critical it was. The challenge was also economic and had its politico-diplomatic implications. An economically prosperous China had vastly improved its economic engagement with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region while the US appeared diffident and confusing. China's trade and investments in the region had soared impressively, and it had also increased its developmental assistance to many of the developing Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) members including Indonesia. China's economic clout was not only effective in the ASEAN countries but also in the close allies of the US. Acknowledging it impliedly, President Obama had mentioned in his Canberra speech: "All of our nations—Australia, and the United States, all of our nations—have a profound interest in the rise of a peaceful and prosperous China—and that is why the United States welcomes it." Above all, it is a widely acknowledged fact that China is closely integrated with the US and the US-led global economy. The pivot strategy therefore aims at "balancing without containment" of China.²⁰

Key Components of the Pivot

The components of the pivot strategy have been described differently by various US leaders and commentators. In essence however they fall under the following five categories:

1. **Military re-deployment in the Asia-Pacific:** This seeks to shift the US military assets released from Afghanistan and Iraq. It is proposed that by 2020, 60 per cent of US naval strength will be deployed in this region leaving the remaining 40 per cent for other regions. It has been promised that US sequestration will not be adversely affecting the "rebalance" strategy. There would be clear emphasis on technology upgradation and rotating US military presence would be preferred over traditional permanent bases.
2. **Strengthening alliances and building strategic partnerships:** There is a serious attempt under the pivot strategy to reinforce and, wherever required, even redefine traditional alliance relations in the region with countries like Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, Philippines and Thailand. This is in the hope of undoing the threatened US isolation in the region and building confidence and capabilities of the allies in supporting US moves towards the Asia-Pacific security. In addition to the traditional allies, much attention is also devoted to strengthening existing strategic partnerships in the region with countries like India and Singapore, and seeking new such partnerships with countries like Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia. Attempts are also discernible under the US rebalancing strategy to bring its allies and strategic partners closer for security cooperation in the region. The proposals like the US-Japan-India strategic triangle or US-Japan-India-Australia strategic quadrangle

speculated upon by a number of US analysts fall into this category: aimed at putting in place a strategically viable “united front” in case of any adverse security situation in the region. Strengthening defence capabilities of the allies and strategic partners is also opening opportunities for the US arms sales in the region that will keep US jobs intact and help boost the US economy.

3. Strategic architecture: The US wants to ensure that any strategic architecture in the region, like the East Asia Summit and ASEAN-related organisations, neither isolates the US nor falls under the Chinese dominance. The US also seeks to make these regional organisations take meaningful and effective decisions rather than becoming talking forums.
4. Economic resurgence: The US pivot strategy also seeks to help revive and expand its economic stakes in the region. Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) is envisaged to boost the US trade and investment prospects in the region. The objective is to inject new life in the sagging US economy as also to compete with China for economic space and opportunities in the region.
5. Ideological assertion: The pivot strategy also has an ideological front where significance of human rights and democracy are emphasised and diplomatically pursued to the discomfort of the countries that violate these norms or are seen to be lacking in them like China.

All these components of the US strategy are expected to take a firm shape only by 2020. In the meanwhile, questions are continuing to be raised and doubts expressed on the sustainability of these components and the will and the capability (including financial resources) of the Obama administration to pursue them sincerely and seriously.²¹ The US strategy has strongly stirred the security situation in Asia, both on the count of US withdrawal from Iraq, Afghanistan and West Asia as well as reassertion in the Asia-Pacific region. While China has strongly been resenting the US strategy, both the US allies and strategic partners look towards the strategy with mixed feeling: seeking limits on China’s growing military capabilities and assertion with the US support, but ensuring that the region is not pushed into any conflict through China’s isolation or containment.

The present volume seeks to explore various dimensions of the US pivot/rebalancing strategy in the Asia-Pacific region and its implications for regional and global security. This is done keeping in mind India’s response to the US strategy and how it affects India’s security concerns. Hopefully, the essays in the volume by experts and scholars would be able to generate a lively debate among Asia’s security watchers and policymakers on the questions related to the US rebalance strategy in the Asia-Pacific region.

NOTES

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EVOLUTION OF
US REBALANCING

2

Evolution of US Rebalancing Strategy: Implications for India

Arvind Gupta and Sanjeev K. Shrivastav

Recognising the Asia-Pacific region as the most rapidly growing and dynamic region in the world, the Obama administration pronounced numerous policy statements during 2011-13. These statements clearly indicate that the United States (US) is now proactively preparing to enhance the levels of its political, economic, military as well as socio-cultural engagements with the Asia-Pacific region in the years and decades to come. This shift in the US foreign policy is being referred as “United States’ policy of rebalancing towards Asia-Pacific”. Such a shift in the US policy is likely to create a zone of contestation among the nations in the Asia-Pacific region.

This chapter attempts to examine the following three questions:

1. What is the US rebalancing policy?
2. What are the reactions to this rebalancing policy among the nations in the Asia-Pacific region?
3. What implications will it have on India’s security and foreign policy?

The main argument of this chapter is that the US policy towards the Asia-pacific is in an evolving state and currently in a flux. It has created many uncertainties in this region. India should watch the trajectory of the US rebalancing policy and cautiously engage with the United States in areas of convergence while avoid getting involved in unfolding entanglements.

Understanding US Policy of Rebalancing

To understand the rebalancing policy of the US, it is useful to see how it began and evolved. During late 2011 and early 2012, the Obama administration announced that it would be intensifying the role of the US in the Asia-Pacific region. This was at the time when the US was showing signs of war weariness and its economy was under considerable stress. Moreover, during this time, China was showing signs of political, military and economic resurgence, and

many of China's neighbours were becoming uncomfortable with its growing assertiveness.

The US policy of rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific appears to have been driven by the economic as well as political rise of nations in the Asia-Pacific region, and in particular by the rise of China. The United States has already ended its combat mission in Iraq and is now planning to withdraw its combat troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. Now, with this new strategy, the Obama administration appears to be focussing on the Asia-Pacific region. In December 2011, the then US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, while writing in *Foreign Policy* summed up the emerging geo-political landscape in Asia and set the grounds for a shift in the US foreign policy. She wrote: "As the war in Iraq winds down and America begins to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the US stands at a pivot point. Over the last 10 years, we have allocated immense resources to those two theatres. In the next 10 years, we need to be smart and systematic about where we invest time and energy, so that we put ourselves in the best position to sustain our leadership, secure our interests, and advance our values. One of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will therefore be to lock in a substantially increased investment—diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise—in the Asia-Pacific region."¹

In her article, Secretary Clinton attempted to point out that the Asia-Pacific region was in the process of building a mature security as well as economic architecture; therefore, given its interests in the region, it was essential for the United States to get engaged with the Asia-Pacific region more closely. Clinton also argued for taking lessons from the post-World War II era when the US engaged with transatlantic nations substantially, which in turn helped the US to maintain its power and influence during the Cold War period. She insisted that it was time for the US to engage with the Asia-Pacific region, which is the most rapidly growing and dynamic regions of the world; therefore, according to her, it was absolutely essential for the US to do so in the 21st century.² In her assessment, wars in the Middle East were winding down. So, for the US to maintain its global leadership, it was necessary to invest in the Asia-Pacific where a new security and economic architecture was shaping up. In her opinion, the United States must show greater commitment to this region.³ It would be worth noting that earlier, in November 2009, during his visit to Japan, President Obama had termed himself as the first Pacific President of the United States.⁴ In November 2011, President Obama visited the Asia-Pacific region for ten days and attended the East Asia Summit in Bali, Indonesia. This comprehensive visit by President Obama to the region was a clear indication that his administration would give greater salience to the Asia-Pacific region.⁵

Hillary Clinton's article, in *Foreign Policy*, amplified what President Obama had already stated in his speech in the Australian Parliament at Canberra on November 17, 2011. President Obama stated: "For the United States, this reflects a broader shift. After a decade in which we fought two wars that cost us dearly, in blood and treasure, the United States is turning our attention to the vast potential

of the Asia Pacific region ... Our new focus on this region reflects a fundamental truth—the United States has been, and always will be, a Pacific nation...As the world's fastest-growing region—and home to more than half the global economy—the Asia Pacific is critical to achieving my highest priority, and that's creating jobs and opportunity for the American people...Indeed, we are already modernizing America's defense posture across the Asia Pacific. It will be more broadly distributed—maintaining our strong presence in Japan and the Korean Peninsula, while enhancing our presence in Southeast Asia. Our posture will be more flexible—with new capabilities to ensure that our forces can operate freely. And our posture will be more sustainable, by helping allies and partners build their capacity, with more training and exercises.”⁶

Rapid growth and dynamism of the Asia-Pacific region is one of the key reasons why the US is willing to enhance its levels of engagement with this region. During the last two years of her tenure as the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton made regular visits to the Asia-Pacific region and attended the meetings of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well.⁷ In recent times, too, the current US Secretary of State John Kerry, US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hegal and other top US officials have visited the Asia Pacific region a substantial number of times. In November, 2012 immediately, after his re-election for the second term, President Obama visited Thailand, Myanmar and Cambodia and attended the East Asia Summit in Phnom Penh.⁸ This indicated the continuation of US priorities to the Asia-pacific region during Obama's second term as well. The White House Press Secretary Jay Carney, while announcing this trip in November 2012, acknowledged: “The President's trip to Asia will be an opportunity to build on our successful efforts to refocus on the Asia Pacific as the most rapidly growing and dynamic region in the world”.⁹

Realising the importance of the economic aspect of the rebalancing policy for its success over the long term, President Obama pushed forward the US efforts to join and establish a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) with nations of Asia-Pacific region. The TPP has emerged out of the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership (TPSEP) agreement between Singapore, Brunei, Chile and New Zealand, signed in 2005.¹⁰ As far as US engagement with the TPP negotiations is concerned, this process had begun in September 2008 itself during George W. Bush administration, when the US showed its interest for negotiations of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with TPSEP member countries. During the first term of the Obama administration, formal negotiations began in March 2010.¹¹ On November 12, 2011, the nine nations i.e. Chile, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Vietnam, Singapore and the US declared broad outlines of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement with a “common vision to establish a comprehensive, next-generation regional agreement that liberalizes trade and investment and addresses new and traditional trade issues and 21st-century challenges.” The TPP has emerged as the defining feature of the US' economic engagements in the Asia Pacific region under the Obama administration. The Asia-Pacific region has become a key destination for

US exports as total export of goods by the US to the region in 2012, has been worth \$942 billion. This constitutes 61 per cent of the total exports of US goods in that year. As of August 2013, nineteen rounds of TPP negotiations have taken place among twelve countries, and this negotiation process is still ongoing.¹²

The rapid growth, dynamism and future prospects of Asia-Pacific region have been clearly highlighted in the US National Intelligence Council Report 2012 as well. The report noted: “The diffusion of power among countries will have a dramatic impact by 2030. Asia will have surpassed North America and Europe combined in terms of global power, based upon GDP, population size, military spending, and technological investment. China alone will probably have the largest economy, surpassing that of the United States a few years before 2030. In a tectonic shift, the health of the global economy increasingly will be linked to how well the developing world does—more so than the traditional West. In addition to China, India, and Brazil, regional players such as Colombia, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa, and Turkey will become especially important to the global economy. Meanwhile, the economies of Europe, Japan, and Russia are likely to continue their slow relative declines.”¹³

Given the rapid social and economic growth as well as military modernisation, China is likely to emerge as the major challenger to the US in years and decades to come. In view of this scenario, the US would be putting its best efforts to maintain its strategic influence in the Asia-Pacific region. It would be imperative for the US to maintain this strategic influence in the region in order to provide security assurances to its allies such as Japan, South Korea Philippines, Australia etc. and also to secure its own interests in this region. The non-democratic nature of China’s governance as well as its aspirations and assertive behaviour to attain supremacy in the world order, makes it an uncertain power. In view of a rising China as well as emerging regional strategic scenarios in the region, the US appears to be forging closer ties with nations of the Asia-Pacific. In this process, the US is strengthening its old alliances as well as making efforts to establish closer partnerships with other nations of the Asia-Pacific region which have critical influence.¹⁴

Meanwhile, it would be worth noting that over sixty one per cent of total world population resides in the Asia-Pacific region. Along with China, other nations in this region are also rising with higher economic growth and prosperity levels.¹⁵ China has grown significantly and modernised all its critical sectors over the last four decades. With its rising power status, China has been successfully enhancing its strategic influence in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. At the same time, India and the South East Asian nations have also risen, economically as well as militarily. The US realises that it is essential to be part of this dynamism and growth to maintain its strategic influence in this region and ultimately secure its vital interests as well as protect its allies—Japan and South Korea, Philippines, Australia etc.—in future. The rebalancing policy of the US may be viewed as strategic signalling as well which is aimed at indicating US’ preparedness for

dealing with any challenges emerging out of the dynamic strategic scenarios in the region as and when they arise.¹⁶

In recent times, China has been showing assertive as well as aggressive behaviour vis-à-vis its neighbours such as towards Japan relating to the Senkaku Islands dispute and also towards Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines etc. relating to South China Sea territorial disputes. More recently, in November 2013, China suddenly announced an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the Senkakau/Diayou Islands in the East China Sea. According to notification, all planes which are to pass through the Air Defence Identification Zone should provide prior information to the authorities in China regarding their flight. This assertive and aggressive move by China generated concern among the US and its allies Japan and South Korea as well as other Asia-Pacific nations.¹⁷ It may be noted that China's economic and military capabilities as well as its increasingly assertive and aggressive behaviour vis-à-vis its neighbours might have prompted the US to take on greater efforts to raise the levels of cooperation with its allies and partners in the Asia-Pacific region to successfully implement its rebalancing strategy in the region.

Meanwhile, it would be worth considering whether there is any ideological component in the US rebalancing policy. In this regard, Prof. S. D. Muni has pointed out: "There is a strong and asserted ideological component in the 'rebalancing strategy' relating to democracy and human rights. This component is hopefully aimed, besides strategic mobilisation of the like-minded regional countries, to generate internal pressures within China in favour of opening the society, polity and economy. The values of democracy, freedom and human rights are underlined by US diplomats in almost every interaction they have with China. No wonder China is so uneasy and opposed to the 'rebalancing strategy'."¹⁸

Asia-Pacific nations are rapidly rising while the United States has been confronted with major internal problems such slow economic growth and recent economic crisis, high unemployment rate, need for healthcare reforms, etc. In this regard, it would be essential for the US to enhance internal strengths of its economy and society i.e. levels of economic growth as well as key national capabilities in order successfully implement the rebalancing strategy in years and decades to come. It appears that realising this imperative, the second Obama administration has been focussing more closely on enhancing the internal strengths of the US.¹⁹ Now, it is clear that this US rebalancing strategy towards the Asia-Pacific region is a military as well as an economic strategy. The economic component of this strategy would be more critical over the long term because the economic aspect would influence the military posture of the United States in times ahead. Also, as the China and other nations in the Asia-Pacific region rise, it is likely that there would be a relative decline of power and influence of the US. This realization might also be propelling the US to enhance its presence as well as engagements in the Asia-Pacific region.²⁰

Key Features of US Rebalancing Strategy

The US Department of Defense (DoD) released the strategic guidance document on January 3, 2012 which noted: “While the US military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region.”²¹ This guidance document further noted that the US strategy would be focussing its attention on the following key areas: “A shift in overall focus from winning today’s wars to preparing for future challenges; a shift in geographical priorities toward the Asia and the Pacific region while retaining emphasis on the Middle East; a shift in the balance of missions toward more emphasis on projecting power in areas in which U.S. access and freedom to operate are challenged by asymmetric means (‘anti-access’) and less emphasis on stabilisation operations, while retaining a full-spectrum force; a corresponding shift in force structure, including reductions in Army and Marine Corps end strength, toward a smaller, more agile force including the ability to mobilise quickly; and a corresponding shift toward advanced capabilities including Special Operations Forces, new technologies such as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) and unmanned systems, and cyberspace capabilities.”²²

While delivering an address on “Indo-US Defence Relations” at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) on June 6, 2012, then US Secretary of Defense, Leon E. Panetta stated: “America is at a turning point. After a decade of war, we are developing a new defence strategy - a central feature of which is a “rebalancing” toward the Asia-Pacific region. In particular, we will expand our military partnerships and our presence in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia.”²³

According to the new strategy, the US has planned to deploy 60 per cent of its naval force into the Asia-Pacific region by the year 2020. Earlier, US naval forces were divided in equal proportion between the Atlantic and Asia-Pacific regions. While delivering an address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on June 2, 2012, Leon Panetta had stated: “By 2020 the Navy will reposture its forces from today’s roughly 50/50 percent split between the Pacific and the Atlantic to about a 60/40 split between those oceans. That will include six aircraft carriers in this region, a majority of our cruisers, destroyers, Littoral Combat Ships, and submarines. Our forward-deployed forces are the core of our commitment to this region and we will, as I said, sharpen the technological edge of our forces. These forces are also backed up by our ability to rapidly project military power if needed to meet our security commitments.”²⁴

According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report, published on March 28, 2013, the following steps, among others, have been taken by the US with regards to its rebalancing strategy: Announcement of new troop deployments to Australia, new naval deployments in Singapore, and new areas for military-to-military cooperation with Philippines; efforts to strengthen and

enhance the US' military presence in East Asia and making it "more broadly distributed, more flexible, and more politically sustainable" even if there is a decrease in the total US defence budget; release of the defense guidance document for this new strategy of the US; United States' joining of the East Asia Summit (EAS) and also negotiating a Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement.²⁵ The CRS report further notes that enhanced focus of the US on the Asia-Pacific region appears to have been driven by four major developments: the growing significance of the Asia-Pacific region for the future of US economy, in particular the rise of China; China's enhanced military capabilities as well as its assertive behaviour in the maritime domain; the end of military missions in Iraq and Afghanistan; and efforts towards reducing the US federal budget, in particular the defence budget.²⁶

Later, then US National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon, in a significant speech on "The United States and the Asia Pacific in 2013" at the Asia Society on March 11, 2013 stated: "To pursue this vision, the United States is implementing a comprehensive, multidimensional strategy: strengthening alliances; deepening partnerships with emerging powers; building a stable, productive, and constructive relationship with China; empowering regional institutions; and helping to build a regional economic architecture that can sustain shared prosperity. These are the pillars of the U.S. strategy, and rebalancing means devoting the time, effort and resources necessary to get each one right."²⁷ During this speech, Donilon clarified: "Here's what rebalancing does not mean. It doesn't mean diminishing ties to important partners in any other region. It does not mean containing China or seeking to dictate terms to Asia. And it isn't just a matter of our military presence. It is an effort that harnesses all elements of US power—military, political, trade and investment, development and our values."²⁸

On June 1, 2013, the US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel while delivering his address during the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore stated: "America and other nations of the Asia-Pacific must continue to strengthen existing alliances, forge new partnerships, and build coalitions based on common interests to ensure this region's future is peaceful and prosperous. In support of this goal, America is implementing a rebalance – which is primarily a diplomatic, economic and cultural strategy."²⁹ In his remarks, Hagel acknowledged that as the US implements this strategy, the US Department of Defense will have lesser resources as compare to the past. Meanwhile, he pointed out that "it is always a matter of the wise, judicious and strategic use of those resources that matters the most and has the most lasting impact".³⁰

Reactions by the Major Asia-Pacific Nations on the US Rebalancing Strategy

There have been varied reactions on the US policy of rebalancing policy among the Asia-Pacific nations.

China has been viewing this strategy as a comprehensive attempt to prevent its rise. As the United States increases its military engagements with enhanced alliances and partnerships in the region, China is concerned about it.³¹ Similarly, as the United States pushes forward the Trans-Pacific Partnership in the Asia-Pacific region, China is viewing it as an attempt to balance its efforts to enhance its ties with ASEAN states as well as to integrate economies of this region through establishment of a mechanism for regional economic cooperation.³² In this regard, a *People's Daily* editorial in early 2012 titled "Obama, Not Afraid of Breaking Your Back Pivoting to Asia?" pointed out that as China emerges on world stage the United States would not like to lose its number one position in the existing international order in general and in the Asia-Pacific region in particular.³³

However, Japan has welcomed this US shift towards the Asia-Pacific region. The announcement by the US that it would rotate marines through Darwin in northern Australia was welcomed by Japan.³⁴ Similarly, Australia has welcomed this US policy. The US and Australia, in November 2011, announced the Force Posture Initiatives, which were aimed at enhancing access of the US to the bases and facilities in Australia.³⁵ Meanwhile, it would be worth noting that Japan has been engaged in enhancing its ties with South Korea, Philippines and Australia.³⁶ In view of increased volatile situation in the maritime domain in East Asian region, Japan, South Korea and the United States are willing to establish closer cooperation with each other.³⁷ It may be noted that Japan has been expressing its concerns about China's long-term intentions.³⁸ South Korea has expressed its support for the US rebalancing strategy.³⁹ In the Southeast Asian region, this new US strategy has been welcomed by most of the ASEAN members as these states have been viewing it as a preventive tool vis-à-vis China and its rising military assertiveness.⁴⁰ However, some nations have voiced caution or concern over how China might respond to these strategic moves by the US. In his initial comment about this strategy, the Indonesian Foreign Minister pointed out the danger of "a vicious cycle of tensions and mistrust" in the region as an implication of this strategic move by the United States.⁴¹ The Malaysian Prime Minister expressed concern about the likelihood of increased tensions in the region.⁴² Cambodia appears to be aligning itself with Chinese positions.⁴³

Despite these concerns, remarks made by Lee Hsien Loong, the Prime Minister of Singapore during an interview at the World Economic Forum in Davos on February 6, 2012 welcomed the enhanced US engagements with the Asia-Pacific region. According to Loong, the influence of the United States on East Asia has been benign and for the long term. Loong welcomed the US engagement with the region despite recognising the fact that China is worried about US intentions. At the same time, he expressed hope that this new policy of the United States to Asia Pacific region shall continue for long period of time.⁴⁴ Therefore, regional dynamics will be significant in determining the outcome of this US rebalancing policy.

Implications for India

The United States has been considering India's role in this rebalancing strategy as critical. In this regard, the US strategic guidance document stated: "The United States is also investing in a long-term strategic partnership with India to support its ability to serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region."⁴⁵ India appears to have been carefully and deeply observing various developments regarding the US rebalancing strategy towards Asia Pacific while keeping its national interests at the core of its considerations. India's Defence Minister A K Antony, during his meeting with then US Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta in New Delhi in June 2012, indicated the need for strengthening multilateral security architecture in the Asia Pacific, but also pointed out that it should be undertaken at a pace comfortable to all the countries concerned.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, on February 5, 2013, welcoming this enhanced US engagement processes with the Asia Pacific region, the then India's Ambassador to the United States Nirupama Rao while delivering an address on "America's 'Asian Pivot': The View from India" at the Brown-India Initiative Seminar Series in Rhode Island on February 5, 2013 stated: "India's vision is to create a web of inter-linkages for our shared prosperity and security. We want the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific regions to develop into a zone of cooperation rather than one of competition and domination. We would like to work for an open, inclusive and transparent architecture of regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, where all major powers in Asia and beyond work together to address the traditional and non-traditional challenges and to create a basis for a stable and prosperous Asia. These are the challenges that cut across national boundaries and require cooperative responses. Based on this vision, we welcome the U.S. engagement in the Asia of the Indo-Pacific. The continuance of economic growth and prosperity in both our countries is in many ways linked to the opportunities for growth and prosperity in this region. It is a space that impacts our destinies, whose security and prosperity is vital to both of us, and where we have an increasing convergence of interests. We believe that India and the United States are stakeholders in the creation of an inclusive, participatory network of interdependence, cooperative trade, economic development, security and stability in the Asia of the Indo-Pacific."⁴⁷

The India-US joint statement released after the third summit meeting between the US President Obama and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in Washington DC on September 27, 2013 noted: "Consistent with the U.S. rebalance to Asia and India's Look East policy, the Leaders expressed a desire to partner more closely with other Asia-Pacific countries, including greater coordination with Japan, China and ASEAN, among others, including through the evolving institutional architecture of the region. The Leaders share a commitment to support regional multilateral institutions as they continue to develop into effective bodies built on international rules and norms that can address shared challenges."⁴⁸

As the new strategic scenarios unfold in the Asia-Pacific region, it may be suggested that India must continue building and strengthening its national capabilities and securing its national interests while moving towards engaging with other nations in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. It would be essential for India to maintain a balanced position and posture with regards to its responses to this US rebalancing strategy. India should refrain from giving its responses in reaction to any policy pronouncements and should avoid itself putting into conflicting situations in the Asia-Pacific region. Ultimately, it is India's national interest which must guide India's engagements in the Asia-Pacific region and same approach may be applied with regard to other regions as well. India-US strategic partnership has been constantly growing over the years despite facing occasional challenges. Meanwhile, it would be essential to ensure that no third country should perceive this partnership as a challenge or threat to itself. Therefore, it would be essential for India to constantly work on maintaining and enhancing friendly relationship with China based on mutual trust and mutual interests. As US further enhances its engagement processes in the Asia Pacific region, there may be increased efforts by the US to establish closer cooperation with India which includes defence cooperation. In this regard, it would be worth suggesting that India's decision to any such proposal for closer cooperation by the US should be guided by its own national interests and deeper considerations of current geostrategic realities as well as in pursuance of the vision for establishing an environment for sustained peace, stability, growth and prosperity in the region.⁴⁹

It would be essential for India to evolve a long-term strategy to utilize various opportunities which are arising in the Asia-Pacific region while at the same time, it would also be essential to deeply consider security related challenges as well. Several political, economic, security as well as socio-cultural factors have made the Asia-Pacific area a highly dynamic region which include the rise of China, the United States' rebalancing strategy, efforts being made to evolve a regional security architecture, recurring tense situations in South China Sea and East China Sea and on the Korean peninsula, the growing significance of the Indian Ocean region and maritime related issues as well as the emergence of various issues related non-traditional security.⁵⁰

In view of rising China, India and other nations of the Asia-Pacific region, the United States appears to be forging closer partnership with India to ensure its strategic influence in the Asia-Pacific region. At the same time, the US is making efforts to forge closer relations with other nations in South Asia and South East Asia. The United States is constantly making efforts to strengthen its existing ties with its traditional allies like Japan and South Korea, Philippines and Australia. Meanwhile, it would worth considering that despite having a sense of competition between United States and China, both the sides have been making attempts to forge a better relationship considering their mutual economic interests as well as to imperatives to maintain peace and stability in the region.⁵¹

With the implementation of US rebalancing strategy in the Asia-Pacific region, there is likelihood of occurrences of tense situations from time to time however it is unlikely that this would lead to a conflict between major powers in the region. China's connectedness with the world economy and the existence of nuclear weapons are some of the major factors which would prevent any friction to escalate into bigger conflict. But it is likely that Asia-Pacific region would be a zone of contestation particularly between the United States and China. It may be suggested that in view of emerging strategic scenario in the Asia-Pacific region, it would be essential to enhance the levels of communication mechanisms between the major powers in the regions and in particular between United States and China. An enhanced level of communication mechanism will help in perception management between major powers in the region which will ultimately help in peacefully dealing with various issues as and when they arise in times ahead.

In the overall analysis, the success of US rebalancing strategy would ultimately be determined by factors such as higher levels of US economic growth, its enhanced levels of capability building processes, and its success in forging deeper cooperative relationships with nations the Asia-Pacific region. These are some key factors which are likely to determine the power and strategic influence of the United States in the Asia-Pacific in years and decades ahead. Realising these imperatives, the second Obama administration appears to be deeply focussed on enhancing internal strengths of the United States, i.e. economic growth and national capability building processes in key sectors such as health, education, defence and infrastructure etc.⁵² At the same time, Obama administration appears to be making consistent efforts in establishing deeper relationships with various nations of the Asia-Pacific region which include China. India has also been making sustained efforts in achieving higher economic growth and strengthening and enhancing capability building processes in critical sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, research and development etc. In view of strategic partnership between India and the United States based on shared values and shared interests⁵³ and as they remain engaged in their nation building processes, it may be suggested that India and the United States must closely cooperate and collaborate with each other in enhancing their key capabilities in various key sectors. Enhanced levels of their internal strengths would certainly help both India and the United States in efficiently utilizing various opportunities as well as successfully dealing with various challenges in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Map of the Asia-Pacific Region⁵⁴

NOTES

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MILITARY IMPLICATIONS
OF US REBALANCING

3

Military Implications of the US Rebalancing Strategy

Vivek Chadha

Introduction

The US rebalance or the pivot to the Asia-Pacific is not merely a military move aimed at readjusting the deployment of platforms in light of the withdrawal from Iraq and drawdown from Afghanistan. It is the fulcrum of the US efforts to retain its economic growth, strategic influence and competitive edge in all spheres. It is also about the often unsaid China factor—a factor that has the potential to impact every domain of undeniable US leadership.

It would be an overstatement to classify the rebalance as a paradigm shift in the US strategy for the region. The US has been and is likely to remain a Pacific power in the foreseeable future. In the past, the pillars of its association with the region have been similar to the ones proposed. Since the beginning of the Cold War, the US has remained a pre-eminent power in the Asia-Pacific, through its *economic and military strength* and *network of alliances* with countries like Japan, South Korea and Australia. It has also maintained a substantial *forward presence* in Japan and South Korea. This coupled with a generational *lead in military technology* has kept the US ahead of its rivals. It is through these salient pillars of its strategy that the US has maintained a favourable environment in the Asia-Pacific region.

It therefore emerges that the pivot or rebalance is not entirely a fresh perspective, nor is it aimed at achieving anything substantially different. It does, however, reinforce the importance of the region, in light of the emergence of China as the greatest threat to US supremacy and a desire to move away from nation building, which was a by-product of the war on terror. Rebalancing rather than being a new strategy can be described as a readjustment of priorities and focus, backed by military capability. This capability will mirror the policy through asset reallocation both between theatres and within the Asia-Pacific.

In addition to the China factor, the readjustment is likely to be impacted for the first time in the last five decades by the cloud of severe budgetary constraints. When these two factors are viewed in concert, the challenges posed become evident. China is emerging as the largest trading partner in the area of focus of the pivot.¹ Its strategic influence is on the rise and it is competing with the US in all spheres for leadership, including military modernisation. Simultaneously, the US Armed Forces are threatened by a \$ 500 billion budget cut over the next decade. Therefore, the rebalance should be seen as a larger strategy of the US to maintain its slipping position as the strategic prime mover in the Asia-Pacific and by co-relation the world. In doing so, it will deter the ability of China to disturb the regional status quo within the financial constraints of depleting financial outlays. This will demand of the US both ingenuity and resilient partnerships for it to remain a pre-eminent power in the region.

The US is likely to pursue this goal through the following objectives:

- Establish a military posture, which has both deterrence and punitive capability in the region within its reducing means.
- Maintain a generational lead in military technology over China, to achieve its strategic objectives.
- Create and strengthen a network of allies and partners, who have vested interests in building their economies in an environment of peace and security.
- Strike a balance between credibility of alliances with partner countries in the region and simultaneously discourage any temptation on their part to use this as a leverage for escalating military tensions in bilateral disputes.

The paper briefly traces the trajectory of events leading to the announcement of rebalance by the US. It further analyses the factors that have forced a more proactive and vocal enunciation of the policy. This is followed up by a focus on the military shift as a result of the rebalance strategy, its implications and finally the impact of sequestration.

Events Leading to the US Rebalance

The US “Pivot” to the Asia-Pacific or the “rebalancing”, as it was subsequently christened, was a shift waiting to happen after the end of the Cold War. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the US as the pre-eminent power, the strategic significance of both Europe and the Atlantic diminished. This intervening period witnessed the US in a state of strategic stall, with the absence of a potential adversary, which could challenge the brief phase of unipolarity in world politics. Referring to this period, Condoleezza Rice, wrote: “That we did not know how to think about what follows the US-Soviet confrontation is clear from the continued references to the ‘post Cold-War period’.”² It was not until the rise of China was finally acknowledged as a threat to US influence in the world in general and the Asia-Pacific region in particular

that the need for a shift was realised. Rice identifying the threat from China wrote in the year 2000: “What we do know is that China is a great power with unresolved vital interests, particularly concerning Taiwan and the South China Sea. China resents the role of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region. This means that China is not a status-quo power but one that would like to alter Asia’s balance of power in its favor [*sic*].”³

However, the open admission of a definitive threat from China during the initial years of the Bush administration’s first tenure in the White House faded after the launch of the “war on terror”. The shift in focus towards terrorism led to a softening of US focus on China, given the need for wide ranging cooperation against a common threat and the inability to focus militarily on two major fronts. Thus, despite the threat perceptions enunciated by senior officials in the Bush administration, the pivot did happen, but it tuned towards Iraq and Afghanistan.

This preoccupation with the “war on terrorism” and a simultaneous economic slowdown, opened a window of opportunity for China to enlarge its area of influence. Its core interests increased in rapid succession from Taiwan to Tibet and then the South and East China Seas⁴, bringing into focus the disputes with Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia.⁵

Chinese activism raised concerns amongst the US allies and partners about the ability and lack of will of the sole superpower to assert its influence in the region. This was reinforced after the slowdown of the US and European economy in 2008. Joseph S. Nye felt that this very assessment led to an increase in Chinese activism and a desire to take a more proactive stance in the South China Sea dispute.⁶

The withdrawal of the US forces from Iraq and the impending drawdown from Afghanistan facilitated the desire to correct the imbalance that had crept in over a decade of intense involvement in the region. In an address to the Australian Parliament at Canberra on November 17, 2011, President Barack Obama announced the necessary recalibration of US focus. He emphasised the determination of the US to remain a key player in the Pacific region. “Our new focus on this region reflects a fundamental truth—the United States has been, and always will be, a Pacific nation.”⁷ He also went on to reinforce his intent for the consumption of US allies and potential adversaries: “The United States is a Pacific Power and we are here to stay.”⁸

Reflecting on this strategic direction, the US clearly signalled its intent to enlarge its role in the region in concert with its allies and partners.⁹ The amplification of this intent aimed at ensuring “security” in the region, “international order”, which would guarantee the rights of countries and adherence to “international law”, thereby safeguarding freedom of navigation.

The specific contours of the US rebalance from the overall strategic perspective were outlined by the former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton when she said: “Our work will proceed along six key lines of action: strengthening bilateral security alliances; deepening our working relationships with emerging powers,

including with China; engaging with regional multilateral institutions; expanding trade and investment; forging a broad-based military presence; and advancing democracy and human rights.”¹⁰

Factors Influencing US Rebalancing

The strategic guidance laid down by the Department of Defense outlines the shifting contours of priorities for the US. It aims at a smaller footprint while countering terrorism through surgical strikes, maintaining presence and influence to shape events in the Middle East, reducing presence in Europe, Africa and Latin America and providing an impetus to its presence and focus on the Asia-Pacific.¹¹ Amongst the areas of interest outlined, the Asia-Pacific has emerged as a priority for the US in the foreseeable future. Given this reassessment of interests, a rebalance of strategic focus became inevitable. The US rebalancing has been influenced by a number of factors. This paper will consider three, as a prelude to an assessment of its military implications.

Calibration of the US Influence in the Asia-Pacific

The visual aspect of the US rebalancing, has been the redeployment of its military hardware, which became the focus of world attention. However, the shift is not merely military in nature and more importantly it represents a strategic rebalance. This includes enhancing economic ties in the region, strengthening and building partnerships with allies and friendly countries and finally ensuring that a stable environment can be ensured by deterring the disturbance of status quo.¹² The US decision to join the East Asia Summit indicated its willingness to increase its influence at the multilateral level.¹³ Similarly, an impetus to bilateral ties, with specific focus on military engagement, is also evident. This is evident through stronger military ties with Australia, India, Japan, Singapore and other countries of the region, as will be dealt with later in the paper. On the economic front, the US initiative to establish a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) with countries like Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam on November 12, 2011 was seen as an attempt to enhance trade, investment and influence.¹⁴ There is broad consensus on “ensuring that the United States plays a key role in shaping Asian economic architecture will also affect its influence in the region.”¹⁵ This is seen in the US as the economic lever of the pivot to the Asia-Pacific.¹⁶

Rise of China

The feeling that the Asia-Pacific region had not received adequate attention in the recent past was accentuated most by the rise of China. This was especially in light of China’s growing assertiveness as well as its enhanced capability. It is evident from the article written by Condoleezza Rice in 2000 that China was firmly on the US radar. However, the rapidity of its rise and growing assertiveness was a catalyst in the ensuing shift. This assertiveness has been most pronounced

amongst the US partners and allies in Southeast and East Asia, who have territorial disputes with China. The decision to include some of these disputes as core issues by China, by implication, could lead to the use of force in case of a showdown. China's state-owned *Global Times* in a blunt warning wrote, "If these countries don't want to change their ways with China, they will need to prepare for the sound of cannons. We need to be ready for that, as it may be the only way for the disputes in the sea to be resolved."¹⁷ China's military capability gives it the ability to take pre-emptive action to assert its territorial claims and simultaneously deter US intervention. This could become an important factor in the capacity of the US to retain its influence in the region.

China's ability to use force and its qualitative enhancement has been a subject of debate in the past. However, recent advances have greatly augmented its capability. This is increasingly becoming a cause for concern in the US. In its assessment, the US Department of Defense (DoD) China Report for 2012, says: "China's approach to dealing with this challenge is manifested in a sustained effort to develop the capability to attack, at long ranges, military forces that might deploy and or operate within the western Pacific, which the DoD characterizes [sic] as 'anti-access' and 'area denial' (A2/AD) capabilities."¹⁸

Some noteworthy capability enhancements by China will provide a backdrop for increasing US concerns in the region are:

- China's policy of A2/AD has raised serious concerns within the US establishment, in terms of their ability to retain the initiative in the region. A2/AD has received a fillip through improving Chinese capability to target both ground and seaborne targets as a result of fresh induction of weapon systems. These provide China with the ability to interdict potential threats in their bases and at standoff distances, thereby allowing it greater freedom of action in its area of interest.¹⁹ This, when seen in the perspective of Taiwan and disputes in the South China Sea, brings into focus the concerns of the US.
- China's strategic deterrence will improve as a result of recent advances in Multiple Independently Targetable Re-Entry Vehicle (MIRV) and penetration aids.²⁰
- The induction of JIN based SSBN launched nuclear capable JL-2 will give the Chinese a range of 7,400 km, and thereby a potent sea based nuclear capability.²¹
- The launch of the Luyang III class guided missile destroyers will further enhance the capability of the previous generation, which were equipped with phase array radars, giving capability at par with US vessels of a similar class. This will include multipurpose vertical launch systems, capable of launching Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles (ASCM), Land Attack Cruise Missiles (LACM), surface to air missiles and anti-submarine rockets.²²
- The development and likely deployment of the fifth generation fighter aircraft by 2018 is likely to bridge the existing capability gap in this vital

aspect of war fighting. This will be augmented by a long-range bomber fleet and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to enhance surveillance and strike capabilities.²³

- China's doctrinal shift towards fighting in an "informationalised" environment, includes the use of its cyber warriors to achieve information dominance on the battlefield and beyond. The last few years have witnessed a rapid rise in China's ability to gain access and exploit information by any means necessary.²⁴ This is likely to reinforce China's ability to achieve A2/AD capabilities.
- The ambiguity in the "no first use" policy clearly enunciated by China has raised doubts regarding its policy on the issue. This enhances the level of threat to US assets and its partner countries in the region.²⁵

While there has been a reluctance to make direct references to each other by the US and China, however, mutual discomfort between them remains clearly evident. The China White Paper of 2013 makes an indirect reference to US attempts to contain China. It says: "Some country has strengthened its Asia-Pacific military alliances, expanding its military presence in the region, and frequently makes the situation there tenser...Major powers are vigorously developing new and more sophisticated military technologies so as to ensure that they can maintain strategic superiorities in international competition in such areas as outer space and cyber space."²⁶

Therefore, the China factor was and remains a key determinant of the US strategy in a bid to safeguard its interests in the region, given that China has both the potential and reason to challenge the status quo maintained under the US security umbrella.

The US rebalance strategy has also witnessed an increasingly uneasy Russia enhance its own focus towards the region. Russia stepped up its military cooperation with China and July 2013 witnessed "Joint Sea 2013", the largest joint naval exercise between the two countries.²⁷ The competition in the region has also forced Russia to increase its engagement in spheres beyond military. This includes energy supply to China in a mutually beneficial situation.²⁸

Pull-out and Drawdown

The pull-out from Iraq and the drawdown from Afghanistan is likely to release forces, which will be available for deployment elsewhere.²⁹ Given the shift in focus towards the Asia-Pacific, this surplus is likely to find its way into the region. The large financial allocations for countering insurgency in the past, could also find its way into conventional forays in priority areas like the Asia-Pacific. This could potentially release funds, which will not only offset budgetary constraints as a result of sequestration but also provide the additional outlay for force accretion and modernisation. However, there are contradictory views on the subject, which will be analysed later in the paper.

A concerted decision was taken to move away from stability operations, which

were manpower and resource intensive.³⁰ These, as events of the past decade indicate, took place in the Middle East and Afghanistan. The decision has been supported by a strategic shift, which focuses more on the strategy to operate forward, and provides “offshore options to deter aggression, influence events abroad, and win conflicts in an era of uncertainty.”³¹

Military Implications of Rebalance

The military rebalancing was outlined by the US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta. He indicated that the US Military assets would be shared in a ratio of 60:40 between the Pacific and the Atlantic theatres. This was a departure from the existing 50:50 ratio. However, the US rebalancing effort is not merely a reflection of military numbers.

The US strategy to implement the rebalance from the military perspective follows a long term approach. This is evident from recent policy statements and actions initiated to build upon the existing capabilities in the region.

The US announced its determination to ensure peace and stability in the region. This aspect indicates strengthening of security parameters at different levels. First, the US wanted to maintain the salience of accepted guidelines in the region, which govern the approach of individual countries in an international environment. This has been emphasised by reinforcing the need to play by “rules”, “norms” and “order”.³² There is little doubt about the US intentions to caution China through these repeated messages, given its growing concerns as also of a number of Southeast and East Asian countries about China’s assertiveness. Second, it was also aimed at allying the concerns of partners and allies, which had increasingly started doubting the willingness of the US to support them, if China decided to flex its military muscle.

With China as the most obvious competitor for the US and its allies in the Asia-Pacific, indicators suggest that the US has a three-pronged strategy, which will guide its rebalance in the region. The first stage is likely to witness attempts to *integrate* China into the regional dynamics. This would imply elevation of China as a stakeholder with added responsibility and accountability. It would also demand greater transparency. Bilateral and regional disputes would be addressed through negotiation rather than change in status quo by use of force. This may be accompanied by bilateral and multilateral military engagement to build trust and confidence between both countries. The US decision to invite China for the 2014 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise is a step in the direction.³³ The second stage involves *proactive deterrence* through a network of alliances and partnerships. It also includes deployment of forces and military assets with the aim of addressing principle concerns like freedom of navigation through international waters, deterring change of status quo on the basis of proactive military action by China and North Korea and security to trade and energy supplies. The third stage involves building capacities for *operational superiority* in the eventuality of a conflict. This will be ensured by strengthening

defensive capability against envisaged threats, which include long range missiles, submarines and cyberattacks, as also amphibious assaults on disputed territories. The offensive capacity will aim to defeat the A2/AD capabilities of China, to include breaching the defensive network, countering fast improving electronic warfare capabilities, cyber threats, air defence systems, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) networks in order to achieve battlefield superiority. While these options are listed as three different stages, action for all options is likely to progress simultaneously.

The US Deputy Secretary of State Ashton B. Carter, without referring to any specific threats, gives indication of a four-pronged strategy. This includes changes in presence and posture, investments, innovations in operational planning and building alliances and partnerships.³⁴ If these are analysed from the perspective of a possible threat from China, it reinforces the argument of integration, proactive deterrence and operational superiority as a basis of the US approach to an emerging China in the Asia-Pacific region.

Presence and Posture

The presence of US forces as envisaged emphasises the physical aspect of the rebalance since it is the easiest to translate into military terms. The redeployment is as much a reflection of increased force levels in the Asia-Pacific, as it is of the nature of deployment envisaged. The posturing indicates both evidence of reshuffling of forces within the region and improving their efficiency to undertake responsibilities they are best suited for.

The first aspect which has facilitated the rebalance is a more efficient employment of assets by the US. In the past, a large quantum of military hardware was employed on duties it was not designed for, resulting in inefficiency. As an example, naval vessels like destroyers and amphibious ships were deployed for humanitarian duties. This will be reversed by allocating Joint High Speed Vessels (JHSV) and Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) instead for such duties.³⁵ *Second*, the concept of forward basing has also been strengthened. This will lead to limiting the earlier practice of repeated to and from shuttling movement of ships from the US mainland. The assets relieved as a result will be available for alternate deployment. Forward deployment would be augmented with specialist naval assets like the JHSVs and LCSs. Singapore is one of the countries which will witness the forward location of LCSs.

The US Chief of Naval Operations Jonathan W. Greenert elaborates on the concept of forward deployment, which is one of the three tenets of the navy's overall approach.³⁶ He argues that forward deployment will deter aggression, influence events beyond the US shores and better deal with uncertainty. This deployment is centred on "bases" provided by allies like Japan and South Korea and "places" leased by partner countries like Singapore. In addition to the advantages of a forward presence, the policy also helps retain initiative and maintains presence at global hot spots, which would have otherwise required the

maintenance of large standing fleets. This is also one of the measures undertaken for cost-cutting, as a result of sequestration.

Even as the US plans for deployment around its traditional bases in the region, with a degree of readjustment, the possibility of local resentment against these, as has happened in the past cannot be ruled out. While the concept of rotation of troops can partially address this limitation, however, contingencies to further reduce permanent presence could be seen in future.³⁷ This could have an impact on the deployment of troops, air assets as well as missile defence platforms.

The US Navy has 285 ships at present and these are likely to go up to 300 by 2019.³⁸ This will be augmented by forward deployment of assets in the Asia-Pacific region. Presently, the US Navy has approximately 50 ships deployed in the region on any given day. These operate from its bases in Japan, South Korea, Guam and Singapore. Of these 50 per cent are part of its policy of Forward Deployed Naval Force (FDNF). This includes the carrier “*USS George Washington*”, nine cruisers and destroyers, four amphibious ships and three SSNs”.³⁹

The redeployment of naval assets will be supported by relocation of troops in the region. The decision to rotate 2500 marines in Australia over six years and increase the presence of ships and aircrafts, is one of the major changes that have brought about.⁴⁰ Similarly, stepping up of ties with Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia has witnessed an impetus in the recent past. While the US decided to rotate four LCS progressively into the future in Singapore, Philippines is likely to witness enhancement in the rotational policy, along with efforts to improve the capacity of its armed forces.⁴¹ A summary of changes in deployment that are likely to take place are listed as follows (Table 1):⁴²

Table 1: Deployment Changes in the US Military Forces

US Mil Component	Mil Platform	Present Deployment	New Location	Remarks
US Navy	EP-3 Signals Reconnaissance Aircraft	Afghanistan	PACOM	Move completed. Unspecified numbers
	Firescout Unmanned Vehicle	Afghanistan	PACOM	Unspecified numbers
	Electronic Surveillance Aircraft	Afghanistan	PACOM	Unspecified numbers
	P-3 Maritime Surveillance Aircraft	Middle East	PACOM	Unspecified numbers
	4th Forward Deployed Naval Force SSN		Guam	2015
	Two guided missile destroyers		Western Pacific	Threat from N Korea (moved)
	Six destroyers	Rota, Spain	Asia-Pacific	From 10 in rotation to 4 at Rota, Spain

US Mil Component	Mil Platform	Present Deployment	New Location	Remarks
	Destroyers and amphibious ships	Used for HADR	Asia-Pacific	Number not specified. Replaced by Joint High Speed Vessels and Littoral Combat Ships
	Mobile Landing Platforms, Afloat Forward Staging Ships, JHSV, LSC			To increase forward presence, with troops in rotation. Will offset reductions due to budget
Air Force	14 ground based interceptors		Alaska	Against threat from N Korea (moved)
	TYP 2 Radar		Japan	Threat from N Korea (planned)
	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System		Guam	Ballistic missile defense system against N Korea
	B-1 aircraft	Afghanistan	Asia-Pacific	
	B-2 aircraft	Afghanistan	Asia-Pacific	
	MV-22 Osprey		Japan	
Army	Troops	Afghanistan	Asia-Pacific	Strength of 60,000 will be maintained, some of which was earlier with CENTCOM
	22,500 troops	South Korea	South Korea	No cut as a result of sequestration
Marines	18,000	Asia Pacific	Asia-Pacific	Will remain based out of Iwakuni, Okinawa, Darwin and Hawaii
Military Infrastructure	Guam			Infrastructure development as strategic hub
	Marianas, Saipan, Tinian			Infrastructure development

The above data provides certain clear indicators regarding the rebalance envisaged for the US forces. A brief summation of the same reinforces the following:

- *First*, it is evident that there is indeed a shift which is taking place in terms of US military assets. However, it is also clear that this is likely to be facilitated in large measure by the withdrawal and drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even as assets are planned to be transferred from these theatres, their final move will be contingent upon the residual military assets required

in the region and second, their battle worthiness after a decade of intensive deployment.

- *Second*, the shift is also accompanied by an intra-Asia-Pacific rebalance. This will entail a larger presence of assets in Guam, Australia, Philippines and Singapore, thereby spreading them in proximity of potential hot spots.
- *Third*, core military assets like cruisers and destroyers will be relieved by non-traditional security assets like littoral combat ships. This will enhance the conventional war fighting capability of the US and simultaneously enhance its footprint against sub-conventional threats and in pursuance of humanitarian initiatives.
- *Fourth*, the rebalance will be facilitated by a forward posture that will increase efficiency, cut costs and maintain presence in critical areas of interest of the US.

Investments

The US rebalancing is likely to receive an impetus as a result of technologies and inductions, which will facilitate achievement of region specific objectives. This will include the Virginia class submarines and modules for cruise missiles. This nuclear powered deep ocean submarine has anti-submarine and shallow littoral capability.⁴³ The P-8 Maritime Surveillance Aircraft and MH-60 anti-submarine helicopters will further enhance the ability to counter envisaged submarine based threats. The surveillance and electronic warfare capability will be increased through the Broad Area Maritime Surveillance sensors on board the Global Hawk unmanned aerial vehicles and EA-18G electronic aircraft with strong jamming capability. The US Air force will deploy its fifth generation aircraft in the region to ensure capability accretion. The Army will improve upon the ballistic missile defence capability, with the initial deployments already having begun. The forces will enhance their cyber capabilities, given the increasing importance of the same in recent times. The decision to build upon the capacity of Guam as a strategic base, as also in Marianas, Saipan and Tinian will be a part of infrastructure development in the region.

Partnerships

The US derives strength in the Asia Pacific region through its network of allies and partners. Though the alliances have a Cold War history, yet their relevance has been reinforced in the recent past. These have also been augmented through partnerships, which aim at cooperation for common interests and concerns. A summary of the same is given as follows (Table 2).

Impact of Sequestration on Rebalance

The announcement of the rebalance was almost simultaneously accompanied by warning signs of deep cuts in US defence expenditure. Available indicators suggest a negative impact of cost-cutting on defence preparedness and the very effectiveness of rebalance as envisaged.

Table 2: Major US Alliances and Partnerships in the Asia-Pacific⁴⁴

Country/ Grouping	Nature of partnership	Numbers deployed	Military Relationship
Australia	Ally	Existing—193. Will increase to 2500 on rotation	Contributed to conflict in Afghanistan. Bilateral exercise: <i>Talisman Saber</i> .
Japan	Ally	36,763	Key ally in region. Largest troop location in Asia Pacific. Joint exercise: <i>Keen Sword</i> and <i>Keen Edge</i> .
South Korea	Ally	Approx. 28,500	Approx. 28,500 soldiers deployed.
Thailand	Ally	139	Joint exercise: <i>Cobra Gold</i> .
Philippines	Ally	162	Increase in rotational presence envisaged. Joint exercise: <i>Balikatan</i> .
Vietnam	Partnership	21	Increasing defence cooperation.
Singapore	Partnership	150	US employs air and port facilities. Four LCS will be deployed.
Taiwan	Partnership	?	Largest contributor of arms to Taiwan. Helps maintain status quo.
New Zealand	Partnership	12	Washington Declaration will enhance security cooperation.
Indonesia	Partnership	28	Increase in defence cooperation. 140 exercises conducted in 2011.
India	Partnership	33	Key provider of arms and technology. Substantial increase in defence cooperation in recent past. A variety of exercises like annual Malabar series, Shatrujeet, Cope Thunder, Yudh Abhyas. Defence sales to India more than \$ 8 billion.
Myanmar	Partnership		Military to military relations have commenced.

With President Obama signing the Sequester Bill, March 2013 brought home the full impact of budget cuts, especially for the US defence forces. The new law could result in cuts to the tune of \$ 500 billion over the next decade.⁴⁵ Despite the obvious impact of budget cuts, there have been categorical statements reinforcing the determination of the administration to go ahead with the rebalance and protect it from the negative fallout of sequestration. Speaking at Seoul, Ashton Carter said: “In the United States, our commitment to the alliance is part of our Asia-Pacific rebalance and we will ensure that all the pieces of our defense [*sic*] relationship continue to move forward, and I should say this will occur despite the budgetary pressures in the United States. The Asia-Pacific rebalance is a priority. It’s a historic priority. We have the resources to accomplish it and no matter what happens in the budget debates that go on in the United States, our commitment

to the Asia-Pacific rebalance and our commitment to the United States-ROK Alliance will remain firm.”⁴⁶

However, this confidence has been belied by the concerns voiced by a number of key functionaries both within the government and armed forces. Carter himself in a statement before the Senate Armed Forces Committee, on February 12, 2013 outlined the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific as one of the pillars of the US defence strategy. He went on to point out that if the plan for sequestration was to go ahead, “we (the US) will need to make substantial changes to our strategy that will directly diminish our military strength”.⁴⁷ Ash Carter suggested that the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 will lead to a nine per cent budget cut for the financial year 2013, adversely impacting all military activities, including operational effectiveness.⁴⁸ He categorically informed the House Armed Forces Committee that “one of the ways our strategy would need to change is we couldn’t do what we wanted to do in the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific theatre...All that is put in doubt and put in jeopardy if these further budget cuts go on”.⁴⁹ As per Carter, some of the short term impacts of sequestration are as follows:⁵⁰

- Most flying units will be below acceptable levels of readiness.
- One-third reduction in operations of Navy ships and aircraft in the Asia-Pacific and gaps in availability of Marine Amphibious Readiness Groups.

Sequestration could witness \$ 50-55 billion reduction in annual budgets till 2021, which in turn is likely to adversely impact modernisation efforts.⁵¹

The impact of the sequestration has already begun on individual services of the US Armed Forces and warnings have come regarding the fallout of sequestration on the rebalance strategy. Admiral Samuel J. Locklear said that the budget cuts “limited our flexibility to manage and have the potential to undermine our strategic rebalance momentum”.⁵² Locklear described the immediate impact as a mere 50 per cent effectiveness and the long term as an “avalanche”.

The US Air Force has begun grounding a third of its fleet. Air Force General Mike Hostage said this would be done on a “rotating basis”.⁵³ The US Marine Corps voiced similar sentiments with General Jim Amos saying that “every reduction that we make from this point forward will cut into bone—we are beyond muscle”.⁵⁴

In addition to the ongoing operations in Afghanistan, this is likely to have an impact on future deployments in the Asia Pacific as well. Admiral Greenert of the US Navy indicated that they had already cancelled the deployment of a ship to the Asia-Pacific as a result of the cuts. He added, “Overall, due to reduced training and maintenance, about two-thirds of the fleet will be less than fully mission capable and not certified for major combat operations.”⁵⁵

Sequestration is also likely to dent the credibility of the US amongst its allies and partners, especially given its focus on the war on terror during the last decade, which saw its influence recede in the Asia-Pacific region.

Conclusion

The process of rebalance or the US pivot to the Asia-Pacific has started taking shape, and it will undoubtedly remain the cornerstone of US strategy. It will reinforce focus on the region for the foreseeable future. However, while this paper focuses attention on the military aspects of the rebalance, it needs to be emphasised that the tendency to equate economic and military strength in figurative terms tends to confuse numbers with the ability to influence events. US rebalancing is not as much about increasing its numbers in the region as the desire to shape the course of events to its advantage and protection of the security architecture created by it. For the US, besides its qualitative edge in technology and proven military capability, the network of alliances and partnerships is the most important factor to lead the rebalance.

On the other hand, in addition to building military capability, China's inability to effectively influence events is dictated by a heavy reliance on foreign trade, especially with Southeast and East Asia. However, the lack of allies who can help further its desire to dominate the region is in stark contrast to the US. What the US will lose in relative military terms to China as an individual country, it will more than make up for it through its system of alliances and partnerships—military as well as diplomatic—which is bound to impact its ability to influence events. “A smart-power narrative for the twenty-first century is not about maximizing power or preserving hegemony. It is about finding ways to combine resources in successful strategies in the new context of power diffusion and ‘the rise of the rest’.”⁵⁶ This, as the rebalancing approach suggests, will form the basis of the US strategy for the region.

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4

Restructuring the Maritime “Pivot”—Latest Developments in the US Rebalance to Asia

Abhijit Singh

Abstract: Recent developments in Asia are testing the foundational features of the US maritime “Pivot”. With political instability in West Asia drawing American attention and resources, Washington has been forced to confront its deepest fears: its inability to adequately meet the challenge of China growing maritime power that now threatens the US dominance of the Asia-Pacific. Despite the fast-altering dynamics, however, there has been some innovative thinking at work to ensure that the Pivot is appropriately adjusted to address the emerging challenges. This paper highlights some of the latest developments in the US maritime rebalance to Asia. It charts out the evolving contours of a new strategy that appears to be “rebalancing the Pivot to Asia”.

Introduction

In light of the recent political events in Asia, speculation is rife that the US may be forced to slow down its Pivot to the Asia-Pacific.¹ With the crisis in Syria still unresolved and tensions persisting in the Middle East over Iran’s nuclear program, America’s rebalancing strategy seems to have been somewhat undermined. To complicate matters, an increasingly assertive Chinese Navy in the Western Pacific is making the US traditional allies in Southeast Asia deeply anxious. The slow realisation that its strategic manoeuvre to East Asia may not follow a planned trajectory seems to have induced a degree of caution in Washington, under growing pressure to bring the strategy to fruition without provoking China.²

Notwithstanding the rigours of the challenge, however, the US has been trying to re-align the fundamentals of the strategy to help achieve its broader strategic objectives. To protect its vital interests, Washington seems to be in the process of formulating a ‘hedging strategy’, wherein it is taking the necessary steps to be relevant in the Middle East, while continuing to wield decisive influence in the Asia-Pacific.³ The new strategy accords equal importance to the military,

diplomatic and economic components of the Pivot, and is driven not only by the need to preserve America's institutional primacy and financial monopoly but also to ensure that the US Military has a regional opponent worth dominating.⁴

To be sure, the thrust of the US Pivot, so far, has primarily been on its military dimension.⁵ While the Obama administration has striven to project the 'rebalance' to Asia as a "whole of government" endeavour—with a significant economic and diplomatic facet—it is the maritime Pivot that has received the lion's share of official attention.⁶ In part, this is on account of the 'transformational' elements in the military plan involving new deployments of troops and equipment in the Asia-Pacific.⁷ Equally, however, this is the result of a perception of US ineffectiveness in dealing with Chinese aggression in Southeast and Northeast Asia. To add to America's woes, the adverse fiscal climate is making the rebalance strategy appear more vulnerable than ever.⁸

At the heart of the prevailing ambiguity about the maritime Pivot are issues about its usefulness and essential sustainability. As a strategic construct, analysts have constantly wondered if the US rebalance has a viable and practical end objective. Is it a comprehensive and coherent plan for strategic dominance? Or just a tactical manoeuvre, hurriedly planned and implemented, which now runs the risk of crumbling under the weight of political and logistical dissonances? Does the US have a plan to firmly deal with Chinese assertion in East Asia? Or will an American strategy aimed at keeping China in check, paradoxically, need Beijing's support to be successful?

In many ways, these are fundamental issues that predate America's present predicament. In light of the current impediments, however, they raise new doubts about the Pivot's strategic coherence. This, in turn, has created a stark imperative for the Obama administration to bring greater clarity to the policy's essential premises and purposes.

To begin with, the US administration officials reiterate the Pivot's status as a long-term national strategy. Not only, they aver, are its strategic fundamentals sound, it is—by its inherent nature—durable and sustainable. America's political functionaries emphasise the policy's achievable end objectives, not least because it has been meticulously planned and judiciously implemented.⁹ By their assessment, plans are well on track and gaining in momentum.

In order to assess the credibility of these assertions, a reassessment of the operational viability of the maritime rebalance is in order. In military operational terms, the Pivot's two principal military end objectives are as follows:¹⁰

- Shifting of military capacities—especially naval and air capabilities involving surface ships, including eventually aircraft carriers, intelligence and surveillance capabilities and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)—from the Afghanistan conflict and other theatres of operation to the Asia-Pacific.
- Deployment of 60 percent of US naval capabilities in the broad Asia-Pacific/Indo-Pacific region, instead of 50 percent as in the past. This will involve

a net increase of one carrier, seven destroyers, 10 Littoral Combat Ships (LCSs) and two submarines.

US defence officials believe substantive progress has been made in the pursuit of these objectives. Indeed, recent US Military moves in the Asia-Pacific have significantly advanced American interests. In Australia, a company-size unit of 200-250 US marines has been rotated to an existing Australian military facility at Darwin.¹¹ Washington and Canberra are also said to be discussing greater US Navy access to Australia's Indian Ocean naval bases, with an agreement arrived at to deploy an Australian warship in a US carrier strike group in the Western Pacific. Meanwhile, the first of four littoral combat ships have arrived at Singapore, and the Philippines and the US are discussing new military cooperation options. This includes the rotation of American surveillance aircraft in the Philippines, regular deployment of rotational troops and staging frequent joint exercises.¹² The US Navy's significant technology advancements too seem to foreshadow a reinvigorated maritime Pivot. These include the recent launch of a remotely-piloted aircraft from an aircraft carrier and the successful trials of a directed energy weapon (a solid-state laser) to be installed aboard ships in 2014.¹³

The US Navy isn't the only agency to have undertaken concrete initiatives in operationalising the maritime Pivot. The US Air Force has made its own contribution by reaching an agreement with the Royal Australian Air Force to position US Military aircraft at the latter's facilities. To service its additional commitments, the US Air Force has allocated 60 percent of its overseas-based forces to the Asia-Pacific region—including lethal and surveillance UAVs, new fighters and bombers and reconnaissance cyber and space capabilities,¹⁴ and even announced plans to deploy 60 percent of its space and cyber capabilities on the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁵

Even so, there is no detracting from the many difficulties that the US has been facing in sustaining the Pivot. Since the Strategic Guidance on January 2012,¹⁶ the US has faced structural and logistical impediments in executing the rebalance. These include increased political disagreement with China, inability to conclude an agreement on shifting marines from Okinawa to Guam¹⁷ and a plethora of safety issues with expensive American assets such as the Osprey aircraft resulting in reduced operational efficiency.¹⁸ The enduring nature of the constraints appears to have convinced US Military planners that the rebalance cannot succeed without a more focused approach that enlists the support and assistance of regional players.¹⁹

Regional Responses to the Pivot

To co-opt other stakeholders into the broader Pivot strategy, the US needs a practical and effective plan. The nature of cooperation it expects from regional states, however, appears premised on their initial responses to the Pivot. Since its announcement, the rebalance has elicited fundamentally dissimilar reactions

from regional states.²⁰ These can be broadly classified into three distinct categories:

The first is one of “staunch opposition” exemplified by China’s response to what it sees as a clear example of a “China-containment” strategy.²¹ Beijing’s strident criticism of the US strategy in the Asia-Pacific appears driven by fears of a reduction of its own strategic influence in the region—a reflection of the People’s Liberation Army-Navy’s (PLA-N’s) growing maritime ambitions.²² China has adopted a novel strategy of nuancing its disapproval of the rebalance in a manner to appear rational and objective. To deny the US a ready-made justification for increasing its strategic presence in the Pacific, Chinese media and government agencies have alternated between ‘caustic criticism’ and ‘measured disapproval’ in opposing the US maritime strategy in the region.²³

In the second category are those states that explicitly support the rebalance. The Philippines, Japan and South Korea—embroiled in protracted maritime territorial disputes with China—have officially come out in favour of the policy,²⁴ and lead the clamour for greater American security presence in the Pacific. An exception to this general description of states fully supporting the Pivot has been Singapore that has qualified its embrace of close strategic cooperation with the US as premised on the latter’s “stabilizing [*sic*] influence” in the region.²⁵ More broadly, however, all such states believe that the rebalance is a strategic necessity in restoring the security balance in the Pacific.

Finally, there are states that were ambivalent about the rebalance. Spanning the vast expanse of the Asia-Pacific and South Asia, this rather substantial bunch—despite close individual ties with the US—has been more circumspect in offering their unqualified support to the policy. Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and India are examples of such states. Wary of having to choose between Washington and Beijing these states have expressed their reluctance to be seen to be siding with the former.²⁶ Paradoxically, in their strategic deliberations with the US, most of these nations have expressed satisfaction at the improvement shown by Washington in its commitment to the Asia-Pacific region. While publicly empathising with them, the US has sought to enlist the support of these ‘swing states’, whose cooperation is deemed critical for the success of the Pivot.

The “Air-Sea Battle” Concept

Central to the Pivot’s coherence has been the enunciation of the “Air Sea Battle” (ASB) concept—a military operational measure that has for some time been causing China great anxiety. With the aim of protecting US allies against aggressive Chinese posturing, Washington had formalised a Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) for the Asia-Pacific.²⁷ At the heart of the concept, lies the ASB, which is essentially a method of improving the joint operating effectiveness of the U.S. Navy and Air Force units, with the final objective of counterbalancing China’s anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) strategies in

Northeast and Southeast Asia. Since its initial announcement,²⁸ however, the ASB has been perceived as a dangerous idea with the potential of sparking a full-fledged war with China.²⁹ In order to clarify misperceptions about the original JOAC, the US Military in May 2013 released the new “Air-Sea Battle” document that shows the concept as a much-evolved idea since its original articulation.³⁰ The new document validates the ASB’s objective as preserving “access to global commons” and “breaking the enemy’s kill chain”, dispelling—in some measure—the pervasive notion of it being a punitive measure aimed solely at destroying enemy core capabilities.³¹

The new approach emphasises attacks on the sensors and weapons that an adversary would need for a successful area-denial strategy.³² It seeks to take advantage of the adversary’s vulnerabilities as it tries to detect and target US Military assets by: disrupting command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems; destroying weapon launchers (including aircraft, ships and missile sites) and defeating any weapons and adversary launches.³³ China, however, continues to see the ASB as a provocative idea—demonstrative of the US Military’s “change of adversary from international terrorists to the PLA”.³⁴

New Deployments and Agreements

After the US released its Strategic Guidance Document in January 2012, which pledged minimal cuts in the size of the Navy, a plan was drawn up to redeploy American forces freed from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Under the plan, the US Army’s 25th Infantry Division and the 1st and 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force are to return to their home stations in the Pacific theatre.³⁵ In the wake of the massive cutbacks to the defence budget, however, the US seems to have reworked the original plan. The US Military presence is now likely to be more focused on the southern part of the Western Pacific, and will have a more distributed presence. Also, US troop deployments will now be more ‘flexible’ in form—smaller, more agile, expeditionary, self-sustaining and self-contained forces that would carry out specific operational missions.³⁶ The security arrangements with regional partners will emphasise greater military integration.

In contrast to the earlier reliance on large permanent bases in Japan and South Korea, the US forces in the South will now be employed mainly through ‘rotational deployments’ of military units to different parts of the region. The idea is to have a leaner and more effective military presence and avoid large expenditures on maintaining permanent new bases. In keeping with the new plan, the forthcoming deployments will have a strong rotational component. This would apply to the four LCSs in Singapore (with the first crew change on *USS Freedom*—the first LCS in East Asia—having occurred in September 2013);³⁷ the US marines planned to be positioned in Darwin, Australia³⁸ and the first Army attack helicopter reconnaissance squadron deployed to South Korea.³⁹ Additionally, efforts are being made to upgrade an airfield for P-8 surveillance

aircraft and Global Hawk drones on the Cocos Islands of Australia.⁴⁰ The US Navy is also looking at a possible expansion of HMAS Stirling, the Royal Australian Navy's primary base in Western Australia—to accommodate US warships and attack submarines, and a new Australian fleet base in Brisbane (Australia) to accommodate US ships and submarines.⁴¹

The bulk of US efforts are aimed at achieving greater operational support from its partners and allies in the Asia-Pacific.⁴² These include discussions to substantially expand naval access agreements, increase training exercises and diversify engagement with foreign militaries. Recent developments also indicate that the US is reinvigorating its formal US alliances—particularly with Australia, Japan, the Philippines and South Korea—as well as the relationship with Singapore. Through alliances and formal arrangements in Northeast and Southeast Asia, the US seeks to broaden its presence and gain better control of its operational areas, as well as greater leverage over the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs). The network of bilateral military partnerships and alliances on its periphery also acts as a potential counterweight to China.⁴³

Besides regular allies and supporters, Washington is working to co-opt other partners like India, New Zealand, Vietnam and Indonesia.⁴⁴ While the first three states have a developing military relationship with the US, Indonesia has lately developed a closer convergence with US political and maritime interests in the region. Manila has recently been actively involved in regional diplomacy—reflected amply in its leading role in fora like the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) plus and the East Asia Summit (EAS)—and its prominent role in maritime cooperation in the region.⁴⁵ Indonesia has led the discussions during the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) that have supported a composite dialogue on addressing maritime disputes in the South China Sea and Eastern Pacific. In April 2014, Indonesia is due to host a multilateral naval exercise between ASEAN and eight of its dialogue partners,⁴⁶ and a Counter-Terrorism Exercise (CTX) under the aegis of the ADMM plus.⁴⁷

Expectedly, America's strategic endeavours have caused deep concern in China. US efforts to strengthen its military force posture in Asia by reinforcing security ties with allies and partners and enhancing the role of regional institutions are viewed by many in Beijing as strategic moves aimed at constraining China's orbit of influence, and as the principal cause of regional instability and insecurity.⁴⁸

Rebalancing the Maritime "Pivot" to Asia

While some of America's Southeast Asian allies have been critical of its security commitment as being inconsistent with the political promise of confronting Chinese aggression, Washington has been emphasising the need for a balanced relationship with Beijing.⁴⁹ The US efforts to 'keep the peace' have taken on added urgency with the growing number of provocative incidents in the East Sea and the South China Sea.

The US now appears to be shaping a narrative that detracts from geopolitical competition and emphasises cooperation with China. Accordingly, Pivot plans are being carefully adjusted to manoeuvre America into a position from where it can exert control over strategic spaces in the Pacific without aggravating Chinese sensibilities. In operational terms, however, the new maritime initiative appears to be a tactical counter-balancing move, where the US has signalled its willingness to cooperate with the PLA-N in areas to lower tensions and where it may be absolutely necessary to do so in mutual interest.⁵⁰

In keeping with the 'balanced posture' template, the US Navy has been promoting a maritime convergence of sorts with the PLA-N. Since September 2013, there have been a series of interactions between the US and China aimed at forming a working relationship. In early September, an operational interaction was arranged between three PLA-N and US Navy ships at Hawaii.⁵¹ Three Chinese naval ships—Qingdao, a Luhu-class destroyer; Linyi, a Jiangkai-class frigate, and Hongzhehu, a Fuqing-class fleet oiler, carried out coordinated exercises with the American guided missile cruiser, USS Lake Erie, close to the Hawaii coast⁵²—a rare, if not unprecedented interaction.

Concurrently, the US sent out an invitation to Wu Shengli, the Commander-in-Chief of the PLA-N to visit Washington⁵³—significantly, only three weeks after China's new Minister of Defence, Chang Wanquan, toured both the Pacific Command in Hawaii. During the discussions that followed, both China and the US expressed the need for more interactions and exercises to strengthen their maritime relationship.⁵⁴ The developing bonhomie seemed borne out by exercises a few days later between the USS Mason, a guided missile cruiser, and PLA-N ships Harbin (destroyer) and Weishanhu (replenishment oiler). The ships conducted evolutions requiring a high degree of coordination, including combined Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS) operations, live-fire drills and cross-deck landings.⁵⁵

Despite realising the importance of cooperation in the nautical domain, however, China and the US still appear wary of fully trusting each other. China's continuing assertiveness in Southeast and Northeast Asia suggests that it remains apprehensive of Washington's attempts to expand the scope and intensity of its military engagement in the Asia-Pacific.⁵⁶ It has good reason to be suspicious, as the past twelve months have witnessed a noticeable rise in high level military exchanges and exercises involving the US and Southeast Asian states.

An illustration of the expansion of military exercises is the annual Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) Exercise with Malaysia. For many years, CARAT has included limited exercises between the US and Malaysia, which rarely involved other nations. In July 2013, however, when the two nations participated in the 19th CARAT exercise, they were joined by eight other Asia-Pacific countries.⁵⁷ Significantly, the exercise included *USS Freedom*, a new LCS deployed in Singapore.⁵⁸ Another instance of the persistent efforts of the US to include more regional countries in joint exercises is the recent "Cobra Gold"

exercise, which brought together 13,000 personnel from Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea.⁵⁹ But the US is keen to not let regional endeavours appear like an “anti-China” strategy. Therefore, in its largest multilateral exercise, RIMPAC, to be held in 2014, China has been invited to join as a first time participant.⁶⁰

A Tailored Accommodation

In the event, the emerging alignment between the US and China in the Asia-Pacific has taken the form of a tailored ‘strategic accommodation’ in the far-Eastern Pacific and Indian Ocean regions—areas that aren’t mutually contested, and where it would augur well for both to combine resources and assets.⁶¹ The US Navy is expanding its presence in large pockets of Southeast and Northeast Asia where Chinese territorial claims are contested by other states, and focusing on improving its ‘maritime relationships’ with friendly nations.

The most interesting aspect of the reworked strategy is the ‘rebalance within Asia’.⁶² In order to make up for shortage of resources and personnel, the US plans to undertake a redistribution of assets within the Asia-Pacific—both by stationing more American ships and troops in the Southern Pacific, and by mobilising greater regional support in terms of resource commitments and basing arrangements. The plan is to get US allies to offer basing and material support for maritime security endeavours in the region, in exchange for greater financial assistance from the US.⁶³

Over the past few months, top US political functionaries have visited Southeast Asia in an endeavour to put the new plan into motion. In a visit to Kuala Lumpur in August 2013, Chuck Hagel, the US Defence Secretary, proposed a potential 50 per cent increase in the Pentagon’s funding to support foreign militaries and training in Southeast Asia.⁶⁴ A few weeks later, John Kerry, the US Secretary of State, visited the region to participate in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, ASEAN and EAS meetings.⁶⁵ For their part, despite the disappointment of not finding President Obama attend the regional meets, America’s Southeast Asian partners seemed reassured by US offers of greater military expertise and weapons sales—a material incentive to share the burden of regional maritime security efforts.⁶⁶

New Basing Facilities

While the US alliances with Japan, South Korea and Australia remain the cornerstone of security in the Asia-Pacific, the US realises the importance of expanding its basing facilities in the region. Bases abroad have always held a special appeal for the US, and despite being somewhat diminished by domestic opposition, they are still important manifestations of US foreign policy. For America, not only is a base a useful way of demonstrating the depth of solidarity between itself and the host country, it is an ideal platform to project US power

and influence.⁶⁷ Bases therefore have the potential to deter the US adversaries in a way that occasional force deployments cannot. More importantly, because of the effort and expense needed in building and sustaining bases, they are reflective of the real intentions of the US security policy in the Asia-Pacific.

The Southeast Asian state that may arguably be considered the focal point of the US rebalance is the Philippines.⁶⁸ In July 2013, Washington began serious consultations with Manila for long-term military bases in the country, pushing for a 20-year basing agreement.⁶⁹ The US proposal is to have rotational presence in the Philippines. After the unsavoury experience of running long-term bases in South Korea and Japan, where its military presence led to heightened domestic unrest, the US is looking for access only on a 'semi-permanent' rotational basis (rather than a full-fledged military base). But while the US offer to base its own troops is an attractive one, Manila is said to be weighing the legal implications of such a decision very carefully.

The US has also been increasing its military presence in Australia. America's force posture initiative—announced during President Obama's trip to Canberra in Nov. 2011—has already resulted in the rotation of two companies of Marines through Darwin. The size of the rotation will expand to 1,100 Marine Corps personnel by 2014 and to 2,500 by 2016 (a full Marine Air Ground Task Force).⁷⁰

Significantly, the US and Australia have agreed to plans for greater access by American military aircraft to the Royal Australian Air Force facilities. The two militaries are also in talks to allow greater US Navy access to Australia's Indian Ocean naval bases, and Canberra has agreed to deploy an Australian warship in a US carrier strike group in the Western Pacific. In Nov. 2012, during the annual AUSMIN meeting in Washington, Australia reaffirmed its commitment to the US force posture in the Asia-Pacific by accepting increased basing of US forces and a promise to operate more closely with the US across Asia.⁷¹ Given the significance of Southeast Asia to the 'rebalance', the US has also been increasing its military engagement with Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Brunei. The US Pacific Fleet has been playing an important role in leveraging its partners' military expertise and capabilities.

It is, however, Japan—America's most dependable—that has contributed most significantly to the Pivot. Tokyo has been strident in its desire to expand security cooperation with Southeast Asian nations involved in territorial standoffs with China. It has actively provided military aid and played a key role in coordinating "territorial issues and ocean policies" with other regional states.⁷² In August 2013, Japan agreed to host a US X-band missile defence radar near Kyoto—a move likely to lessen the burden on US Aegis ships.⁷³ Tokyo has announced the formation of an American-style national security council, a precursor to a more proactive security posture and a possible decision to send Japanese troops overseas—much to the chagrin of China.⁷⁴

For its part, the US has been extremely supportive of Japan's security endeavours. Washington has promised to strengthen Tokyo's security posture by

positioning two squadrons of MV-22 aircraft and P-8 maritime patrol aircraft, and rotationally deploying Global Hawk UAVs in Japan.⁷⁵ By 2017, the US also plans to position a squadron of F-35B Joint Strike Fighters—the aircraft's first deployment outside American territory.

Developing 'strategic hubs' in the Pacific

With its focus firmly on an "offshore maritime role", Washington is now attempting a dispersed military presence in the Pacific. This involves a shift of defence resources from the Northwest Pacific (Japan, South Korea) towards the Southwest Pacific. The announcement of the relocation of 4,500 US Marines to Guam, the rotation of Marines through Darwin and the basing of at least four LCSs in Singapore and the rotation of troops through the Philippines are all part of the larger game plan of a spreading out military presence and assets in the Pacific.

The end objective of the rebalance is for the US to have a geographically distributed, operationally resilient and politically sustainable presence.⁷⁶ A key element of the strategy is to develop the US territory of Guam as an alternate 'strategic hub' to Okinawa that hosts a bulk of the US marine troops in Japan. In keeping with the plan, the US Military has been building up forward-deployed forces in Guam to increase operational presence, deterrence and power projection for potential responses to crises and contingencies in support of US allies in the Asia-Pacific. But the development of Guam has also been catalysed by domestic discontent in Okinawa that has necessitated the shifting out of the US marine forces.⁷⁷

Following years of protests by the local population in Okinawa, which saw the US occupation of the Futenma Marine Corps Air Station as an abiding hazard, the US and Japan settled on a Realignment Roadmap which included a build-up of Guam as a facility for hosting marines. Japan had agreed to contribute 60 per cent of the cost in an endeavour planned to relocate 8,000 marines from Okinawa to Guam by 2014, including the III Marine Expeditionary Force at Futenma Air Station.⁷⁸ The eventual relocation of marines to Guam was however held up because of lack of agreement between Japan and the US on the relocation of the Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF)—an equally important component of the broader plan for repositioning marines at Okinawa.

In February 2013, the US and Japan agreed to 'adjust' the Roadmap and separate the move of marines from the plan for the FRF, in order to make progress separately. A US-Japan Joint Statement of April 2012 specified that out of about 9,000 marines to be relocated from Okinawa, about 5,000 marines would move to Guam.⁷⁹ As per the new agreement, Japan has agreed to contribute \$3.1 billion of the revised estimated cost of \$8.6 billion.⁸⁰ This ends the stalemate over moving marines to Guam and represents a significant step forward in bringing Pivot plans to an early and effective culmination.

A robust Marine Corps Presence

For the US, a key variable of the 'rebalance' is the presence of marine forces and heavy-lift aviation assets in the Asia-Pacific. Latest developments indicate that the "tactics" of the rebalance is increasingly being structured around the Marine Corps. While the only permanently forward-deployed Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) of the Marine Corps in the Pacific is the US 31stMEU, plans have been put in motion to increase the marine deployments in Guam and Australia.⁸¹

An increased deployment of the Osprey-F-35B aircraft is an integral part of the plan for enhanced marine forces presence. Since the plan envisages basing rotational forces, there is a need for airlift with greater reach and speed—key aspects of the Osprey aircraft.⁸² With its superior lift capacity and increased operating ranges, the F-35B is likely to play an important role in future contingencies in the region. The US has already deployed 24 of these aircraft to Futenma Base in Okinawa.⁸³ Reportedly, in June 2013, during the US-Japan joint exercise 'Dawn Blitz', which was held off the California coast, the MV-22 Osprey was successfully landed on a Japanese helicopter destroyer.⁸⁴ The joint exercises, which included US marines and personnel from the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF), were specifically aimed at practising amphibious assaults on occupied islands. China was supposed to have been so alarmed by the exercises that it held a counter manoeuvre with Russia a month later.

China, meanwhile, has been developing its own sealift capabilities. In May 2013, the PLA-N took delivery of the first of the Ukrainian-built Zubr large Landing Craft Air Cushion (LCAC) vehicle.⁸⁵ Developed by the former Soviet Union, the Zubris a hovercraft that can lift about 500 troops or up to 150 tons of armour, weapons and material up to speeds of 66 miles per hour. At least three more are expected initially, but some reports suggest China may build many more of an indigenous version.⁸⁶ Increased US Marine Corps deployment in the Pacific may have, in-fact, served as a trigger for the PLA-N to improve its sealift and anti-access capabilities, hoping to deter any aggressive moves by the US and Japan in the East China Sea.

Responding to an Aggressive Chinese Military Posture

Concerned about the US rebalance, China has also been hardening its military posture in the Western Pacific.⁸⁷ Following President Xi Jinping's ascent to power in 2012, Beijing has been stressing maritime operations that strengthen China's sovereignty claims over contested maritime territory.⁸⁸ As a result, the PLA-N has become more assertive in its claims, especially in its dispute with Japan over the Senkaku islands. In addition, Beijing has rationalised the maritime organisational structure with the intension of streamlining command-and-control, developing synergy and coordination and maintaining an effective hold over its perceived maritime zones. In February 2013, Beijing passed a law that brought the various maritime agencies under a single administrative authority with the

aim of improving efficiency in undertaking coastal operations. China's neighbours saw the measure as a political move meant to demonstrate Chinese jurisdiction over contested maritime territory.⁸⁹

For the US and its Southeast Asian allies, the more worrying development has been the PLA-N's growing attempts at strengthening its operational posture in the Asia-Pacific region. For long, the Chinese Navy has withstood the US attempts to contain it within the so-called first Island chain.⁹⁰ The PLA-N leadership now seems intent on developing the capability to break out of the US Navy strategic grip over the Pacific littorals. In late-October, Chinese warships and submarines "sliced through" passages in the Japanese archipelago and out into the Western Pacific for 15 days of war games.⁹¹ The drills, named Manoeuvre 5, were apparently the biggest exercises held in recent years, and reportedly included land-based bombers and surveillance aircraft which flew missions past Japan to support the navy units.⁹²

In official commentaries, senior PLA officers are said to have boasted the "dismemberment" of the so-called first island chain.⁹³ Beijing's military strategists saw the exercises as "a message to Japan and the United States that they will no longer be able to contain China within the first island chain".⁹⁴ The rapid expansion of the PLA-N's area of operations is, however, nothing less than a seismic shift in Asia's military balance.

To nullify Chinese moves, Japan recently announced that it is conducting an exercise that places Type-88 surface-to-ship missiles on Miyako Island.⁹⁵ It is the first time Japan has conducted such an exercise, centred on the strait between Okinawa and Miyako—a common access route to the Pacific by the Chinese Navy. The development also supports analysis that the US and its allies may be on the course to exercising a form of 'offshore control' that enables the enforcement of a distant blockade on China in the event of conflict.⁹⁶

Amphibious Assault Ships and Exercises

The efficacy of the US Pivot is, in significant part, being assisted by the JMSDF—now being cast in the mould of a "dynamic defence" force with growing capabilities to counter China's A2/AD strategies in maritime Asia.⁹⁷ In 2013, for the first time in many years, Tokyo increased its military outlay (albeit marginally), while announcing plans to reposition and re-equip its military.⁹⁸ Reports suggest that the SDF, which until recently emphasised defence of the northern islands, is now said to be in the early stages of redeploying its forces to the West to counter the sharply increased tempo of Chinese naval operations near the Senkaku islands.⁹⁹

Significantly, there are plans to introduce an amphibious landing force, akin to the US marines, for the defence and recovery of outlying islands being assaulted or captured by adversarial forces.¹⁰⁰ Japan's Defence Ministry is reportedly considering the creation of a special "Island Assault Unit" to help it deal with the 'China threat' to its Southern Islands.¹⁰¹ According to a recent announcement,

the first 700 members of the 3,000-strong force will be drawn from the army and would supplement the SDF Western Army Infantry Regiment. The latter comprises Special Forces modelled on the US Marine Corps that are presently responsible for the protection of the Senkakus. To augment the Island assault capability, there are plans to purchase four amphibious assault vehicles.¹⁰²

While Japan's military inductions and marine force plans have been known for some time, what has come as a surprise for China is the pro-activism in the SDF's security role.¹⁰³ Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's announcement of a new National Security Strategy and a review of the National Defence Guidelines has Beijing deeply worried.¹⁰⁴ Many in China see this as a measure aimed at revising the Constitution and positioning the SDF as a full military—with total freedom to engage in offensive operations, presently prohibited under the Japanese Constitution. China is also concerned about Abe's declaration in July 2013 that his government was studying the possibility of giving the SDF the authority to mount offensive attacks on enemy bases.¹⁰⁵

Worried by Japan's moves to improve territorial defence in the East Sea, China is now attempting to build its first amphibious assault ship capable of carrying multiple hovercraft and helicopters.¹⁰⁶ Reports suggest that construction of the 35,000 tonnes ship has begun, and that it may be in commission as early as 2015.¹⁰⁷ China already has three Type 071 amphibious warfare ships, and is currently building another one, but it has not yet had such a large-scale ship designed to carry many helicopters and landing vessels. By all accounts, the new ship could be used to assert China's territorial claims over the disputed Senkaku islands.

India and the US Rebalance

The establishment of a long-term partnership between Washington and New Delhi is widely perceived as a crucial imperative for the success of the Pivot. The US sees India as an economic and security anchor in the region, and has for some time now been urging the latter to “Look East, Engage East and Act East”.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Washington perceives strong complementarities between its Pivot strategy and New Delhi's Look East policy, and has been urging a joint India-US security approach in the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁰⁹ In all recent high-level visits to New Delhi US political functionaries have made a mention of India's Look East and a security role for New Delhi in the broader Indo-Pacific.

For its part, India—after a prolonged phase of strategic hedging on the issue—appears to be developing some internal consensus on supporting the US Pivot. Speaking during the Joint Commander's Conference in November 2013, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh flagged concerns over instability around India following redeployment of military assets.¹¹⁰ These anxieties, he mentioned, were a result of the US Pivot to the Asia-Pacific and territorial disputes over the South China Sea. The Prime Minister's pitch for maritime security in the Indo-Pacific was more than evident in his emphasis of the need for Indian strategists to chart

a steady course through a fluid and uncertain strategic situation in India's neighbourhood.¹¹¹

But while New Delhi is willing to back the US on its Pivot strategy, it has made it clear that it is not open to the idea of becoming an American ally.¹¹² India's essential strategic orientation precludes such a possibility. Similarly, India is willing to consider a strategic partnership with China, but only after developing a good working relationship with Beijing.

Conclusion

The eventual purpose of the Pivot is to establish US pre-eminence in the Asia-Pacific without having to resort to any outward display of strength. In essence, the long-term strategic plan is aimed at facilitating an American economic revival and a reassertion of its flagging dominance in the Asia-Pacific. While this entails blunting China's growing assertiveness, the US realises its aims must be achieved without causing conflict. Given the enormous pressure from other Southeast Asian states, Washington can ill-afford a strategic accommodation with Beijing (neither a G-2 nor a "great-power" relationship). Nor can it afford to radically alter the pivot's essential trajectory. Its efforts are, therefore, focused on finessing the existing plan to make it more effective, yet less aggressive. In that sense, the new Pivot appears to be an attempt to walk a cautious line between China and American allies in the Asia-Pacific.

The new Pivot, it appears, is being used as a metaphorical enabler to forge a narrative that the US firmly controls and uses to its utmost advantage. Its end objective, apparently, is to maintain the status quo in the Asia-Pacific and get ASEAN nations to collectively apply pressure on China to sign up to a code-of-conduct in the South China Sea.¹¹³ Until then, US security assurances against growing Chinese power might not be diluted. At the same time, Washington is being careful to not openly bait Beijing, whose cooperation may prove crucial in establishing a credible and sustainable security order in Asia.

The re-worked plan signals the US determination to maintain force levels and defence capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region—no matter how substantial the challenges confronting the US might be. The re-adjusted Pivot may eventually turn out to be more of a political and diplomatic 'balancing act' than a strictly 'military manoeuvre'.

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5

Military Dimensions of US Pivot and Its Implications

P.K. Gautam

Introduction

The paper begins with the deployment pattern of the US Military in the region. It lists the main military instruments for implementation of the pivot policy followed by evolution of the key concept of Air Sea Battle (ASB) at the core of the US Military posturing. The response of China is followed by implications and further areas of research and debate including a brief mention of relating ancient Indian strategic thought to explain the current situation.

Deployment Pattern

The US pivot to the Asia-Pacific was announced as the future defence strategy in January 2012: “US President Barrack Obama travelled to Australia and launched the military component of the US pivot with great fanfare.”¹ The President explained that after 10 years of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military would shift focus to the Asia-Pacific. This change was motivated by the need to respond to the growing sophistication of China’s military inventory and reassure its allies in the region. Key features being: (a) Naval deployment in Pacific and Atlantic from the present ratio of 50:50 to become 60:40 by the year 2020, (b) US Forces in Korea to remain at 20,000 army, 8,000 air force and 500 navy/marines, (c) Greater access in the deep-water port in Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam, (d) Docking of four Littoral Combat Ships in Singapore where a naval repair facility exists to support US Navy’s 5th and 7th Fleets, (e) Reopening of US logistic base in Subic Bay and Joint Special Operation Task Force Headquarters at Zamboanga City in the Philippines, (f) Redeployment of 9,000 marines from Okinawa in Japan to Guam, Hawaii, US mainland and Australia. A further 10,000 marines will remain along with 4,000 army/navy and 7,700 air force personnel.

In all, the US Pacific Fleet consists of 180 ships, nearly 2,000 aircraft, 140,000 naval and civil personnel and 2,700 marines redeployed from Okinawa.² Since the 1950s, Washington has regional Defence Treaty Obligations with Australia, Japan, the Philippines and Thailand. With Taiwan there is strategic ambiguity, as the 1954 Treaty on mutual defence was repudiated in 1980s due to diplomatic recognition of mainland China.³

Main Military Instruments of the Pivot Policy

This new concept has brought back the role of technology and innovation to the forefront. It can be said that for the US Military, with the announcement of the pivot, it is back to the future. ‘Force on Force’ or ‘state versus state’ warfare of high-end war is like music to the US Military. Preference of firepower and technologies has been the “New American Way of War”. And now it improves the old. Over and above the pivot and its various manifestations, one capacity that the US is developing is the Prompt Global Strike (PGS), which includes hypersonic technology vehicle, advanced hypersonic weapon, and the strike missile of the air force. Costing about US\$ 240 billion, the PGS relies on an extensive and costly intelligence, command and control support.⁴ The logic of PGS is a non-nuclear capacity to deter proliferating actors. Yet it is debatable whether this logic is flawed. While this chapter is not on PGS, however, this capacity looms large as an emerging US capacity, and needs to be watched.

With regard to the “pivot”, in 2012, the plan to locate 60 per cent of America’s warships in the Pacific by 2020 was announced. As of 2013, the US navy has 283 warships: of which 101 are deployed, 52 of them in the Pacific and Indian Ocean including five aircraft carriers. There will be 62 warships in the region by 2020.⁵

In other words, by 2020, the US Navy will relocate its forces from the present 50-50 split in the Pacific and the Atlantic to a 60-40 split in these oceans. US Pacific Command (USPACOM) is at the core of the pivot policy; its Area of Operations (USPACOMAOR) is Indo-Asia-Pacific—from the coast of California to the India-Pakistan border. Further, 3.6 billion people inhabit the region, and American economic interests are at stake. Moreover, the region includes countries with large armies/militaries. In addition, enough historical experience of the Second World War and the Vietnam era remains in military memory and various academic studies. Therefore, there has been continued US troop presence in the region since the end of World War II. Thus, the terrain or military geography is well known to the Americans. And the main feature here is in the maritime security domain with logistic bases. As in the case of cyberspace and air domain, distance is no longer very significant.

China has a growing missile force, submarines, space-based capabilities and nuclear assets including anti-satellite systems. Main areas of concern appear to be China’s new conventional capabilities like hundreds of new, accurate, mobile, solid-fuelled ballistic missiles capacity of the Second Artillery against Taiwan and

anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs)—DF-21D.⁶ Few years ago, a RAND study had alerted the US to China's large and modern missile and air force as an insurmountable challenge. It was shown that China's arsenal of short-range ballistic missiles would overwhelm every runway in Taiwan.⁷ China's ASBM similarly invited much attention. The case had been well made. Now with pivot in the discourse, the most innovative outcome is that of the ASB described as follows:

Concepts and Ideas in Evolution of Thinking in the US Military Leading to the ASB Concept

One important feature of the US Military has been that ideas and concepts precede implementation. Combine this with the "American Way of War" where technology is the key and the outcome by new ideas is evident. Jeremy Black is right when he says that the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) meets the American need to believe in the possibility of High Intensity Conflict and of total victory.⁸ This cultural industry of ideas and concepts is driven by the stakes and the strong influence of defence industrial lobby to remain in lead in all aspects of combat at land, air, sea, space and cyberspace. Setting the agenda for strategic and military theories and concepts of war runs parallel in not only political hegemony but also "military intellectual" hegemony. The agenda and stage, so to speak, is set, and the environment is shaped.

This has been one defining feature of the US Military. Briefly, some benchmarks are as follows:

- (a) Star Wars programme of 1980s,
- (b) Air Land Battles series against Warsaw Pact in Europe leading to deep strike and Follow On Force Attack (FOFA),
- (c) Borrowing military technical revolution (MTR) from Soviet thinkers, combining it with cybernetic and then creating:
 - (i) System of system and platform independent ideas,
 - (ii) RMA, Network Centric Warfare (NCW),
- (d) Studies on transformations, adaptation and innovation,
- (e) Command of the Commons including ocean, space and cyberspace,
- (f) China's ASBM and other developments such as anti-access and area-denial capabilities (A2/AD) under the rubric "Assassin's Maze" resulting in Pentagon's new "Air Sea Battle" (ASB) concept—now juxtaposed on the military dimension of US Pivot towards Asia

ASB. ASB is in response to A2/AD threats. Washington has taken special note of China's development of A2/AD including kinetic and non-kinetic anti-satellite systems, conventional cruise and ballistic missiles, submarines, and increasingly sophisticated cyber-warfare capabilities.⁹ In open literature, there has been very little analysis and information on A2/AD and ASB. A new office has been created, and in 2011, it was included in the 2010 *National Military Strategy of the US*.¹⁰

The main services for ASB concept are the US Air Force (USAF) and US

Navy (USN). The logic is that in regions where access is constrained, there is a need to reduce traditional emphasis on expeditionary land warfare. To find some usefulness for the army that had termed ASB as equivalent of medieval siege warfare¹¹, it is being suggested that the army should get into the business of surface-to-surface missile—an expertise it had lost to strike targets further than 300 km including absence of any anti-ship missile capability. Mirroring China or Iran, it is argued that US should have its own A2/AD against regional hegemony by deploying missiles (surface-to-surface and for missile defence) on strings of islands and coasts to Japan and South China Sea.¹² The US may rely more on non-kinetic means like cyber war to cause kinetic impacts on chosen target(s). Reduce manned aircraft is already underway by way of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). Camouflage, stealth and deception may gain in relative importance due to cost factors.

It needs to be noted that the US had taken an early lead in precision strike capabilities. Now its edge is reported to have eroded, as weapons technology has spread rapidly to other countries. As a result, the capacity/ability of the US to project power has diminished.¹³

Budget. According to estimates, during 2010 and 2016, Department of Defence will spend \$ 267.9 billion on ASB: of which aircraft will account for 61.7 per cent.¹⁴ The 2011 Budget Control Act (BCA), also known as sequester expects, cuts off \$ 500 billion over the next nine years, on top of \$ 487 billion already underway. The impact of \$ 52 billion worth of cuts at the beginning of fiscal year October 2013 is yet to be seen.¹⁵ How will the ambition of pivot be achieved with more and more budget cuts? Plans are underway to have a smaller, leaner, agile, flexible, ready and technologically advanced military, which includes about one lakh (100,000) troop cut.¹⁶ Nevertheless, in spite of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganisation Act of 1986 for jointmanship, inter-service rivalry will increase over the budget. The army it seems will be the last priority.

Energy Self Sufficiency. Due to shale oil and gas boom, the US will be energy independent. For the US, energy self-sufficiency is the perfect excuse for a phased withdrawal from the Middle East; freed from energy dependency, America should be able to concentrate on the Pacific.¹⁷

Response of China

The Chinese, like all professional militaries, have observed the US Military's performance with respect. The wars that the US has undertaken employing high technology and communication technology have spawned the idea of informationalisation of warfare. The idea of information, which is similar to what is also called strategic communication, has led to the People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) concept of "three warfares": psychological warfare, public opinion

warfare and legal warfare.¹⁸ [The Chinese in 2008 created the Ministry of National Defence Press Affairs Office (also known as Ministry of National Defence Information Office) for this purpose.] In particular, legal warfare encompasses the use of both domestic and international law, as well as the laws of armed conflict to garner international and domestic support by presenting oneself as the more just or virtuous side in legal terms.

But what is the Chinese response to the concept of pivot? Scholars of China in India argue that to contain China the US promotes the “China threat”. The US’s relations with Japan and South Korea, military engagements with South East Asian countries and growing relations with India are all seen as a part of a larger strategy to reduce China’s strategic space. China’s rapid development has unsettled the US. This is seen by the Chinese as the reason behind the US pivot in Asia.¹⁹ When the US project began in 2012, Zheng Xiwen from China noted that “US has further advanced in Asia-Pacific ‘rebalancing’ strategy and has used DPRK’s satellite launch to adjust its military deployment in northeast Asia and expressed its intention to build a missile defense [*sic*] system in Asia similar to the one in Europe”.²⁰ In specific terms, Chinese scholars have noticed the strategic military dimension of the US’s: (a) deployment of 2,500 troops in rotation, and basing powerful C-band radar and space telescope in Australia, (b) deployment of Littoral Combat Ships in Singapore, (c) relocation of 8,000 marines from Okinawa to Guam and deployment of new F-35 stealth fighters to Kadena Air Force Base in Japan, the MV-22 Osprey transport plain to the Futenma Base and suggestion to amend Japan-US cooperation Defence Guidelines and refine the defence guidelines to protect Japan against China’s threat to southwest islands of Japan, (d) redeployment of naval warships to Pacific Ocean from status quo of 50:50 (Pacific-Atlantic) to ration of 60:40 to include six aircraft carriers and (e) deployment of two other stealth aircraft, B-2 and F-22, to military bases in the Pacific by 2017, in addition to the new F-35 stealth aircraft, to mount a strategic blockade against China.²¹

The US signals after the conclusion of the Iraq War and the plan for relieving the military in Afghanistan in future gave a new set of early indication of the military dimension to the Chinese. The main highlights are as follows:

- (a) Development of new Virginia class submarine, new refuelling aircraft and new stealth bombers.
- (b) Readjusting the layout in the three island chains: first chain of mainland Japan, the Philippines and Taiwan; second island chain of Guam, Australia and the adjacent islands and the third chain of Hawaii. The intention of the readjustments is to perfect the three line deployment and shift the centre of gravity to Guam. While reinforcing Northeast Asia, the US forces plan to strengthen military presence in Southeast Asia, and South China sea in particular. The next reason is to enhance the status and role of Australia as a “double anchor” that works in concert with Japan. Tightening control of Malacca is another purpose.²²

- (c) The emphasis that US forces must acquire the capability to cope with the PLA's A2/AD capabilities as given in the release of the ASB concept, which is the basis of the US document *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* released on January 5, 2012.
- (d) Developing the Asian version of missile defence system in Asia from bilateral to trilateral systems in two directions:
 - (i) Northeast direction among the US, Japan and South Korea.
 - (ii) Southeast direction among the US, Japan and Australia.
- (e) Rearming allies in the Asia-Pacific.²³

In Tang Yinchu's analysis, two views exist in China. First is that although the US may say that the concept is not to contain China, it is in fact clear containment. The second is that the US rebalancing in all-directional redeployment is not solely targeted at China. According to Yinchu, the second view makes more sense. The reasons are as follows: First, 65 per cent of world's raw materials are found in the Asia-Pacific—a symbol of hope for the world economy. Second, the US is afraid of the rapid rise of China that may challenge and endanger US hegemony. US rebalancing is to contain China's development. Third, in the past 10 years, some US allies have revealed a tendency to break away. This prompts the US to stage the rebalancing, which it expects would reshape the alliances and reinforce unity within them. It may be concluded that due to interdependence in economic and financial sectors, common interests may not tilt towards an all-round confrontation. China thus needs to enhance crisis awareness and military readiness and internal balancing by way of its ability to stay stable, unified and strong and do its own affairs well.²⁴

One important philosophy noted by Chinese observers is the idea of RMA. They stress that in the "series of strategic, military and diplomatic initiatives in rebalancing by the US depend more on "military revolutions" to maintain its military hegemony as seen in its "integrated air-sea battle", "space war" and "network space war".²⁵ There is no ambiguity in pointing out that the "Air Sea Battle" is directed at China.²⁶ Kai Liao sees it as a strategy to exploit Chinese vulnerabilities and compete in areas where the US is strong.²⁷ Lanxin Xiang argues that as a result of these developments by the US, China will give top priority to "offensive defence" doctrine.²⁸ Tang Yongsheng from the National Defense University invites attention to the targeting philosophy of ASB: "It is aimed at attacking China's land based strategic targets from sea and air using the US Air Force and navy as well as support from important allies." There should be no doubt that a new innovative arms race is in the offing. Tang Yongsheng points out that "China must develop an effective strategy to counter Washington's aggression and maintain strategic balance with the US".²⁹

This is the beginning of a new struggle for military balancing with technology. However, the Chinese do not seem to view the US-China relations as analogous to the US-Soviet Union relations during the Cold War period though structural

contradictions and challenges of strategic competition exist.³⁰ Characteristically, in this regard, the Chinese often quote their ancient and re-emerging sage Confucius, “Confucius has always stressed moral adjustment to the world, not rational domination of the world.”³¹

Implications

The US has identified India as the key partner.³² In this regard, it is important to note that India is not an ally of any country or military block. It maintains good relations with all major powers. It has its own set of friends such as Vietnam, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan. It supports unhindered freedom of navigation in the international waters and stresses that contentious issues be settled in accordance with international law.³³ In addition, India and the US have a number of agreements on defence cooperation. At operational levels, they cooperate like in the US-India Disaster Response Initiative (DSI), security of US ships transmitting the narrow and vulnerable choke point of the Strait of Malacca after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Tsunami disaster of 2004-05, non-combatant evacuation operations in Lebanon in 2006 and anti-piracy operations in Gulf of Aden. Joint training exercises are now a regular feature. Defence sales are also picking up and diversifying.³⁴

Watching the unfolding drama of pivot, military modernisation and concepts such as ABM and A2/AD is not an easy job. Why it is a complex issue is because it is both a conceptual idea and the matching weapon technology is not fully deployed. It also is an overlap of strategy and concepts. Much of its weapon systems are theoretical ideas or have not been tested or proofed like the land based anti ship surface to surface missiles. It has been argued that the core of ASB is termed the “scouting campaign” or “blinding campaign” during which both sides conduct lightning strikes on each other’s Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) and Command and Control (C2) and sensors networks to deny the adversary information. This “campaign” will take place in space and cyber domains, and involve kinetic and non-kinetic Anti-Satellite (ASAT) warfare through ballistic missile strikes or directed-energy weapons.³⁵ There is no dearth of such ideas, but each capacity and capability involves high cost. Nevertheless, missile and its counter will grow with precision accuracy. Thus, both offensive and defensive aspects need more focus. Capacities cannot be just for strategic weapons under Strategic Force Command, but would need to go down to formation levels such as divisions and equivalent tactical groups in the navy and air force.

Unlike the US, India does not have an institution or a tradition of publishing any security strategy.³⁶ Much has to be assumed or inferred from speeches. But absence of an official document does not mean absence of studies on trends or changes on means of military instruments and technologies. This is an ongoing

exercise, and requires professionalism in the military, political leadership, bureaucracy and technocracy. Determining the contribution of technology, system integration and material and non-material factors is an important dimension of this challenge. With this high-end technology intensive warfare, India will have to gear up, enhance the capacities of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and increase defence production with a matching conceptual base with the services as active partners in all phases of the emerging technologies. This will demand a new integrated period of civil-military relations at another plane. It is about knowledge and technology, and of not only doing fundamental research but also getting involved in production. The reliance on legacy-based equipment may lessen as technological advancement accelerates. Unlike Moore's law, where the price of computer halves as computing capacity doubles, in this case, an increase in price runs parallel to technological advancement.

Will India continue to be a consumer of foreign ideas and foreign weapons? Here, it needs to be mentioned that as far as ideas are concerned certain ancient Indian concepts such as those in the *Arthashastra* have been practised by the US in the recent past. (The Appendix briefly describes in Kautilyan vocabulary the use of indigenous knowledge in the geopolitical game.) For Indian civil and military leadership, this is an important implication. Can we shape the military dimension for our own national interests? For one, in India, we need to watch out against picking up fancy foreign jargon from the US. (Lt Gen R. Nanavati's latest book,³⁷ and my monograph have already sounded a warning to this effect.³⁸) Although picking up fancy foreign jargon is related to counter insurgency, the same can be said about this new arena of technology-driven competition. For example, the confusion over RMA and use of American terms like kinetic/non-kinetic, hard and soft power, and ignoring our own simpler military glossary, which can be grasped by all ranks. It is clear that there is too much jargon in the military dimensions of the US pivot, as in ASB. So much is the confusion that a concept has been confused with strategy. In fact, even the commander of the USPACOM warns that ASB has been misinterpreted, particularly, by US allies and partners, as a strategy rather than a concept: ASB is not a secret weapon.³⁹

It may be unfair to expect foreign writings being jargon free. So much of rhetoric and ideas are floated by academics and think tanks. For an example even in the case of India, the standalone Indian Army concept of "cold start" elicited different responses not only from within India but also Pakistan, where it led to the justification of deployment of nuclear weapons for tactical use by way of its short-range tactical missile called Nasr. Brigadier Feroz Hassan Khan (Retd) from Pakistan mentions that "Nasr pours cold water to cold start—thus this is a weapon of peace. It resorts the balance; it should convince India to think long before deciding to attack".⁴⁰

This unfolding debate on pivot, technology, budget and new character of war demands a very high degree of sustainable study of modern war. Further, it needs to be institutionalised. Institutionalisation cannot be purchased by defence off sets, or expected to be delivered by market forces of supply and demand or some inspirational writings of gifted amateurs. A conscious decision needs to be taken to internalise the military dimension in all its facets. So far to the best of my knowledge, there is no academic institute or university in India studying this. System analysis in developing new weapon systems using computerised war-gaming techniques and structure analysis is another area where history is a handy tool. A study in 2006 had suggested that a more enlightened approach can bring together military officers, historians, technologists and quantitative analysts.⁴¹ For trend and technology forecasting, there is need for a history of science and technology, and how it has influenced research, development, production and absorption by users. This type of work will provide better answers to questions such as: What was the historical process in initiation and finalisation of qualitative requirement? What was the outcome of the many project management organisation? I've already highlighted this serious gap in professionalism in an earlier paper.⁴² Some additional points are as follows:

Areas for further research and open academic debate in India

- (a) High-end warfare including scenarios like Malacca blockage and international law of armed conflict including ideas of just war and legitimate use of force such as drones and cyber weapons.
- (b) ASB and how China is adapting to it: How will the new arms race unfold including the development and deployment of missile defence and PGS?
- (c) In the absence of a central agency in India to study theories of war, which should be the lead agency with maximum stakes? To my mind, it should be the Indian Navy, followed by the Indian Air Force and the Indian Army. Their training institutes should become centres of excellence. Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) may think of National Defense University (NDU) tackling this aspect, and must earmark an institute which may become the hub. Academics need to be recruited to follow the topic. This study needs to be truly joint.
- (d) **Defence Production.** The need and balance between adequate self-sufficiency versus continued imports.
- (e) Training and education of not only military and DRDO personnel but also civil servants who may serve the Ministry of Defence or External Affairs and have to deal with or negotiate issues on arms and disarmament.

Appendix

Concept of Hub and Spoke in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*

Clearly in the present US policy, without the US even being conscious of it, ancient ideas from Indian traditions, such as alliances systems of the hub and spoke, have been used for contemporary times.

Ancient Indian strategic thought can now be deployed to understand concepts and issues of power politics. In ancient indigenous knowledge on statecraft, as given in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, there are a number of types and variations of alliances and treaties in the circle of kings (*mandala*). Kamandaka (origin varies from 5th to 7th AD), the great follower of Kautilyan school of diplomacy, likens the *mandala* to the outer rim of the wheel connecting to the spokes radiating from the axle.⁴³

In Book Six: The Circle (of Kings) as the Basis under "Chapter Two": *sutras* 39-40 (6.2.39-40), it is mentioned:

39. Making the kings separated by one (intervening territory) the felly and those immediately proximate the spokes, the leader should stretch himself out as the hub in the circle of constituents. 40. For, the enemy situated between the two, the leader and the ally, becomes easy to exterminate or to harass, even if strong.⁴⁴

Interestingly, the manifestation of the "hub and spoke" is very clear in the US policy on the Asia-Pacific. Major General Ashok Joshi has observed this Kautilyan formulation: The US policy in the Far East is termed as the "Hub and Spoke" system, wherein the US is the hub, and Australia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand are the spokes.⁴⁵

Princeton's G. John Ikenberry has identified the "hub and spoke" multilateral network that the US created after World War II, which allowed it to guide the liberal, international order and reap its benefits simultaneously.⁴⁶ David Shambaugh refers to the alliance system being followed by the US as the "hub and spoke" model. But he does not attribute it to Kautilya.⁴⁷ Be that as it may, there is evidence of the use of this Kautilyan concept of "Hub and spoke" in US strategy unconsciously. Let us see the case of James L. Cook's work. According to his cogent text (like Kautilya's aphorisms or *sutras*): strategy is designed to link *ends* (national interests), *ways* (concepts that describe how something might be done) and *means* (resources that are employed as capabilities). In his conception of *ways*, he shows the "pivot-but hedge" approach focused on the Asia-Pacific. He adds, that although US bilateral alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand and the Philippines will remain the "corner stone" of US commitment in Asia-Pacific region (the so called "hub and spoke" approach), there has been more deliberate effort to work with regional organisations like Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).⁴⁸

Christian Le Miere argues that a transformation of the “hub-and-spoke” alliance system that existed since the end of the Second World War is both a part and consequence of the US rebalancing strategy. At the heart of the hub and spoke system is a series of mutual defence treaties drawn up at the height of the Cold War from the 1950s with defeated powers or key allies. According to Christian Le Miere, now the system is being labelled as a “spoke-to-spoke” system like offshore balancing.⁴⁹

Patrick Olivelle in his work on Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* has interpreted and refined the concept of *Vigraha* (the policy of hostility) to mean a political strategy rather than actual war. It is a part of foreign policy. A king may use the policy of *vigraha* against another king, and then remain at one place without actually waging war (*vigrahyasita*). In Kautilyan conception, what the US is attempting is *vigraha* as interpreted by Patrick Olivelle.⁵⁰ This gives the perception of an enemy to the allies, or spokes, and the hub is virtually present in their heart and mind though physically it may be separated by a long distance.

Importantly, the spokes or allies need to have some attributes. Kautilya provides the perfect answer. In *Book 7 (The Six Measures of Foreign Policy)*, Chapter 9 on “Pact for (securing) an Ally, money, land and an Undertaking”, *Sutra 38* says: “A perfect ally is said to have six qualities, namely, constant, under control, quickly mobilising, hereditary, great and not given to double dealing.” If we leave heredity aside from the text (since monarchies were the norm then), it is unlikely that the qualities will not be similar now.

The US pivot towards Asia ultimately depends on its partners.⁵¹ Partners are the “spokes” and the US the “hub”. Kautilyan thinking can again be clearly seen in the idea of “Forward Partnering”, as proposed by F.G. Hoffman. It is argued that forward partnering is the best option with allies for C2, ISR and access to bases and airfields.⁵² The US allies and partners tacitly welcome the US military presence, which entails various joint exercises and trainings including use of territory as launch pads for offensive weapons.

The intellectual property of ancient and enduring Indian concepts now needs to be reclaimed by the people of the Indian subcontinent and must be acknowledged by scholars. It is time that students of International Relations (IR) understand the behaviour of a hegemon (*vijigisu* or would be conqueror), as in the text of *Arthashastra* with its military dimensions. The US pivot is just one manifestation in the modern context. Concepts, vocabulary and ideas enduring from ancient Indian traditions clearly seem to apply in the way states behave in contemporary times.

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REGIONAL AND COUNTRY
PERSPECTIVES

6

US Pivot to the Asia-Pacific: Impact and Implications for West Asia

Rajeev Agarwal and Prasanta Kumar Pradhan

It is becoming increasingly clear that in the 21st century, the world's strategic and economic center [sic] of gravity will be the Asia Pacific, from the Indian subcontinent to the western shores of the Americas. And one of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decades will be to lock in a substantially increased investment—diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise—in this region.

*Hillary Clinton at the East West Centre, Honolulu on
November 1, 2011.*

As the world's fastest-growing region and home to more than half the global economy—the Asia Pacific is critical to achieving my highest priority...As President, I have, therefore, made a deliberate and strategic decision—as a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future, by upholding core principles and in close partnership with our allies and friends.

*President Barack Obama to the Australian Parliament on
November 17, 2011.*

Introduction

The above statements by Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are amongst the most important policy pronouncements by the US in recent times. Pursued rigorously, this policy of focusing towards the Asia-Pacific could prove to be a game changer in the global political scenario. Already, there is an intense international debate on US future foreign policy alignments, the pivot to the Asia-Pacific and its dynamics, reasons for these announcements and the possible effect of this shift on the rest of the world. Among the regions of the world, the West Asian region is perhaps the most apprehensive amidst worries of the US abandoning the region¹ and leaving them prone to grave intra-regional and transnational security threats. Moreover, the “Arab Spring” protests that began

in late 2010 have put the West Asian region in a difficult position. On one hand, the region grapples with internal turmoil, regime changes and changing geo-political dynamics in the region, and on the other, it prepares to fend for itself, as the US, its security guarantor, rebalances towards the Asia-Pacific region.

As the US pivots towards the Asia-Pacific, it is important to examine the necessity of adopting such a policy at this point of time. It is also crucial to examine the possibilities of the policy having any adverse effect on the existing equilibrium in the West Asian region, and whether the pivot towards the Asia-Pacific will come at the cost of presence and influence of the US in West Asia. Besides, it is also important to understand the perspective of countries in West Asia on the policy. This paper examines such relevant issues under the following headings:

- Why Pivot, Why Now
- Extent of the US Presence in West Asia
- US Interests in the region
- Likely Impact of the Pivot on the West Asian Region
- West Asian Perceptions on the Asia-Pacific Pivot

Why Pivot, Why Now

For more than four decades (starting soon after the withdrawal of the British Empire's military engagement from the Gulf region in December 1971), the US has ensured security in the West Asian region. The Carter Doctrine in January 1980 stated that the US would use force if necessary to defend its interests in the Gulf.² It almost coincided with the establishment of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as a political and security arrangement with an immediate objective to protect themselves from the threat posed by the Iran-Iraq War and to contain the spread of Ayatollah's brand of Islam. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991 further legitimised and prolonged the presence of American troops in the GCC countries.³ Since then, the US has ensured, continued and expanded military presence in the region. Through separate bilateral security arrangements with all the GCC countries, it has ensured that no intra-regional military conflict breaks out. The region has also served its strategic interests including oil and gas, role in the Cold War era and, of course, the concern towards the security of Israel.

However, since the onset of the "Arab Spring" in 2010-11, there is a sense of discomfort and mistrust in the region's relationship with the US. Commencing from Libya, where the US refused to take the lead role, to the current Syria crisis, there is a feeling that the US is losing interest in the region.⁴ Also, with its one time allies like Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Tunisia's Ben Ali overthrown, there is a fear that the US will not be able to exercise the same influence on popularly elected governments in the region, especially the ones with Islamic leanings.⁵ The US Central Command's (CENTCOM's) 2013 posture statement "to protect the

nation's interests in the Middle East is to work by, with and through key regional partners to bolster regional security and promote stability, while minimizing [*sic*] a permanent US military footprint"⁶ has further raised apprehensions in the region regarding security guarantees by the US in a time where it is focusing on reducing its military footprint.

There is a feeling in the US, with regards to West Asia, that it needs to move on and that the region should learn to solve its own problems. The sentiment was echoed by former US Defence Secretary at Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies Research (ECSSR) in Abu Dhabi: "It is our hope that the Gulf Cooperation Council, the GCC, can play an important role in the future providing security for this region...That's what we're doing for the UAE and that's what we're doing with other countries. Yes, we give them the help they need, we give them assistance, but the fact is that they have to help provide for their security."⁷ Also, with the Iraq war wound up and the war in Afghanistan winding down, the US would be quite reluctant in getting embroiled in any other avoidable military engagement in the region. This has been quite clear from its stance on Libya and even Syria. With Iran too, despite Israeli threats of military strikes and crossing of red lines, the US has managed to ensure restraint and has indicated towards giving dialogue an extended opportunity over military strikes. There is also a growing perception that the threat of global terrorism has been reasonably contained, especially with reference to the US mainland.⁸ The growing might of China and the global economic opportunities in the Asia-Pacific, presence of major US allies (Japan, South Korea and Australia) have also compelled the US to look towards the Asia-Pacific. Coupled with it is the most important development in recent times in the US—the discovery of shale gas, which is predicted to virtually free the US of the burden of oil imports and catapult it into a leading oil producer by the end of the decade.⁹ This singular major development is projected to reduce the US dependence of oil imports from West Asia, and in conjunction with emerging trends in the Asia-Pacific, as mentioned above, facilitate its focus towards the Asia-Pacific region.

Following on from President Obama's speech to the Australian Parliament, the issues prompting the transition towards Asia Pivot were adequately documented in the Strategic Guidance, January 2012,¹⁰ which stated that the process was prompted due to the following compulsions:

- The Budget Control Act, 2011, which mandates reductions in federal spending including defence.
- Drawing down of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the resultant reduced requirement of active military engagement in West Asia.
- Realisation that the US economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in Western Pacific, East Asia and the Indian Ocean region.
- China's emergence as a regional power with the potential to effect US economy and security in a variety of ways.

- Growth of China's military power and need to ensure better clarity of China's strategic intentions.
- Arab awakenings in West Asia resulting in governments that are more responsive to legitimate aspirations of their people.

Despite the compulsions, a critical look at US interests in the West Asian region and their possible future trajectory may allay the fears in the region and lead to some conclusions, as also point towards the magnitude and intensity of the US footprint and engagement with the region.

Extent of the US Presence in West Asia

For the past four decades, the American presence in the West Asian region has strengthened day by day. Today, the US is deeply entrenched into the politics and security of the region. It has both allies and adversaries in the region with Israel being the strongest partner of the US in the region. The US has not only been vital in establishing the state of Israel and maintaining its security in the turbulent decades following its establishment by providing financial aid and military technology but has also always supported Israel in its fight against the Arabs. The oil-rich GCC countries are also a strong and wealthy set of political allies of the US in the region. The authoritarian Gulf Arab Sheikdoms have proven to be loyal and reliable friends of the US, and they rely upon the US for their security. Besides, other countries such as Yemen, Iraq and Egypt, which are going through severe internal turmoil, are dependent on the US either for security or for financial aid. The regional political and strategic situation helps the US to continue its presence in the region.

As regards security, it has been the US which has primarily served as the security guarantor for the Arab Gulf States. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991 led to the establishment of a strong military presence in the Gulf region. The Iran threat is another important reason for the Gulf monarchies to remain under the US security umbrella. Similarly, the threat of Hizbollah to Israel's security ensures continued US presence in the region. Apart from these threats, the GCC countries have used the US military presence as a bulwark for ensuring their regimes' survival.

Presently, the US has significant number of troops and military assets like aircraft carrier-based naval task forces and Fighter aircraft squadrons in the Gulf region. Oman has five US military bases:¹¹ Masir, Omolghanam, Khazab, Samarit and Beitolfalaj bases. Most of these bases have landing strips of adequate length to enable operation of modern long-range fighter aircraft. Saudi Arabia hosts major land and naval bases: Zahran Aerial Naval Base, Asaafanie Naval Base, Hafrolbaten AWACs aerial base and a naval facility in Jebel Island. Qatar hosts Al Udeid Air Base, west of Doha, which hosts forward headquarters of United States Central Command, headquarters of United States Air Forces Central, No. 83 Expeditionary Air Group RAF and the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing of the

USAF.¹² Kuwait hosts up to 15,000 US troops stationed at Camp Arifjan, Ali Al Salem Air Base and Camp Buehring, using them primarily as staging hubs, training ranges and bases to provide logistical support. UAE does not permit permanent bases on its soil although Al Minhad Air Base located approximately 24 km South of Dubai has been used often by the US Air Force. Bahrain hosts the most important and strategic military presence in the Gulf Region with the Naval Support Activity Bahrain, a US Navy base, and is home to United States Naval Forces Central Command and United States Fifth Fleet. It is the primary base in the region for the naval and marine activities. Normally, there are two aircraft carrier strike groups operating in the United States Fifth Fleet area of responsibility (AOR).¹³ Apart from this, around the region, the United States Armed Forces are stationed in Turkey and Israel. In addition, the US has close military partnerships with Georgia and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus. Because of the war in Afghanistan, the US has significant military presence in that country, in Pakistan and in some of the Central Asian Republics.

US Interests in the Region

US interests in the region are defined by multiple core interests which range from geo-strategic interests to oil, Iran nuclear issue and terrorism, besides obviously its declared objective of securing Israel, its ally in the region. Elucidating them, President Obama said, “For decades, the United States has pursued a set of core interests in the region: countering terrorism and stopping the spread of nuclear weapons; securing the free flow of commerce and safe-guarding the security of the region; standing up for Israel’s security and pursuing Arab-Israeli peace.”¹⁴ It is therefore necessary to look into US core interests in the region to examine whether and how, the Asia-Pacific pivot will impact the West Asian region.

Geo-strategic Interests

West Asia is important for the US for its strategic geographic location. The region occupies a central position connecting to South Asia, Central Asia, Africa and Europe. The close relationship of the US with the countries of the region and its strong military presence gives it leverage to keep a tab on the developments in the neighbouring region such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, South Asia, Central Asia and Africa. As any problem in the region can quickly spread to the neighbourhood in a very short span of time, it is therefore important for the US to maintain its presence in the region. Also, the safety of the Strait of Hormuz is important for international navigation. It is the most important choke point in the world, which had oil flow of about 17 million barrels per day in 2011.¹⁵ Iran has in the past threatened to close the Strait in case of any conflict emerging in the region. This may lead to a triggering international crisis and spike in oil prices.¹⁶

Regional Security and Stability in West Asia

At present, the US is the most important player in the regional security of West Asia, as it provides security to the GCC countries and maintains balance of power among the countries of the region. The three major players in the region—Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel—have severe differences among themselves in their respective perceptions and thinking about the regional politics and security. For instance, Iran and Saudi Arabia have ideological differences as they tend to claim their leadership among the Shias and Sunnis, respectively. Both these countries slam Israel over the Palestine issue. Israel and Iran share animosity not only over the Iran nuclear issue but also over Iran's support to terrorists groups like Hizbollah, as also Iran's occasional rhetoric over non-recognition of Israel's right to existence as a nation state. Threats of use of force among them are not very uncommon. In such a situation, it is quite comprehensible that the US is acting as a balancer of security in the region. In case of any dilution in the US presence or stance, the security situation as it exists today in the region could deteriorate. Thus, for this important reason, the US likes to maintain its security vigil in the region.

Today, and for the foreseeable future, the West Asia faces a host of risks and challenges. In the near term, there is the possibility of military conflict stemming from the unresolved dispute over Iran's nuclear program. The possibility that either a collapse of the regime or a political transition in Syria might destabilise the surrounding states cannot be ruled out. Conditions in those Arab countries which have already experienced revolutions such as Tunisia and Egypt could further deteriorate, while in countries such as Jordan or the GCC states, the pace of reform might falter, triggering political upheaval. These are but a few of the security challenges facing the region. Were any of these scenarios to materialise, they may not necessarily constitute a threat to the US homeland, but would nonetheless negatively affect its strategic interests as well as the interests of its allies and partners in the region.

Trade and Energy

West Asia remains vital for the US economic interests. From the American perspective, trade with the region is very limited as it contributes only 5 percent of the US total trade.¹⁷ Out of that, oil accounts for 73 per cent of all US imports from the region. The region is the second-largest oil supplier for the US with 21 percent of total US oil imports.¹⁸ The US mainly exports items such as motor vehicles, machinery, aircraft and diamond and imports crude oil.

As West Asia's economy is closely linked to the global economy through oil, gas and other trade and investments, any downturn in their economy would affect the global economy, thus, indirectly affecting the US. In May 2003, the US proposed the Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA) Initiative which intended to increase the region's trade and investment with the US and the rest of the world.¹⁹ It also intended to establish regional trade agreements. As of now, the

US has signed bilateral Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with Israel, Jordan, Bahrain and Oman. The desire of the US to engage the region economically reflects its broader policy of engagement with this important region. This initiative is intended to add further stimulus to the current geopolitical and security dimensions of the relationship.²⁰

As regards oil, the International Energy Agency (IEA) in its annual report *World Energy Outlook 2012* projects that the US will overtake Russia as the world's top gas producer by 2015 and will pass Saudi Arabia as the top global oil producer by 2017. By 2035, the US is likely to be energy self-sufficient and an exporter of oil and liquefied natural gas. The IEA notes that unconventional oil, which is primarily located in Americas, stands at 3.19 trillion barrels, exceeding West Asia-dominated conventional oil of 2.67 trillion barrels. Even if the US achieves its desired goal of energy independence, the global economy would be tied to the energy markets in the Gulf. US is now moving in the direction of achieving energy self-sufficiency. At present, the US imports 52 per cent oil from the Western Hemisphere, while only 22 percent from the Gulf region. The top five suppliers of oil to the US are Canada (29 percent) followed by Saudi Arabia (14 percent), Venezuela (11 percent), Nigeria (10 percent) and Mexico (8 percent).²¹ But this should not be understood as the US losing interest in the region. In fact, in view of the primary interest of the US to maintain a secure and stable oil market and supply routes, it is highly unlikely that the US will lose interest in the region.²² In addition, Asian allies of the US import large amount of energy from the region and use it to manufacture goods exported to the US. In this way, the US is indirectly importing oil from the Gulf region.²³ Further, as oil and gas are globally traded commodities, increase in prices in one place affects prices globally.

Protecting Israel

Ever since the establishment of the state of Israel, the US-Israel partnership has continued to strengthen. The US has been the main force behind the establishment of Israel, and during the subsequent decades of war and conflict against the Arab neighbours, Israel has received enormous political, military and economic support. Reiterating his support for Israel, the US President Barak Obama stated, "As for Israel, our friendship is rooted deeply in a shared history and shared values. Our commitment to Israel's security is unshakable."²⁴ For the US, protecting Israeli interests in the conflict-ridden West Asian region is a priority. Continued presence of the US in the region would provide security to Israel in a turbulent neighbourhood. Besides, there has always been a strong domestic Jewish lobby in the US which pushes for stronger US relationship with Israel in every respect.²⁵ That lobby is strong both politically as well as economically. Even the new US envoy to the United Nations (UN) Samantha Power has stated that she will defend Israel at the UN: "Israel's legitimacy should be beyond dispute, and its security must be beyond doubt. I will stand up for

Israel and work tirelessly to defend it.”²⁶ Such a statement from a top US official reflects the centrality of Israel for the US and the depth of the ties between the two countries.

Also, for the US, Israel is a permanent foothold in the region and remains the most important strategic partner. Both the countries share intelligence and combat doctrines, and are involved in joint military and defence cooperation.²⁷ Israel’s national missile defence would help protect American interests in Europe, the eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf region. There are also a number of Israeli-developed defence equipment which have been used by the US forces.²⁸

Iran

Iran is an important country to be dealt with immediately for the US and its allies in the region. The Iranian nuclear controversy still continues to haunt the Gulf Arab monarchies as the US and the EU are still negotiating with Iran. For the Gulf Arab monarchies, the important US allies in the region, Iranian nuclear programme is the principal threat to their security which they find extremely difficult to tackle.²⁹ The GCC countries have time and again reiterated their fears and apprehensions of a nuclear-armed Iran to the world. In the wake of the Arab Spring, the GCC-Iran relationship has further degraded and aggravated as war of words have continued between them.³⁰ GCC and Iran differ on political, ideological and strategic matters. The US is the net security provider for the Gulf monarchies, and has military bases in all the GCC countries. Without the US security cover, it will be difficult for the Gulf monarchies to defend themselves in case of an Iranian aggression.

Threat of Terrorism

In the current phase of instability in the region amidst the protests and regime changes in some countries, a number of radical elements are seeking to capitalise on the situation created during last couple of years. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula’s expansion of operations in Yemen³¹ and al-Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra’s presence in Syria³² are a few examples. They illustrate the extent to which the post-revolutionary transition period has increased the threat posed by al-Qaeda, its affiliates and supporters in the region.

Dealing with the threat of terrorism is a priority area for the US in West Asia. The 9/11 attacks on the US have clearly manifested the involvement of terrorists from the region, and this has clearly altered the US strategies in the region.³³ The recent experiences have shown that tackling terrorism demands coordinated efforts from all the countries concerned as it is difficult to wipe out terrorists militarily. The growth and activities of terrorists in Iraq and Yemen during last few years have shown that it is difficult to cleanse these elements completely from a country or a region; they can, though, be successfully suppressed and their activities be tracked. Anti-US and anti-West sentiments are usually high among the Islamic terrorist groups, and they tend to condemn the policies

of the US or other western countries. US has been targeted by the terrorists in the region as well. They have attacked the US embassy in Saana and US installations in Saudi Arabia in the past. Fearing al-Qaeda attack, the US ordered closure of its 22 embassies throughout North Africa and West Asia on August 4, 2013 including embassies in the capitals of its trusted allies such as Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries.³⁴ The countries of the region themselves will not be able to contain the terrorist activities and break their network. They need the support of the US intelligence, weapons, training and finance without which it will be difficult for any country in West Asia to successfully tackle the menace of terrorism. In such a situation, it would not be easy for the US to reduce its priorities in the region.

Syria

The situation in Syria continues to worsen day by day as the regime's forces and the opposition forces are involved in killing each other. The UN has estimated that around 93,000 people have been killed in Syria between March 2011 and April 2013.³⁵ As the situation continues to aggravate, it has posed a challenge for the US policy towards Syria. The most important American goals of preserving regional peace, ending state sponsorship of terrorism, limiting the spread of weapons of mass destruction and supporting human rights and development³⁶ have been affected by the aggravating conflict in Syria. Clearly, the US is against the regime of Bashar al-Assad who is an ally of Iran. So, it would be prudent for the US to contain him in the present situation where civil warlike condition has led to death and destruction of lives and property. A Libya-like solution to the conflict by backing the opposition forces has not been successful in Syria till now. The other major powers such as Russia and China have vetoed the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution seeking external military intervention in Syria as they have appealed for a political and diplomatic solution to the conflict. The principal concern for the US in Syria at present is the increase in infiltration of terrorists into Syria and the formation and activities of the Syrian Islamist groups.

If Syria is left to itself it will lead to further damage. Assad in power also keeps the Iranian influence in the region intact, as Assad acts as an Iranian force in the Levant. Also, the instability in Syria poses a threat to Israel. Israel has in turn in the recent past launched rockets into Syria. Thus, it is important for the US to remain engaged in Syria and take a lead in providing a political and diplomatic solution to the conflict.

The above-mentioned US interests in the region have not only been strategic in nature but also have ensured its preeminent position in the region for the past four decades. However, in the past decade, events and developments in the region and elsewhere in the world have forced the US to relook at its engagements and policies in the region. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, continuing conflicts in the region and the developments post the onset of Arab Spring have clearly

indicated to the US policymakers that this region could get messier in the coming years with no long-term prospects for peace. Coupled with this, the current economic down turn in the US, the discovery of shale gas and the reduced dependence of the US on the oil from the region has further contributed to the changing American perception. On the other hand, the rise of China as a major global power challenging the American hegemony and the concerns expressed by the US allies in the Asia-Pacific on the threat posed by China has also contributed to the changing American thought.

Likely Impact of the Pivot on the West Asian Region

How will the “Asia Pivot” impact the West Asian region? If indeed the US interests and resources do pivot away from the region in significant amounts, what will be the implications on this region? All such questions will be answered during the course of the next decade, as the detailed contours of the US policies unfold and get implemented. But irrespective of the turn of events and evolving policies, it is clear that the days of free riding on US guarantees in the region are going to be soon over. As Leon Panetta told an audience at the ECSSR, “It is our hope that the GCC, can play an important role in the future providing security for this region.” Across the board, he said, Washington is urging allies to build local capacity: “That’s what we’re doing for the UAE and that’s what we’re doing with other countries. Yes, we give them the help they need, we give them assistance, but the fact is that they have to help provide for their security.”³⁷

There are indications already that countries in the region, while attempting to convince the US to stay focused in the region, have started hedging against the worst-case scenario. An example of this thought process was visible during the GCC summit in Bahrain when in December 2012 the GCC decided to strengthen its regional security framework possibly in the shape of “Gulf Union”.³⁸ Increase in import of weapons and equipment by countries of the region is yet another indication of the region looking for self-sufficient alternatives. In December 2011, the US signed a massive US\$30 billion sale of 84 F-15 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia.³⁹ In April 2013, it announced another massive defence deal worth US\$ 10 billion of arms sale to Saudi Arabia, Israel and United Arab Emirates which includes sale of 26 F-16s to the United Arab Emirates and advanced missiles to both Gulf states capable of being launched in friendly territory and penetrating with great accuracy far behind an opponent’s borders. In the case of Israel, there is also substantial US financial assistance, topping US\$3 billion in military aid in the fiscal year 2012-13. Israel is likely to buy new missiles designed to take out an adversary’s air-defence radars, as well as advanced radars for its own warplanes, new refuelling tanker planes and—in the first sale to any foreign military—the V-22 Osprey troop transport aircraft.⁴⁰

Former US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta talked of increasing ratio of military deployment in the Asia-Pacific during his address at the Shangri-La Security Dialogue in June 2012: “By 2020 the Navy will reposture its forces

from today's roughly 50/50 percent split between the Pacific and the Atlantic to about a 60/40 split between those oceans. That will include six aircraft carriers in this region, a majority of our cruisers, destroyers, Littoral Combat Ships, and submarines."⁴¹ Obviously, the increase in ratio can only happen once rebalancing and re-prioritisation takes place from other regions which include West Asia. The US Navy has already cut the deployment of aircraft carriers in the Gulf region from two to one when it cancelled the deployment of USS Truman in February 2013.⁴² US Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel at the Shangri-La Dialogue on May 31, 2013 too highlighted the rebalancing of forces from West Asia: "The United States is adding to the capacity of our ground forces in the Pacific after Iraq and as we unwind from Afghanistan. The 1st and 3rd Marine Expeditionary Forces and the Army's 25th Infantry Division are all returning to their home stations in the Pacific theater [*sic*]. The United States Army is also designating 1st Corps as "regionally aligned" to the Asia-Pacific region. In addition to our decision to forward base 60 percent of our naval assets in the Pacific by 2020, the U.S. Air Force has allocated 60 percent of its overseas-based forces to the Asia-Pacific—including tactical aircraft and bomber forces from the continental United States. The Air Force is focusing a similar percentage of its space and cyber capabilities on this region. These assets enable us to capitalize [*sic*] on the Air Force's inherent speed, range, and flexibility."⁴³

One of the issues which would gravely impact the region is the threat of proliferation of nuclear weapons. There has been hardly any forward movement on talks with Iran on the nuclear issue in the past decade, and despite concerns expressed by Israel as well as the GCC, the US is still intent on dialogue with Iran. Election of Rohani as the Iranian President has offered some hope on the issue, not from the point of Iran abandoning the programme but from the point of reaching a viable understanding which allows face-saving exit to all parties in the process. Speaking at his oath taking ceremony in Tehran on August 04, 2013, Iranian President Hassan Rohani pledged to shun extremism and take a moderate approach to governing the Islamic Republic: "The government of hope and prudence will have moderation as a basis of its management for running the country."⁴⁴ On the nuclear programme and the resultant sanctions, he added, "The only way for interaction with Iran is dialogue on equal footing, with mutual respect and mutual confidence building...if you want the right response it should not be through the language of sanctions, but through discourse and respect." The US too responded via a statement by the White House press secretary stating that Rohani's inauguration "presents an opportunity for Iran to act quickly to resolve the international community's deep concerns over Iran's nuclear program."⁴⁵ The results are already being witnessed when the talks between P5+1 and Iran commenced in October 2013. The interim deal reached on November 24⁴⁶ is a welcome step in the path towards the resolution of this very critical issue in the region. The deal would be valid for six months initially and could lay the framework for a permanent deal later. The interim deal stipulates that Iran will

stop enriching uranium beyond 5 percent. In return, there will be no new nuclear-related sanctions for six months if Iran sticks by the accord. Iran will also receive sanctions relief worth about US\$ 7 billion (£4.3bn) including US\$ 4.2 billion from oil sales and the rest from other sectors including precious metals. The deal has been largely welcomed despite concerns raised by Israel and some Gulf nations (even prior to the deal).

Israel-Palestine peace talks is another major issue likely to be impacted by the US shift of focus. In this case, the US has indicated clearly in recent times its frustration both with Israel as well as the Palestine leadership on their rigid stance and suggested that its interest in being the key interlocutor may diminish if both the parties do not cooperate. Israel's insistence on continuing to build settlements in disputed areas has often drawn the ire of the US administration. However, the resolution of this issue may not require US presence in significant numbers in the region, as Israel, in conjunction with its military technological cooperation with US, would be enough to ward off any immediate security threat before the situation escalates beyond a point which requires US military intervention. Also, the Arab nations, while denouncing any Israeli aggression against Palestinians are unlikely to get involved in any military flare-up directly unless Israel intends annexation of Palestinian territory, an unlikely proposition.

Oil and natural gas is the next issue impacted by reduced US reliance. While it may be true that in the coming decade, the US may not require Gulf oil and gas, but its availability and pricing will have to remain a US concern. Any disruption in the supplies due to worsening security situation or terrorist threat is likely to impact global economy adversely having indirect and direct impact on the US economy. Here, the US may cede some space to emerging nations like China and India who have been virtually "free loaders" on the security provided by the US in the region while rapidly emerging as the largest consumers of oil from the region. There are increasing indications in the region that China and India are being goaded to take a larger role towards energy security in the region.

For long, West Asia has been strategically the most important region for the US. Not only did it serve as its energy basket but it was also the key outpost against the USSR during the Cold War and the hub of operations thereafter in its Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). In geopolitical terms, the US feels that with the emergence of China as the competing global power and the interests of its key allies in the Asia-Pacific, it might be ready to dilute its strategic interests in West Asia at the expense of strengthening its posture in the Asia-Pacific. While this may be prompted by hard choices put before the US policymakers due to economic situations and tightening defence budgets, the US would be well aware that not only China but even Russia would be only too keen to fill in any prospective strategic space vacated by the US in West Asia. Russia has been slowly building ties with Turkey, Iran, Syria, Iraq and even Saudi Arabia in its quest not only to have a larger say in regional issues but also to increase its access to warm waters across the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean region. China, over

the past two decades has virtually bridged its homeland with West Asia across Central Asia with ambitious oil and gas pipelines, as also rail-road projects, with a singular intent of circumventing the vulnerable areas through the sea routes. In case the US dilutes its hold on the region, the West Asian region could see major re-alignments in balance of power equations in the region.

West Asian region along with North and Central Africa has been the hub of global terrorism for over past decade. With Osama Bin Laden dead, war in Iraq over and the one in Afghanistan winding down, the US feels that the threat of terrorism may not be as well pronounced as earlier, especially in context of attacks on its homeland. Former US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta alluded to it during his address at the Shangri-La Security Dialogue in June 2012: “We have significantly weakened al-Qaeda’s leadership and ability to attack other nations. We have sent a very clear message that nobody attacks the United States and gets away with it.”⁴⁷ Also, developments in military technology like drones, UAV, surveillance mechanisms may prompt the US to think that prerequisite of “boots on ground” may not be necessary to tackle this threat anymore. This may be a serious miscalculation on its part as is being witnessed across the region. Despite the use of technology, terrorist threats continue to increase in intensity and cope. The attack on the US embassy in Libya in September 2012, attack in Algeria in January 2013, attack on the French embassy in Libya in April 2013 and continuing strikes in Afghanistan and Iraq are a grim reminder of the adverse impact on security if the US pivots away from the region.

West Asian Perceptions on the Asia-Pacific Pivot

I made clear that America is not—and never will be—at war with Islam... Israelis must acknowledge that just as Israel’s right to exist cannot be denied, neither can Palestine’s. The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements.⁴⁸ US President Obama at Al Azar University in Cairo in June 2009.

The above-mentioned speech set hopes soaring on renewed American-Arab relationship for the future. But all that has happened thereafter has sown seeds of doubt and apprehension in the region on US future engagements and interests in the West Asian region.

The onset of “Arab Spring”, ouster of trusted allies in Mubarak and Ben Ali, US response in Libya, its present stance of not getting directly engaged in Syria, its reluctance to stop Iran’s nuclear programme through military threats or actions and the announcement of “Asia Pivot” have set serious doubts in the minds of policymakers in the region on the future intentions of the US with respect to the region.

There is also a perception that the US is no longer interested or even capable of shaping the geopolitical canvas of the region, especially post the Arab Spring, a concern even acknowledged in US CENTCOM’s 2013 posture statement:

“Perhaps the greatest risk to US interests in the region is a perceived lack of an enduring US commitment to collective interests and the security of our regional partners. This impression, if not actively and often countered, and any lack of clarity regarding US intentions in the region, particularly with respect to Afghanistan’s future, Middle East Peace, and shaping an acceptable outcome in Syria, could reduce our partners’ commitment to stand with us and leave space for other actors to assume less benign leadership roles.”⁴⁹ This perception is further boosted by the US drawing down its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, reduced reliance on the region’s oil and gas due to its own home-grown discoveries, as also the feeling that with the current economic downturn, the US will be forced to look inwards more than any other region in the world.

Scholars and policymakers in West Asia are viewing the Asia Pivot with concern and anxiety and see it as a sign of faltering resolve and diminishing ability of the US to maintain its presence in the region despite the political turmoil throughout the region post the “Arab Spring”.⁵⁰ There is also a perception that the US is no longer shaping the strategic balance in the region, a concern even echoed recently by a former Gulf commander, “I need some kind of assurance from the Americans should things in the Middle East fall apart. We need to know how we will protect ourselves. Joint exercises are great, but we need to be clear during moments of real crisis.”⁵¹

The current issue of concern in the region is the crisis in Syria. With every passing day that the Assad regime survives, the threat of the spill over effect of civil war and terrorist influence in the region including neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq is growing. Even the fragile peace on borders with Israel is threatened. Whereas the entire GCC led by Saudi Arabia and Qatar is funding and supporting the Syrian opposition, the US has so far been non-committal on any military intervention in Syria. Turkey and Egypt too have called for the ouster of the Assad regime, and even Israel is on alert from the threat of spill over, but the US has so far exercised restraint and even vetoed the possibility of supplying weaponry to the opposition forces.

Next are the region’s concerns about the Iranian nuclear program. While the region, especially the GCC and Israel, is concerned that the clock is ticking by and that Iran is taking advantage of the time in negotiations, the US is still inclined towards a negotiated solution. The GCC is worried that Iran could reach the critical capability after which there will be no other option but to accept Iran as a de facto nuclear power. The May 2013 International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report has reported that Iran has 8960 kg of UF₆ enriched up to 5 percent U-235 and 324 kg enriched up to 20 percent U-235. 20 percent U-235 is 44 kg more than the figure mentioned in the last IAEA report of February 2013.⁵² Of this, U-235, 182 kg (+15 kg since the previous IAEA report) remain in the form of UF₆ enriched up to 20 percent U-235 while the rest 142 kg has been further processed into uranium fuel pellets. Assuming that Iran would need approximately 240 kg of UF₆ enriched to 20 percent U-235 to produce weapons grade uranium

(enriched to above 90 percent) for one nuclear device, if required Iran could then get the required quantity in a matter of few months. This is a cause for alarm in the region, a fear which could trigger off a nuclear race in the already volatile region. There is also a perception that the US, by hurriedly withdrawing from Iraq, handed over Iraq on a platter to Iran which has led to an increase in Iran's influence across the region.

As regards the Israel-Palestine Peace Process, there is a feeling in the region that the US has not pressurised Israel enough and that the process is drifting into insignificance. There is however some hope with the announcement of the peace process resuming, initiated by the US Secretary of State John Kerry in August 2013, wherein he was successful in bringing together the negotiators from Israel and Palestine in Washington after a gap of almost three years.⁵³ It is a conflict in which the US still has considerable leverage with both parties. It has also been one of the personal priorities of President Obama. Failure to reach a satisfactory resolution till now inhibits its ability to achieve its future goals in the region. Former US CENTCOM, Chief Gen. James Mattis described the impact the lack of a solution has had on his work and why it underscores the importance of Kerry's efforts: "I paid a military security price every day as a commander of CENTCOM because the Americans were seen as biased in support of Israel...Moderate Arabs who want to be with us can't come out publicly in support of people who don't want to show respect for the Arab Palestinians. So [Kerry] is right on target with what he's doing."⁵⁴

Apart from the core issues reflected above, there are a number of issues wherein the region is at conflict with the US policies. These include the crisis in Yemen, Bahrain and the current turmoil in Egypt post the ouster of President Morsi or even calls by the US upon the GCC nations to be more participative and responsible for their own security. In all these, there is a consistent feeling in the region that the US is failing to see the lurking threats in the region and the turbulent strategic landscape. This has led to a situation where the GCC and others in the region may have to look at alternate structures to ensure stability in the region.

Perhaps echoing concerns of the region, Abdulaziz Sager, Chairman of the Gulf Research Center wrote in *Arab News*, "The US-GCC relationship appears to be at a crossroads. Despite a long history of relations and a clear common and mutual interest in the stability and security of the Gulf region, the GCC states and the United States look as if they are growing apart on an almost daily basis...the prevailing mood appears to be that the terms are beginning to change to such a degree that the GCC states have no choice but to act on their own and without consideration of US interests and concerns. This is bound to have consequences, real and unintended, for both sides, and the question should be asked whether such increased separation will not come back to haunt the region as a whole."⁵⁵

Conclusion

The announcement of the Asia Pivot policy is, certainly, an important landmark for the US foreign policy. But the apprehension that the US may abandon the crucial West Asian region for the Asia-Pacific at present seems misplaced. The US has a number of interests which are crucial for its interests both in the short term as well as in the long run. Thus, it seems unlikely that focus on the Asia Pivot policy would come at the cost of withdrawal from the West Asian region. So, while the Asia-Pacific region beckons the attention of the US, it cannot simply abandon West Asia. There are multiple issues where only US has the leverage which it cannot afford to lose or surrender for the simple fear of irreparable damage to the region and the globe at large it might cause. William Burns, the Deputy US Secretary of State, at a security conference in Bahrain in December 2012 too emphasised on the continuing importance of West Asia even as other “pivots” beckon the US: “For all the logical focus on ‘pivots’ in other directions, however, the fact remains that the United States cannot afford to neglect what’s at stake in the Middle East....It’s a region that demands continued American leadership, despite the pull of other challenges and the natural policy fatigue that comes after a decade in which our national security strategy was dominated by wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.”⁵⁶

The longest festering dispute between Israel and Palestine can only move ahead with US initiatives, Iran’s nuclear issue requires constant and active US involvement. Gulf States still look for US security guarantees due to lack of robust regional security architecture. Even Syria crisis demands more proactive participation from the US. The fight against global terror with deep-seated roots in West Asia cannot be left to itself or to the countries in the region without active collaboration with the US. Therefore, the US would have to evolve an integrated and coordinated roadmap securing its national interests around the globe, especially in the Asia-Pacific and West Asia. It may be pointed out in this context that much of the Asia-Pacific’s growth is mentored on the regular and steady supply of oil and gas from West Asian region, with China and India being the largest importers besides Japan and South Korea. Also, the security of sea lanes through the Indian Ocean connecting these regions would demand relative security in the West Asian region. Thus, while “rebalancing” towards Asia Pacific, the US would not be able to divorce itself from the West Asian region.

The Asia-Pacific Pivot and interests in West Asia therefore cannot be a zero-sum game for the US. One does not come at the cost of another. Also, owing to the contiguity of the regions (both bridged across the Indian Ocean), overpowering economic and geopolitical interests and the capability to address concerns in either of the regions in near real time owing to technological advances in communications, surveillance and increased ranges of military platforms, the US can afford to concentrate on the Asia-Pacific without ignoring West Asia.

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US Pivot to Asia and China: Rhetoric, Responses and Repercussions

Rukmani Gupta

Since the US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton first announced an American national interest in the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea at the ASEAN Regional Forum in July 2010, Chinese officials have been wary of American involvement in maritime and territorial disputes along China's periphery. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the fleshing out of the "pivot" or "rebalance" to Asia espoused by the Obama administration has raised concerns in China.

The US pivot or rebalance, as it has come to be known during the second Obama administration, has essentially three elements—military, diplomatic and economic. Collectively, these are aimed at reinforcing American leadership in matters of regional security and ensuring American economic prosperity through deeper engagement with economies of the Asia-Pacific. Even though the focus of the pivot is American national interest, and US officials have been at pains to emphasise stable relations with China as part and parcel of this policy, there is little doubt that the US pivot to Asia has strained bilateral relations between the US and China. This relationship, conceivably the most important bilateral relationship for both countries, covers a broad range of issues—bilateral, regional and global. However, despite the 90-odd modes of engagement between the two governments at various levels, contentious differences between the two countries persist. The professed will of leaders from both countries to deepen cooperation notwithstanding, the recent past saw growing tensions between the US and China over the US' relations across Asia, maritime disputes in South and East China Seas and human rights—all issues that fall under the rubric of the pivot.

This article attempts to understand the rationale behind Chinese rhetoric on the US pivot to Asia, identifies Chinese responses to it and proposes possible repercussions for the region.

Chinese Rhetoric on the US pivot

Chinese pronouncements on the US pivot to Asia can be divided into types— a) official statements, and b) writings in official and semi-official media including newspapers and journals.

In the first category fall statements and remarks made by Chinese government officials and spokespersons. With regard to the US pivot policy itself, the rhetoric is far more muted than may have been expected. The tone of official pronouncements regarding the US' role in the Asia-Pacific was set early on and is reflected in a speech made by Assistant Foreign Minister Le Yucheng in December 2011.¹ With reference to the US pivot, Le said, "Recently, the United States has adjusted its policies toward the Asia-Pacific and increased its input in this region. Some people are thus worried and doubt if China and the US can coexist peacefully in the Asia-Pacific. Some even believe that China's surrounding environment has deteriorated. In my view, the US has never left the Asia-Pacific, so there is no 'return' to speak of. China does not want to and cannot push the United States out of the Asia-Pacific. We hope the US can play a constructive role in this region, and that includes respecting China's major concerns and core interests. The Pacific Ocean is vast enough to accommodate the coexistence and cooperation between these two big countries."

Statements by officials thus highlight the ability of the US and China to work together and betray little apprehension of American motives on the Chinese side. Similarly, replies to questions by spokespersons of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the US' role in the Asia-Pacific have generally highlighted cooperation and the standard response has been: "We welcome the US' constructive participation in the Asia-Pacific affairs and stand ready to engage in positive interactions with the US in Asia-Pacific so as to jointly safeguard regional peace, stability and prosperity."²

This positive spin on the US' Asia policy does not necessarily extend to the official media. Even as the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Liu Weimin displayed no alarm at the prospect of increased American military presence in Australia,³ *Xinhua*, the official news agency of China, carried an opinion piece that reflected Chinese apprehensions over US military activities. Titled, "U.S. 'Return' to Asia Raises More Questions than It Can Answer", this piece questioned the reliability of the US as a partner of Asian countries and cautioned against American "Cold War" mentality.⁴ Opinion pieces picked by editors in official publications thus reflect antipathy towards American designs in Asia, which the rhetoric of government officials seeks to downplay. Thus, the struggle between the demands of growing Chinese power and nationalism on one hand and the need to maintain stable relations with the US on the other hand is evident even in "official" rhetoric when it refers to specific developments.

Semi-official media and commentators free from the constraints of diplomatic finesse have largely been quite negative in their assessment of the motive and purpose of the US pivot. Writings in the *People's Daily* and *PLA Daily*—both of

which are known for close ties to the civilian and defence establishments of China—view the US pivot policy as part of a zero-sum game.

Soon after Hilary Clinton's article announcing "America's Pacific Century", a commentary in the *People's Daily* decried US attempts to "hedge" against a rising China.⁵ Across the semi-official media, commentators usually see the pivot as having one of three aims, which seem to link closely with the three elements of the pivot policy. First, it is aimed at establishing the containment of China through reinforced US military presence.⁶ Second, it seeks to wrest regional leadership away from China. In particular, American engagement with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is seen as a precursor to US leadership of ASEAN. Third, the US seeks to establish economic links in the region that need not necessarily include China; thus establishing its economic centrality in a region that has prospered through China's economic rise.

The Military Dimension

The military component of the rebalancing strategy was outlined in the Defense Strategic Guidance document released by the US Department of Defence in January 2012.⁷ This document highlights American plans to strengthen existing alliances in Asia and to seek greater cooperation with emerging partners. India is identified as a linchpin in this strategy. The American relationship with India, the document avers, is aimed at supporting "its ability to serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region". Given Chinese apprehensions of an evolving US-India partnership for the containment of China⁸ and the outstanding border dispute between China and India, it cannot be wondered that Chinese threat perceptions have only been exacerbated.

In addition, the document seemingly lays blame for regional tensions on the Chinese doorstep by stating that the growth of China's military power must be accompanied by "greater clarity of its strategic intentions in order to avoid causing friction in the region." Both Iran and China are mentioned in the document as countries that will continue to pursue "asymmetric means" to counter American power projection capabilities. It would thus suggest that the US clubs China, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, with Iran, which had been identified as a "rogue state" by some American officials in the past. Chinese commentators have seen the "pivot" to Asia as a clear signal of US intentions to intervene in China's relations with its neighbours.⁹

Commentators such as Huang Renwei of the Shanghai Academy of Social Science believe that the US pivot poses largely a military challenge to China.¹⁰ In this regard, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has continued acquisition of military hardware and sought to improve skill development.¹¹ However, the involvement of the US in China's maritime disputes in the recent past has only deepened suspicions about America intentions. Japan-China tensions over Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea are seen as indicative of military

pressures the US may come to bear on China through the rebalance policy. The Japanese government purchased three of five Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea, which are also claimed by China, from private owners in September 2012. This “nationalisation [*sic*]” of the islands is viewed by China as an attempt to change the existing status quo on the issue. US officials have refrained from taking a position on the issue of sovereignty over the disputed territory, but have reaffirmed that they recognise Okinawa’s administrative control of the islands and as such these would fall within the ambit of the US-Japan security treaty.¹² The US would thus come to the aid of Japan in the event of external aggression on the islands. Chinese commentaries have decried the US-Japan Security Alliance as a remnant of the past and unreliable.¹³ In addition, the US also held military exercises with the Philippines (April 2012) and Japan (November 2012). The reinvigoration of military relationships between the US and countries of the region, particularly those which have territorial disputes with China, is unlikely to mitigate Chinese threat perceptions. As regards issues in the East China Sea, Chinese maritime vessels and planes have been aggressively patrolling the region around the islands, American reassurances to Japan notwithstanding. The Chinese military response to the Japanese purchase of the disputed islands seems to point to a dangerous possibility of military escalation in the region. This development suggests that a China that feels contained by the US and its military allies is more likely to respond aggressively than seek dialogue.

The Diplomatic Dimension

An important component of the US pivot is bringing to bear the full force of American diplomatic experience and strength to deepen diplomatic engagement with countries of the region. Maintaining a good relationship with China has been highlighted by US government officials as an integral part of the pivot policy. First Hilary Clinton and later Thomas Donilon both underlined the inclusion of China in the pivot policy. To this end, Vice President Xi Jinping’s high profile visit to the US in February 2012 was seen by some as laying the groundwork for a stable relationship. Xi during the trip remarked that the two countries would establish a “new path of cooperative partnership between major countries featuring harmonious coexistence, sound interactions and win-win cooperation.”¹⁴ During this trip, Xi also made an unusual visit to the Pentagon. This was taken as a good sign for increased military to military engagement between the two sides. The Xi-Obama 2013 summit in California too seemed to suggest that the two leaders had reached an understanding about respective interests in the region. However, the rhetoric of “new type of great power relations” aside, little headway seemed to have been made regarding American diplomatic irritants for China in the region. Beginning with Hilary Clinton’s participation in ASEAN-led forums, the US has only upgraded its participation in regional organisations. There has been a concurrent deepening of bilateral relations in

the region. American diplomatic engagement of Philippines, Vietnam and Myanmar, in particular, are viewed with suspicion by Chinese commentators.

American diplomatic engagement of countries in the region is often seen by Chinese commentators as an excuse to foment trouble for China. An example of this is found in US involvement in the disputes of the South China Sea. A stand-off between China and the Philippines over the Scarborough Shoal began on April 10, 2012. Manila's attempt to intercept a group of Chinese fishing vessels that it claimed were fishing illegally in the waters around the shoal was prevented by two Chinese maritime surveillance vessels. Even as the stand-off continued, the US and Philippines held the first ever "2+2" meeting in April 2012. This meeting, intended as a consultation for defence, security, political, and economic policies between the two countries, follows the format of other such meetings held between the US and key Asian allies—Japan and the Republic of Korea. It is hardly surprising then that US diplomatic engagement in the region is viewed as duplicitous by Chinese commentators.¹⁵

On July 24, 2012, the Chinese government announced the creation of Sansha city to strengthen administrative control over the Paracel islands, the Spratly island chain as well as Macclesfield Bank, all of which are disputed regions in the South China Sea. Subsequently, on August 3, 2012, the US Department of State, released a statement on the South China Sea expressing concerns over China's unilateral moves regarding the upgradation of Sansha city to a prefecture-level city and plans to establish a military garrison there. The statement also made references to China's "coercive economic actions" (restrictions on import of fruits from the Philippines) and "use of barriers to deny access" (preventing Filipino fishing vessels access to waters around the shoal) related to the dispute with the Philippines.¹⁶ Chinese reaction to the statement was far from muted. Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qin Gang while commenting on the American statement said, "The US statement ignored the facts and sent a totally inaccurate signal." Chinese media too was replete with statements of outrage at "biased" American perceptions of the situation.¹⁷

Apart from responding to perceived American misrepresentation of issues, the Chinese government has seemingly stepped up its efforts to woo Southeast Asia. After the criticism faced by China in the wake of the 21st ASEAN Summit in November 2012 at Phnom Penh, Chinese leaders have been at pains to allay fears of ASEAN countries that do not have significant territorial disputes with China. US President Obama's inability to participate in ASEAN-led forums in October 2013 provided Chinese leaders with a distinct opportunity to gain the initiative in regional forums. Xi Jinping undertook state visits to Indonesia and Malaysia during this time announcing new initiatives to mitigate misgivings among Southeast Asian countries. These included the Treaty of Good Neighbourliness, Friendship, and Cooperation between China and ASEAN proposed by Xi in his address to the Indonesian Parliament on October 3, 2013.¹⁸ With both Indonesia and Malaysia, Xi secured agreements to raise bilateral

relations to comprehensive strategic partnerships including defence and security cooperation. At the 16th ASEAN leaders' Summit in Brunei on October 9, 2013, Xi while praising the state of China-ASEAN relations in the last decade made a seven-pronged proposal on the framework of bilateral cooperation for the coming 10 years.¹⁹

Economic Dimension

In the Chinese view, the US pivot's economic goal is to stimulate the American economy and hasten its recovery. Even though statements by Chinese officials underline that China remains open to joining the Trans Pacific Partnership²⁰ (TPP), which is the primary economic element of the US pivot, commentaries in semi-official publications suggest otherwise. American assessments of regional economic integration processes are believed by Chinese scholars to be negative, seen as jeopardising Chinese economic interests.²¹ An important element of this assessment is believed to be Chinese centrality in regional economic gatherings. Therefore, the TPP is viewed not only as a means to gain economic benefits by the US but also as an attempt to undermine China's economic relations in Asia. After all, free trade agreements such as the China-ASEAN (CAFTA), China-Taiwan (ECFA) and ASEAN+3 economic arrangements have been the impetus for regional integration in the past few years. Apart from wresting economic initiative from China, the TPP and American championing of this trade pact are viewed as an attempt to deny China political clout.²² Hence, Chinese commentators and scholars propose a two-pronged approach to the economic aspect of the US pivot: a deepening of Chinese institutional engagement in the region and strengthening the internationalisation of the Chinese Renminbi (RMB). China has made steady progress in both these directions. Xi Jinping in his engagement with ASEAN leaders in October 2013 announced major economic initiatives, including the establishment of an Asian infrastructure development bank and a new RMB 100 billion (US\$ 16.3 billion) currency swap agreement between the Chinese and Indonesian central banks. China has also permitted Singapore-based investors to buy RMB denominated securities, paving the way for direct trading between the two countries' currencies.²³ This comes at the heels of a similar deal during the British Chancellor George Osborne's visit to China in October 2013. These developments suggest that China is steadily though cautiously moving towards internationalisation of its currency.²⁴

Conclusion

It is evident that though rhetoric on the US pivot by Chinese officials has been relatively bland, emphasising the positive prospects of stability in the region, popular discourse as reflected in semi-official publications does not view the US pivot as benign. Across military, diplomatic and economic realms, China has sought to mitigate the ability of the US to squeeze Chinese influence and options. Along with increased military acquisitions and exercises, a less compromising

rhetoric on territorial issues that may involve the US military has been adopted by China. In this regard, the US pivot can be seen as forcing China's hand to react more aggressively. On the diplomatic front, China considers US involvement in maritime issues of Southeast Asia as a direct provocation. In this sphere, even as it heightens military preparedness, China has sought to soothe apprehensions of neighbouring countries and actively participate in regional forums. Economics is increasingly being used by China as both a stick (in the case of the Philippines during the stand-off over Scarborough Shoal) and as a carrot (proposals of an ASEAN infrastructure bank). There is little doubt that China will fight to keep the economic initiative in regional integration. Even as its neighbours in Southeast Asia welcome US engagement in the region, it is clear that no country wants to have to pick between China and the US. By engaging diplomatically and economically, China seems to reassure its neighbours that they would not have to make such a choice.

Both China and the US have a great interest in maintaining stable bilateral relations; however, the threat perceptions shaping their world views continue to pose a challenge to stability in their relationship. For China, the concerns centre on the seeming inability and unwillingness of the US to accept China's emergence as a global power centre. The US, at the same time, continues to remain wary of the future trajectory of China's growth and its implications for American pre-eminence in the world order. This is evident even in the apparently symbiotic economic relationship. 2012 was marred by trade disputes between the two at the WTO²⁵ and allegations from the US Department of Defence regarding Chinese cyber espionage and theft of intellectual property.²⁶ It is thus hardly surprising that the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project²⁷ on American and Chinese perceptions of each other found that the people in both countries were increasingly wary of each other. 68 per cent of Americans surveyed said that China could not be trusted too much, while the number of Chinese who regard the US favourably has fallen 15 percentage points since 2010 to 43 per cent. It can be expected that economic and strategic tensions between the two countries will only increase in the coming years. Although each seeks to avoid confrontation, especially in the military realm, the imperatives of domestic political discourse as well as international obligations and aspirations can be expected to deepen competition between the two countries in military, diplomatic and economic realms.

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8

Chinese Military Response to US Rebalancing Strategy

Mandip Singh

Writing in the classic *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides, the famed historian and military thinker, wrote: “The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Lacedaemon, made war inevitable.”¹ He went on to add that it was not just the fear caused to Sparta by Athens, even the state of Corinth blamed Athens for aiding Corcyra. This raised the additional danger of entangling alliances. This phenomenon, also called the “Thucydides Trap”, is what the world is witnessing today. Simply put, a “rising power” is bound to challenge the “established power”, and to meet the responses of the “established power”, the “rising power” will invariably compete if not confront the “established power”. Thus, China, the rising power, views the US rebalancing strategy towards the Asia-Pacific as a strategy to “contain” China, while the US, the established power, believes China is positioning itself to overthrow the US as the undisputed leader of the international world order.

The numbers speak for themselves. China, the second largest economy in the world, has \$ 3.2 trillion in reserves to back its economy riding at an astounding GDP growth of over 10 per cent over the better part of the last two decades and a massive military modernisation programme supported by a steady 10 per cent increase in its military budget over the same period. From here onwards, the figures only get better. According to the US National Intelligence Council report titled “Global Trends 2030”, economically, China is projected to become the world’s leading economy surpassing the US; militarily, US “ability to depend on its historic alliance partnerships will diminish even further”; technologically, while still remaining the world leader, “China’s large, sustained investments could make it close to a peer competitor by 2030.”² The World Bank report of 2009 stated: “In 2020 China’s GDP per capita would be broadly comparable to the current level in Latin America, Turkey and Malaysia. Adjusted for purchasing power, in 2020 China’s GDP per capita would be one-fourth of the US level and China’s

total economy larger than that of the US.”³ All in all, the ominous signs of declining US power and a determined China marching towards, and seeking, “a new type of great power relation”,⁴ a phrase that is increasingly gaining currency in the Chinese lexicon in describing its future relations with the US.

The US rebalancing strategy has been explained in detail by several office bearers of the Obama administration over a period of time, and it is now clear that the strategy has an all-encompassing aim of enlarging the US footprint in the Asia-Pacific in the diplomatic, economic, social and military dimensions. The Chinese reactions to this strategy are also all-encompassing. This paper looks at just one facet of the Chinese response, viz. the military dimension, and seeks to review China’s military strategies to challenge the US in the Asia-Pacific. The paper looks at doctrinal, military diplomacy, weapon acquisitions and reorganisation in force structures underway in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) as a part of this military strategy.

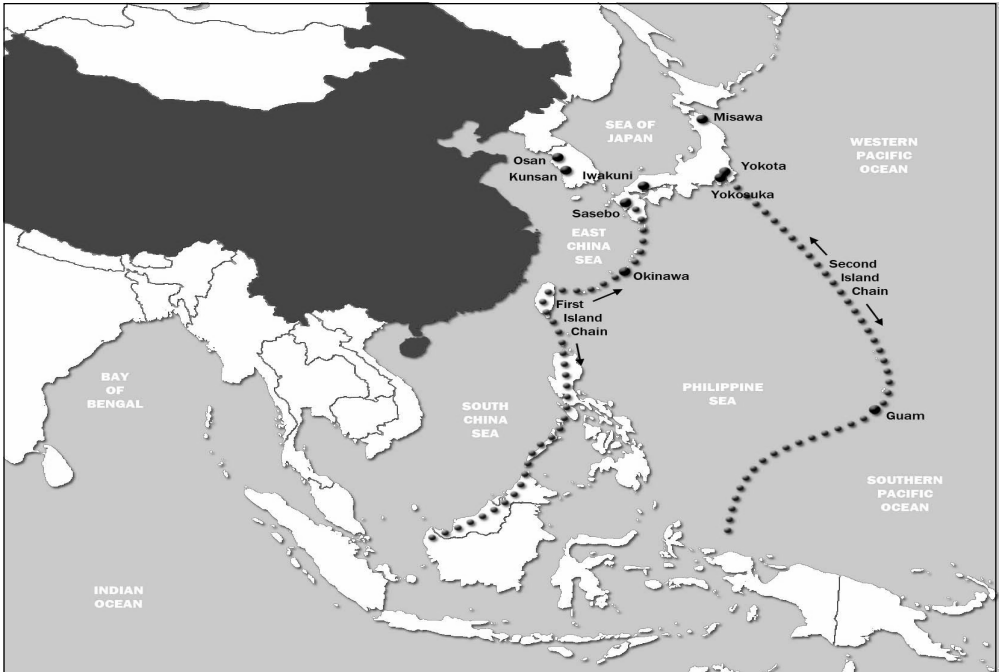
“Counter Intervention” Strategy

The US administration has termed China’s response strategy as “Anti-Access, Area Denial” or A2AD. Chinese authors have been using the term “Counter Intervention” (CI). Its two components are: anti-access—denying the enemy access to territorial boundaries—and area denial—preventing the enemy unhindered or unchallenged freedom of operations in the proximity to its territorial boundaries.

In a broader context, anti-access imposes caution on the enemy by presenting a threat to its bases, installations and assets using an array of missiles—Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles/Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (ICBM/IRBMs)—and aircraft at long ranges. Nearer home, the freedom of unhindered use of the common spaces is denied using a mix of nuclear powered submarines, Carrier Strike Groups (CGs), stealth fighter aircraft and Short-Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBMs). In the Chinese context, this is best explained by the Map 1.

China is geographically gifted: Its land boundaries are largely along natural terrain features, which do not lend itself to easy access. In the North and North East lies the cold Siberian Tundra, while in the North West lies the hostile Gobi desert. The West is isolated by the high mountains that emanate from the Pamirs, and the South and South West is bounded by the Himalayas. Thus, it is only the seas to its East that afford the easiest routes to mainland China. These have been identified by two strategic lines: the first island chain along the line Sasebo-Okinawa-Taiwan-Philippines-Sarawak that include the East China Sea (ECS) and South China Sea (SCS), and the second island chain along the line Yokosuka-Guam-Papua-New Guinea that includes the Western Pacific Ocean and the Philippine Sea. Chinese counter intervention strategy aims to prevent the US and its allies access to the first island chain by use of a combination of ASBMs/ASCs in the area between the two island chains, and deny them freedom of operation in the SCS and ECS using a combination of SRBMs, CSGs, nuclear

Fig. 1



Map courtesy: <http://luckybogey.wordpress.com/2010/12/30/hair-of-the-dog/>

submarines and Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA) systems. The entire strategy hinges on a robust, reliable and survivable Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) platform comprising of information warfare, cyber warfare and space warfare capabilities.

The strategy is discussed in the following subsections:

- Doctrinal shift—extension of the “active” defence.
- Increased military diplomacy.
- Rightsizing, reorganisation and restructuring.
- Weapons acquisition and development programme.

Doctrinal Shift

While China maintains that its basic doctrine remains “active defence” and its intentions are purely defensive, the manifestation of this doctrine has seen a steady shift in goalposts. According to Yarosh and Cordesman, it is defensive but specifically states “that a strategic defensive posture is only viable if mated with an offensive operational posture”.⁵ In the early Mao years, the PLA Navy (PLAN) was a coastal “brown” navy with a role limited to patrolling its coast, while the PLA had a continental mindset, limiting itself to exerting influence and force in

the immediate neighbourhood. After Jiang Zemin's enunciation of the "Two Transformations", the PLA began to look outward in the early 1990s. In recent years, the PLA has expanded its interests exponentially by extending its outreach to as far as the Gulf of Aden in anti-piracy duties, contributing the largest contingents to UN peacekeeping operations worldwide and undertaking fleet patrols beyond the first island chain in the western Pacific Ocean.⁶ In recent years, there have been reports of Chinese submarines carrying out patrols in the Pacific and Indian oceans with increased periodicity. A news report in *Hindustan Times* quoting a classified document by the Indian defence ministry said that "at least 22 contacts were recorded with vessels suspected to be Chinese attack submarines patrolling outside Beijing's territorial waters last year",⁷ while *The Diplomat* quoted an extract from a US government report on China that "the PLA Navy has begun to conduct military activities within the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of other nations, without the permission of those coastal states. Of note, the United States has observed over the past year several instances of Chinese naval activities in the EEZs around Guam and Hawaii ... While the United States considers the PLA Navy activities in its EEZ to be lawful, the activity undercuts China's decades-old position that similar foreign military activities in China's EEZ are unlawful."⁸

In April 2013, the PLA released a paper titled "Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces". This paper replaced the biennial National Defence Paper that was traditionally a roundup of the PLA's policies and employment of its main services. The new paper is shorter by half, has done away with foreign policy and nuclear issues altogether and makes no mention of China's military budget. However, the paper gives a fair idea of the PLA direction in the coming future. Without mentioning the US, it clearly identifies US as having "expanded its military presence" in the Asia-Pacific and making the "situation there tenser". The roles for the four services as enumerated in the paper define the PLA's doctrine shift as follows:

- "In line with strategic requirements of mobile operations and multi-dimensional offense and defense [*sic*], the PLAA has been *reoriented from theater defense [sic] to trans-theater [sic] mobility.*"⁹ (Italics for emphasis) This gives the PLA ground forces flexibility and strategic mobility to concentrate large forces at the point of decision in minimum time with dedicated effort.
- The PLAN "*develops blue-water capabilities of conducting mobile operations, carrying out international cooperation and countering non-traditional security threats, and enhances its capabilities of strategic deterrence and counter attack.*"¹⁰ (Italics for emphasis) While the newly inducted carrier *Liaoning* has already been on patrol, its fleets have been active in international waters. PLAN maintains a flotilla of 3-4 ships combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden. On March 19, 2013, a flotilla consisting of four principal warships and other auxiliaries led by the *Jinggangshan*, an amphibious Landing

Platform Dock (LPD) warship of the South China fleet, carried out a 5000-nautical-mile voyage in the SCS and the Western Pacific Ocean. The flotilla followed the general alignment of the “nine-dash” line in a demonstration of China’s claim in the region.¹¹ The flotilla was at sea for 16 days and crossed through the Bashi Straits (between Taiwan and the Philippines) into the Western Pacific Ocean beyond the traditional “first island chain”, indicating its capability to operate and project naval power in the Western Pacific. It also visited James Shoal, the southernmost point of the “nine-dash line”, almost 1,800 km from the mainland and just 80 km from Sarawak, an area claimed by Malaysia and China. At James Shoal, an elaborate oath ceremony was held by the sailors fuelling jingoism and instilling nationalist fervour in the rank and file. According to *Strait Times*, the “crew vowed to ‘defend the South China Sea, maintain national sovereignty and strive towards the dream of a strong China’, among other pledges.”¹² The fleet commander, Admiral Jiang Weillie, acknowledged that in recent times this training has increased in frequency from “once every few years and nowadays several times every year”,¹³ confirming an active presence of the PLAN in the SCS in recent days.

- The PLA Air Force (PLAAF) “is strengthening the development of a combat force structure that focuses on *reconnaissance and early warning, air strike, air and missile defence and strategic projection*.”¹⁴ (Italics for emphasis) The recent unveiling of three major aircraft—the J-20 FGFA, the J-31 FGFA and the Y-20 transport—is a manifestation of the PLAAF’s air strike and strategic projection capabilities.
- The PLA Second Artillery Force (PLASAF) is a “core force for China’s strategic deterrence “and its” *capabilities of strategic deterrence, nuclear counterattack and convention precision strike are being steadily elevated*.”¹⁵ (Italics for emphasis)

Military Diplomacy

Military diplomacy has emerged as a key component of China’s CI strategy. China conducted its first ever joint exercise with a foreign army in 2002. Ever since, the PLA has embarked on a comprehensive and institutionalised programme of joint exercises with over 30 countries in the last decade. While the PLA Army has played a predominant role in as much as 50 per cent of the 60 joint exercises conducted so far, the PLAN and PLAAF have also increased their interaction with foreign armies. However, as the powerful militaries of the US and allies enlarge their footprints in the Asia-Pacific, China has reached out to the two most powerful militaries that have a profound influence on the Asia-Pacific—Russia and India.

Russia

President Xi Jinping decided to make Russia his first overseas visit destination,

signalling a huge shift in China-Russia relations. For the first time ever, a Head of State was accorded a ceremonial welcome by the Russian Defence Ministry at the Russian Armed Forces' Operational Command Centre. Xi was briefed by Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, in the presence of the Russian Defence Minister Sergey Kuzhugetovich Shoygu and Chinese Defence Minister Chang Wanquan and State Councillor for Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi. From the Centre he was shown "alternately real-time images of the Russian land force, navy and air force, strategic missile forces and special forces on duty and at drills. Xi listened, through the control systems, to the reports from generals of Russian fleets on marine escort missions, commanding officers of relevant regions on duty and heads of military industry enterprises that have cooperation with China".¹⁶ Undoubtedly, the Russians had sent a strong signal that they retained the technological superiority and the capability to be a strong contender for military power in the changing global order in the Asia-Pacific.

China has a large inventory of Soviet and Russian weapons. From 1990-2007, Russia sold China almost \$ 25 billion of weapons. These include some of the front-line systems that are in service in the PLA today—over 200 SU-27 and SU-30 air superiority fighter aircraft, 20-50 IL-76 heavy lift transports, four Sovremenny Class destroyers, 12 kilo class diesel submarines and 16 battalions of S-300 PMU-1 and S-300 PMU-2 air defence regiments that form the backbone of missile defence cover to the Chinese mainland. In 2007, Russia accused China of "reverse engineering" its aircraft—the J-11 copied from the SU-27—and cut off all arms transfers.¹⁷ This choked the supply of spares affecting maintenance and operability of these systems. While the PLA has embarked on an ambitious weapons indigenisation programme, it needs to ensure that in the interim period, till these weapon systems reach serial production, its security and defence needs are not jeopardised. More so when tensions with Japan in the ECS and its assertiveness in the SCS has the potential for conflagration in the near future. China's military industrial complex has already demonstrated that its technology and innovation capabilities compare with that of the Russians, and it does not require Russian weaponry, yet till its major weapon systems are fielded, like the Carrier Strike Battle Groups (three-five CSBGs by 2020), nuclear powered submarines (three under construction), J-20 and J-31 fifth generation fighter aircraft (likely to be inducted by 2018 and 2020, respectively), Y-20 heavy lift aircraft (likely induction by 2014) and Type-071 LPDs (two under construction) and Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD), China needs Russia. Russia, in contrast, has vast military industrial complex urgently in need of orders and rejuvenation. It's a win-win for both nations. The \$ 3.5 billion order for 24 SU-35 fighters and four Amur (some reports suggest Lada Class although both are conventional type) class diesel submarines¹⁸ need to be seen in this perspective. In fact, this is not all, there are reports that "China and Russia were expected to co-operate further in developing military technology, including S-400 long-range anti-aircraft

missiles, IL-76 transport aircraft and IL-78 air-refuelling tankers.”¹⁹ Some of these are renewed contracts that halted when Russia pulled the plug on arms transfers in 2007.

In April 2012, China and Russia held the largest ever naval exercise in the western Pacific in which Russia fielded seven ships and China exercised 18 of its state-of-the-art naval vessels together over a period of five days in the Yellow Sea of the port of Qingdao.²⁰ In its list of 10 most important exercises in the world in 2012, *PLA Daily* listed this joint exercise right on top, hinting perhaps to the US the importance China gives to its growing naval cooperation with Russia in the Western Pacific.

This feat was soon overtaken when from July 5-12, 2013, the Chinese and Russian navies held their largest-ever joint naval exercise off the Bay of Peter the Great in the Sea of Japan. Called “Joint Sea 2013/Naval Interaction 2013”, the PLAN sent four destroyers, two missile frigates and a support ship, while 12 ships including with one submarine, three fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters, and special warfare units represented Russia. This exercise saw the two navies fire live munitions, practise anti-piracy drills and conduct joint patrols.

The “Peace Mission” series of anti-terrorism exercises is another initiative where China and Russia are the biggest contributors and the militaries cooperate closely. These exercises “bear important significance in promoting the established mechanism of joint exercises under the SCO framework, deterring and striking the ‘three evil forces’ (terrorism, separatism and extremism) and maintaining regional security and stability.”²¹ China would like to continue these exercises as it serves its interests in the controlling the restive Xinjiang region bordering the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) member nations. China also purchased 50 Russian Mi-171 helicopters and AL-31F engines in deals worth \$ 1.3 billion in 2012. Russia’s Federal Military-Technical Cooperation Service is quoted as saying that in 2012 alone arms sales to China rose to \$ 2 billion amounting to 15 per cent of total arms sales by Russia in 2012.²² Clearly, China needs Russia to put its “counter intervention” strategy into place.

India

There are two distinct schools of thought on dealing with India in China. The hawks, largely PLA driven, are wary of the growing military relations between India and the US. Strategically, they view India as a part of the growing concert of democracies comprising Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia and the US, which intend to “contain” China. They cite the Indo-US nuclear deal and the \$ 10 billion arms sales to India in recent years as examples of the growing US-India relations. The more conservative foreign ministry sees hope in engaging India and weaning it away from the US. They quote, India’s policy of strategic autonomy and historical precedent of never joining an alliance as indicators of India’s ability to maintain a balance in relations with both China and US.

Chinese Defence Minister Li Guanglie’s visit to India in September 2012 set

the stage for a thaw in military exchanges between China and India post the denial of visa to a senior Indian military commander. Among other issues, China realised the sensitivity of the border dispute in the Indian mindset especially after the commemoration of the 60th year of the 1962 war with China in 2012, which invigorated a serious debate across India on our relations with China. The new People's Republic of China (PRC) leadership sent the right signals: In his first meeting with PM Manmohan Singh, President Xi Jinping said: "China and India should improve and make good use of the mechanism of special representatives to strive for a fair, rational solution framework acceptable to both sides as soon as possible (on the border issue)".²³ In addition, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang surprised the Indian leadership by selecting India as its first destination of his first ever overseas visit. In what is termed as a "handshake across the Himalayas", he said in an op-ed in *The Hindu*, "China's development promises opportunities for India, and India's development promises opportunities for China. Our common development will benefit people of the two countries and offer the world more and better opportunities",²⁴ alluding to a new beginning in India-China relations. Writing a piece in a leading Indian newspaper prior to Li Keqiang's visit to India, Chinese ambassador to India Wei Wei wrote that "it is China's strategic choice and established policy to strengthen good-neighborly [*sic*] and friendly cooperation with India, and that will not change"²⁵—a far different tone from the one made by one of his predecessors who laid claim to the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh just prior to the commencement of Hu Jintao's visit to India in 2006.

In January 2012, both sides set up the "Agreement on a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on Boundary Affairs", a Confidence Building Measure (CBM) to reduce tensions on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). At the fifth Annual Defence Dialogue (ADD) in Beijing in January 2013, "two sides agreed to expand and enhance bilateral exchanges covering the Armies, Navies and Air Forces of the two countries. They agreed to advance mutual strategic trust and enhance mutually beneficial practical cooperation."²⁶ This also paved the way for a reciprocal visit of India's Defence Minister to China from July 4-7, 2013. The visit was salvaged by the Chinese after an unconditional withdrawal of its troops, which had transgressed the LAC at Depsang in Ladakh and set camp inside Indian territory for almost 20 days from April 15 to May 5, 2013. Realising the gravity of the situation and the adverse impact on the budding relationship, the PLA relented and reverted to "status quo ante". During the Indian Defence Minister's visit, both sides discussed the Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA), a far reaching CBM that seeks to further cement the military ties and mitigate tension across the 4,057 km-long LAC.

The coming year would see the two armies participate in a joint anti-terrorism exercise in China, while the navies would increase ship visits, conduct joint maritime search and rescue and joint counter piracy operations. As a first, the two air forces will also conduct functional exercises in flight safety, aviation medicine and training.

Rightsizing, Reorganisation and Restructuring

The 2.3 million-strong PLA²⁷ appears to have undergone further downsizing and reorganisation. According to the 2013 Defence paper, the strength of PLA Army (PLAA) is 850,000 while the PLAN and PLAAF are 235,000 and 398,000, respectively totalling 1.48 million (about 1.5 million). This total of 1.5 million does not include the PLASAF whose last known strength was 100,000. Thus, it can be assessed that almost 800,000 troops have been reorganised and absorbed into various organisations like the PLASAF, which is undergoing an expansion in conventional missile capability, possible raising of cyber warfare and space warfare units.²⁸

In addition to “intensify [ing] the strategic administration”²⁹ of the Central Military Commission (CMC), the PLA has established the Department of Strategic Planning, reorganised the Communications Department as the General Staff Headquarters (GSH) Informationisation Department and the Training and Arms Department as the Training Department in the GSH. These three departments are responsible for integrating the four services of the PLA and coordinating the operations, communications and training of all components of the PLA as a part of its doctrine of Integrated Joint Operations (IJOs).

The PLA has also expanded and operationalised the PLA Marine Corps, which has been trained in undertaking amphibious operations and actions against hostile vessels at sea.³⁰ This force is mandated to undertake sea landed operations by effecting capture of island territories at sea giving the PLA the capability of transporting, supporting and executing amphibious operations. Interestingly, both the marine brigades are presently known to be under the Southern Fleet responsible for expansion of interests in the SCS.³¹

The PLA established the Sansha Garrison Command on the Sansha islands, a part of Hainan Province, in May 2012. The garrison is responsible for “national defense mobilisation [*sic*] and the militia and reserve forces in Sansha City”. This was earlier part of Xisha Maritime Garrison Command directly under the PLA Navy.³² *People’s Daily* reports that “its national defense [*sic*] function will become more complete, its comprehensive defensive capabilities more strengthened, and its joint combat capabilities more enhanced” by setting up this division size command. Located on Yongxing Island, this 1.9 km-long island is devoid of fresh water and depends on the mainland for sustenance. According to *Global Times*, “Top priority of the work of the Sansha City is to maintain the sovereignty over the islands (Xisha, Zhongsha and Nansha), reefs and waters, and it needs a matched garrison command that integrates island, sea and air garrison capabilities.”³³ The Sansha Military Area Command (MAC) gives the PLAN the capability to deny freedom of operation to hostile forces in the SCS.

The most important restructuring has been effected in China’s coastal and maritime defence forces. The uncoordinated and often disjointed actions by the “five dragons”, the various maritime agencies functioning under different ministries, during the incidents at Diaoyu/Senkaku islands and Scarborough shoal

necessitated a central body to control maritime law enforcement and protect and use its oceanic resources. Accordingly, a new agency, named National Oceanic Administration (NOA) has been created and will have under its control the coast guard forces of the Public Security Ministry, the fisheries law enforcement command of the Agriculture Ministry, and the maritime anti-smuggling police of the General Administration of Customs. Earlier, the NOA had just one maritime law enforcement department, China Marine Surveillance (CMS) under its command. The proposed administration, under the Ministry of Land and Resources, will carry out law enforcement activities in the name of China maritime police bureau and under the operational direction of the Ministry of Public Security.³⁴

Weapon Acquisition and Development

Anti-Access

The mainstay of China's anti-access arsenal are the long range Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles (ASBMs) and the Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles (ASCMs). These missiles aim at destruction of US bases, logistics and support echelons and CSGs. The US bases in South Korea, Japan, Singapore and the Philippines are well within China's SRBMs/IRBMs forcing the US to provide for "extended deterrence" including nuclear deterrence to its allies in East Asia. The DF-21D ASBM has been nicknamed "carrier killer" because of its unique ability to generate hypersonic speeds on the end of its trajectory and by a system of control fins, evade countermeasures and home in on a moving target. This makes an ASBM different from most ballistic missiles, which have a fixed trajectory during the terminal phase of flight making it extremely difficult to intercept and destroy in a short reaction time frame. The DF-21D is based on a variant of the CSS-5 Medium-Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM) with a range in excess of 1,500 km, is armed with a manoeuvrable warhead, and when integrated with appropriate command and control systems, is intended to provide the PLA the capability to attack ships, including aircraft carriers, in the western Pacific Ocean.³⁵

The other weapon of denying access is the nuclear-powered submarine. China continues production of its newest Jin-class (Type 094) nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) and is likely to produce five new SSBNs of the Type 094 class. In addition, it is known to have two Shang-class (Type 093) nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSN), four older Han-class SSNs and China's single Xia-class SSBN (although the Xia-class never undertook an operational patrol). According to the US Department of Defence report of 2010, "China is further expanding its current force of nuclear-powered attack submarines and may add up to five advanced Type 095 SSNs to the inventory in the coming years."³⁶

Area-Denial

The PLA has developed a combination of new generation missiles, aircraft and

sea borne combatants to deny unimpeded and uncontested use of China's near seas. The PLASAF has been developing a potent conventional missile capability after it realised that its No First Use (NFU) nuclear policy may jeopardise its second strike capability by use of precision conventional weapons. The thrust has been on Land Attack Cruise Missiles (LACMs) like the 1,500 km DH-10 and mobile solid fuelled SRBMs. In fact, PLASAF's changing force structure during 1985-2012 indicates that the PLASAF has as many as 46.96 per cent SRBM and 11.74 per cent LACMs in its total inventory of missile launchers.³⁷ In addition, the Second Artillery's inventory of Short-Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBM) deployed to units opposite Taiwan stood at more than 1,100.³⁸ To improve the lethality of this force, the PLA is also introducing new SRBM variants with improved ranges, accuracies and payloads. This lends credibility to China's focus on area—denial capabilities in the coastal, littoral and near seas.

On July 24, there were reports that China tested the DF-41, a three-stage solid propellant ICBM with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) capability. Test fired from Wuzhai test centre, the DF-41 has a range of 12,000-14,000 km and can carry three to 11 warheads with a CEP of 100-500 m. It is capable of rail and road transportation and can be fired from rail cars or Transporter Erector Launcher (TEL) vehicles and is likely to be stored in caves.³⁹ The most important technological achievement of this missile is its ability to defeat the Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) Shield of the US and its allies by its MIRV capability.

The PLAAF got a shot in the arm with the maiden flight of the J-31, the new stealth fighter prototype developed by AVIC Shenyang Aircraft Corporation (SAC) on October 31, 2012. The J-31 is a fifth-generation stealth fighter which looks like the F-35 of the US. A Taiwan-based report suggests that Russian Yakovlev Aircraft Corporation sold the Yak-141 engine to China sometime early last decade, which was used by Chengdu Aircraft Industry Group to develop the J-20, the country's first stealth fighter, while Shenyang Aircraft Corporation developed the J-31.⁴⁰ The J-31 being smaller and more technologically superior is likely to replace the J-15 for service on the aircraft carriers in future. This coupled with the J-20, which was unveiled in 2011, will form the main stay of the of air defence of China's coastal defences and interests up to the second island chain.

Among the surface combatants in the PLAN are the Type 052D guided missile destroyers, under construction at the China State Shipbuilding Corp, Jiangnan Changxing shipyard near Shanghai. As many as 10 Type 052D DDGs could currently be under construction. At 160 m long and 18 m wide, the Type 052D is slightly larger than its predecessor, the Type 052C, and is believed to weigh in at just over 6,000 tonnes.⁴¹ Reports indicate the vessel will use a Type 346 Active Phased Array Radar System and Type 518 L-band long-range radar. The main 100 mm gun on the Type 052C appears to have been replaced by a new PJ-38 130 mm gun in addition to a helicopter-landing platform and close-

in weapon system. According to *China Military News*, the new destroyers are equipped with two 32-unit vertical launch systems capable of launching HQ-9B air-defence missiles, anti-ship and anti-submarine missiles (range 7-125 km).⁴² The other major production is the Type 022 Houbei class Fast attack boats which have been constructed in large numbers. The Houbei Class are wave piercing catamarans, equipped with eight YJ-82/83 series of missiles with a range of 200 km and at 38 knots present a formidable target to an adversary when operating in large numbers off the coastal and littoral waters. When operating with 16 Song class (Type 039) and 12 Kilo class (Type EKM 636/877) submarines, they can sanitise China's vast coastal waters.

Space and Cyber Warfare

The success of the CI strategy hinges on China's ISR capabilities—real time, reliable, robust with inherent redundancy—to support its weapon systems and deployment. The two main components of the ISR capabilities are space and cyber domains. China has made great strides in the development of its space capabilities—offensive space capability demonstrated by the ASAT test in 2007 by downing a satellite using rockets and defensive space capability by putting in place its own 35 satellite Beidou navigation system for guidance, navigation and communications. With as many as 18 space launches in 2012 alone, China's ambitious space programme reflects its importance to space-based intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, navigation, meteorological and communications. Of the 18 satellites, 11 were remote sensing satellites, which serve dual applications supporting military and civil requirements. China also launched three communications satellites, five experimental small satellites, one meteorological satellite, one relay satellite and a manned space mission in 2012.⁴³

China uses two types of satellites for secure military communications—the Fenghuo and the Shentong. The Fenghuo provides secure digital data and voice communication to Chinese military forces, while the Shentong provides secured voice and data communications services for ground users using Ku-band. On May 27, 2012, China launched the Zhongxing-2A (Chinasat-2A) by a Chang Zheng-3B (Y17) (Long March 3B) rocket from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre. The Chinasat-2A satellite was built on the DFH-4 platform, with a launch mass around 5,200 kg and is the first of a second-generation DFH-4-based Shentong-2 satellite in operation. This will greatly enhance the PLA's voice and data usage capabilities as it gets "informationalised". This was the 163rd successful Chinese orbital launch, 163rd launch of a Chang Zheng launch vehicle, fifth launch from Xichang in 2011 (73rd overall from Xichang) and eighth successful orbital launch for China in 2012.⁴⁴ Among the other space-based programmes are plans to launch the Tiangong-2 space lab in 2014 and the Hard X-ray Modulation Telescope (HXMT), the country's first astronomy satellite, around 2015.⁴⁵

The PLA cyber warfare responsibility lies with General Staff Department's

(GSD) Fourth Department (Electronic Countermeasures), while the Computer Network Defence (CND) and intelligence gathering responsibilities are with the GSD Third Department (Signals Intelligence). They have been integrated to launch the Integrated Network Electronic Warfare (INEW) strategy which aims at a combined application of electronic warfare and computer network operations against an adversary's command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) networks. Unconfirmed reports indicate that the Third Department could have as many as 130,000 personnel working in general headquarters staff positions, 12 operational bureaus and three research institutes.⁴⁶ PLA campaign doctrine identifies the early establishment of information dominance over an enemy as one of the highest operational priorities in a conflict; INEW appears designed to support this objective.⁴⁷ There is adequate evidence to suggest that the PLA has been reaching out to the civilian sector including commercial sources for such operations.

Since the US logistic and supply lines are long and vulnerable, they offer a prime target for PLA's cyber operations. A 2012 Northrop Grumman report for the US Government states:

"PLA analysts consistently identify logistics and C4ISR infrastructure as US strategic centers of gravity suggesting that PLA commanders will almost certainly attempt to target these system with both electronic countermeasures weapons and network attack and exploitation tools, likely in advance of actual combat to delay US entry or degrade capabilities in a conflict"⁴⁸

Analysis

Having seen the four-pronged Chinese military response to the US rebalancing strategy, the obvious question that needs an answer is: Are the Chinese adequately prepared to challenge the US in the Asia-Pacific? It may be recalled that the doctrinal shift in Chinese military thinking and its weapon acquisition programme commenced much earlier when Jiang Zemin pushed for transforming the military in the 1990s. It was a result of a long-term plan based on national interests and threat assessment supported by the Communist Party of China (CPC). The US rebalancing strategy is a more recent policy initiative. Has the US reacted to the Chinese expanding national interests or have the Chinese responded to the US rebalancing strategy? The answer lies somewhere in between. China's expanding interests and rising aspirations became evident in its quest for energy security in Africa and Latin America, expanding trade and markets in Central Asia and South East Asia and growing assertiveness on its maritime and land frontiers. These drew the attention of the Bush administration, which first propounded the pivot to Asia-Pacific policy, but was unable to implement owing to its commitment in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴⁹ It was the Obama administration that realised the need to reassure its allies in the Asia-Pacific, as also reassert its position as the world's paramount power that dictated the rationale for its rebalancing strategy.

It is unlikely that China will challenge the US in the near future. At one-sixth the budget, one-third the naval size, low technology and innovation base, nascent space and cyber capability and a yet-to-be-tested nuclear triad, China has a long way to match up to the US. But an aggressive military doctrine, ever-increasing military budget, robust military industrial base and successful education, science and innovation programme is driving China in the right direction and could “tip the balance” against the US in the coming decades.

Conclusion

China’s counter intervention strategy is still unfolding. China realises that it is still a long way from matching the US in technology and capability. However, a generous defence budget maintained at over 10 per cent growth every year for over a decade and the PLA’s growing muscle in foreign policy will ensure that China’s aim of fighting “local wars under conditions of informationalisation” will be realised by 2020. The A2AD capability, coupled with adroit military diplomacy and greater international commitment, will enable the PLA to confront the US rebalancing strategy, militarily across the full spectrum of conflict in the coming decade. “Thucydides Trap” is very much a reality.

The US has slowly but steadily begun to rejuvenate its relations with its allies in East Asia. The confidence building measures have an all-round appeal—active diplomacy, as was evident in the North Korean crisis; economic engagement, by pushing its agenda in the TPP and military diplomacy, including joint exercises with Japan, Korea and the Philippines. In sum, the US is redrawing the equations in the Asia-Pacific. As China’s counter intervention strategy gains more credibility, the future will witness greater power play by the US and its allies in the region.

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9

US Pivot to Asia-Pacific: Implications for the Indian Ocean Region

Sarabjeet Singh Parmar

In November 2011, Hillary Clinton, the then Secretary of State, in her *Foreign Policy* article “America’s Pacific Century” defined the Asia-Pacific as “stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the western shores of the Americas, the region spans two oceans—the Pacific and the Indian—that are increasingly linked by shipping and strategy.”¹ The CRS Report for the US Congress in 2012² stated that “additionally, underlying the ‘pivot’ is a broader geographic vision of the Asia-Pacific region that includes the Indian Ocean and many of its coastal states.” In his November 17, 2011 address to the Australian Parliament, President Obama said that the future being sought in the Asia-Pacific was “security, prosperity and dignity for all.”³ During his speech he covered the imperatives that not only drove the US relations with the region but also those that impinge on the future sought. Some salient points covered were as follows:⁴

- The region’s importance—home to half the world’s economies that created jobs and opportunities for Americans.
- Contribution by emerging powers towards regional security.
- Security based on an international order that would uphold the rights and responsibilities of all nations and people.
- Freedom of navigation and commerce.
- Maintenance of credible US military presence with flexible posturing despite reduction in defence spending.
- Commitment to treaty obligations, involvement with and engagement of regional organisations and strategic partners.
- Continuation of building a cooperative relationship with China.

Further, the Strategic Guidance Document published by the US Department of Defence in 2012 stated that “US economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean Region and South Asia, creating a mix of evolving challenges and opportunities”.⁵

However, the US interest in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) could be considered low-key; therefore, the US places the region in the periphery of its vision. Although there is a fair amount of US commitment in terms of military presence and political engagement, the requisite degree of “coherency” in the US policy is missing. The geographical dimensions by both Clinton and the CRS report factor in only parts of the IOR. Clinton refers to the start point as the Indian Subcontinent, and the CRS report refers to many of the coastal states.

In addition, being geographically positioned between the Persian Gulf and the South China Sea, areas which have been the main focus of the US, dilutes the US interest in the IOR. Therefore, the “pivot point” to the Asia-Pacific could be considered as grounded east of the Malacca Straits. A “point” from which the US could, if the need arose, turn and focus on the IOR. This in a way could be viewed as the IOR being considered a secondary area and an extended part of the “offshore balancing” concept leaving the stability of the area to the “logic of great-power balancing to reassert itself, relieving Washington of the burden of maintaining equilibrium far from American shores”.⁶ Therefore, the US is looking at applying a “modified” mix of the “Neo-Nixon” doctrine⁷ and “offshore balancing” concept so that the IOR as a secondary area would look after itself while the US pivot concentrated on the areas east of the Malacca Straits that are considered primary. This article examines these issues and the possible implications in the IOR.

The Dilemma of Geographical Definition

“Geography is too important to be left to geographers. But it is far too important to be left to generals, politicians and corporate chiefs. Notions of ‘applied’ and ‘relevant’ geography pose questions of objectives and interests served.”⁸ This aspect becomes clearer when one revisits the US definition of the Asia-Pacific and the inclusion of the IOR. A part of the IOR is now included in the US definition of the Asia-Pacific, as was enunciated by Hillary Clinton⁹ and the Obama Administration.¹⁰ The inclusion has clearly been due to the “strategic importance of the energy resources and trade that pass through the Indian Ocean and the Straits of Malacca before reaching the manufacturing centers [sic] of East Asia”.¹¹ It is evident from recent writings that the US has been looking at the IOR as an emerging area of Strategic Interest.¹² As per Michael Green and Andrew Shearer:¹³ “The Pentagon’s 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) set the tone by calling for a more ‘integrated approach to the region across military and civilian organisations [sic]’ and asking the rest of the US government for an assessment of ‘US national interests, objectives and force posture implications’, which the National Security Council is now undertaking in preparation for the next National Security Strategy report, expected in 2012.”

However, for the year 2012, no such report was made.¹⁴ This aspect further questions the standing of the IOR in the pivot strategy and whether the US

looks on the IOR as a secondary area with an emphasis only on the protection of maritime trade and freedom of navigation.

The generally accepted geographical definition of the Asia-Pacific, prior to the inclusion of the IOR by the US in various statements, was limited to the area east of the Malacca Straits and included the western Pacific. However, a common linkage was the maritime element, and the stress on maritime is apt as “the overriding geopolitical characteristic of Asia-Pacifica is its Maritimity”.¹⁵

The emphasis to include the IOR in the discourse, essentially maritime, has led to the growing usage of the wider term “Indo-Pacific”. The term broadly “refers to the maritime space comprising the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific. Littoral to it are the states of Asia (including West Asia/Middle East) and eastern Africa”.¹⁶ The foundation of the term “Indo-Pacific” could be traced back to the speech by Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the Indian Parliament in August 2007. Abe spoke about the “confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans” as “the dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and of prosperity” in “broader Asia”.¹⁷ The term has also been articulated in Australia’s 2013 Defence White Paper: “A new Indo-Pacific strategic arc is beginning to emerge, connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans through Southeast Asia.”¹⁸ Although usage of the term is expanding, it remains majorly restricted to the strategic community and in government circles of the US, India, Japan and Australia. This could be attributable to the fact that other nations are restricted in their outlook to the immediate neighbourhood because of, firstly, the issues that they face, secondly, their limited capacity and capability in dealing with these issues only and, thirdly, issues beyond the immediate neighbourhood being either peripheral or not impinging on their interests.

Thus, the rationale of the term Indo-Pacific could stem from, firstly, bringing India into the US Pivot equation and, secondly, connecting the four major players (US, India, Japan and Australia) on issues of convergence to aid the US pivot policy towards the Asia-Pacific. However, till the time the term Indo-Pacific does not gain acceptability and ascendancy in the strategic lexicon, the term Asia-Pacific and its general definition would prevail in most dialogues and discussions: “This implies that the US clearly articulate what such a region would resemble, whether it would encompass the Indian Ocean region and the Asia-Pacific as a whole, simply refer to the region stretching from the North-Eastern Indian Ocean to the south western Pacific Ocean, or just represent an attempt to integrate India further in an Asian architecture conducive to US interests.”¹⁹

Till such time the US idea of Indo-Pacific is articulated, the definition of Asia-Pacific as perceived by the US could be divided into two broad spectrums: based on economic-diplomatic and a military-diplomatic combine, both with an inescapable interlock. The economic-diplomatic combine is of utmost importance to the US as “in 2010, 61 percent [sic] of US goods exports and 72 percent [sic] of US agricultural exports worldwide went to the Asia-Pacific. By 2015, East Asian countries are expected to surpass NAFTA and the Euro zone to become

the world's largest trading bloc. Market opportunities will only increase as the region swells by an additional 175 million people by 2030".²⁰ In order to protect the economic-diplomatic combine, the military-diplomatic combine has also gained ascendancy "to defend against threats to those interests (economic)."²¹

However, the main thrusts of the combines are concentrated east of Malacca. This could be attributed to the fact that "US alliance structure, such as it is in the Indian Ocean Region, is far less coherent than what it has engineered in either Europe or East Asia"²² and, therefore, the US interest in the IOR is low-key. The key question is: Does the US view the IOR as an area for a "modified" "Offshore Balancing" and a mix of a "Neo-Nixon" doctrine approach? An approach that could be adopted till such time it is comfortable with the situations in the Gulf and east of Malacca or till the time it may have to contend with a similar complex situation in the IOR.

Modified Offshore Balancing and the Neo-Nixon Doctrine in the IOR

Modified Offshore Balancing

The concept of offshore balancing in the South Asia region is not new and is attributed to the "geo-strategic ideas of Sir Olaf Caroe, the last foreign secretary for the British raj in India (1939-45)."²³ As the British hold was diminishing, "Caroe began to worry about what he came to call, in a prescient phrase, 'the wells of power', the oil resources of the Middle East in general and of the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula in particular."²⁴ The British realising their diminishing power and, therefore, reducing influence in the region apparently induced the US to enter in the region when the US had no significant interests.²⁵ During the late 1940s, a committee was formed to look into the planning requirements of the Indian Armed Forces.²⁶ The committee based its report on three assumptions: one of which clearly spells out the foundations of "offshore balancing"—China and India would maintain sufficient forces to overcome a minor power and would be able to hold out against a major power until Imperial Forces could arrive. However, the report also mentioned the apprehensions of India coming under Russia's influence and spoke of China as a long-term threat. China is still viewed as a threat, and although the threat from Russia subsided after the end of the cold war, its re-entry in to the IOR is a possibility given the rising debate on its growing proximity with China and pivot to Asia²⁷ and plans to increase its Pacific Fleet.²⁸

Although offshore balancing calls for the retirement of the US from "stressful engagements on the Eurasian continent, notably Iraq and Afghanistan",²⁹ the same would not be applicable for the IOR as "the mounting importance of South Asia—a region far less hospitable for US power projection—renders offshore balancing too costly and too hazardous to supply the basis for an Indian Ocean strategy."³⁰ Therefore, a modified offshore balancing approach would be in order.

This modified approach would permit the US to reposition combat power in the IOR on an as required basis. A task made easier as the US has assets stationed in Diego Garcia and Australia, which could be diverted to the main expanse of the IOR. Should the need arise, these assets could be strengthened by positioning of additional combat power allocated to the three commands that oversee the region. This would meet the outlook seen in the US approach to the IOR.

While the US defence document prepared by the US Navy, Marine Corps and Coastguard “Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower” of October 2007 called for continuously posturing credible combat power in the Western Pacific and Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean and selective and rapid repositioning of the combat power to meet contingencies arising elsewhere,³¹ the Strategic Guidance Document 2012 looks at “networks of cooperation with emerging partners”³² and specifically at “investing in a long-term strategic partnership with India to support its ability to serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region.”³³ Therefore, although a great deal of interest is being evinced, and the IOR does appear to be in vogue in US strategic thinking, this approach appears to be in a state of flux. Some of the major factors attributing to this are as follows:

- Reduction of US commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Situation with Iran and Syria.
- Situation in the South China Sea and East China Sea.
- Rising Chinese presence in the IOR.
- Ability of the US to project power in the IOR due to sequestration that would result in reduction in number of assets.
- The division of the IOR between three US commands—Pacific Command (PACOM), Central Command (CENTCOM) and Africa Command (AFRICOM).

The US may find it difficult to appropriate assets from the Gulf, even after withdrawing from Iraq and Afghanistan due to the ongoing situation with Iran and Syria. Appropriation of assets from east of Malacca would also be a difficult task as it could dilute the support it has promised to its allies in the region. The creation of AFRICOM from the three US commands (EUCOM, PACOM and CENTCOM) was part of the strategic necessity to “move Africa into the centre of US strategic interests, after years of attempting to implement Africa policy on the geopolitical edges of three separate commands.”³⁴ The creation of AFRICOM has now, in a way, placed the IOR in lieu of Africa—divided between three commands as against two earlier (CENTCOM and PACOM). The IOR now stands divided as follows (see Map 1):

- CENTCOM: Middle East nations up to Pakistan, Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden.
- AFRICOM: East Coast of Africa, waters along the east coast from South of Somalia.
- PACOM: Main Area of IOR including littoral nations west of India.

Thus, coordination between the three US commands would be a vital imperative. Also, the three US commands could find appropriating assets a difficult task as brought out by Admiral Jonathon Greenert, the US Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), in his blog dated September 27, 2013: “If sequestration-level reductions persist in the years after FY 2014, the Navy of 2020 would not be able to execute the missions described in our defence strategy, the Defence Strategic Guidance.”³⁵ In an earlier blog dated September 20, 2013,³⁶ the CNO had mentioned that sequestration would result in a reduction of the naval budget by 10 per cent—actually entailing a cut of 14 per cent on all activities, as military personnel accounts are exempt from this cut. The main impact as per the blog would be in two areas—firstly, on operations and maintenance, and secondly, on investments. In short it means that fewer assets would be available to respond to a contingency. This would have an immense impact on naval activities from 2014 onwards as post sequestration time would be required to bring the combat power to an acceptable level of numbers and training. This aspect would have a bearing on the pivot strategy as, firstly, it is still unfolding and, secondly, it would need a consistent number of assets available at any time. This would also affect the “modified offshore balancing” approach; therefore, the US with its allies and strategic partners would have to work out plans for various contingencies. In order to ensure an appropriate balance in the IOR the US may have to adopt and amalgamate the Neo-Nixon doctrine along with the “modified offshore balance” concept.

Neo-Nixon Doctrine

In response to a question put before him in 1969 regarding the role of the US military in Asia, President Nixon had stated:³⁷ “I believe that the time has come when the United States in our relations with all our Asian friends, be quite emphatic on two points: One that we will keep our treaty commitments...but two, that as far as the problems of internal security are concerned, as far as the problems of military defence, except for the threat of a major power involving nuclear weapons, that the United States is going to encourage and has the right to expect that this problem will be increasingly handled by, and the responsibility for it taken by, the Asian nations themselves.”

The main issue of the doctrine was reduction of US presence in regions of interest. Apart from looking at an exit policy from Vietnam, Nixon had also expanded on the doctrine so as to resume dialogue with Russia and China. The US finds itself in somewhat of a similar position as it is : Firstly, looking for an exit policy from Afghanistan and Iraq; secondly, embroiled in a situation in Syria where it faced opposition from Russia and China as well as the United Kingdom³⁸ in respect of a possible military intervention; thirdly, in the middle of the ongoing imbroglio with Iran; fourthly, reaffirming its status on the treaty obligations with its allies in Asia-Pacific; fifthly, facing a resurgent Russia and sixthly, balancing a rising China—which is seen as the central theme of its Pivot policy. The issue

is further complicated because of the growing economic and trade engagements, an aspect that was not so prominent in the late 1960s/early 1970s.

A study of the US assistance in the Persian Gulf, in specific reference to Iran (under the Shah) and Saudi Arabia, springs forth some aspects that have a bearing on the US approach to the IOR. Major Marc Jasper in his thesis written while attending the Naval Post Graduate School clearly brings out that “since the 1940s, US policy in the Middle East has been primarily based on three concerns: access to oil; the survival of Israel; and containment of hostile states in the Gulf region, first the Soviet Union, then later Iran and Iraq respectively.”³⁹ Jasper further writes that although Nixon’s twin pillar policy was based on arms sales to Iran and Saudi Arabia, thereby bringing stability to the region and also control of the region without deploying US troops, the policy, although considered consistent to date, failed due to “fall of one pillar (the Shah’s Iran), serious domestic troubles in the second pillar (Saudi Arabia), and, most important, the advent of a large, continuous and direct US military presence in the Gulf.”⁴⁰ The last aspect, although an issue that goes against the “grain” of the policy to reduce US presence, is an essentiality that goes hand in glove with the US assistance to bolster the capabilities of the Gulf nations. A similar situation exists in the South China and East China Sea region where there is a US presence, whose military capability would be augmented,⁴¹ and alliances with several nations. Therefore, the US is building strategic alliances with nations that are viewed as stable regional powers and working towards mutual beneficial cooperation. An aspect enunciated by Chuck Hagel, the US Secretary of Defence, in his speech at the Shangri-La dialogue 2013, wherein he put forward the following points:⁴²

- The vision for Asia-Pacific was an open and inclusive one.
- To achieve the vision, the US was seeking to build relations with rising powers like India, Indonesia and China.
- The US was working to enhance the capacity of its partners so as to provide for their own and the regions security.
- The US was working with its closest and most capable allies and partners to jointly develop and deploy cutting-edge technologies to tackle emerging security challenges.
- The US was looking towards India as one of the leaders in the broader Asia region and also moving from defence trade towards sharing of technology and co-production.

In sum, the overall picture emerging is that firstly, the US would not dilute its presence in the regions where it is presently deployed; secondly, it would appropriate assets to areas on an “as required basis” and thirdly, it would rely on its strategic partners and allies to ensure regional security for which it is building their capacities and capabilities. This could be viewed as a “modified” mix of the “Neo-Nixon” doctrine and “offshore balancing” concept.

Implications for the IOR

“Since the vital military and political interests of the United States do not require it to play a leading role in guaranteeing the security of the Indian Ocean littoral, the traditional American formula of forward deployed forces backed by nuclear security guarantees is not necessarily appropriate for this region. Instead, the best means for achieving regional stability is to facilitate the emergence of a multi-polar regional arrangement led by strong democratic states.”⁴³ This view reinforces the aspects covered in the previous paragraph as applicable for the IOR. Therefore, the importance of the IOR to the US would be its importance for its allies and strategic partners, both intra and extra-regional, mainly due to the following aspects:

- Stability: This aspect is of vital importance as it signifies that the region is one of the most politically troubled with ingredients that could potentially lead to inter or intra-state conflicts. Some salient issues influencing stability are as follows:
 - The failed state index 2013 includes 10 IOR nations in the top 35.⁴⁴
 - “In 2011, a total of 142 political conflicts were recorded in the IOR, representing more than a third of the 388 conflicts worldwide, including 12 of the world’s 20 wars, as well as an additional eight limited wars.”⁴⁵
 - Presence of two nuclear power states—India and Pakistan. The China angle cannot be discounted due to the ongoing border dispute with India, its proximity to Pakistan and ingress into the Indian Ocean.
 - Use of the Indian Ocean for maritime terrorism, human smuggling, drug trafficking and gun running.
 - Piracy, although on the wane, is an example how a non-traditional threat, a resultant of instability in Somalia, could affect maritime trade and stability in a region.
 - Lack of regional security architecture.
- Natural Resources.
 - The region holds around 49.7 per cent of the world’s proven oil reserves; around 49.7 per cent of the world’s proven gas reserves and 19.8 per cent of the world’s coal proven reserves.⁴⁶
 - The east Indian Ocean accounts for 8 per cent of total world fish production, while the west Indian Ocean is facing overfishing and exploitation due to deep water fishing by non-littoral states such as Spain, Taiwan, Japan, France and Uruguay.⁴⁷
 - Availability of minerals, mainly polymetallic nodules and polymetallic massive sulphides.⁴⁸ Other minerals of interest are iron, titanium, chromate, lithium, bauxite, cobalt, nickel manganese, rubber and tin.⁴⁹
- Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs): “The Indian Ocean accounts for the transportation of the highest tonnage of goods in the world, with almost 100,000 ships transiting its expanse annually. On its waters are carried two-thirds of the world’s oil shipments, one-third of bulk cargo traffic and

half the world's container shipments.⁵⁰ The IOR is home to major sea transit routes that pass through several choke points in the region, choke points that have been witness to closure and threat of closure by both traditional and non-traditional threats. Therefore, any disruption in the flow of maritime trade would impact on cost and the world's economy.

Due to a lack of a US-led or dominated security arrangement, unlike what exists in other regions, the US interest would be to ensure a more stable region, with minimal requirement of their presence and intervention. However, the economic angle due to globalisation would accrue more US attention as being "the world's greatest trading nation, see its exports and imports travel predominantly by sea. The US economy, consequently, would not be so prosperous and dynamic were American or foreign-flagged shipping unable to use the world's oceans at will, free from restriction or interference."⁵¹

Although the US is looking at India, Indonesia and Australia as strategic partners, the implications for the IOR would be dictated majorly by the following relations:

- US–Australia
- US–Indonesia
- US–India
- US–Pakistan
- India–China
- Pakistan–China

US–Australia

US–Australian relations are well established. However, the quantum of interest that Australia evinces in the main expanse of the IOR would remain limited. The Australian interest would at best remain centred in the eastern part of the IOR mainly due to its capability and capacity. Notwithstanding this limitation, Australia could aid in guiding meaningful dialogues as it, firstly, takes over as chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) from India for the period 2013 to 2015⁵² and, secondly, assumes the chair of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in 2014.⁵³

US–Indonesia

US–Indonesia relations have seen resurgence after a comprehensive partnership was proposed in 2008. Two major issues that stand out are as follows:⁵⁴

- A 600 million US\$ compact through the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). The money would be invested in renewable energy, maternal and child nutrition, modernisation of Indonesia's public procurement system and green prosperity.
- Recognition of Indonesia's role in maintaining maritime security in the South China Sea dispute.

Although the economic relations have not progressed as desired owing to a variety of reasons, the defence relations have magnified and the main elements that attract attention are as follows:⁵⁵

- Cooperation and dialogue in areas of maritime security, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, reform and professionalisation.
- Frequent joint exercises.
- Upgradation of existing military assets and procurement of equipment via Foreign Military Financing (FMF).

Indonesia's importance stems from the fact that it sits astride the Malacca Straits and could control the eastern entry and exit point to and from the IOR. A decisive verity recognised by both the US and China. The US brought Indonesia back in to its ambit despite the cutting of FMF due to the Indonesian military involvement in the Dili massacre of East Timor civilians and the killing of people during the August 1999 East Timor independence vote by military-backed militia.⁵⁶ This was brought about by the US-led fight against terrorism and the recognition that Indonesia "was a key to Southeast Asian stability and security, especially since it is astride the region's vital sea lanes."⁵⁷ Owing to this geographical situation, China would also not want to antagonise Indonesia. Therefore, there appears to be a tacit understanding between China and Indonesia due to political, economic and military ties despite China's nine dash line claim cutting through Indonesian waters north of the Natuna Islands that encompass the Natuna gas fields.⁵⁸ In 2013, China–Indonesia relations saw a more focused approach: Firstly, Indonesia was the first southeast nation to be visited by the Chinese President Xi Jinping since assuming office; secondly, President Jinping became the first foreign leader to be bestowed the honour of addressing the Indonesian Parliament and thirdly, economic and trade cooperation was enhanced based on the talks during the visit. This triangular equation would require delicate handling by all three nations, and could affect the US pivot if China engages Indonesia positively.

US–India

US–India relations have seen an upsurge since the signing of the civil nuclear deal. India is oft seen as a predominant regional power with a benign approach. These internationally acceptable attributes aptly fit its envisaged role as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and as a lynch pin in the US pivot to Asia. A role brought out by Chuck Hagel in his speech at the Shangri-La dialogue 2013, wherein he said:⁵⁹ "India's role as a stabilizing power is of growing importance with the increase of trade and transit between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The United States considers India's efforts to enhance its military capabilities as a welcome contribution to security in the region."

India's central position in the IOR overlooking the SLOCs, its proximity to the choke points in the IOR, especially the Malacca Straits, Straits of Hormuz and Gulf of Aden accord it the specified importance. In the maritime arena, the Malabar series of exercises have enabled India and the US in achieving a high

degree of inter-operability over the years, despite the varying types of ships and equipment India operates. The number of military assets being procured from the US by India has been growing steadily. Although the rejection of the F-16IN aircraft offered by the US for the Medium Multi Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) deal slightly marred the relations, the procurement of assets such as P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, C-17 transport aircraft and C-130J Super Hercules transport aircraft place India as one of the biggest customers of American weaponry in this decade. Since 2003, India has procured military equipment worth around US\$ 10 billion.⁶⁰ Presently, negotiations are ongoing for the procurement of AH-64 Apache attack helicopters, CH-47 Chinook heavy lift helicopters and M-777 lightweight howitzers. Post the third bilateral meeting between the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the US President Obama on September 27, 2013, the relations are now poised to enter a new level of defence technology transfer, joint research, co-development and co-production.⁶¹

However, this relationship is governed by two other relations: US–Pakistan and India–China. Although the US–Pakistan relationship has seen a “sine curve” ride, the overtures of the US to Pakistan in the past have affected its relations with India. It is evident that the US would need Pakistan in its withdrawal from Afghanistan, especially for maritime mobility. The request for US\$ 1.162 billion (US\$ 857 million for civilian assistance and US\$ 305 million for security assistance) by the Obama administration for the fiscal year 2014, which commenced on October 10, 2013,⁶² could be a step in this direction. This aspect of assistance is a “tight rope” walk that the US would need to tread with caution, especially as India is heading for elections in 2014.

India–China relations, based on rivalry and mistrust, are an imperative that are central to India’s role in the IOR. The debate of the string of pearls, oft seen as an encirclement of India, focuses mainly on the burgeoning Chinese economic “island hopping strategy”.⁶³ Although China has also assisted Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar in building of ports and other related infrastructure, India’s relations and geographical proximity to these nations could dilute the Chinese efforts. Therefore, though the issue of use of “places” does not, presently, accrue China any advantage of significant maritime presence, it does place China in a strategic position in the IOR with the ability to increase its maritime footprint, especially due to its close relation with Pakistan (discussed later). “The centrality of the ‘ocean’ in the region’s affairs is further underscored by the fact that problems on land invariably find a reflection at sea.”⁶⁴ China is also wary of India’s look east policy, and as this policy predates the theory of the string of pearls, it cannot be seen as a response to the string of pearls theory. In time, China would have to accept India’s look east policy as a comprehensive part of its national interests. China also recognises that at present it cannot match India’s military ability to influence events in the IOR and therefore exerts pressure on India via the land border. The incursion of Chinese troops 19 kilometres into Ladakh reported on April 15, 2013 is supportive of this fact.⁶⁵

India's policies towards its neighbours, specifically the relations and investments, in terms of goodwill and trust earned, would determine the focal point of the US approach to India. It is perhaps for this reason that the US is engaging the island nations where there is reasonable Chinese influence. A case in point being the reported signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Maldives to provide a "cost free border control system."⁶⁶ Signing of a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)⁶⁷ was also reported, but the setting up of a US military base has been denied by the US, and Maldives had stated that it was yet to decide on signing the SOFA.⁶⁸ These aspects could have a bearing on the US pivot to Asia and India-US relations as, firstly, US could perceive this as India's inability to counter Chinese presence in the IOR, both economically and militarily, and secondly, dilute the aspect of India being seen as a net provider of security in the region.

Pakistan-China

The defence relations of Pakistan with China commenced after the US stopped arms supplies to both Pakistan and India during the 1965 war between both the nations. Pakistan being the more affected nation turned to China and received more than 200 tanks and 100 military aircraft.⁶⁹ The flow of conventional arms from China grew, and "it was well established by the early 1980s that nearly 65 percent [*sic*] of Pakistan's aircraft and 75 per cent of its tanks were supplied by China."⁷⁰ In 2012, as per Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Pakistan accounted for 55 per cent of Chinese arms exports.⁷¹ The flow of conventional arms also grew to include nuclear and related technologies. "In the mid-1980s, China supplied Pakistan with a nuclear weapon design suitable for tactical aircraft delivery. In addition it provided Pakistan with important components required to detonate a nuclear weapon."⁷² The aspect of supply of nuclear technology is considered most important and sensitive for the region especially after the Kargil conflict of 1999 that was fought under the shadow of nuclear weapons. Although China did not evince any support favouring Pakistan, it could take advantage of the strained relations to counter Indian steps to bolster its land borders and enhance and expand its maritime capability and capacity. Pakistan sees China as a balancer against India and the US, as the evolving geopolitics of the Indian Ocean "is being caused by the heightening endeavours of US and India to gain the over lordship over Indian Ocean region, because of their respective self-conceived geopolitical right to do so."⁷³ The increasing number of exercises conducted between both nations is indicative of a growing nexus to counter the US-India influence in the IOR.

In September 2013, Pakistan and China held a joint air force exercise named Shaheen 2 in China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. This exercise follows Shaheen 1 that was held in Pakistan in March 2011.

On the maritime front, Pakistan has proposed annual maritime exercises commencing from 2014 with the first scheduled in the Arabian Sea. Interestingly,

the proposed exercises coincide with the planned first sea trials of China's new strategic submarine that is equipped with JL-2 missiles.⁷⁴ Introduction of these submarines in the planned exercises would alter the strategic scenario tremendously. The institutionalisation of these exercises could be viewed as a counter to the Malabar series of exercises and a means of challenging India's maritime capacity and capability.

The usage of Pakistani ports/bases as "semi-military"⁷⁵ bases by China to enhance its maritime, aerospace and military footprint is a possibility given the commonality due to supply of assets from China as well as co-production of hardware.⁷⁶ Gwadar port, which has once again been taken over by China, is strategically placed overlooking the entrance to the Straits of Hormuz. Use of this port would accrue China not only the advantage of reciprocity vis-à-vis the Malacca straits but also give it greater operational flexibility in the Arabian Sea: an aspect that could dilute the US pivot centred east of Malacca as it would require the US to rethink its appropriation of assets.

Conclusion

The implications of the US pivot in the IOR are complex and cover a multitude of issues that require comprehensive understanding and delicate handling. The US approach to the IOR in this context clearly appears incoherent as it seems to be unable to decide the importance to be given to this region. Some issues that require a relook and rethink of the strategy the US is to adopt in the IOR as a part of the pivot are as follows:

- Clear geographical definition of the Asia-Pacific or Indo-Pacific.
- Efficacy of dividing the IOR between three commands.
- The stress on the diplomatic-economic combine due to the maritime trade that plies the region as compared to the diplomatic-military combine.
- Relations with IOR nations, especially Pakistan and India.
- Possible effects of sequestration.
- The growing Chinese influence.

The US would have to consider at some point in time of positioning more assets in the IOR and also developing a regional security and economic architecture with its allies and strategic partners. Before doing so, it would have to clearly prioritise its relations with them. Therefore, till such time a clear enunciation is made of its IOR policy, the mixed approach of a "modified", "Offshore Balancing" and "Neo-Nixon" doctrine is a workable solution, albeit transitory.

NOTES

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10

The US Rebalancing Strategy: Responses from Southeast Asia

Rahul Mishra

Introduction

The US “Pivot to Asia” or “Rebalancing towards Asia” strategy, since its inception, has been lauded as a remarkable shift in the American approach towards the East Asian region and deeper engagement with its security dynamics.¹ In November 2011, during his visits to Australia and Indonesia, the US President Barack Obama spoke at length about the American “Pivot”—later rechristened as “Rebalancing” towards Asia, and declared, “The United States is a Pacific power, and we are here to stay”.² Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in her October 2011 article published in *Foreign Policy*, coined the term “Pivot to Asia”, and described the “Pivot” as a “prologue to America’s Pacific Century”.³ Subsequently, in 2013, during his first ever visit to Southeast Asia as the US Secretary of State, John Kerry reaffirmed the US commitment to rebalancing towards Asia.

A closer look at the US Rebalancing towards Asia strategy and consequent Chinese responses is giving “an East Asian twist to what is increasingly referred to as the ‘New Great Game’”.⁴ The reasons for calling the emerging dynamics the “New Great Game” are simple. In the past few years, East Asia in general and Southeast Asia in particular have emerged as the new global geopolitical centre of gravity with a re-shift of politico-diplomatic, military, institutional and economic focus on countries of the region and their intra-regional politics. Just like the term Indo-Pacific, which attempts to hyphenate the Indian and the Pacific Oceans and their evolving politico-security, demographic and economic dynamics, the term “New Great Game” has also come into vogue, and generated a new set of intense and increasingly nuanced debates on the likely future of global and regional politics. Evidently, the Pivot or Rebalancing towards Asia encompasses “initiatives across all elements of American power”.⁵ Moreover, it attempts to make inroads into every aspect of regional dynamics.

At the politico-diplomatic level, the Obama administration has been more than ordinarily active in the Southeast Asian region over the past two years. There have been dozens of high-profile visits by top leaders of the Obama administration including President Barack Obama, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State John Kerry and former Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta to the region.

Strengthening ties with Vietnam, stepping up defence cooperation with the Philippines, reinvigorating relations with Thailand and swift reconciliation with the Thein Sein Government of Myanmar are also critically important elements of the politico-diplomatic aspect of the Rebalancing strategy in Southeast Asia. At the military level, apart from a shift in terms of focus of the US Naval Forces, it involves new troop deployments to Australia, new naval deployments to Singapore, and new areas for military cooperation with the Philippines.⁶ Intensified military coordination with Japan, and South Korea and bridging gaps with Indonesia and Vietnam are also part of the military aspect of the American Rebalancing strategy in Southeast Asia and beyond. The US desire to become the torchbearer of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and signing Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with South Korea encompass the economic dimension of the US Rebalancing towards Asia. America's proactive participation in the Shangri-La dialogue, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) Plus and the East Asia Summit (EAS) constitute the institutional dimension of America's Rebalancing strategy. Clearly, the East Asian region in general and Southeast Asia in particular lie at the core of the US Rebalancing towards Asia strategy.⁷

Not surprisingly, China has been sceptical of renewed interest and intensified activism of the US in this part of the world. From the time of release of the first comprehensive statement regarding the US Pivot or Rebalancing towards Asia till date, reactions from Chinese leaders and the media have largely been negative.⁸ As Amitav Acharya opines, "China has viewed these initiatives with much suspicion and regards them as detrimental to its interests. It sees Washington's use of the EAS to address the South China Sea disputes as blatant interference and unnecessary internationalisation of the issue, which it prefers to address bilaterally with the respective parties. It deems the TPP as an exclusionary framework aimed at countering China's economic influence. As for Washington's rebalancing, Beijing considers it another name for containment."⁹ Beijing perceives that the US Rebalancing towards Asia has squeezed its strategic space in Asia.¹⁰ Many Chinese are concerned that the 'Pivot to Asia' is little more than code for an increase in US naval power in the region, aimed at boxing them in.¹¹ In fact, many believe that the military dimension of the rebalancing seems directed at them and smacks of containment, and they resent it.¹² China has, over and again, protested against the US ship visits in the region.

In the broader framework of the US Rebalancing towards Asia, this paper discusses the responses of and implications for countries of the Southeast Asian

region and their flagship organisation, ASEAN, and its goal of maintaining “cohesion” and “centrality”. The paper attempts to briefly explore the US position and examine implications of the US Rebalancing towards the region and its constituent countries, as well as ASEAN and ASEAN-propelled initiatives such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Programme (RCEP). The paper concludes with some observations on likely trends for Southeast Asia in the context of the US Rebalancing towards Asia and China’s increasingly assertive postures with regard to territorial disputes and interplay of several other factors.

Decoding the US Rebalancing in Southeast Asia

In the past few years, China’s phenomenal military and economic growth and escalating tensions in the South China Sea have led to deeper uncertainties among the Southeast Asian countries about the future of the region. A widening gap in terms of economic and military prowess between China and the Southeast Asian countries has only intensified such uncertainties and resultant apprehensions. Evidently, “how to adapt to China’s growing power and influence is a question that dominates the foreign policy establishment of nearly every country in the world. Among the regional countries, China arouses unease because of its size, history, proximity, potential power and more importantly the memories of the *middle kingdom syndrome*.”¹³

It is widely believed that China seeks to ensure a multipolar world and unipolar Asia, as against the US which has been striving to keep the international system unipolar, with a multipolar Asia.¹⁴ As the centre of gravity of global politics and economics is shifting toward Asia, it is clear that the one who dominates Asia will eventually dominate the world, too. Naturally, China is the strongest claimant to supremacy in Asia and is doing all that it considers feasible to achieve its goals. However, a number of issues have to be resolved, militarily or otherwise, before China ascends to the status of the hegemon in Asia. To forestall such a situation, the US is trying its best to woo the countries of the region. The Rebalancing towards Asia seems very much a part of that.

Politico-Diplomatic Dimensions of the Rebalancing

From the speeches made by the US President Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, John Kerry and other office bearers of the US administration, it is evident that Washington is keen to engage countries of the Southeast Asian region. In the past two years, visits to almost every Southeast Asian country by the US leaders, attempts to engage ASEAN and other affiliate institutions in a more proactive manner and offering military and non-military support to the Southeast Asian countries are part of American attempts to reinvigorate robust presence in Southeast Asia. A number of initiatives have been taken that have helped boost Washington’s bilateral ties with several Southeast Asian countries including Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

Regional Responses

In so far as responses from countries of the Southeast Asian region are concerned, a wide spectrum is emanating. For instance, while Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam have welcomed the US move, countries like Indonesia and Malaysia have demonstrated a cautious approach. Interestingly, countries such as Cambodia have given a measured response with a blend of apprehension, while Myanmar has been a direct beneficiary of America's renewed interest in Southeast Asia.

As far as the macro-level analysis of the region is concerned, responses could be broadly divided into maritime and mainland Southeast Asia. As Thitinan Pongsudhirak argues, "It appears that maritime Southeast Asia is increasingly leaning towards Washington, whereas mainland Southeast Asia is more influenced by Beijing."¹⁵ He further adds, "The region of Southeast Asia is moving ahead in the face of regionalist rhetoric and aspirations. Maritime Southeast Asia features states that have locked horns with China over territorial claims in the South China Sea. The Philippines and Vietnam are at the forefront, with Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei in support, vis-à-vis China. The South China Sea has thus become an arena of tension and conflict, inviting the US as a countervailing superpower to check Beijing's assertiveness."¹⁶ Making a distinction between mainland and maritime Southeast Asia, he argues, "The interests and concerns of maritime Southeast Asian states are divergent from the CLMT (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand), which were either silent or supportive of Cambodia's pro-China stance at the annual regional ministerial meeting in Phnom Penh in July 2012, when ASEAN failed to produce a joint statement due to the insistence of the Philippines and Vietnam on adding the South China Sea issue in the Joint Statement."¹⁷ While the categorisation seems a bit over—simplified, it does, however, throw light onto the dynamics of the region. Clearly, parties involved in the South China Sea dispute with China are finding it difficult to accommodate their interests with China's regional aspirations. Embracing Washington's "Rebalancing" strategy without annoying China represents one of Asia's core challenges today.¹⁸ Responses from individual countries depict that each country is attempting to deal with the challenge in its own way depending on its strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis the US-China equation.

Vietnam: The Newfound Friend

With Vietnam, the US had fought one of the deadliest wars in the 20th century. For decades, the two countries maintained an arm's-length relationship. However, of late, Vietnam and the US have started inching closer. In 2010, under the ASEAN chairmanship of Vietnam, the way for the US entry into the EAS was cleared. Concerns on China have been the primary reason for their newfound warmth.

In July 2013, Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang visited the US. He was the second Vietnamese President to visit the country since 1995. (Nguyen Minh

Triet was the first Vietnamese President to visit the US in 2007). Sang's visit came after Obama's overtures reflecting Washington's "desire to place Hanoi at the centre of its Pivot strategy in East Asia".¹⁹ The exchange of high-level visits is a significant break from the past, and has provided fresh impetus to Vietnam-US relations.²⁰ During the visit, it was decided to establish the Vietnam-US Comprehensive Partnership to "provide an overarching framework for advancing the relationship".²¹ The Partnership is "intended to contribute to peace, stability, cooperation, and prosperity...(It) will create mechanisms for cooperation in areas including political and diplomatic relations, trade and economic ties...defence and security."²² The agreements signed during the visit are likely to play a crucial role in fostering trust between the two countries and possibly culminating in a Strategic Partnership.²³

China is perhaps one of the most important factors in shaping the Vietnam-US relations. Interestingly, the Southeast Asian countries, earlier apprehensive of the US intentions in their backyard, are now finding it beneficial to lean towards Washington.²⁴ The Obama administration's Rebalancing towards Asia policy has further encouraged these countries to get closer to the US. Clearly, Vietnam is weighing its options and seems to have found a safe and reliable partner in the US.²⁵

Vietnam's policymakers acknowledge that cordial relationship with the US is one of the priorities for Vietnam. As Ton Sinh Thanh, Vietnam's Ambassador to Sri Lanka, states, "The history of the relations has had many twists and turns but the two countries normalised relations in 1995. Now the US is second biggest trading partner of Vietnam with US\$ 25 billion of trade volume, but the US became Vietnam's largest export market with US\$ 20 billion. US total investment in Vietnam amounted to US\$ 10.5 billion. About 15,000 Vietnamese students are studying in the US. Our President Truong Tan Sang visited USA in July 2013, and the two countries have decided to form a Comprehensive Partnership."²⁶

The Philippines: A Rediscovered Ally

The Philippines has been traditionally close to the US. During the Cold War, the Philippines always sided with the US by virtue of being in military alliance with the US. Moreover, during the Korean War, it cooperated with the US, and provided logistical support during the Vietnam War. In 1992, Philippines had asked the US to withdraw from the Subic Bay naval base, which led to downgrading of military ties between the two allies.²⁷

The 2013 US Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operation in the typhoon Haiyan-hit Philippines substantiated the claims made by the US that it is keen to engage Southeast Asian nations in a robust manner through the Rebalancing towards Asia strategy. Typhoon Haiyan killed around 2,000 Philippine people. On November 11, 2013, two American transport planes and a group of US marines were sent to Tacloban. Additionally, the aircraft carrier George Washington and cruisers Antietam and Cowpens, the destroyers Mustin

and Lassen and the supply ship Charles Drew were also sent to the Philippine coast.²⁸ According to media reports, the US and the Philippines are likely to sign a new treaty focussing on upgrading military cooperation between the two countries.²⁹ For the Philippines, “the US Pivot provided a golden opportunity to demonstrate a more independent and balanced foreign policy”.³⁰ China’s diplomatic standoff with the Philippines on the South China Sea have only contributed to the acceptability of the US ‘Rebalancing’ in the Philippines. “It is not a coincidence that the diplomatic tensions heightened after the US Pivot to Asia strategy was first put in motion back in 2010. China, of course, contributed to this escalation when it submitted its “9-dash line” claim in 2009.”³¹ Clearly, the Philippines has re-emerged as a strong ally of the US, which has been extraordinarily vocal against China’s posture in the South China Sea dispute.

Singapore: An All-Weather Partner

Singapore is one of the most important allies of the US which has maintained cordial relations with China as well. Singapore has traditionally been a votary of “institutional balancing” in the region, inviting as many major external powers in the region as possible so that the balance of power remains stable and in the best interest of Singapore (and other member countries of ASEAN). In a reply to the parliamentary question on Singapore’s response to the US Rebalancing towards Asia, the Minister for Defence, Dr Ng Eng Hen said: “Singapore therefore welcomes the US’ continued engagement of this region to ensure Asia’s prosperity and security. In recognition of the US’ positive influence in the region, we have allowed US military aircraft and vessels to use our facilities for several decades—first, under our 1990 Memorandum of Understanding and later in 2005, under the Strategic Framework Agreement signed by PM Lee and then-President George W. Bush. The recent announcement of the deployment of up to four US Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) to use our military facilities is consistent with these signed agreements.”³²

Singapore will do its best to ensure that the US-China relations don’t get damaged while supporting the US moves in the region, particularly, as Singapore realises that an overt rivalry, military or otherwise, between the US and China would damage the Southeast Asian countries the most, not to mention the ASEAN and its affiliate institutions. As Minister for Defence, Dr Ng Eng Hen states: “Ultimately, Singapore is friends with both, and hopes that the US-China relations flourish. We do not wish to see their relations deteriorate, and indeed, both sides, China and US, have openly affirmed that the Asia-Pacific region is big enough to accommodate both the US and China. Other nations need not choose better relations with one at the expense of the other. Instead, all stakeholders should work towards an inclusive regional security framework that builds common understanding and cooperation. To achieve this, the ASEAN Defence Ministers and their ‘Plus’ partners are expanding dialogue and enhancing military-to-military

interactions through the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting and other multilateral fora."³³

The Obama administration's strategy of rebalancing US foreign policy priorities to the region enhances Singapore's role as a key US partner in the region. Singapore and the US are among the 12 countries on both sides of the Pacific involved in the TPP, which is the centrepiece of the Obama administration's economic Rebalancing towards Asia.³⁴

Myanmar: A Test Case of American Engagement in Southeast Asia

One of the most dramatic changes in Southeast Asia lately has been the political transition in Myanmar. President of Myanmar Thein Sein has been taking steps to bring the erstwhile pariah country back to the mainstream of international community. The US support is seemingly reinforcing Thein Sein's reformative policies, and the country, which was called the "outpost of tyranny", is turning into the "Outpost of Rebalancing Strategy". This is due to the fact that the US has been an extremely important external factor influencing Myanmar's domestic politics and economy, regional stature and international acceptability. The US has been pressurising Myanmar, by all means necessary, to ensure the reversal to democracy and greater respect for human rights in the country. Needless to say that the West, led by the US, has been vitally important in shaping Myanmar's own willingness to change.

For almost two decades, since the overthrow of democratically elected government in Myanmar, Myanmar-US relations remained mired with mutual suspicion and hostility as the US wanted the junta to restore democracy against its wishes. Taking cues from other countries that were at loggerheads with the US, the military junta of Myanmar took extra caution in safeguarding its interests. As a result, relations with China were strengthened, and subsequently, the capital was also shifted from Yangon to Naypyidaw. According to Bertil Lintner, "The Junta's apparent fear of a pre-emptive US invasion by sea or air strikes was at the time seen by some as a major motivation for the junta's decision to move the capital to what they perceived to be safer, central mountainous location away from the coast. After all, the US government had publically clubbed Myanmar together with rogue regimes and referred to it as an 'outpost of tyranny.'³⁵ Both Myanmar and the US have been looking for an opportunity to restore ties. Myanmar's China concern gave the US an opportunity to "break the ice"; Myanmar too didn't miss the chance.

With the Myanmar visit of Hillary Clinton in November 2011, barely a month after the launch of the Rebalancing strategy, the US worked for restoration of ties and easing of sanctions, which manifested the turnaround in the US approach. It also aimed to secure political manoeuvring space for Aung San Suu Kyi. Myanmar agreed to the US demands, including the release of political prisoners and granting more rights to people of the country, which led to normalisation of ties between Myanmar and the US. Consequently, it was

announced on January 13, 2012 that the US would appoint its Ambassador to Myanmar again, thereby elevating the diplomatic representation in Myanmar. Subsequently, Derek Mitchell was appointed as the first-ever US Ambassador to Myanmar after 1990. In July 2012, the US eased sanctions that were imposed on Myanmar. In fact, Hillary Clinton announced a plan regarding “targeted easing” of sanctions.

Later, after much debate and discussions, the US “suspended” the sanctions imposed on Myanmar. On February 6, 2012, the US waived some more sanctions. The most prominent among them was the provision to allow Myanmar to work with the World Bank and other international financial organisations.³⁶ The decision was seen as yet another gesture to appreciate the reform measure taken by the Thein Sein Government. Within a few weeks since Hillary Clinton’s visit to the country, more than a dozen high-profile leaders from the US and other Western countries paid visits to Naypyidaw.

Apart from Hillary Clinton, several US officials including Congressman Joe Crowley, US special envoy for Burma, Derek Mitchell and Luis CdeBaca of the State Department also visited Myanmar. Moreover, Crowley has in the past sponsored bills authorising sanctions against Myanmar including the 2008 measure that stopped gems from Myanmar entering the US via third countries.³⁷ Clearly, the US decision to restore ties came in response to the Sein Government’s release of thousands of political prisoners, a move that was hailed by Barack Obama as “a substantial step forward for democratic reform”.³⁸ The US has acknowledged these changes in swiftly changing Myanmar; it has been taking into account the suggestions made by Myanmar’s neighbours including India and the member countries of ASEAN.³⁹ Additionally, Myanmar’s souring ties with China provided the US a chance to get closer to Myanmar.

The second Obama administration has realised that the real challenge for the US foreign policy lies in Asia. This sufficiently explains the US “Rebalancing towards Asia” strategy policy as also Obama’s visit to Myanmar and Thailand within a month since he assumed the second term in office. Evidently, Myanmar is one of the major success stories where Obama has made a difference by trying to bring the country on to a democratic path through diplomatic means.⁴⁰ The November 2012 visit of President Obama had immense symbolic value as it was the first-ever visit of a sitting US President to Myanmar. Obama’s visit was also indicative of the US acknowledging the ongoing political reforms in Myanmar. Arguably, the visit is also believed to have foreshadowed Obama administration’s focus on Asia as part of a strategy to dilute the Chinese influence in the region.⁴¹ As another gesture of support, Obama referred to the country by the government’s preferred name “Myanmar” rather than “Burma”, which has been used by the European countries, Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and other pro-democracy activists.⁴² During the visit, President Obama was full of praise for President Thein Sein and his government. He stated that the democratic and economic reforms started by Thein Sein could lead to “incredible development

opportunities”.⁴³ He added, “Flickers of progress that we have seen must not be extinguished...reforms launched from the top of society must meet the aspirations of citizens who form its foundation.”⁴⁴

Encouraging Myanmar to move away from decades of military rule has indeed been a success for President Obama, which has been acknowledged by his critics and fans alike. Obama’s Myanmar policy was positively received across the US policy circles as also amongst the allies and friends of the US. There was also a lingering feeling that friction in the US-Myanmar relations had become “a drag on America’s relations with ASEAN and its member countries”.⁴⁵ Later, in May 2013, Obama lifted the ban on US entry visas to Myanmar’s military rulers and their associates but kept sanctions on investing or doing business with figures involved in repression since the mid-1990s.⁴⁶

Clearly, for the US, Myanmar has not only become a test case of its influence vis-à-vis China but also a major opportunity to restore democracy in the country and integrate it with the global economic system. Although a lot needs to be done to ensure that Myanmar becomes a fully functioning democracy, the budding shoots of democratic recovery are surely encouraging.⁴⁷ In the process, the Sein Government’s acceptability, both domestically and globally, has also gone up by leaps and bounds.

Thailand: A Time-Tested Friend

In so far as Thailand is concerned, it is uniquely placed in the dynamics of superpower relations in the region. While Thailand’s relations with the US are more than a century old, it is increasingly getting closer to China. It is believed that “Thai diplomatic, political, military, and economic alignment with Beijing is inexorable. Thus, the stock still favours the US, but the flow is more toward China”.⁴⁸ For the records, it may be mentioned that the 1997 Asian financial crisis played a huge role in a turnaround in the Thai approach towards China. Thailand’s flexible foreign policy, which is equipped to deal with unexpected situations, adds further momentum to that. As Chulacheeb Chinwanno states: “Thailand pursues a ‘balanced engagement’ policy with the major powers: China; the US; Japan; and India. Thailand tries to manage its relations with the US in such a way that facilitates closer ties with China. An important objective of Thai foreign policy is to position the country where it will not have to choose strategically between the US and China, but remain important and relevant to both.”⁴⁹

Thailand is cognisant of the benefits that cordial ties with China may accord. Without being over dependent on the US, Thailand wants to reap the benefits of China’s rise in the international economic order. Thus, it is evident that in managing its relations with both China and the US, “Thailand’s core strategic concept of ‘bending with the prevailing winds’ comes into play.”⁵⁰ While holding on to the ‘Strategic Partnership’ with China, Thailand never put the axe to its formal alliance structure with the US, even if it was moribund during much of

the 1970s.”⁵¹ In that context, one may argue that Thailand is carefully weighing its strategic options with regard to China’s rise. While Thailand can’t go against the ASEAN or the US over the China issue, it is employing a unique blend of “bandwagoning” with China on economic issues while not being averse to the US attempt in covert “balancing” against China on the military front. An increasingly assertive China poses a challenge to the countries of the East Asian region. While a “hedging strategy” defines the Thai policy vis-à-vis emerging East Asian security architecture to a great extent, stepped up US presence in the region is being welcomed by Thailand as a measure to ensure a multipolar region.⁵²

An ancient Siamese proverb likens the Thai foreign policy to the “bamboo in the wind”: always solidly rooted, but flexible enough to bend whichever way the wind blows in order to survive.⁵³ More than mere pragmatism, the proverb reflects the country’s long-cherished, philosophical approach to international relations, the canons of which are very much enshrined in the Thai culture and religion.⁵⁴ Throughout its history, Thailand has consistently crafted a cautious, calculated foreign policy and jealously guarded its independence.⁵⁵ Thailand and several other countries of Southeast Asia are ensuring a multipolar region, and to prevent undesirable hostilities in the region, they are welcoming the increasing presence of the US in Southeast Asia. Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and member countries of ASEAN, while holding their national interest supreme, cherish the common vision of ensuring a peaceful and prosperous East Asia.⁵⁶

Brunei Darussalam: Navigating Carefully

Ever since its independence from the United Kingdom in 1984, Brunei Darussalam shares a congenial relation with the US. Their relations date back to 1850 when both countries signed a Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Commerce and Navigation which is in force till date. Clearly, today, their cooperation has been strengthened. In the recent years, frequent exchanges of high-level visits between the US and Brunei are shaping their relations. In September 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Brunei so as to promote the bilateral and regional cooperation. During her visit to Brunei, the Secretary launched the US-Brunei English Language Enrichment Project for ASEAN, dined with the Royal Family at the Royal Palace Istana Nurul Iman, and held bilateral meetings with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, His Royal Highness Prince Mohamed.⁵⁷ Later in March 2013, the Sultan of Brunei paid a visit to Washington D.C. when both countries pledged to work towards maintaining peace and stability in the region.

Brunei does welcome the rejuvenated interests of the US but with certain conditions. Given that the US Rebalancing towards Asia has several themes, Brunei is, by and large, interested in the economic aspect of the strategy. Though the US-Brunei economic relations mainly involve the trading of oil and gas, agricultural products and garments, both countries are endeavouring to expand

the scope of their economic relations. Out of four ASEAN member states negotiating on the TPP, which is an integral part of the US Rebalancing strategy, Brunei is one. It can be said that while other Southeast Asian states prefer to either align with Chinese interests or favour the US Rebalancing towards Asia, Brunei has taken its own path of neutrality.

Indonesia's 'Dynamic Equilibrium'

By virtue of being centrally located in the ASEAN region with the largest geographic size and economic prowess, Indonesia figures prominently in the emerging geostrategic dynamics of the region. Remarkably consistent economic growth and political stability in recent years coupled with impressive domestic situation and successful diplomacy substantiate Indonesia's position as "first among equals" in the ASEAN. Today, Indonesia not only holds a key position in ASEAN, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) but also keeps cordial relations with major stakeholders of the region including China, India and the US. Keeping a fine balance in relations with both China and the US is one of Indonesia's remarkable achievements. Over the years, it has tried to take some responsibility for the upkeep of ASEAN by playing a proactive role during the Preah Vihar crisis and 2012 ASEAN Summit.

Comprehending the rising complexities of the region, Indonesia has devised the concept of "dynamic equilibrium" with regard to its engagement with the major stakeholders of the region. Through promotion of mutual and peaceful cooperation, it seeks to minimise superpower rivalry in the region in order to enhance regional security and stability. Moreover, Indonesia's own geographical vulnerabilities have motivated it to strive and contribute towards regional peace, which sufficiently explains its stand on maintaining ASEAN centrality and supporting moves for regional cooperation. For instance, Indonesia has been supportive of China's cordial relations with the ASEAN, despite not being at good terms with China till 1998. However, like many other countries of Southeast Asia, Indonesia is mindful of the pitfalls of an increasingly assertive China, which has prompted Jakarta to encourage the US Rebalancing towards Asia; but only the calibrated and non-threatening aspects so that the Rebalancing doesn't lead to the creeping in of classical security dilemma in Southeast Asia. Given that the US Rebalancing towards Asia is crucial for Indonesia for enhancing regional stability and peace, it favours a benign presence of the US and other major powers.

While one may argue that Indonesia's stance on Rebalancing is critically important, its role will largely depend on factors including the China-US relations, China's relations with ASEAN, Japan and India as also on Indonesia's politico-military and economic prowess in the coming years.

Malaysia's Cautious Optimism

In so far as the Malaysian response to the US Rebalancing towards Asia is concerned, "Cautious optimism" most aptly explains its position.⁵⁸ Evidently, "the most problematic strategic conundrum facing Malaysia is the South China Sea and managing its relations with both the US and China."⁵⁹ Malaysia is likely to continue to embrace China's rise and give it the benefit of the doubt. Moreover, it will continue to downplay regional anxieties about China's military build-up. But if China decides that amphibious landing ships are the best tools to resolve disputes, Malaysia may well need to rethink its present approach.⁶⁰ The recent visit of the Malaysian Defence Minister is indicative of the fact that Malaysia is striving hard to keep a fine balance in terms of its relations with the US and China. The two sides have also agreed to upgrade bilateral military ties and go in for regular joint training programmes.

Cambodia: China's Trusted Partner

If China has a reliable friend in the Southeast Asian region, it is evidently Cambodia. China is Cambodia's largest source of foreign investment and aid and one of the largest trading partners. However, China's dominance is surrounded by renewed controversies; for instance, while the Cambodian government warmly welcomes Chinese aid, saying that it comes with no strings attached; many experts are concerned that China is providing aid for its own selfish reasons.⁶¹ To substantiate this, the case of Cambodia's support to China vis-à-vis South China Sea dispute can be taken into consideration. One may note that after the Vietnamese and Indonesian chairmanships of ASEAN, it was speculated that the next three annual chairs, namely: Cambodia, Brunei and Myanmar, would seek to appease Beijing by minimising international exposure of the South China Sea issue.⁶² In fact, this had happened at the 2012 ASEAN summit, chaired and hosted by Cambodia. As expected, Philippines had insisted on a reference to the standoff between Manila and Beijing at Scarborough Shoal in July 2012 but Cambodia, acting as the ASEAN Chair, refused on the grounds that the boundary disputes are bilateral in nature and thus shouldn't figure in the joint statement.⁶³ For the first time in the forty-five year history of ASEAN, member states were unable to issue a joint communiqué at the end of the Summit.

As far as the US Rebalancing is concerned, at the initial stages, Cambodia was quite apprehensive of the strategy due to its close proximity to China. Nevertheless, the situation is beginning to get fluid now. Given that the US is Cambodia's largest trading partner, it holds special place in Cambodian foreign policy manoeuvres. Their cooperation is growing in a number of areas and in 2012, both countries agreed to begin exploratory discussions of a potential bilateral investment treaty (BIT).⁶⁴ In May 2012, the US and Cambodia held a joint military exercise so as to improve their capability to take part in the UN peacekeeping operations. The Angkor Sentinel exercise, held at the National

Training Center for Multinational Peacekeeping Forces in Kampong Speu province, is the fourth to be held since 2010.⁶⁵ On the economic front, while China continues to dominate the centre stage in Cambodia, the US is not so far away.

Needless to say that Cambodia is aware of the importance of having China and the US on its side. It may be noted that while Vietnam and Philippines favour the US rebalancing act simply to leverage their position with regard to the South China Sea dispute, Cambodia is probably at the other end of the spectrum, covertly aligning itself closely with Chinese interests.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, in essence, Cambodia tries to step up diplomatic and economic relations with both the countries.

Military Aspects of the Rebalancing

In so far as the military aspects of the American Rebalancing towards Asia are concerned, the US has clearly boosted up military funding and assistance to countries of the region—from the Philippines to Vietnam, there is an upward trend in military cooperation with the US. For instance, according to media reports, “from only 50 ship visits in 2010, nearly 90 ships have visited the Philippines since January this year”.⁶⁷ Additionally, the US has stationed surveillance planes there and promised up to US\$ 30 million in support for building and operating coastal radar stations. Framework agreement on a regular rotational US military presence in the Philippines is yet to bear fruit.⁶⁸

With regard to the military aspect of Singapore-US relations, the two sides had signed the Strategic Framework Agreement for a closer partnership in defence and security in 2005 much before the conceptualisation of the US Rebalancing strategy. The agreement opened a new chapter in the bilateral defence and security relationship, expanding the scope of current operation in areas including counter-terrorism, counter-proliferation, joint military exercises and training, policy dialogues and defence technology.⁶⁹ In the current period, their defence cooperation ties have been bolstered. In June 2012, Singapore agreed to host in rotation as many as four US littoral combat ships.⁷⁰ Moreover, the two sides also announced to hold ‘strategic partnership dialogue which includes the Third Country Training Program (TCTP), a joint technical assistance program for developing countries in the region, including in the Lower Mekong area. The initial projects under this program have focused on training officials in the Lower Mekong region in the areas of environment, health, urban planning, and disaster management.⁷¹ In December 2013, US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and Singapore’s Minister for Defense, Dr Ng Eng Hen met in the Pentagon to witness the Singapore Armed Forces’ Exercise Forging Sabre and the 20th anniversary celebrations of the Republic of Singapore Air Force’s Peace Carvin II F-16 detachment, and reaffirmed the excellent and longstanding bilateral defence relationship between the two countries.⁷²

Amongst all the ASEAN member states, Vietnam seems to prefer the foreign

power presence in the Southeast Asian region the most. Vietnam's defence cooperation with the US has been deepening and widening lately. Though both countries fought a war from 1965 to 1973, the relations were normalised in July 2011. Two months later on September 19, 2011, the MoU on 'Advancing Bilateral Defense Cooperation' was signed. In October 2013, under the purview of the MoU, the US and Vietnam held two important annual high-level security meetings in Washington namely: The 6th Political, Security, and Defence Dialogue and the 4th Defence Policy Dialogue. From June to August 2012, Vietnam sent its first observer to the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) and in July 2012, the US hosted Vietnam's Steering Board 501, which has responsibility for dealing with unexploded ordnance.⁷³ In October of the same year, the USS *George Washington* aircraft carrier hosted a fly out by a delegation of Vietnamese officials in international waters off Vietnam's eastern coast.⁷⁴ This burgeoning defence cooperation is attributed to China's assertive postures in the South China Sea.

As far as Myanmar-US military ties are concerned, they are still at a nascent stage and have a long way to go. The US policy towards Myanmar has until now largely skirted the military aspect, focusing instead on developmental aid and furthering economic ties through the easing of sanctions. However, a defence attaché has always been maintained and discussion are going on about possible military cooperation.⁷⁵

Like Vietnam, the Philippines and Singapore, Malaysia is also upbeat about its military cooperation with the US. The Combined Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) Malaysia 2011 exercise was launched on June 6, 2011, in Kuantan, Pahang which is a series of bilateral military exercises during which both the US Navy and Royal Malaysian Navy learnt more about each other's practices in order to enhance the military capability, planning and execution of both countries' navies.⁷⁶ On September 17, 2013, a joint exercise between the Malaysian and the US, Kris Strike Exercise army held at the 52nd Royal Artillery Regiment, Sungai Petani Airport Camp, in Sungai Petani, Malaysia.⁷⁷ In a bid to further deepen its military cooperation with the US, in early 2014, Malaysia's Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein proclaimed that Malaysia wishes to intensify joint military exercises and training with the US.⁷⁸

In case of Indonesia, defence trade is an important component of the overall Indonesia-US bilateral relationship. For instance, the US has granted 30 Excess Defence Articles F-16s to Indonesia, with Indonesia refurbishing them with national funds. This is a landmark case of defence cooperation.⁷⁹ Moreover, in early September 2013, the US and Indonesia participated in joint counterterrorism exercise, part of a trend of growing military ties between the two countries.⁸⁰

Being a non-NATO ally of the US, Thailand-US military ties are crucial to the US Rebalancing towards Asia. The US has provided funds for the purchase of weapons and equipment to the Thai military through the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program.⁸¹ Thousands of Thai military officers, including many of those in top leadership positions throughout the services and in the civilian

agencies, have received US training under the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program.⁸²

It is believed that “sustained attention and commitment of sufficient resources to the Asia-Pacific region will be the key to assuaging the doubts of regional friends and allies about US staying power”.⁸³ Nevertheless, in assessing the military dimension of the US Rebalancing towards Asia, one may argue that the biggest challenge for the US will be to maintain the military wherewithal necessary for an active presence in the Southeast Asian region. It will play vital role in shaping the future role of the US in Southeast Asia.

Economic Dimensions of the US Rebalancing in Southeast Asia

To give a fillip to the Rebalancing towards Asia policy, the US is trying to provide it the economic dimension as well. The TPP, commercial arm of the ‘Rebalancing’ strategy, has been projected as the 21st Century trade pact that will involve friends and allies of the US. So far, China is kept out of the TPP. For ASEAN member countries, TPP might emerge as a challenge since ASEAN has come up with Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), with China and India as members.

Trans-Pacific Partnership

The TPP has been lauded as the commercial arm of the US Rebalancing towards Asia. It is a proposed trade agreement involving Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the US and Vietnam. It is an attempt to further expand the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement (TPSEP or P4) of 2005, which was signed by Brunei, Chile, New Zealand, and Singapore. Projected as the economic pillar of the US Rebalancing towards Asia and lauded as Obama administration’s key long-term foreign policy objective, the TPP is supposedly designed to bind the region into a stable economic zone and become the world’s largest free trade zone.⁸⁴ Being a free trade initiative, it aims to liberalise trade in goods and services, encourage investments, promote innovation and enable economic growth and development. Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the US and Vietnam participated in the 17th round of negotiations of TPP, which were held in Peru from May 15-24, 2013.⁸⁵ Though the US was not involved in the TPP at the initial stages, it has arguably become the leader ever since it joined the negotiation process, so much so that TPP is now perceived as the US-led multilateral arrangement. According to Li Xiangyang, “TPP is an important part of the US ‘Return to Asia’ strategy that is based on economic and geo-political-security considerations. China ‘containment’ is an undeniable target of the agreement”.⁸⁶ Li further adds, “Once TPP is instituted, APEC will be the first to be sidelined. For China, the exclusive TPP will not only bring about the ‘excludability effect’, but also possibly reverse the course of the East Asian regional integration that China has been pushing for over a decade. It

will constitute a major challenge to China's rise".⁸⁷ However, some experts don't agree with the argument and maintain that TPP is not a tool to contain China. Nevertheless, TPP is certainly a tool to re-engage countries of the Southeast Asian region.⁸⁸

TPP and RCEP: Complementary or Competitors

Interestingly, while TPP is being promoted by the US as the "Next Generation FTA", ASEAN itself has been busy flaunting the RCEP as a logical outcome of maturing cooperation with its "Plus Six" partner countries: Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea. The stated objective of launching RCEP negotiation is "to achieve a modern, comprehensive, high-quality and mutually beneficial economic partnership agreement among ASEAN member states and ASEAN's FTA partners. It will cover trade in goods, trade in services, investment, economic and technical cooperation, intellectual property, competition, dispute settlement and other issues."⁸⁹

As explained in the manifesto, the RCEP's main purpose is to create a comprehensive and mutually beneficial economic partnership that has a deeper level of engagement compared to the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA).⁹⁰ If everything goes as planned, RCEP will bring the economies of the 16 member countries closer creating a 3-billion strong market with a combined GDP of about US\$ 19.78 trillion based on 2011 figures. The RCEP would then be the largest regional trading arrangement.⁹¹ Currently, ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) is the largest FTA in terms of population and the third largest in terms of nominal GDP in the world.

It may be noted that ASEAN already has separate bilateral FTAs with non-ASEAN participating countries. Additionally, several members of the proposed RCEP have bilateral FTAs with one another. However, numerous terms of agreement for FTAs and different "Rules of Origin" have created a "spaghetti-bowl" situation, thereby impeding the harmonisation and effective use of the FTAs. With the RCEP, it is hoped that simpler and streamlined rules, cutting across the region, will facilitate smoother trade ties. Trade costs are also likely to go down.⁹² According to a recent study done by the Asian Development Bank, "The deal might help consolidate ASEAN FTAs under a single regional agreement and will provide income gains of around US\$ 644 billion in 2025, representing 0.6 percent [*sic*] of the world's GDP, through a freer flow of goods, services, investments and labour among participating economies."⁹³

One of the primary motives of the ASEAN promoting the RCEP is the belief that ASEAN must not lag behind in conceptualising and initiating a regional trade bloc, considering that China and Japan have been striving to assume the leadership in the region. For ASEAN, RCEP is a vital tool to be at the "driver's seat". Nevertheless, several attempts are going on to realise regional economic integration. For instance, the East Asia Free Trade Agreement (EAFTA) is promoted by China, with the ASEAN countries, Japan and South Korea as its

other members. Moreover, the proposed Comprehensive Economic Partnership in East Asia (CEPEA) is promoted by Japan, and its members include the ASEAN countries, China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia and New Zealand. However, both these initiatives are not advancing well.⁹⁴ As mentioned earlier, RCEP was first mooted during the 19th ASEAN summit in Bali, Indonesia, in November 2011. RCEP not only brought ASEAN to the centre stage of regional economic integration but also successfully emerged as a conciliatory measure when Japan and China came up with completely contrasting proposals for regional trade cooperation. China supported the EAFTA, which restricted the grouping to ASEAN+3 members; Japan, in contrast, favoured the Comprehensive Economic Partnership (CEP) in East Asia, which further added three countries: India, Australia and New Zealand.⁹⁵ The foundation stone for negotiations had already been laid down by ASEAN+6 on the sidelines of the 21st ASEAN Leaders' Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in November 2012.

RCEP, if materialised, will strengthen ASEAN regionalism and would lessen the impact of TPP in terms of regional integration impact. ASEAN-led RCEP and the US-led TPP have several commonalities. Both are aiming regional economic integration through trade liberalisation. Four ASEAN member states, viz., Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam are also involved in the TPP negotiations. Nonetheless, even though RCEP and TPP have a few analogous aims, these two economic arrangements are rather different. While India and China are major negotiators for RCEP, these two are excluded from the TPP. Some believe that the TPP, rather than being a device to contain China, is a means of furthering economic integration in the Pacific.⁹⁶ However, certain provisions of the TPP are increasingly becoming a source of dissatisfaction among the Southeast Asian countries involved in negotiations and further discouraging the developing countries to be a part of the TPP. For instance, Vietnam is heavily dependent on non-TPP countries for the import of raw materials, but the TPP agreement will put restrictions allowing the import of raw materials from TPP countries only. Moreover, farmers and consumers in Japan are also opposing the pact.⁹⁷ Unlike TPP, RCEP takes into account the sensitivities and apprehensions of less developed CLMV countries—Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam—and, for that matter, other members also. Thus, in all likelihood, such countries will prefer RCEP over TPP, thereby strengthening ASEAN regionalism. For instance, according to reports, the “Indonesian government is likely to join RCEP rather than TPP free trade pacts due a bigger potential market...the government is still studying the two pacts from the benefit side.”⁹⁸ Thus, the economic dimension of the American Rebalancing towards Asia (i.e., the TPP) has showed somewhat divisive tendencies. Through RCEP, however, ASEAN strives to put its act together.

As far as membership is concerned, unlike TPP, RCEP is open to non-ASEAN FTA partners as well. As of now, only ASEAN+6 members are participating. The possibility of the US joining the RCEP is not unlikely, as it is already a member

in an ASEAN-affiliated grouping like the EAS and ADMM Plus. It is worth noting that the US entry into the EAS in 2011 was staunchly opposed by China. Likewise, China might again be opposed to its entry into the RCEP, as the US membership would pose a challenge to China's strong influence in the region.

Despite numerous boundary disputes between China and its neighbouring countries, economic relations, so far, have largely remained unaffected. When realised, RCEP is likely to give a fillip to their already boosting economic relations, provided the South China Sea conundrum doesn't drastically alter the security situation.

As far as ASEAN is concerned, RCEP is predicted to serve two purposes: First, it will make it easier for ASEAN to achieve the set trade target with potential economic partners like China and India. Second, RCEP will help in boosting ASEAN's economic ties with India, Australia and other East Asian countries. Clearly, countries across the region, including India are set to benefit from RCEP.⁹⁹ TPP, in contrast, doesn't offer such benefits to the region. With RCEP, it is believed that in the short run, China appears to have price, quality and standards very few people can match, but India has advantages in some sectors, too.¹⁰⁰

Currently, ASEAN's joining of TPP is not on the cards. Given that all member countries of ASEAN are yet to become members of APEC and TPP, RCEP might prove advantageous for the ASEAN economies as most of them desperately need a makeover. RCEP will open the doors of bigger markets for countries like China and India and integrate ASEAN economies into the promising East Asian market.

Finalising the RCEP by 2015 would not be a cakewalk for the parties involved in the negotiations. There do exist a few discrepancies which might act as spoilers. First, there is huge economic disparity among the main negotiators, India, China and Japan, which is bound to become an obstacle for the negotiations. Furthermore, provisions suitable for developed countries will not necessarily be constructive for lesser developed countries, and vice versa. Second, boundary disputes are the most likely sources of deep trust deficit between China and its neighbours including India, Japan and countries of the Southeast Asian region. Thus, a mutually agreeable framework for solution, acceptable to all concerned parties, is critically important. Third, tariff reduction and elimination are likely to be complicated. Tariff barriers have been a basis of discontent in bilateral FTAs as well, particularly ASEAN-India FTA, which demand attention of the concerned parties. However, if a comprehensive agreement can be reached, trade barriers in East Asia will come down.¹⁰¹

While RCEP negotiations are still at an embryonic stage, it remains to be seen how it is going to alter the economic calculus in the East Asian region and the ways through which it will attract non-members to join in. However, like any other multilateral arrangement, RCEP too is not liberated from the shackles of apprehensions. The shadow of China's speculated dominance over the agreement has become a matter of debate. However, one may argue that ASEAN's unhindered

economic relations with its “Plus Six” partners and its leadership in RCEP negotiations are likely to determine the future of RCEP.

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which is also expected to be realised by 2015, is closely tied to the successful conclusion of RCEP. To secure its position at the driver’s seat of RCEP and achieve its goals of reinforcing ASEAN centrality and realising AEC within the specified time limit, it is vital for ASEAN to accelerate the RCEP negotiations to conclude them by 2015. RCEP holds immense potential as it will help East Asian countries in facilitating calibrated responses and policies with respect to its future economic relations with ASEAN and its FTA partners at bilateral as well as multilateral levels.

The US Rebalancing and ASEAN: Institutional Dimensions

Great power politics has been the biggest catalyst for ASEAN’s cohesiveness. In fact, the very foundation of ASEAN lies in great power politics. Thus, the Rebalancing, if intensified, will have an impact on ASEAN and its affiliate institutions. Predicting the future of ASEAN, Thitinan Pongsudhirak says, “ASEAN has reached the pinnacle of its integration efforts in its attempts to forge an ASEAN Community by the end of 2015, resting on the three pillars of ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). The blueprints of these plans are ambitious, and ASEAN is likely to fall short again in need of a re-launch of its community objectives. But the organisation is likely to be able to maintain its momentum owing to historical mistrust in East Asia, the ten member organisation has proved its staying power as a steer and steward of regional cooperative vehicles.”¹⁰² Clearly, ASEAN faces numerous challenges and it would be difficult to deal with them effectively if member countries of ASEAN don’t equip themselves with a deeper commitment to lasting peace and robust mutual cooperation. An aggressive US-China rivalry and escalating South China Sea dispute may not be in the best interests of the ASEAN and its member countries. Speaking at the opening session of the 21st ASEAN Summit in November 2012, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen stated: “The early ratification of the protocol on the ASEAN charter on Dispute settlement mechanisms by member countries will help uphold the ‘culture of compliance’ within ASEAN. In addition, we need to further strengthen coordination among executing agencies to promote resource mobilisation, and incorporate regional agreements into national development programmes and plans of member states... maintaining regional peace and security is indispensable for ASEAN’s prosperity and inclusive growth in the entire ASEAN region. In this regard, ASEAN has to further strengthen its capacity and role in the discussions and cooperation mechanisms with ASEAN dialogue partners to address issues related to regional peace and security.”¹⁰³

The lack of consensus during the Cambodia Summit and widening fissures within the ASEAN regarding China’s role in the South China Sea dispute don’t

leave ASEAN with no choices but to put its act together. Intensifying competition for bigger influence in the region might throw the ASEAN open to bigger challenges. While ASEAN was resilient in handling the US-USSR rivalry during the Cold War years, a possible China-US rivalry might put difficult choices before ASEAN and its member countries.

It is beyond doubt that the US Rebalancing towards Asia has created ripples across countries and institutions of the Southeast Asian region. To be sure, an active presence of the US provides a reassuring balance to an increasingly assertive China. While some countries of Southeast Asia find the US Rebalancing comforting, ASEAN as a grouping doesn't like external powers to decide and drive the agenda of the region. A wide range of trends are being witnessed in that context. While the intra-regional integration efforts at economic and security fronts can be seen in the form of the ARF, ADMM Plus, EAS and RCEP, the US-led institutions like the TPP are also coming up. While one finds such types of institutions at cross purposes, problematic issues relating to the balance of influence in the region also exists. In that context, it would be interesting to note how ASEAN manages to keep its influence in the East Asian region intact. It may be argued that if ASEAN successfully manages to focus on unity among its own members, it might also be able to effectively handle the divisive tendencies in the region. Needless to say, the tradition of bringing about mutual consensus without interfering in individual preferences of members needs to be strengthened.

Conclusion

It is believed that under the current Obama administration, the "pendulum in the US policy towards China has swung from attempting to cooperate with China to pushing back against Chinese assertiveness and challenges to international laws and norms. Getting tougher with Beijing was necessary, but it has also created unintentional consequences that have to be dealt with in the times to come".¹⁰⁴

Clearly, under current circumstances, associations and countries of the Southeast Asian region, particularly ASEAN as a group, would go for the 'hedging strategy', and may not like to antagonise China at the cost of the US, or vice-versa. China's growing power and assertiveness have provided an important stimulus for renewed American activism in the region. Nevertheless, Southeast Asian states may take advantage of renewed American interest to hedge against China's rise, most of them will keep their strategic options open.¹⁰⁵ As has been witnessed in case of a number of countries, they seem to be accepting the increased presence of the US in the region, while keeping the ties with China intact and benefitting from its economic growth.

At the regional front, ASEAN seems to be facing challenges, primarily in terms of the "ASEAN Centrality". Moreover, increasing divisions among the member countries are likely to pose new challenges to ASEAN and its affiliate institutions. Nevertheless, as long as the fundamentals of ASEAN are intact and

it enjoys the support of its ten members, it is in a safe position. Support of the “Plus Six” members will play a decisive role in keeping ASEAN cohesive so that it uses the American Rebalancing towards Asia for its own benefit. That would mean greater institutional balancing among the external powers of the region and intense competition for greater diplomatic influence on ASEAN. Diplomacy of middle and small powers largely depends on the interplay among the superpowers of international system. This has been proved true ever since the birth of the Treaty of Westphalia. The US Rebalancing towards Asia is intricately linked with the US-China equation, and will shape the behaviour of countries of the region as it unfolds. The US rebalancing is likely to come up as yet another example demonstrating how the international system and great powers of the system shape the policies of small, medium and regional powers and their groupings as well.

Recent trends in the US-China relations indicate that if their relationship keeps on going on a downward spiral, it might lead to mutual hostilities and unexpected outcomes at global and regional levels. The fact of the matter is that the US Rebalancing towards Asia is aimed at capping China’s strategic space in the region. China has been sceptical of the Rebalancing, perceiving it as a challenge to its strategic ambitions. While one cannot deny the potential utility of an active, and preferably benign, presence of the US for ASEAN member countries and other countries of the East Asian region, a hyperactive military presence of the US that flares up any overt rivalry with China is neither feasible for the US nor desirable by Southeast Asia. Additionally, a hesitantly followed up Rebalancing towards Asia strategy would not have many takers in the region, and to avoid being a gimmick for Southeast Asian friends and allies, the “Rebalancing” strategy itself has to come out in such a strong fashion that it is able to infuse confidence about the hyper power status of the US in general and American Rebalancing strategy in Southeast Asia in particular.

NOTES

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Japan's Response to the US "Pivot to Asia"

Shamshad A. Khan

Introduction

In view of the US preoccupation with Iraq and Afghanistan, and “relative decline” of the US with the rise of China, Japan had been mulling strategies to “complement”¹ its security alliance with the US. In its National Defense Programme Guidelines (NDPG) which laid down Japan’s defence policy for next decade, it identified new regional powers² including Australia, South Korea and other countries belonging to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), with which it wanted to strengthen the security cooperation. This move to complement the US-Japan alliance, or diversify the US-Japan alliance, as Thomas Wilkins interprets,³ was primarily aimed at safeguarding Japanese security. However, the US “pivot” to Asia (described by a Japanese security expert as “America’s return to Asia”) which commits an increased deployment in the Asia-Pacific has instilled new confidence in Japan with regard to the leadership role of the US in the Asia-Pacific.

The “pivot to Asia” which requires US allies and partners to play an active role in maintaining peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region, however, will pose new challenges to Japan. Japan’s security and defence policy, thus far, has been guided by the pacifist principles and the ideals enshrined in its “peace constitution.” Though a section of Japanese politicians have been demanding a change in these policies, especially the restrictions on the exercise of force, there has been no political consensus on this. In the wake of the US “pivot to Asia” strategy, a section of Japanese strategic community has renewed its demand for an easing of the normative restrictions on the use of force by its troops. The present Abe administration is actively contemplating changes in some of these policies, including the self-imposed ban on the right to collective self-defence in order to make the US-Japan security relations more robust. It has revised previous government’s NDPG—adopted barely two years ago—to align Japanese security policy with the changing realities of regional security.

Prior to America's "pivot to Asia" strategy, Japan and South Korea were the supreme US security allies in the Asia-Pacific. Ever since the US declared its intentions to bolster its security relations with the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam identifying them as potential partners, there have been concerns within Japan, an ally of the US, that it may lose its supremacy in the alliance. To maintain its relevance in the alliance or avoid "abandonment", Japan has been most forthcoming in welcoming as well as in playing a proactive role in the pivot to Asia policy. In this context, the paper discusses some questions including: Where does the US situate Japan in its "pivot to Asia" policy? What is the response of Japanese strategic circles to the US rebalancing strategy? What are the measures the Government of Japan is taking to shoulder its responsibility as an ally?

Situating Japan in the US pivot to Asia Strategy

In its policy pronouncements, the US has identified a number of countries with which it aims to strengthen its alliance as part of its "pivot to Asia" strategy, in which Japan finds special mention. Almost all the key figures in the US administration, from Hillary Clinton to Tom Donilon, have accorded top priority to Japan, while enunciating America's long term vision for peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

Hillary Clinton in her *Foreign Policy* article—considered the first detailed blueprint of the US rebalancing strategy—termed the US alliance with Japan as "the cornerstone of peace and stability in the region". She stated that both Japan and the US "share a common vision of a stable regional order with clear rules of the road—from freedom of navigation to open markets and fair competition".⁴ The new rebalancing strategy was announced at a time when the US was debating "sequestration" that is, reducing its budget by \$487 billion over the next 10 years. It was apparent that the US wanted its allies and partners to share the burden of defence expenditure. Clinton made a special reference to Japan, and stated that Japan will contribute "more than \$ 5 billion to ensure the continued enduring presence of American forces in Japan". Both will expand "joint intelligence and reconnaissance activities to deter and react quickly to regional security challenges".⁵

While giving details regarding the defence perspective of the US strategic rebalancing, Ashton B Carter, Deputy Secretary of Defence, stated that "just as we are thinking about our rebalance to the Asia Pacific, Japan is considering itself and its role in the region".⁶ Till then, Japan had not spelt out its response to the US strategic rebalancing—at least officially. However, it has announced measures to strengthen security of its outlying islands closer to China. Carter linked Japan's internal balancing strategy with that of the "pivot" to Asia when he stated:

"Japan is assessing its role in regional peacekeeping operations and humanitarian/disaster response, and considering which capabilities it will need for the future. The Japanese are exploring forward stationing of their own forces on Guam, and looking to joint exercises."⁷

A number of US dignitaries visited Japan following Osama's re-election apparently to synergise its rebalancing strategy with Japan. Following a visit to Tokyo, Thomas Donilon, the then National Security advisor to President Obama, stated that the US alliance with Japan remains the "cornerstone of regional security and prosperity". He added that "there is scarcely a regional or global challenge in the President's (Obama's) second term agenda where the United States does not look to Japan to play an important role".⁸

A few months after President Obama's re-election, internal political developments in Japan led to a snap general election following which the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) assumed office at the end of December 2012. The newly elected government announced that it intended to revise the defence guidelines laid down by the previous Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government. The reason cited was that the, above-mentioned, guidelines, which were to remain in effect for another decade, did not address the changing regional security realities. However, it became clear following Chuck Hagel's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue that the US wanted Japan to change the defence guidelines to further the US rebalancing strategy. Chuck Hagel stated:

"With Japan, we have agreed to review the Defence Guidelines that underpin our alliance cooperation and are making substantial progress in realigning our force posture and enhancing alliance missile defence capabilities."⁹

Japanese Perspective on the US Rebalancing Strategy

In the words of a Japanese scholar, "Japan has naturally welcomed this policy."¹⁰ Most non-Japanese scholars trace the origin of the policy to Hillary Clinton's article in *Foreign Policy*. Japanese strategic thinkers, however, trace it to the defence department's Quadrennial Defence Review 2010, which elaborated the US regional security strategies with a particular focus on Asia. Noburo Yamaguchi, a professor of military history and strategy at the National Defence Academy of Japan, argues that the 2010 QDR "parted ways with the previous QDR released in 2006", which focussed on the global war on terror and largely ignored the Asia-Pacific region.¹¹ He further argues that the US Department of Defence outlined the strategic concept in an official document released in January 2012. The document declared that the US "will of necessity rebalance towards the Asia Pacific region".¹² Similarly, Tomohiko Satake, a Research Fellow at the National Institute for Defence Studies, says that the "Obama administration has comprehensively strengthened its political, military, and diplomatic engagement with the Asia Pacific region"¹³ on the basis of the January 2012 strategic doctrine.

The Japanese strategic community sought internal changes in Japan's pacifist security policy in the wake of the new US rebalancing strategy. Fumiaki Kubo, a professor at the University of Tokyo, made some suggestions to the Government of Japan that would prove "effective" in bringing closer ties with the US. Kubo's policy prescriptions included:

“building up the Japan Coast Guard, increasing defence spending, bolstering Japan’s Security Council, improving confidentiality law, and amending government’s interpretations of the right of collective defence are among the approaches that should be pursued”.¹⁴

Yet another Japanese strategic thinker argues that Japan should make an all-out effort to keep the US engaged in the Asia-Pacific and use its defence and security capability to ensure that insurgency and trouble should not resurface in other parts of the world. Noburo Yamaguchi argues:

“America’s turning back to Asia is based on the assumption that wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are winding down. If the situation in the two theatres were to seriously worsen, the US focus might shift away from the Pacific.”

Japanese scholars also feel that Japan should make a financial contribution to the US rebalancing strategy to share the burden with the US. Hideki Asari, deputy director general of Japan Institute of International Affairs, argues that the “financial difficulties of the United States are a restrictive factor on military planning... the allies and partners of the United States in the region, including Japan, need to work together with the US to make the ‘rebalancing’ strategy sustainable.”

However, Tadae Takubo, vice president of the Japan Institute for National Fundamentals—a Tokyo-based think tank—argues that Obama’s social security schemes have “deteriorated the already deficit-plagued federal budget further to the disadvantage of defence outlays”.¹⁵ He opines that because of its domestic problems, the US “would have no choice but to ask allies to share defence burdens”, adding that “Japan must be prepared to meet US’s request”.¹⁶

Within Japan, some scholars have also suggested that the Japanese Government should remove the normative restrictions on its security policy, along with the legal hurdles in the way the exercising of collective self-defence. Fumiaki Kubo points out that the Japanese Government maintains that it “cannot exercise the right of Collective Self-Defence”. He suggests that amending this “long-standing interpretation” would “dramatically expand the scope within which Japan can meaningfully support the US in security matters”. He adds:

“If Japan makes up for the current weak spots in the current alliance by adopting the measures...including the amended interpretation of the Collective right to Self-Defence, it could enhance its value as an ally of the US.”¹⁷

As regards the impact of rebalancing on regional security issues and, more importantly, on China, the Japanese strategic thinkers are of the view that the robust US military presence will help moderate China’s behaviour. Noburo Yamaguchi opines:

“If US political commitment to Asia remains strong with robust military presence, and its alliance in this region remain tight, China may have less incentive to compete militarily with the US and its allies, and may be inclined to be more co-operative.”

Yet another Japanese scholar argues that "China...is the driving factor that promoted this new US strategy". He goes on to say that the "enhanced US presence in the region" will put an end to the discourse on the "decline of the US power". America's re-commitment to its regional allies and partners will be a "signalling to China".

A section of non-Japanese scholars believe that pivot to Asia strategy is simply a "balance of power" strategy and among its key components is the "forward deployed" diplomacy.¹⁸ Yet another section of non-Japanese scholars, including Christopher Layne, believe that America's rebalancing strategy marks the beginning of its "offshore balancing" strategy—a strategy in which the US "withdraws its forward deployed forces from the region and shifts responsibility of the maintenance of balance of power to regional countries".¹⁹ Tomohiko Satake, a Japanese scholar, however differs with these scholars. He debunks Layne's offshore balancing strategy, and says that the "essence of Layne's offshore balancing strategy is burden shifting or buck passing". Satake believes that the ongoing US strategy is to project its "strong leadership in maintaining the regional order while expecting its regional allies and friends to enhance their defence capabilities". Therefore, Satake states that it is not burden shifting or buck-passing, but burden-sharing that the US is pursuing in Asia. Moreover, he adds that there is no guarantee that the US would "never change its strategy from burden sharing to burden-shifting (that is offshore balancing)". Satake believes that if the US allies do not play their role in "burden sharing" they may face risk of abandonment. So, in Satake's reading, the message between the lines, perhaps to Japan, is to expand its regional security role. He goes on to say:

"From the perspective of its allies, it is necessary to expand their regional security roles to some extent, as well as further strengthen their defence capabilities, in order to minimise future risk of abandonment."²⁰

Japanese Government's Response to the US Pivot to the Asia-Pacific

The Japanese strategic community welcomed the US rebalancing strategy without any delay. However, the official response came a little later. Prime Minister Noda, in a joint press briefing on November 2012, stated: "I welcome the US policy to place importance on the Asia Pacific region." He added that he would "like to further cooperate and work in order to generate synergy effects between the policies of Japan and the United States".²¹

Noda's successor Shinzo Abe took some bold measures, including putting the defence guidelines, adopted in 2010 by the previous government, on hold and promised revision in the defence guidelines. An interim report on Japan's "Defense Posture Review" released by the defence ministry cited two main reasons for the revision of the NDPG. Firstly, the "regional security environment has become more tense, as seen by China's increasing activities in Japan's vicinity as

well as North Korea's missile launches". Secondly, "the US is emphasising its presence in the Asia-Pacific in cooperation with allies including Japan".²²

At first glance, the move to revise the NDPG appears to be in response to the challenges posed to Japan's territorial integrity by China following Senkaku's nationalisation. But the changes could be a well-thought-out strategy to meet the US demand as part of the pivot to Asia strategy. In fact, a summary of the defence posture review notes that Japan will "further strengthen defence cooperation through discussions of roles and missions Japan should carry...for US-Japan Defense Cooperation".²³

In its revised defence guidelines issued on December 17, 2013, Tokyo noted that security environment around Japan is becoming "increasingly severe", and felt the need to "strengthen the Japan-U.S. Alliance to make it more balanced and effective".²⁴ In line with the US policy to play a role in the security of the Asia-Pacific, Japan also showed its commitment to play a similar role. The guidelines noted that "Japan will contribute more actively than ever to ensure peace, stability, and prosperity of the world while pursuing its own security and peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region".²⁵ It further added that "Japan will build comprehensive defence architecture and strengthen its system for preventing and responding to various contingencies".²⁶ This commitment is akin to the US pivot to Asia strategy.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, some scholars see the US "pivot to Asia" as a strategy to shift responsibility for the maintenance of balance of power to regional countries. Some of the changes in Japanese security strategy, as announced in the newly adopted defence guidelines, suggest that Tokyo is preparing to assume those responsibilities. The defence guidelines state that "the Self-Defence Forces will strengthen its ability to deal with attacks by aircraft, naval vessels, and missiles" to "ensure maritime and air superiority".²⁷ The guidelines also unveiled plans to create an "amphibious force" akin to the US Marine Force, and note that "the SDF will develop full amphibious capability, in order to land, recapture and secure without delay in case of any invasion to any remote islands".²⁸ As of now, Japan does not have a full-fledged marine force. But it is likely to set up a new amphibious unit combining elements of the ground, maritime and air self-defence forces on the lines of the US Marine Corps.²⁹ Japan seems to be serious about this as it has already participated in a military drill with the US Marines in the simulated recapture of an isolated island in California on June 17, 2013.³⁰

In addition, Japan has drawn up a plan to improve the manoeuvrability of the Self-Defence Forces. In its budgetary appropriation requests for fiscal 2014, the defence ministry has sought ¥ 100 million to study the feasibility of acquiring MV-22 Osprey, a vertical take-off and landing transport aircraft.³¹ The ministry is also considering the deployment of the Global Hawk unmanned high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft used by the US Military as early as fiscal 2015.³²

Much before the review of the NDPG, Japan had already strengthened its

naval and air defence capability. It has made a start with the launch in August 2013 of the Izumu class ship—the largest warship since World War II—that can carry 15 helicopters.³³

The Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force is also acquiring next-generation 3,300-ton Soryu-class submarines—the first Japanese submarines to be equipped with air-independent propulsion systems. Analysts believe that this is partly for countering the Chinese anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) threat.³⁴ Japanese security experts believe that the air and naval build up is part of Japanese Government's strategy to secure the south western island closer to China, but it is "also crucial in the context of America's military strategy against China, especially its air-sea battle concept".³⁵ They also add that "Japan's 'counter A2/AD capabilities,' such as improving anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities or hardening US military bases in Japan including Okinawa, is consistent with the US air-sea battle concept".³⁶ Similarly, Noburo Yamaguchi also believes that if Japan establishes a "reliable defence posture" to safeguard its outlying islands this will work well to "reinforce US capabilities in overcoming A2/AD-related challenges in the western Pacific."³⁷

But to complement the US militarily, Japan has to change some of its pacifist policies, as has been pointed out by the Japanese security experts. Shinzo Abe has been most vocal about removing some of the restrictions imposed on the exercise of force by Japanese troops. He has announced an ambitious agenda to make Japan militarily stronger, by creating a "National Defence Force", giving the right of pre-emptive strike to its defence forces along with the right to engage in "Collective Self Defence" to aid the militaries of its security allies including the US. The Abe administration believes these changes are necessary in view of the regional security situation.

If Abe can accomplish the above mentioned goals, the "defence only" security policy pursued by previous governments would be changed. He has mulled every option including amending the Constitution and especially Article 9, but he has fallen short of the required majority in both the houses of the Diet. As a last option, he wants to change the official interpretation of the right of "Collective Self Defence. In August 2013, Abe government appointed Ichiro Komatsu, a diplomat as the director general of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau (CLB) that interprets the Constitution. According to the Japanese media, Komatsu is in favour of lifting the ban on Japan's right to Collective Self-Defence, and that is why he has been picked for the post.³⁸ If things go as planned, Japan's forces will have the right to collective self-defence after the CLB's re-interpretation. It will give more power to its SDF, which will be available to aid the US forces in the region in any exigencies as well as for PKOs and will finally put an end to the charge that Japan is a "Free Rider" on the US security.

Japan has not only shown its willingness to adjust its defence policy and preparedness to fulfil US expectations and facilitate America's "pivot to Asia" strategy but has also come forward to help regional countries deal with the

emerging security architecture. On its part, Japan has launched “capacity building” programmes for the navies of South East Asian countries. As part of this programme Japan has decided to provide Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam with maritime equipment such as patrol vessels for their coast guards and maritime communications systems through Official Development Assistance—a financial aid plan of the Japanese Government. Japanese scholars believe that Japan’s efforts to enhance the maritime capabilities of South East Asian nations are in “consistence with US’s rebalancing strategy”.³⁹

The Pivot to Asia and the Evolving Japan-US-India Security Architecture

While elaborating the US pivot to Asia policy in *Foreign Policy*, Hillary Clinton identified India among “key emerging power” with which Obama administration has pursued “broader, deeper and more purposeful relationship”. The US has also identified India among the “important partners for the United States, and increasingly central contributors to peace and security in the region”.⁴⁰ Japan, however, had been cautious to accord similar priority to India in its envisioned security architecture despite forging “strategic partnership” with Delhi in 2006. The previous NDPG adopted by DPJ government did not give much attention to India. It did mention India in its official documents that guide Tokyo’s security policy but for enhancing cooperation in securing “maritime navigation”.⁴¹ It was clear that the then DPJ government wanted to limit security cooperation with India in the maritime domain only, apparently not to affront China.

The new defence guidelines as well as first ever National Security Strategy (NSS) adopted by the Shinzo Abe government on December 17, 2013 has made a departure from the previous stance. It clearly identifies India as a power that is changing the “balance of power”. The new defence guidelines recognise India’s ascendancy among key security players. It notes that “as a result of change in the balance of power due to the development of countries such as China and India...multipolarisation of the international community is progressing”.⁴² The NSS document puts this issue more strongly. It argues that India and China are the “primary drivers” of change in “balance of power”.⁴³ It must be noted that Japan has adopted the NSS document for the first time which sets out Japan’s policies pertaining to national security, and is centred on diplomatic policy and defence policy. As regards the security cooperation with India is concerned, the defence guidelines state:

“Japan will strengthen its relationship with India in a broad range of fields, including maritime security, through joint training and exercises as well as joint implementation of international peace cooperation activities.”⁴⁴

Japan’s enunciation that it will strengthen relationship with India in “broad range of fields” is reflective of the fact that it does not want to limit its security cooperation in maritime field only. More importantly, the NSS document clubs

India among the countries with which Japan wants to strengthen its "cooperative relations". The NSS document states that Japan will strengthen its "cooperative relations" with countries including India, with which it "shares universal values and strategic interests".⁴⁵ The other countries mentioned in the document are Australia, South Korea and ASEAN countries. It further notes that "India is becoming increasingly influential"⁴⁶ in the international community. It recognises that India because of its "geographic location" remains "important for Japan,"⁴⁷ and to secure its maritime interest, it will strengthen cooperation with India.

By boldly positioning India in its security and diplomatic strategy, Japan has sent a clear signal that New Delhi remains important not only for its maritime security but also for its overall security. Since the two strategic documents, mentioned above, will remain effective for a decade, it can be said that India will continue to gain prominence in Japanese strategic policy.

A quick glance at the US and Japanese strategic perceptions suggest that they consider India an important player for maintaining peace and security of the Asia-Pacific. Apart from forging separate strategic partnership with India, they have established a trilateral dialogue mechanism at the diplomatic level to discuss issues that impact the regional security. The trend suggests that a US-Japan-India trilateralism is in the offing.

Conclusion

Japan's response to America's "pivot to Asia" strategy, suggests that it is ready to assume its responsibilities as an ally to maintain its relevance in the alliance. It has taken a number of measures to strengthen its Air Self-Defence Force and Maritime Self-Defence Force, which analysts interpret, is aimed at A2/AD Strategy to counter China, a strategy similar to that which the US is keen to adopt against China's naval and air power expansion. It has also revised its defense guidelines—which lays down policy for Japan's defence strength—to complement the US rebalancing in the Asia-Pacific. The Abe administration is also debating the issue of allowing its defence forces to aid the US forces in emergency situations by interpreting the Constitution to allow its forces to exercise right of "Collective Self Defence". Presently, it is debating two scenarios under which Japan's defence forces could come to the aid the US forces: a) If the US forces are attacked during joint Japan-US exercises on high seas or on other occasions and b) if a ballistic missile is targeted towards the US mainland.⁴⁸ The scholars debating on the Japan-US security alliance had identified Japan's prohibition against "Collective Self Defence" as a "constraint"⁴⁹ on alliance cooperation and US-Japan "combined capabilities".⁵⁰ To meet the US expectations under the "pivot to Asia" strategy, Japan is gearing up to change the self-imposed prohibition. This, as well as other security changes, discussed above will certainly strengthen Japan's existing security alliance with the US. But a consensus on changing the existing constitutional interpretation of exercising "Collective Self Defence", as of now, is proving elusive: both among the political parties and the people. The New Komeito, a junior

coalition partner of the ruling LDP, has expressed its opposition to the move.⁵¹ Though, the Japanese media is not opposed to the US pivot to Asia per se, a section of the Japanese media is opposed to the easing of the legal restriction on the right of collective self-defence. *Asahi Shimbun*, in an editorial, stated:

“the government wants to make it possible for Japan to help US vessels even before Japan is attacked. But in that case, wouldn't the SDF's actions consequently cause Japan to get embroiled in a U.S. war? This is a dangerous choice”.

The daily also states that “we must not allow” the Constitutional binding “to be lifted by the judgment of experts alone”.⁵²

The media is also opposed to giving the right of pre-emptive strike to Japanese troops. *The Japan Times* believes that “allowing the SDF to possess such capabilities carries the danger of increasing the arms race in North East Asia and destabilising the security situation surrounding Japan”.⁵³

The internal debate in Japan suggest that while the strategic community has welcomed the US's new Asia initiatives and wants the government to change its normative security policy, another section of Japanese people is not ready to accept new role the establishment is willing to assume in response to America's “pivot to Asia.”

They fear that the new security approach of the Abe administration will change the basic character of the Japanese security policy. A tussle between the people and the establishment is likely to ensue, and this will make it difficult for the Japanese Government to go beyond “self-defence”.

NOTES

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 21. Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Noda of Japan Before Bilateral Meeting, Peace Palace, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/11/20/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-noda-japan-bilateral-meeting> (Accessed August 16, 2013).
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43. "National Security Strategy", December 17, 2013, Government of Japan, Tokyo, p. 6.
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NUCLEAR DIMENSIONS

12

Pivot to Asia and Nuclearisation

Rajiv Nayan

Introduction

The Obama administration's pivot to Asia policy attracted attention not only in Asia but also globally. Though the term—pivot—was used by the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in one of her articles,¹ the policy she pronounced for the Asia-Pacific region echoed in writings and speeches of other Obama administration officials and even in some of the documents and reports generated by the US administrations before Obama. As enunciated, the pivot to Asia policy is not for the entire Asia. Central Asia, West Asia and a large part of even South Asia are out of its purview. It is basically for Pacific Asia: "Stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the Western shores of the Americas."² In fact, the very first line, and to an extent the first paragraph, of Clinton's article makes it clear that after investing 10 years in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US is going to focus on the Asia-Pacific region.

Clinton pronounced the "American statecraft" which is to be implemented through means "diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise" in the region. Assuring that the policy will be "smart and systematic", she briefly informed about the contours of the new "strategic turn" in the Pacific Asia policy. She promised to make use of the existing American assets such as the network of strong alliances and forward deployed diplomacy as well as to create new diplomatic infrastructure, such as forging bilateral relationships with China and other significant Asian countries supporting Asian multilateral institutional frameworks and initiating minilateral meetings. The area of operation starts "from opening new markets for American businesses to curbing nuclear proliferation to keeping the sea lanes free for commerce and navigation".

Later, on November 17, 2011, President Obama, in his remarks to the Australian Parliament, reiterated the broad points made by Clinton.³ He gave details and rationale for the American Pacific Asia policy. The pronouncement generated discussions on multiple dimensions of the American foreign and security

policies. A section of the international community considers it a somewhat assertive, if not aggressive, policy of otherwise careful administration.⁴ For some, it is an indicator of the American withdrawal,⁵ though Clinton and others explicitly stated the commitment of the US in the region. Some viewed it a high-decibel, low-performance project.⁶ Many do not see anything new in the policy;⁷ so, they do not expect any dramatic development. Yet, some see it an evolution of the American policy to adapt to the new global reality characterised as Rising Asia. As the “pivot to Asia” policy articulated by the then Secretary of State was interpreted differently by different scholars and policymakers, it is important to make a sober assessment of not only the policy but also the implications of the policy. Though Clinton mentioned nuclear issues, including the North Korean problem only at a few places, on a number of occasions, nuclear matters vis-à-vis Asia have been approached quite vigorously by the Obama administration. An impact on the emerging nuclear scenario is certainly one of the important areas to explore as Asia has emerged as the centre of the global nuclear order.

Currently, Asia has four declared nuclear weapon countries, namely China, India, Pakistan and North Korea; one acknowledged nuclear weapon country, Israel and a suspected nuclear weapon country, Iran. China is a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). North Korea was a member of the NPT, but after withdrawing from the treaty, it has conducted three nuclear tests. The last test was on February 12, 2013. India and Pakistan never joined the NPT. Israel, too, did not join the NPT, and it is widely acknowledged in the world to possess nuclear weapons. However, it does not confirm possession of nuclear weapons. The US provides nuclear protective umbrella to Japan, South Korea and Australia in the Pacific Asia.

This paper examines the Obama administration’s nuclear policy in Asia. It does not intend to discuss or analyse whether the pivot to Asia is a new or continuing policy of the US. Instead, it intends to discuss and analyse the impact or implications of Obama’s Asia policy for the nuclearisation of Asia. For the purpose, the study is based on the assumption that the Obama administration is taking new initiatives and providing a new thrust to its Asian policy. The paper seeks to address the research puzzle through answering a set of questions: Does the US strategy have any impact on the nuclearisation of Asia? Will it give an impetus to Iran’s nuclear ambitions? Will there be pressure on North Korea to cap its nuclear programme? Could the strategy desist the possible option of nuclearisation in Japan and South Korea? The paper argues that the US pivot to Asia or the rebalancing policy has had very limited impact on the countries that have either acquired nuclear weapons along with their delivery capabilities or are suspected of acquiring such weapons.

North Korea

North Korea along with Iran and Syria constitutes the American idea of the triangle of proliferation.⁸ The US Government accepts that North Korea

“continues to behave outside the rules of normal and acceptable international conduct”.⁹ North Korea is arguably the most important test case of the US Asia policy. Nuclearisation of North Korea is considered a threat not just to the US national security but also to international peace and security.¹⁰ For North Korea, the US has marshalled all the tactics of its old and new diplomacy. On the one hand, it has used bilateral diplomacy through “exploratory” rounds¹¹ and visits of the Special Representative for North Korea, and on the other, it has exploited “the network of institutions and relationships” it is involved and engaged in. The US somehow roped in North Korea in 2011, and from July 2011 onwards, three rounds of bilateral denuclearisation dialogue took place. As the US new Asian rebalancing policy does not prohibit the use of the old tools, it is still using sanctions and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to influence the behaviour of North Korea and Iran. The US is pushing for multilateral and national sanctions. The Special Representative of North Korea Policy, Glyn T Davis, in a Congressional hearing claimed that sanctions do not have any punitive role to play in the North Korean case.¹²

The imposition of sanctions through the UN has been the most important part of the US policy for North Korea. Favouring “full and transparent” implementation of UN sanctions, the US has not just campaigned for robust sanctions imposed through multiple UN resolutions, such as 1718, 1874 and 2087, but has also imposed unilateral sanctions stronger than the UN’s. In 2013, the US supported the UNSC resolutions for imposing sanctions on North Korea.¹³ Not only North Korean organisations listed in the UNSC resolutions are targeted by the US Government but also additional North Korean entities come under American curbs.¹⁴ The American Government maintains¹⁵ that the principal objective of sanctions is to prevent proliferation, not to punish North Korea. The US maintains that sanctions may be used to hinder the North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile developments.

Although the US claims to have an active support of 60-80 countries,¹⁶ especially from its European allies for the campaign for robust sanctions in the UN, yet it is its East Asian diplomacy that is really crucial. It banks on its allies such as Japan and South Korea and the new partner China.¹⁷ To enforce denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful manner, it has used the traditional framework like the Six-Party Talks as well. It is working with China in the UNSC and outside¹⁸ to influence the North Korean behaviour. China seemingly has become an important partner of the US to influence North Korea because of China’s geographical location and historical ties with North Korea.¹⁹ However, it maintains that negotiations need to be authentic and credible and talks should not be held for the sake of talks. It is opposed to the North Korean provocative behaviour²⁰ to extract concessions from its neighbours.

A combination of theatre and deterrent capability is required to deal with the aggressive behaviour of North Korea towards the US. Possibly, as part of its coercive diplomacy, it threatened to introduce tactical nuclear weapons in East

Asia. Whenever North Korean nuclear or ballistic missile tests take place, the plan to deploy Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) batteries also becomes the subject of discussions with its allies. Some even suggested “modifying the B83 into an earth or rock penetrator” for North Korea and China.²¹

Notwithstanding the centrality assigned to North Korea in the pivot to Asia policy, the US failed to denuclearise North Korea or to an extent denuclearise the Korean peninsula. This stark reality is reflected in what a Congressman said during a Congressional hearing, “U.S. officials have used diplomacy, energy assistance, financial sanctions, and counter-proliferation tools, including proactive interdiction activities. Despite the varying combinations of tools, the United States has failed to persuade the North Korean regime to abandon its nuclear weapons program.”²²

North Korea is continuing with its missile and nuclear tests. In 2012, North Korea conducted two long-range tests on April 13 and December 12. North Korea is developing missiles in all the ranges. It uncovered KN-08, apparently, North Korea’s first ICBM in a military parade.²³ This, too, basically demonstrated its assertiveness and recklessness towards the commitment it made. The US had in fact warned North Korea that any missile test under the cover of a “satellite launch” will be a deal breaker. All the countries that are parties to the Six-Party Talks condemned the test, but North Korea, it seems, remains unaffected.²⁴

North Korea is nuclearising without paying any heed to international public opinion. The third nuclear test in February 2013 is a testimony to it. According to one estimate, it has supposedly “accumulated between 20 and 40 kilograms of plutonium, enough perhaps for six to eight nuclear weapons”.²⁵ However, some calculate more than this stockpile. In 2012, it amended its Constitution to declare itself as a nuclear weapon state.²⁶ North Korea maintains that its nuclear weapons are not a “bargaining chip under any circumstances as they are shield for justice and peace and treasure of the nation”.²⁷ Earlier, North Korea had promised to have a moratorium on nuclear tests and all its nuclear endeavours, including uranium enrichment at the Yongbyon nuclear complex. It had also promised to give access to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors to the Yongbyon nuclear complex. Though North Korea has so far conducted three nuclear tests, yet it has not revealed the size of its fissile material stockpile. This has resulted in different study groups and projects to make guesses. On the nuclear front, it is working on both the routes: plutonium and enriched uranium. It resumed enrichment of uranium and reprocessing of spent fuel despite giving assurance to the international community and the countries involved in persuading North Korea to give up activities on both the fronts.

In 2010, Siegfried S. Hecker’s famous report informed the world that at the Yongbyon Nuclear Complex, North Korea is building a 25 to 30 megawatt-electric (MWe) experimental Light-Water Reactor (LWR).²⁸ This was considered North Korea’s first attempt to acquire LWR technology. His report also informed about the existence of ultra-modern enrichment facility to feed the reactor.

Although Hecker maintained that when the facility was shown to him, it was meant to produce only Low-Enriched Uranium (LEU); yet he acknowledged that with little efforts the facility may be converted to enrich uranium to produce bomb grade materials. He also felt that LWR could be used for manufacturing plutonium, though he did not seem quite convinced that North Korea would use LWR for producing plutonium. Later, in 2013, he maintained that North Korea requires tests to miniaturise weapons.²⁹

Currently, North Korea may be struggling, but it has not given up on the nuclear front. Some members of the US academic community informed that North Korea is wary of American interventionist policy against non-nuclear weapon countries, and this apprehension is basically leading it to develop and preserve nuclear weapons.³⁰ The attempt to isolate does not seem to be working. To what extent sanctions are biting is not known, but the country has not changed its behaviour. It has also refused to show transparency. Despite the failure to deter or persuade North Korea from going nuclear, the US does not appear willing to accept North Korean nuclear weapons. It wants verifiable denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. The US officials are visiting the region, and in the bilateral meetings with China, Japan and South Korea, they are emphasising the point.³¹

Japan and South Korea

The ineffectiveness of the US and the international community in denuclearising the Korean peninsula and restraining the behaviour of North Korea worries North Korea's neighbours. China has its own understanding with North Korea; so, the North Korean nuclearisation and continuous nuclear and missile testings may not be troubling China much. But a nuclear North Korea is making South Korea and Japan quite nervous.³² This anxiety further increases when the Obama administration talks about drastically reducing the size of the American nuclear weapon stockpile and bringing it to a few hundreds. The combination of North Korean nuclearisation and the apprehension of the US withdrawal of the extended deterrence seems to have triggered yet another round of discussions of South Korea and Japan going nuclear.

When the current Japanese Prime Minister won his elections, it was expected that he could take a tough line on nuclearising Japan. But he appears by and large restrained. Actually, he, on a number of occasions, denied that the country had any plan to develop its independent nuclear weapons. A few years ago, a Japanese foreign minister had indicated that the country has the capability and may review the need for nuclear weapons.³³ The general impression was that he meant indigenously acquiring nuclear weapons, though officially it was later explained that what he meant was continuation of the protective nuclear umbrella extended by the US.

In the past, too, some Japanese Prime Ministers explored the nuclear weapon option by igniting the debate on nuclear weapons. After the North Korean nuclearisation, the then Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso³⁴ too wanted a debate

on nuclear weapons, which was basically for testing the mood of people for it as well as signalling the concerned country that the option is not completely unthinkable. It is an open secret that Japan has been conducting secret nuclear feasibility studies for years, and it has continued to do so because of North Korea in recent years, especially after 2006.

The Japanese strategic and policymaking communities also seem to be divided on the weaponisation of Japan. A strong section³⁵ still favours relying on the extended deterrence and other options such as BMD and civil defence³⁶ to counter North Korea weaponisation and possible aggression. The Fukushima incident has at least in the short and medium term put a brake on the campaign for nuclear weapons for Japan. However, strong voices are emerging, and increasingly becoming louder, that want Japan to have nuclear weapons³⁷. Or at least, it should threaten to have the nuclear arsenal. This section may not succeed now, but it will have the Japanese Government retain the option of weaponisation in the future.

In this context, one question that is generally being posed is: Does Japan have technological capabilities to assemble weapons and their delivery systems quickly? This question has been answered by different analysts in different ways. For a long period, Japan is being called a “para nuclear state”. The Japanese plutonium reprocessing capability, time and again, has been coming under the limelight in the context of the hidden nuclear weapon development ambitions of Japan, and the Japanese Government has been repeatedly denying that with the kind of nuclear material Japan has, it cannot develop nuclear weapons. It is generally understood that if Japan decides to develop nuclear weapons, in a very short period, it may have more weapons materials than some of existing nuclear weapon countries. Of course, Russia and the US will be the exceptions. In 2011, William J Perry, Chairman, Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States testified in one of the US Congress committees, “Turkey, and especially Germany and Japan, have the potential to become nuclear weapons powers rather quickly were they to decide to do so.”³⁸ The consensus is that Japan has the capability, and it may produce a plutonium-based bomb, but it will take time as it may have to overcome several hurdles other than technical.

Similarly, the question of the nuclearisation of South Korea has also been significant. South Korea has explored diplomatic options. It has become a reluctant supporter of the Six-Party Talks.³⁹ Like the US, it wants assurance that the Six-Party Talks should deliver and should not continue as a mere talk shop. The extended deterrence is becoming the mutually assuring security language of South Korea and the US. In the past, several times, possible nuclear weapon preparedness was reported. However, each time, the South Korean Government vehemently denied those news reports. After the North Korean nuclearisation and the perception of the decline of America, South Korea has been exploring options other than the reliance on American-extended nuclear deterrence. It looked towards China to restrain North Korea. However, it seemingly has been disappointed with the Chinese behaviour as well.

In South Korea, too, a section is becoming vocal and assertive for building, or exploring to build, nuclear weapons to counter its dangerous neighbours. The surveys regularly conducted by different bodies demonstrate the positive connection between North Korea provocation and the demand for nuclearisation of South Korea.⁴⁰ One opinion poll indicates that 66.5 per cent of South Koreans support the idea that South Korea should develop nuclear weapons.⁴¹ The pro-nuclear bomb section, which is receiving domestic political support, is presenting its case even on international platforms.⁴²

The international strategic community is divided on the capability of South Korea to assemble nuclear weapons at a short notice as well. Generally, it is acknowledged that at least since the early 1970s, South Korea has developed its capability to develop nuclear weapons. It has mastered key technological steps such as enrichment and reprocessing. And it can adapt the existing institutions or build new institutions to support its bomb-making project. Some may argue that as an NPT country and a country which has signed the safeguards agreements with the IAEA, it will find the task extremely difficult. However, though the task may be difficult, it is not impossible. South Korea may come under serious pressure to develop nuclear weapons when Japan does so. Considering the ethnic mistrust, South Korea is neither going to trust Japanese nuclear umbrella nor the Chinese umbrella.

Although the US is promising to reduce its nuclear arsenals, it will be difficult for it to withdraw nuclear protective umbrella considering the emerging nuclear situation in Asia. This fact was admitted on many occasions, including in the Congressional hearings in which it was stated: "Extended deterrence, U.S. security assurances, including nuclear assurances, virtually eliminate any incentives ... our other allies and friends may have to acquire their own nuclear weapons capabilities. Without a policy of extended deterrence we would face a highly proliferated nuclear world, a world that would be much more unstable than we face today."⁴³ The most interesting aspect is that the US pivot to Asia policy raised the question whether the US has the capability to provide nuclear umbrella to its allies as it is not investing in nuclear modernisation in recent years.⁴⁴ And quite importantly, the official answer to the concern was that the US is investing resources to protect its allies because of the US pivot to Asia policy.

Iran

As discussed, Iran does not come in the Asia-Pacific described in the US classic "pivot to Asia" policy. On the surface, it may be seen as a Middle East problem rather an Asian concern for America. If it is assumed that the focus is shifting to the American idea or categorisation of Asia, Iran should not be a priority for the US. In reality, for the US, notwithstanding its gradual withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, the Middle East is as important as Asia. Iran is not going to disappear from the US radar because of the presence of the strong Jewish lobby

in the US and its sustained involvement in the Middle East because of several economic and foreign policy reasons.

Iran, an NPT member country, maintains that it has an inalienable right to nuclear energy under Article 4 of the treaty, and the treaty nowhere prohibits enrichment of uranium for the peaceful or civil nuclear energy purpose. The NPT, it seems, has emerged as the biggest barrier to address the Iranian problem in the US way. The US maintained that Iran was “building toward” a nuclear weapons programme.⁴⁵ Iran keeps insisting that it does not have any programme, which indicates any step towards nuclear weapons development. However, the US and a strong section of the international community suspected that Iran was developing enrichment technology for nuclear weapons development.⁴⁶

To ensure that Iran does not develop enrichment technology for development of nuclear weapons, the US has been signalling all kinds of measures. Though Israel has been applying pressure to launch pre-emptive strikes before it is too late, yet the Obama administration has basically relied on diplomacy. It has worked with the international community in the UN and the member states of the UNSC to impose sanctions. The US has also been working with its European partners which are being considered almost irrelevant in the administration’s new Asia policy. Currently, E3+3 process⁴⁷ involves the UK, France, Germany, Russia and China with the US for addressing the Iranian issue. After the role Russia played in engaging the Syrian chemical weapons issue, it seems the US may rely on Russia, and possibly China, for Iran as well. If the current trend continues, the US European allies may play either secondary or background role vis-à-vis the Iranian issue.

After several ups and downs, the E3+3 and Iran agreed on a historic Joint Plan of Action on November 23, 2013.⁴⁸ Both sides had a six-month “set of initial understanding” as a step towards resolving “urgent concerns” within a year and have a “mutually agreed long-term comprehensive solution”.⁴⁹ Both sides have started implementing the interim agreement since January 20, 2014. Under the deal, Iran is supposed to curb its activities on enrichment of uranium and the existing enriched uranium stockpile. Iran has to halt enrichment of uranium above 5 per cent. During the period, it has to convert the half of the existing 20 per cent enriched uranium stockpile to below 5 per cent level. Half of them are to be diluted in a form that it is not enriched again. There will also be no additional or next generation centrifuges or new centrifuges facility. Iran was restrained to undertake work at Natanz, Fordow and, more importantly, Arak. Among other provisions of the agreement, prominent were enhanced monitoring, Iran’s addressing of all so-called UNSC resolutions, curbing military-oriented nuclear activities, especially at Parchin and limited sanctions’ relaxation. The US also threatened to impose additional sanctions if Iran defies the agreement.

After the interim measures, the comprehensive solution may have the following elements:

- Have a specified long-term duration to be agreed upon.

Reflect the rights and obligations of parties to the NPT and the IAEA Safeguards Agreements.

Comprehensively lift UNSC multilateral and national nuclear-related sanctions, including steps on access in areas of trade, technology, finance, and energy, on a schedule to be agreed upon.

Involve a mutually defined enrichment programme with mutually agreed parameters consistent with practical needs, with agreed limits on scope and level of enrichment activities, capacity, where it is carried out, and stocks of enriched uranium, for a period to be agreed upon.

- Fully resolve concerns related to the reactor at Arak, designated by the IAEA as the IR-40. No reprocessing or construction of a facility capable of reprocessing.
- Fully implement the agreed transparency measures and enhanced monitoring. Ratify and implement the Additional Protocol, consistent with the respective roles of the President and the Majlis (Iranian Parliament).
- Include international civil nuclear cooperation, including among others, on acquiring modern light water power and research reactors and associated equipment, and the supply of modern nuclear fuel as well as agreed research and development (R&D) practices.

The IAEA is yet another institution through which the US uses to check nuclear ambitions of Iran. The November 2013 deal has continued to see a role for it.⁵⁰ Since May 15, 1974, an agreement signed between the IAEA and Iran is in operation to apply safeguards on the declared Iranian facilities. Iran has declared 17 nuclear facilities and nine locations outside facilities “where nuclear material is customarily used”. Since 2003, the IAEA Board of Governors has adopted 12 resolutions regarding implementation of safeguards, and through UNSC, the US has been insisting that Iran implement what the IAEA Board of Governors has been demanding. Of all the outstanding issues, the possible military dimensions of the Iranian nuclear programme has been the most contentious. Iran has been asked to ratify Additional Protocol and to open all its sites for the IAEA inspection as confidence building measures to demonstrate that it genuinely not developing nuclear weapons in the November 2013 deal.

The IAEA reports on the Iranian facilities and nuclear activities send mixed signals. Iran declared that it had not reprocessed spent fuel and extracted plutonium, and the IAEA reports had been endorsing the Iranian claims. Although Iran is not going to suspend its uranium enrichment, yet as it was before the November 2013 deal, the declared activities do not appear alarming. Iran has been maintaining that verification of all the declared sites of the country by the IAEA does not point towards any suspicious acts, though some observations made in the reports were objected by Iran. However, the IAEA reports indicated that activities for nuclear device were taking place at the Parchin site. Iran objected that some of the facts supplied to the IAEA for making the reports were from questionable sources. The Iranian Government earlier maintained that the IAEA

reports had not reflected the cooperative approach Iran had been taking towards IAEA. According to Iran, IAEA is an independent international organisation, not part of the UN; therefore, it is not obliged to implement UNSC resolutions. The IAEA, as Iran wants, should take into account merely its own statute and the Safeguards Agreement Iran signed with it.⁵¹

The IAEA reports, frequently, kept drawing attention, and activating the US to work with the international organisations, its friends and allies. The Obama administration, for its first term, had announced to use bilateral diplomacy to address the Iranian issue. However, the US had taken unilateral measures to impose sanctions, too.⁵² The US integrated its various departments and agencies to implement a network of laws and Iran-focused orders. The Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act is now complementing the 1996 Iran Sanctions Act. Other relevant US legal mechanisms for sanctions on Iran are the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act, Executive Order 13590 and Executive Order 13622. The US has also mobilised its financial institutions and private companies to increase the effectiveness of sanctions. No doubt, these financial institutions are mobilised more than before, but several instances of sanctions busting has been appearing.

However, throughout the first term, the Obama administration struggled to draw a new road map to solve the Iranian puzzle. The political change in Iran after the election of Hassan Rouhani and the general understanding that he had been authorised by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to negotiate nuclear issues appear making significant changes in the US attitude and policy towards Iran. Rouhani has been making positive statements, and after the gap of about three decades, the top leaders of both the countries are greeting each other. The US Secretary of State met the Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif in New York during the September 2013 UN General Assembly meeting. The evolving or new approach of the US may be gauged from the statement of Secretary of State that notes: "Needless to say, one meeting and a change in tone, which was welcome, doesn't answer those questions yet, and there's a lot of work to be done. So we will engage in that work, obviously, and we hope very, very much—all of us—that we can get concrete results that will answer the outstanding questions regarding the program. But I think all of us were pleased that the Foreign Minister came today, that he did put some possibilities on the table. Now it's up to people to do the hard work of trying to fill out what those possibilities could do."⁵³

The US is accused of softening the language on Iranian nuclear weapons, which the US officially denies. In the US, a section of the policy community apprehends that the new Iranian leadership is basically buying time to build nuclear weapons.⁵⁴ Analysts from Iran's neighbouring Gulf and Arab countries along with Israel also express such concerns.⁵⁵ Therefore, to ward off this criticism, the November 2013 deal has imposed several curbs on the enrichment level. Moreover, a strong section in Israel, including the Israeli Government, maintains that even if Iran renounces its nuclear weapons officially, the hatred towards Israel

may compel Iran to develop and possess nuclear weapons clandestinely. In fact, US officials made it obvious after the recent political change in Iran. Nevertheless, an opinion poll of security experts conducted by a journal clearly indicates that the charm offensive of Rouhani is working.⁵⁶

The future of the Iranian relationship with the US in particular and the West in general appears entering into an interesting phase.⁵⁷ Rouhani has made tall promises on the nuclear front by stating that he would resolve the issue within a year. Though his basic concern is to get sanctions rolled back, as discussed, the US even in the changed circumstances, will extract a concrete and verifiable assurance from Iran that it is not developing nuclear weapons. The US may get the Additional Protocol ratified.⁵⁸ Earlier, Iran wanted enriched uranium for research and isotopes for medical treatment. Now, it is willing to negotiate that as well. The US may have to face hardliners in both the countries, who may try to come in the way of a reasonable solution. If the current US administration succeeds, it will be a great achievement.

Other Issues of Nuclear Asia

Chinese Conundrum

Officially, the US designates China as a partner in its “pivot to Asia” policy. It is relying on it to a great extent to solve the North Korean nuclear behaviour and to an extent address the Iranian issue. However, a strong section of the US policymakers acknowledges that “China is always the ‘get out of jail free’ card for North Korea. They can always provide ways for the North Koreans to export materials, import materials, should they wish”.⁵⁹ China’s neighbours, too, hardly trust China in solving the Iranian or the North Korean nuclear issue.

On the contrary, its neighbours fear secret Chinese nuclear weapons development programme.⁶⁰ Interestingly, the US supports a “strong, prosperous and successful China”, playing a “greater role in supporting international rules, norms of responsible behaviour”. At the same time, it maintains that the growing Chinese military modernisation, which includes modernisation of its nuclear weapons and missiles and other delivery vehicles, has worried China’s neighbours. In recent years, it is developing both cruise and ballistic missiles in all the ranges. It is believed to be modernising new warheads as well. China will of course claim to have stronger and more credible nuclear deterrence, which in the Chinese thinking, is the “cornerstone of China’s ability to safeguard its national security within a complex international environment”.⁶¹ Though China’s official reaction to it is restrained or highly nuanced, yet its academic community articulates what the government does not want to state publicly.

An emerging dominant view is that China is developing the modern strategic systems for “anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) missions”. Chinese missile and fast developing submarines may be useful for the Asia theatre in which the American carriers groups may be harmed. However, one of the Chinese writers maintains,

“China should deploy forces to North America and the Caribbean to reach a ‘balance.’ However, currently, China cannot compete with the US on a military basis. Therefore, China should have weapons that could be an ace in the hole. Although China’s conventional weapons have developed rapidly, China and the US are still about 20 years apart in this field.”⁶² The writer further states, “Only nuclear weapons can force the US to use methods other than starting wars to compete with China. Without deterrent capability, China’s security can only rely on US good intentions and restraint. However, looking at US political ethics and US history, we cannot find these virtues.”⁶³

In this context, a relevant question is: Is China augmenting its nuclear strength because of the US pivot to Asia policy? The answer to it is quite complex. China is modernising its military. Nuclear weapons are not an exception.⁶⁴ Pivot to Asia or Asia rebalancing policy is a recent phenomenon. It may have just provided an extra argument to the ongoing nuclear and ballistic missile modernisation of China. The Chinese Government intends to shift the blame on the US Asia-Pacific policy in a subtle manner. In the 2013 White Paper, it notes: “The Asia-Pacific region has become an increasingly significant stage for world economic development and strategic interaction between major powers. The US is adjusting its Asia-Pacific security strategy, and the regional landscape is undergoing profound changes.”⁶⁵ The Chinese apprehension or excuse that the American deployment of BMD may adversely affect the nuclear deterrence or strategic stability has been contested not only by the US and its regional allies but also by several experts in and outside the US.

What is the US approach to the rapid Chinese nuclear modernisation? Even those in the US who have faith in the American nuclear deterrence architecture express apprehensions about the US-China crisis management mechanisms. Transparency of the Chinese Military’s modernisation is one of the policy options suggested by the US. However, the US denies that it intends to encircle China. Nor does it step up its nuclear weapons programme⁶⁶ to counter the aggressive Chinese nuclear behaviour. A section of the US strategic community believes that the American nuclear deterrence vis-à-vis China is ‘incredibly strong’.⁶⁷ Some of the Western writings raise serious questions about the Chinese ability to harm the US. But the fact is that the US is reluctant to take on China, and China is asserting its nuclear presence all over Asia

Proliferation Network

The US policymakers fear undermining of the non-proliferation regime by the proliferation network. Some even believe that North Korea funds its regime through “illicit and clandestine” proliferation activities. The current proliferation network continues to dodge all non-proliferation initiatives by hiding shipping containers and using the ring of overseas agents, front companies, banking arrangements, transnational criminal groups and so on. On a number of occasions, the US policymakers, including the US Government, have admitted

that the proliferation network exists, but only on a few occasions, do they mention the complicity of China and Pakistan. However, these days, generally, the US policymakers mention only Iran-North Korea transactions and overlook other countries such as Pakistan and China involved in illicit and clandestine transactions.

Significantly, hearings of experts and government officials in the US Congress committees continue to underline the existence of the proliferation network and even the Pakistani involvement. One of the hearings mentioned March 2011 Iran-Syria transactions of rocket launchers as one of the categories of weapons from Iran to Syria, which was intercepted in Turkey. The same hearing discussed Pakistan as one of “the patrons of North Korea in black market weapons deals”.⁶⁸ Congressman Ted Poe, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Non-proliferation and Trade of the US Congress made a very profound statement in the April 2013 Congressional hearing: “China also helps the North Koreans, and China helps Pakistan. Meanwhile, the North Koreans assist the Iranian nuclear program, and while they are doing that they assist the Pakistanis in a missile program in exchange for nuclear technology. The Pakistanis not only assist the North Koreans, but they help the Iranians as well. And then of course Iran assists Syria in chemical and biological weapons programs. They are all busy bees helping each other out getting weapons they wish to probably use in the future. This is a serious threat to the world, this proliferation, and it is important that we recognize [*sic*] the truth for what it is.”⁶⁹

Unfortunately, a strong section of US policymakers, including the US Government, believes that the proliferation network in which A Q Khan and the Pakistani establishment were involved no longer exists. An impression is created that it is the private sector or privately-owned companies from Pakistan and China that are involved in proliferation activities. Definitely, it is far from the truth. Interestingly, the Chairman of Congressional Committee on Foreign Affairs in the 2011 full committee hearing raised the issue, “Does a responsible stakeholder, as reported in the Western press, allow the trans-shipment of North Korean missile components to Iran via Beijing airport in open defiance of those U.N. sanctions, which as a Perm-5 Member State, it is duly bound to enforce?”⁷⁰ To which Larry Wortzel, Commissioner, US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, answered: “They [Chinese authorities] are pretty heavily involved. They accept those transshipments [*sic*] from North Korea through China. They facilitate them. Those things don’t happen without the concurrence of central authorities in the provinces and from a national air control system. They have got their own customs people, so they are well aware of it and they could stop it.”⁷¹

Worse, some of the Western analysts,⁷² who acknowledge that the A Q Khan proliferation network was state-sponsored using a unique business model involving several private companies and individuals, recommend to overlook the involvement of the Pakistani state in the proliferation network. The puzzling argument is that if the Pakistani Government or State is targeted, it may go against Western and

European interests. This kind of argument not just hides the true nature of proliferation network but also legitimises the proliferation link and, on top of it, the Pakistani nuclear blackmail. However, in the US, sensible voices in the strategic community recognise the danger. One of the analysts aptly sums up the issue as follows: “One crucial difference between the challenges of deterring Russia and deterring the PRC pertains to the degree that China has abetted the nuclear capabilities of North Korea, Iran, Pakistan, helped them to become a network of proliferation. And these countries with their known relationships to terrorist organizations [*sic*] appear to be moving toward an age that may include nuclear terrorism. How does the United States—the United States, in my opinion, has failed to arrest China’s support for this network. We may in the not-too-distant future be paying a very heavy price.”⁷³

Conclusion

The pivot to Asia policy, generally understood as the American pro-active policy in Asia, expected America to use strong and realistic diplomacy⁷⁴ at least in relation to China and North Korea. After the announcement or adoption of pivot to Asia or Asian rebalancing policy, nuclearisation of Asia has not seen any positive development. The reason for it is very simple: the US has failed to target the central figure of the Asian nuclearisation, that is, China. North Korea is marching ahead with its nuclearisation programme. The US has outsourced its North Korea denuclearisation programme to China, which is playing a highly deceptive game. It gives the impression to be working with other great powers, including the US, but in reality, it is busting sanctions against North Korea and even clandestinely supplying key technologies for its nuclear and missile programmes. But from time to time, it keeps issuing statements and notifications against North Korea to mislead international public opinion.

In the near future, it does not seem that the affected neighbours of North Korea will develop nuclear weapons, but they will not close the option either. The technological preparedness will continue. For Japan and South Korea and many other countries in South East Asia, the aggressive military and nuclear modernisation of China is further preparing them to explore nuclear weapons option. As long as the US keeps extending its nuclear protective umbrella to its allies, at least those countries will shelve the idea of developing nuclear weapons. This will lead to a setback to the current move to reduce nuclear weapons arsenals. There is a possibility of keeping more nuclear weapons than declared by the US. However, other countries in the region, which are not protected by the nuclear umbrella, will feel insecure because of the existence and modernisation of Chinese and North Korean nuclear weapons. Just now, these countries may not have the capability to assemble weapons. However, the pressure may force them to nuclearise. As a result, the world may witness a new nuclear weapons chain reaction and a new Asian nuclear race.

The Asian nuclear arms race may be fuelled by the already existing

proliferation network. The US is downplaying some of the key actors because of its inability to deal with emerging Asian security dynamics. It has declared China a stakeholder of the non-proliferation system and officially wants to make it a partner to manage Asian affairs.⁷⁵ The US Government is also deliberately downplaying continued proliferation activities of Pakistan. This overlooking will not help in understanding the existing proliferation network that starts from East Asia and passes through South Asia involving Pakistan and West Asia and reaching America. So, the problem of Iranian nuclear weapons may be solved, if it is really solved, mainly because of the change of the regime in Iran, not because of American diplomacy and policy.

The Asian nuclear race may spill over into the world at large, and we may witness a global nuclear arms race. The nuclearisation of Asia may have its spiral effects on other aspects of weapon too. Pan-Asia institutions and regimes through which the US operates is either ineffective or fragmented in nature. The US, before and after the announcement of pivot to Asia or Asia rebalancing policy, took several initiatives to strengthen the archaic regime based on the Cold War legal arrangement. However, even these initiatives seem to have failed. The Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) is the most burning example. Pivot to Asia policy needs sharpening, and the US must focus on the root cause called China if it wants to manage the nuclearisation of Asia.

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INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

13

India's Approach to the Asia-Pacific

Arvind Gupta

Several political, security, economic and socio-cultural factors are at play in the Asia-Pacific making the region highly dynamic. India needs to have a long-term strategy to make use of the opportunities arising in the Asia-Pacific while keeping in view the security challenges. The Asia-Pacific is marked by the following key trends: rise of China; the rebalancing strategy of the US; a regional architecture underpinned by the centrality of ASEAN; the growing importance of the Indian Ocean region and maritime issues and the growing salience of non-traditional security threats.

This paper discusses some of the key trends in the Asia-Pacific and sets out a long-term approach for India to maximise its security and developmental opportunities. The focus is on Indo-ASEAN relations, while other countries are discussed in brief.

Rise of China

China's rise has created a flux. An economic giant, with a GDP of US\$ 7.3 trillion (2011-World Bank) and an annual military expenditure of Yuan 650 billion (approximately US\$ 103 billion) in 2012, China has overtaken Japan in economic and military terms and may overtake the US economy in the next 10-20 years depending upon the growth rate differential between the two countries.

China's rise is altering the balance of power globally and regionally. The confidence in China's peaceful rise and development has been seriously dented due to rising tensions in the South China Sea and East China Sea. The new leadership is nationalistic and sharply focused on China's 'core' interests.

China's rapid military modernisation and projection of its power beyond immediate neighbourhood and in the West Pacific has raised apprehensions among its neighbours. It has developed a powerful navy—with aircraft carriers, submarines, anti-ship missiles—which is rivalling that of Japan and the US. China

is following the Anti-Access Anti-Denial (A2D) strategy to deter the US from entering the island chain in the area of Chinese influence.

The rising tide of nationalism in China has caused anxieties among neighbours. China's formulations on 'core' interests with attendant focus on sovereignty has created doubts in the minds of the neighbouring countries about China's intentions. China regards the South China Sea as its internal waters. This will have major impact not only in the neighbourhood but also for international shipping.

On the flip side, it must also be recognised that China's rise has also benefited the neighbours, particularly in the economic field. For most countries, China is the number one trading partner. China-Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) trade is \$ 380 billion. The ASEAN economies have got integrated with that of China. People-to-people contacts between China and its neighbours have also deepened with greater connectivity, openness and transparency.

China is getting integrated with the regional architectures. This has increased China's role in regional stability. For instance, China has a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with ASEAN. The ASEAN countries are part of a global supply chain which passes through China to global markets. Thus, the economic and social interdependence has increased. China is participating in Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) negotiations. RCEP will bring about a higher level of economic integration between the ASEAN, China, Japan, Australia and India.

The future is uncertain. China's economic performance is suspect and riddled with many problems. How long will China maintain its growth? What will be the impact of the slowdown of Chinese economy in the region? It will all be worth studying. China presents a complex picture. The talk of containment of China is problematic given the growing interdependence between China and most major economies of the region.

US Rebalancing Strategy

The US has been a key player in the security and economic architecture of the region. The biggest challenge before the US is to adjust to the rise of China. Having got entrapped in the highly expensive wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and having been affected by the economic slowdown, the US is in a perilous state. The US has been compelled to reduce its defence budget due to lack of resources.

Many analysts believe that the US is declining vis-à-vis China although it will remain a military and economic power in the foreseeable future. The US also has the ability to bounce back due to its vast capabilities in innovation. Yet, according to some conjectures, China will overtake the US as the number one economy in the next two decades. That will be an important psychological moment for the world.

Beset by fundamental changes in the international order, the US has signalled

a shift in its policies towards Asia. Doubts have arisen among the US allies in its ability to shore up its key military alliances in the region, for instance, with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia and Thailand. Faced with a rising China and a declining US, many countries are adopting hedging strategies vis-à-vis China. Essentially most of the countries are seeking greater engagement with China, while being on guard against its assertiveness.

The US has declared a policy of rebalancing and pivoting to Asia. The policy is imprecise and has created considerable confusion. Did the US ever leave Asia? If not, why is this talk of return to Asia? What will be the nature of the US defence postures? Will the 60:40 ratio in military deployments between Asia and the rest of the world be sufficient to strengthen the US defence in Asia Pacific?

In recent times, the rebalancing strategy has been further elaborated by officials in the second Obama administration. Economic and cultural dimensions of the strategy have been elaborated. The aim of rebalancing strategy has been defined to be the strengthening of the existing alliances, searching for new partners (India, Indonesia), forging economic partnerships [Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)] and achieving a constructive relationship with China.

However, Beijing has taken rebalancing as an attempt to contain China. It clearly is suspicious of the US partnerships especially the one with India. The Chinese are developing their own A2D strategies to prevent the US from coming too close to the Chinese shores. The Chinese assertiveness in South China Sea, East China Sea and other areas are part of its strategy to keep the US away and to signal the Chinese area of influence.

The US is concerned about China, but it has to avoid an open confrontation. The US statements on China indicate the US desire to engage with China as deeply as practical. The strategic and economic dialogue between the two countries has been institutionalised. Yet, the relationship between the two countries is far from smooth. Elements of competition and confrontation are manifest in the US-China relations. The rest of the world is also unsure about the direction in which the US-China relationship is proceeding.

How other Countries are Readjusting?

It is in this shifting background that **other countries** are adjusting their policies.

- (a) The **ASEAN Region**, traditionally a region divided by numerous internal fault lines, has sought to put its act together particularly since the 1997 Asian financial crisis. The ASEAN countries have sought to resolve their disputes through consensus and dialogue. They have engaged with the outside world while emphasising the ASEAN centrality in so far as their region is concerned. With a combined GDP of over \$ 2 trillion (2011) and total trade of \$ 2.4 trillion (2011), ASEAN has emerged as a formidable economic force. Yet stability in ASEAN is crucially dependent upon internal as well as external factors. China and the US factors have

challenged the ASEAN, and it finds itself at the crossroads. ASEAN unity is under strain. Vietnam and the Philippines are directly affected by China's rise. The South China Sea is a hotspot of tension and is likely to remain so. The mistrust between China and ASEAN is increasing because of the South China Sea issues. The ASEAN is trying to forge an economic union by 2015. The ASEAN+6 has established the RCEP even as the US is pushing for the TPP which excludes China. Some countries like Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Indonesia have doubts about joining the TPP negotiations.

- (b) **Japan** is getting revitalised. Prime Minister Abe is determined to restore Japan's primacy. Japan's New Defence Policy guidelines indicate that Japan is likely to devote increasing attention to recrafting its military strategy and enhancing its defence postures. China's assertiveness and North Korea's nuclear programme are serious security concerns for Japan. In the altered scenarios, Japan is focusing on India as a security partner. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Japan got worldwide headlines as it signalled deepening of India-Japan strategic and security partnership. Prime Minister Abe is reported to have proposed "a strategy whereby Australia, India, Japan and the US state of Hawaii form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean region to the Western Pacific...I am prepared to invest to the greater possible extent, Japan's capabilities in this security diamond." The Indian Prime Minister spoke of India and Japan as "natural and indispensable partners for...a peaceful, stable, cooperative and prosperous future for the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean regions". Clearly, India-Japan relations are important in the context of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific.
- (c) **Australia** sees opportunities for itself in the so-called "Asian Century". It welcomes the rise of China and accepts its military growth as "natural". Australia is pulling out all stops to deepen its relations with China at every level. At the same time, Australia is also hedging against China by building its own defence capabilities and supporting US rebalancing and pivoting to the Asia Pacific. It is seeking partnerships with India, Japan and South Korea. In particular, Australia takes note of India's growing strategic weight in the region and assigns special importance to India in the context of "Indo-Pacific". It regards Indian and Pacific oceans as "one strategic arch". India needs to deepen its relations with Australia, particularly in the context of Australia's emergence as a major supplier of coal and possibly uranium in the future. Australia is also helping India in education and skill developments.
- (d) **South Korea** faces a volatile security environment, particularly in the context of North Korea's nuclear and missile programme and its unpredictable behaviour. South Korea pays major emphasis on the protection of the sea lanes of communication in the East Asian region

and seek cooperation with India in this regard. It also takes note of Chinese hegemonic outlook in the region. While maintaining close ties with India, the Cheonan incident and Yeon Pyieng Island shelling in 2010 have highlighted the increasing military trend in that area. The Republic of Korea (RoK) relies heavily on international maritime lanes and shipping. In recent track-2 level discussions, South Korea has underscored desirability of a cooperative mechanism and dialogue between the RoK and the Indian navy, institutionalising an official bilateral mechanism for planning and coordination of maritime issues on the lines of an annual maritime dialogue. South Korea also wants maritime cooperation with India such as joint naval exercises.

Opportunities for India

The PM's visit to Japan in May 2013 has been commented upon widely. Strong strategic relationship with Japan is in India's favour. India has strategic partnerships with the US, Japan, South Korea and Australia. These countries want to have closer security cooperation particularly in the maritime sector. India-Japan-US trilateral dialogue should focus on the Asia-Pacific issues including security cooperation. These partnerships would promote stability in the region. China should realise that India has legitimate interests in the region.

What should be India's long term strategy in Asia-Pacific? With the shift of centre of gravity to the Asia-Pacific region, India must seek a role in the shaping of political, economic, social and security process in the region. Not doing so could adversely affect India's interests. India's strategy should be to seek deeper engagement and economic integration with the Asia-Pacific region. India should be particularly engaged in the security dialogues and processes in the region.

India enjoys high credibility in ASEAN and East Asia. India and ASEAN have raised their partnership to strategic level. The challenge is to deepen it further.

The ASEAN-India Commemorate Summit Vision Statement has identified a number of projects for cooperation in the fields of political and security, economic, socio-cultural and developmental, connectivity in regional architecture. Earlier, the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Report (2013) had identified even a larger spread of projects for cooperation. Thus, there is no dearth of ideas. However, what is required is the identification of resources, establishment of institutional framework, monitoring mechanisms, coordination etc. to ensure a timely implementation of these projects.

The next big trend in ASEAN region will be the ASEAN Economic Union and RCEP. This will open up opportunities for India. The success of ASEAN-India cooperation will depend upon how rapidly the two sides move towards economic integration through the FTA in services and in future through the RCEP. India has yet to weigh the costs and benefits of joining the RCEP. The connectivity between ASEAN and India has been talked about for a long time, but the progress has been slow. Similarly, the regional cooperation, particularly

within the framework of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and Ganga-Mekong Cooperation, the Trilateral Highway, etc. has also been slow. The two sides need to focus on implementation issues.

One of the weaknesses of India's Look East Policy (LEP) has been the relatively less involvement of **India's North East** in it. This lacuna must be addressed urgently. The benefits of the LEP, particularly, the increased trade, better connectivity, greater socio-cultural links, cooperation in the area of capacity building, education, youth, etc. must be felt by the people of North East, who are otherwise sceptical of the LEP. Therefore, it is essential that the governments in the North East and the social and cultural institutions in the region should be involved in the formulation and implementation of India-ASEAN policies. Of the numerous activities outlined in the Vision Statement¹, some should be based in the North Eastern (NE) states. For instance, an India-ASEAN cultural centre could be set up in Guwahati. Similarly, Imphal could host an India-ASEAN sports academy. A study of local cultures could be undertaken through an NE university. A special programme can be designed for capacity building targeting the youth of the North East. Trade facilitation centres encouraging trade between the North East and the South East Asia could be set up in the North East. The government could also consider setting up the branches of these institutions in the North East.

The Vision Statement talks about **security cooperation** between India and the ASEAN. An institutional framework needs to be set up for this purpose. For instance, the India-Japan security statement of 2008 could be adopted for India-ASEAN security dialogue and cooperation. This will help set up a broad-based security dialogue between the Indian and ASEAN institutions. India-ASEAN counter-terrorism dialogue should be stepped up, and information sharing should be facilitated. Mutual legal assistance treaties and extradition treaties should be set up. Maritime security dialogue should be initiated

Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) Islands should be brought into the framework of India-ASEAN relations. Giving due consideration to the concerns of the tribes, it is possible to develop some of the islands, particularly, in Nicobar, for tourism. Nicobari youth are keen to take to modernism. Scholarships for the youth of A&N Islands could be provided to make them a stakeholder.

In terms of trade linkages, the Dawei port offers numerous opportunities. During the Thai Prime Minister's visit to New Delhi in January 2012, India and Thailand agreed to develop Chennai-Dawei corridor project. Dawei is a city in southeastern Myanmar and is capital of Tanintharyi Region. Myanmar government has already approved plans to develop a large port and industrial estate in Dawei with the Italian-Thai Development Public Company Limited (ITD) as a major contractor. The entire project estimated to be at least US\$ 58 billion. In November 2010, ITD signed a 60-year framework agreement with the Myanmar Port Authority to build a port and an industrial estate on 250

square kilometres of land in Dawei. This is likely to transform Thailand into a major transit hub within the East-West Economic Corridor. Japan is also keen to invest in the Dawei project. India must invest in Dawei project, as also work on the Chennai-Dawei corridor.

People-to-people connectivity needs to be improved. But this will require liberalisations of the visa regime between India and the ASEAN.

India needs to pay special attention to Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and Singapore on bilateral level. These countries can help India in raising Indian regional profile.

Additionally, India needs to focus on the **Indian Ocean** issues and those of Ocean governance. India needs to take active role in the shaping of the agenda of **Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC)**. In recent times, the Australians and the Japanese have talked about the concept of Indo-Pacific.

NOTES

1. See "Vision Statement—ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit", December 20, 2012, *Ministry of External Affairs*, <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/20982/Vision+StatementASEANIndia+Commemorative+Summit>, (Accessed on December 20, 2013).

America's Pivot to Asia and India's Nuanced Approach

Rup Narayan Das

The tectonic shift of the economy from Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific in recent years; together with China's economic and military rise has thrown up both challenges and opportunities to the countries of the region. The defining aspect of this unfolding geo-strategic scenario is the efforts of US to maintain its preeminence in the region and was articulated in its Pivot to Asia policy. President Obama fleshed out the essential features of this paradigm shift in his address to the Australian Parliament in November 2011. The US Defence Department strategic guidelines "Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st century Defence"¹ unveiled on 5th January, 2012 provided further clarity to the evolving strategic shift. The document announced the shift in US focus from Middle East to Asia-Pacific. Later speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on 2nd June 2012 the US Defence Secretary Leone Panetta outlined details of the US plan for its "rebalance" towards Asia-Pacific declaring that the US Navy will reposition 60 percent of its warships in Asia-Pacific by 2020 as part of the new military strategy.² China's posturing to challenge the US supremacy in the region has added salience to the evolving security scenario. India, yet another rising power, perforce is poised to play a catalytic role in this evolving equilibrium. Although India's engagement with the Asia-Pacific has its own imperatives, the development in the region has cast some resonance on the India-China relations ever since India initiated its 'look east' policy in early 1990s. India's foray into the South China Sea in October 2011, when its state owned Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) Videsh, Ltd (OVL) signed an agreement with Petro-Vietnam to explore hydrocarbon in the disputed South China Sea gave a further twist to India's 'look east' policy.

Both India and China have had deep engagement with the countries of the region. While China's closer physical proximity, historical and ethnic linkage has nurtured its relationship with the region, India also has a cultural, historical and

political relationship with the region. China's economic surplus has enabled Beijing to invest heavily in the countries of the region. The 1997, the Asian Financial crises provided a very good opportunity to China to deepen its economic engagement with the region. While economic engagement with China has brought economic benefits to the countries of the region, China's military rise has given rise to consternation, if not outright fear, in the minds of the leaders of these countries. The spat over South China Sea which got intensified in 2010 and China's assertiveness have further exacerbated the security scenario in the region. The saber-rattling on the East China Sea over the Senkaku islands also fueled the tension in the Asia-Pacific. It was against this unfolding geo-strategic scenario that former US secretary of State Ms. Hilary Clinton forcefully articulated the imperatives of the freedom of navigation earlier at the Asian Regional Forum in 2010 much to the chagrin of China. The United States, which has been the resident power in the region, has reinvigorated its strategic engagement with the region. Many countries in the region are now looking towards India not only for economic engagement, but also for strategic reassurance to soft balance China. What has added salience to the evolving strategic scenario in the region is the nudging of the USA to mentor India in this endeavor of hedging China. It may, however, be mentioned that much before USA unveiled its Pivot to Asia strategy and articulated the 'Rebalancing' to the Asia-Pacific region India has been engaging with the countries of the region; and US has also been trying to co-opt India in its strategy to contain or hedge China. India in tune with its strategic autonomy in foreign policy postulates has been following a nuanced approach to this unfolding geo-strategic scenario. It is against this backdrop that India is trying to calibrate its engagement in the region with a degree of circumspection and finesse in deference to the Chinese sensitivity and susceptibility

From Benign Neglect to Active Engagement

India's engagement in the Asia-Pacific region particularly with countries of South-East Asia like Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea Thailand and Malaysia has been rooted in the history and culture of the countries of the region. India's cultural influence is very vivid and pronounced in Indonesia in particular; so also in Kampuchea, where the world famous Angkor Vat temple is located. In modern times, India extended moral and political support to Indonesia and Vietnam in their fight against imperialism and colonialism. In Indonesia's fight against imperialism, India had played an active role even prior to her independence. Similarly, India played an important role in the Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indo-China that brought peace, though elusive, to the region. In fact India and China together had worked hard for peace and stability in the region in the wake of the Geneva Conference.³

How does one explain India's earlier low key and subdued relationship with the region in spite of geographical contiguity and proximity until when India ushered what is christened as the 'look east policy'? One plausible reason perhaps

is that the cold war years were characterized by geopolitics in which India was tagged with the erstwhile Soviet Union and its economy was on the back burner. With globalisation, India also initiated economic reforms and liberalisation, and this started echoing in India's external relationship and foreign policy postulates. India's shift in foreign policy was articulated with economic contents with the ASEAN as a whole and with individual countries of the regional forum. Since 1991, however, a conscious effort was begun to reach out to these countries as part of India's 'look east' policy.

India became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of the ASEAN in 1992 and a Full Dialogue Partner in 1996. The accordance of the status of a Full Dialogue Partner to India with the ASEAN along with others such as Australia, Canada, China, European Union, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia and the USA is recognition of India's economic prowess and potential. As part of its 'look east policy', India had been seeking a summit level engagement with the ASEAN, *i.e.*, interaction at the highest level. It was in this backdrop that at the Seventh ASEAN Summit, held in November 2001 in Brunei, Darussalam, the then Chairman of the ASEAN, took a decision to upgrade its relations with India to Summit level. India participated in the first ASEAN-India Summit Meeting in Phnom Penh in November 2002 and the second ASEAN-India Summit Meeting in Bali in October 2003.

Yet another aspect of India's engagement with the East Asia is the platform of East Asian Summit. India's participation in the first ever East Asian Summit in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur in December 2005 was aimed to engage India with fastest growing economies of the world. It is pertinent to mention that ever since India initiated its 'look east policy', the volume of its trade with the ten member countries has been growing significantly. The signing of the FTA with the 10 member-ASEAN countries, after protracted negotiation, opens a new chapter in the Indian relationship with the ASEAN countries, both at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

India's Perception of the Evolving Security Scenario in the Region

Although India officially has not extended its support or lack of it to USA's 'Pivot to Asia', its articulation and posturing are suggestive of its nuanced approach to the region. India's concerns in the Asia-Pacific were reflected in the Annual Report of the Ministry of Defence. Referring to the evolving security situation in the region, the Annual Report of the Ministry of Defence of the Government of India for the year 2010-11 said, "The security situation in East Asia increased security concerns among several nations and underlined the need for initiatives for building trust and confidence in the region. The establishment of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus forum of ten ASEAN and eight non-ASEAN countries, including India is seen as an effort to establish open and inclusive security architecture for the region. India's policy is to encourage and participate in cooperative approach which would enable all countries in the region to counter

traditional and non-traditional security challenges and to ensure that the critical sea lanes are kept open, secure and free for navigation and trade.”⁴ Considering that traditionally the Annual Reports of the Ministries and Departments of Government of India are very circumspect in articulating views, such observation in the Ministry's Annual Report reflected India's deep concerns with regard to the unfolding of the geo-strategic scenario in the Asia-Pacific. Referring to China, the Report mentioned, “...India is conscious and watchful of the implications of China's evolving military profile in the immediate and extended neighborhood. India's policy is to engage with China on the principles of mutual trust and respect and sensitivity for each other's concerns.”⁵

The Report for the year 2011-12, while toning down the concerns spelt out India's avenues for engagement in the region with some degree of clarity. It said,

“India has supported efforts to establish open and inclusive security architecture for the region. India's policy is to encourage and participate in cooperative approaches which would enable all countries in the region to address traditional and non-traditional security challenges and to ensure that the critical sea lanes in the region are kept open, secure and free for navigation and trade. India's continued engagement with ASEAN led for a like the ADMM Plus and ASEAN Regional Forum are part of our progressive and multifaceted bilateral and multilateral partnership with the ASEAN community.”

It further added that at the same time India was mindful of the impact that inter-State tensions may have on economic relations and on the military balance in the region and the manner in which these would affect India's national interest.⁶ These articulation resonates the very the underlying objectives of USA's strategy of “Rebalancing”.

India's studied response to the evolving security scenario in the Asia-Pacific region was reiterated clearly at the first ever trilateral meeting of the think-tanks of India, Japan and South Korea held in New Delhi on 29th June, 2012 in the backdrop of the spat over South China Sea. Inaugurating the trilateral meeting Secretary (East) of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India Mr. Sanjay Singh articulated India's concerns and commitments in so many words. He said, “...There is common commitment to maintaining freedom of the seas, combatting terrorism, and promoting inclusive economic growth. India, Japan and ROK depend heavily on the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) for their energy security. These are also the mainstay for trade and connectivity amongst our countries in the region. India has a valued geo-strategic location straddling the SLOCs...” Alluding to South China Sea he added,

“Similar potential exists for example in South China Sea which today is witnessing competing claims. Our common objective is to see that the seas and oceans become regions of cooperation instead of competition particularly as our energy security and trade depends on them. The primacy of our efforts must be to maintain trade, energy and economic security in the seas around

us. There is indeed a compelling case for us to cooperate on maritime security.”

The message was crystal clear which he articulated in no uncertain words when he said, “A trilateral forum such as this gives a significant message not only for the participants but also to the observers as it is a manifestation of greater degree of maturity, trust and mutual understanding amongst the partners. It means that the partners have been able to manage their relationship well and have developed the confidence to talk and find solutions to over-arching issues and concerns both bilateral and regional.”⁷ He also referred to India’s trilateral dialogue with Japan and the US in this regard.

The strategic and security contents of India’s engagement with the ASEAN received further impetus at the Commemorative Summit of the ASEAN-India summit held in New Delhi in December 2012 to mark the 20th anniversary of ASEAN-India summit. Welcoming the delegates, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said that as maritime nations, India and ASEAN should intensify their engagement for maritime security and safety, for freedom of navigation and for peaceful settlement of maritime disputes in accordance with international law. Reiterating the idea of a regional security architecture, he urged up on the member countries to intensify political and security consultations, including in regional forums such as the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN Defence Minister’s Meeting Plus and proposed that the leaders should work together more purposefully for the evolution of an open, balanced, inclusive and transparent regional architecture.⁸ The articulation clearly reflected India’s desire and willingness to work with other stake holders including the US for peace and stability in the region. A common refrain in the narrative of the deliberation was the commitment to the values of freedom, democracy, and access to market and the strategic significance of freedom of navigation.

The elevation of India’s engagement with the ASEAN to the strategic level was well received by the ASEAN community. In an editorial *The Nation* of Thailand wrote, “It took two decades for the leaders of ASEAN and India to have the courage to say that they are strategic partners in the truest sense of the world. They have been reluctant to say this all along, as they don’t want to give the wrong impression that they are ganging up against common adversaries. But the rapidly changing regional environment and global uncertainties have made ASEAN and India realise that they have to forge closer relations beyond the economic and the trade tracks.” Without mincing words the editorial concluded, “From now on, India should do more to maintain the confidence of ASEAN and demonstrate its commitment to make tangible progress on their bilateral ties. In the past, ASEAN also wooed China, thinking that it would help to strengthen the regional security. However the rising tension in the South China Sea accompanied by Beijing’s tough talk has recently changed the thinking within the region. ASEAN wants to make sure that along with US, India will walk side by side with the grouping to increase its support when it is placed on a line-up

with China. In similar vein, ASEAN's increased engagement with India will intensify in proportion to the degree of cooperation the region gets from Beijing on the code of conduct for the South China Sea and other areas."⁹

The border incursion by China on 15th April 2013 in the Depasang in the Ladakh region on the Indian side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the three week border standoff between the armies of China and India found its echoes in India's engagement in the Asia-Pacific, particularly with Japan and to a lesser extent with other countries in the region. It may be just a coincidence, but pertinent that India's Defence Minister A.K. Antony visited three of US's close allies-Australia, Singapore and Thailand immediately after the border incursion. Not only that the timing of the visit was significant, but also the fact that his subsequent visit to China in July 2013 was preceded by his visits to these three countries. The priority was loud and clear in the context of their timing. In Bangkok, Antony held wide ranging talks with his Thai counterpart Air Chief Marshal Sukhompol Suwanatat, calling for cooperation in several areas including keeping open sea lanes and measures to tackle piracy. Antony said both India and Thailand had large stakes in the maintenance of peace and stability in its immediate neighborhood and in the wider Asia-Pacific region. "Our trade is dependent on the sea lanes. Hence, security of the sea lanes and freedom of navigation is critical to our economic and overall security. India supports the freedom of navigation in accordance with the principles of international law", he said in his talks with Suwanatat. He further said that India supports resolution of differences and process of dialogue and consensus between the parties to such disputes. All countries must exercise restraint and resolve issues diplomatically, according to the principles of international law.¹⁰

India's nuanced position with regard to South China Sea, which is discussed below, can be attributed to Chinese sensitivity. Nevertheless India's articulation of freedom of navigation and international law is endorsement of the US position and at variance with the Chinese position. If this articulation is read in conjunction with India's strategic posturing then the message is very clear. India does not want to get involved in the dispute nor does it want to take side with the parties to the dispute vis-a-vis China. At the same it does not want to shy away from the problem. Considering Chinese sensitivity India has always been careful not to get involved in the diplomatic parleys between China and the ASEAN on the issue of a 'code of conduct' between China and the countries in dispute. But a day after China agreed to hold "official consultation" with the ASEAN to give shape to a proposed 'code of conduct' at the ASEAN regional Forum and the East Asia Summit ministerial meeting held at Bander Seri Begawan in Brunei in the last week of June 2013, India's External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid said that New Delhi would contribute to the process as much as it could.¹¹

The US Nudging to India: Going beyond 'Look East', 'Engage East'

The call to engage India in the Asia-Pacific was renewed by the USA when President Obama visited India in November 2010. Addressing the members of Parliament, a rare honour extended to very select Heads of State or the Government, President Obama said, "...more broadly, India and the United States can partner in Asia. Today the United States is once again playing a leadership role in Asia—strengthening old alliances; deepening relationships, as we are doing with China; and we are reengaging with regional organisations like the ASEAN and joining the East Asia Summit—organisations in which India is also a partner. Like your neighbours in South-East Asia, we want India not only to 'Look East'; we want India to 'Engage East' because it will increase the security and prosperity of all our nations."¹²

The appeal to exhort India was reiterated when Ms. Hilary Clinton visited India, on July 2011. Speaking in Chennai she said, "Much of the history of the 21st Century will be written in Asia which, in turn, will be influenced by the partnership between the US and India and its relationship with neighbors."¹³ She added that India could build a leadership role in the Asia-Pacific in fora like the East Asia Summit and the Asian Regional Forum, contribute more to maritime security, democracy promotion, explore a new Silk Route into Central Asia, support rebuilding Afghanistan and even help stabilise Pakistan. President Barack Obama in his address to the Australian Parliament in November 2011 welcomed India's 'look east' policy and urged India to play "a larger role as an Asian Power".¹⁴

Commenting on Mrs. Clinton's visit to India an opinion piece article in *China Daily* said, "In the current Obama administration, Clinton has emerged as one of the most vocal proponent of the "China balancing" theory."¹⁵ In her official press conference in India, Clinton urged India to play a leading role in Asia-Pacific, which directly or indirectly hints at the balancing of China's influence in the region. Referring to the Indo-US relations, the article said, "Overall, Indo-US relations have improved over the last decade, but it will be an exaggeration to say that India is a US ally in the region. A 2005 Indo-US civil nuclear deal did not change the status of the Indo-US strategic relationship in a large way. The emerging new relationship between the two democracies is only a late recognition of their converging interest in combating global terrorism sponsored by state and non-state actors. There is a long way to go for before an Indo-US strategic relationship, and it will be immature at this stage." The message is subtle, yet clear to wean away Indian from moving closer to USA.

During his visit to India in June 2012, the US Secretary of Defence Leone E. Panetta in his address at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses further articulated the US 'rebalancing' in India's context describing the defence cooperation with India as a 'linchpin' in this strategy. He reiterated that the US supports Southeast Asian multilateral forums such as the ASEAN Defence

Ministers Meeting-Plus and that these mechanisms would prevent and manage regional tensions. He further said that India's voice and involvement in these international forums would be critical.¹⁶

There seems to be slight moderation in US strategy towards Asia-Pacific with the exit of Ms. Hillary Clinton and the assumption of the position of the secretary of state by John Kerry, presumably soft towards China. But when Tom Donilon the US National Security Advisor, while speaking at the Asia Forum, said, "US and Indian interests powerfully converge in the Asia-Pacific, where India has much to give and much to gain. South East Asia begins in Northeast India, and we welcome India's efforts to 'look East', from supporting reforms in Burma to trilateral cooperation with Japan to promoting maritime security"¹⁷. It clearly conveyed the message that there would be change with continuity as regards USA's engagement with India as far as Asia Pacific is concerned.

Vietnam: The Fulcrum of India's 'look east' Policy

India's foray into the South China Sea has indeed given a new twist to its engagement with Vietnam and to its 'look east' policy and India's larger engagement in the Asia-Pacific as a major stake holder in the peace and stability in the region. To put the issue in perspective, it may be mentioned that as soon it was reported in the media that India's External affairs Minister S.M. Krishna's would visit Vietnam to participate in the Fourteenth India-Vietnam Joint Commission Meeting on Trade, Economic, Scientific & Technological Cooperation which took place on September 16, 2011 in Hanoi and that the two countries were to sign an agreement to explore oil in the disputed South China Sea, the media went overboard in reacting and commenting. New Delhi and Beijing, however, at the governmental level tried to handle the issue deftly. On September 15, 2011, alluding to the media report, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu said that China enjoys indisputable sovereignty over the South China Sea, and that China's stand was based on historical facts and international law. It further stated that China was opposed to any project in the South China Sea, without directly referring to India.¹⁸

India's Measured Response

The issue was blown out of proportion by the over-zealous media. This can be discerned from a statement by Defence Minister A.K. Antony, which he made in his interaction with the media after the Coast Guard annual conference in New Delhi wherein he said, "South China Sea is not our worry. Our worry is to guard our own backyard and our own areas in our neighboring island nations. We are more concerned about areas around us and we are not the main players in the South China Sea".¹⁹ On yet another occasion, while addressing at the Naval Commanders Conference in New Delhi on October 12, 2011, he said India had no plans to increase its presence in the South China Sea and is only

interested in the uninterrupted passage of ships in the region. "There is no question of India going there in large scale. We will go there for exercise and uninterrupted passage of ships and trade. There is no question of any naval presence there. That is not our intention, our main concern is to protect our core area of interest," he said.²⁰

India-Japan-China: India's Fine Balancing

In India's 'looks east policy' and in its engagement in the Asia-Pacific, Japan is increasingly occupying a strategic significance. This, however, cannot be said to be endorsement of US Pivot to Asia Policy. There are subtle similarities, but there are differences in thrust and approach. According to a Japanese writer and security analyst "Japan wants to create an international coalition together with India, the United States and other nations, to pressure on China. However, New Delhi is seeking a multilateral foreign policy that places equal importance on its relations with not only Japan and the United States, but also on China, Russia and the Middle East." The writer further observed that although "India also has deep interest in the Asia-Pacific and a forward looking attitude toward boosting cooperation through joint military drills and other means. However, India is reluctant to security policies that target a specific country. Instead, India expects that such cooperation will help introduce technology that will improve its military capabilities".²¹

India's growing engagement strategic and security engagement with Japan can be discerned from the Annual Report of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, for the year 2010-11, which said 'Defence and security cooperation has gradually emerged as a key factor of India's Strategic and Global Partnership with Japan and is recognised by both sides as beneficial to peace and prosperity in Asia and the world.' Within the framework of the October 2008 India-Japan Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, which was the first of such document signed by India with any other country, a concrete Action Plan was issued in 2009. The Plan envisaged a wide range of issues, ranging from maritime safety and security, fight against piracy and transnational crime, safety of transport, protection of marine environment and non-traditional security threats like disaster management through consultation and cooperation.

India's relations with Japan have undergone a significant transformation in recent years, with the establishment of the 'India-Japan Strategic and Global Partnership' and the practice of annual summits during the visit of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to Japan in December 2006. India and Japan have also concluded an Annual Strategic Dialogue between Foreign Ministers since 2007. Besides, there are other dialogue mechanisms between the two countries as well such as the 2+2 dialogue consisting of the foreign secretaries and defence secretaries of the two countries. The high points of India's relations with Japan in recent years was signing of two very significant documents, *viz.* a Joint Statement 'Vision for India-Japan Strategic and Global Partnership in the Next Decade' and a Joint

Declaration between leaders of India and Japan and conclusion of the 'Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement during the visit of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's to Japan in October 2010 for the annual summit meeting with his Japanese counterpart Naoto Kan'. The visit helped in giving an impetus to the upward trend in the India-Japan relationship and the summit level commitment to this increasing important relationship.

In pursuance with India's strategic partnership with Japan the defence and security relationship have been further intensified in recent years coinciding with the US Pivot to Asia. In this exercise India as usual has been very careful about Chinese sensitivities. The first India-Japan Maritime Affairs Dialogue was held in New Delhi on January 29, 2013. In the dialogue issues of mutual interest such as maritime security including non-traditional threats, cooperation in shipping, marine sciences and technology, marine biodiversity and cooperation at various multilateral forums were discussed. To what extent New Delhi can go with US Pivot to Asia strategy became clearer when New Delhi withdrew from in March 2013 from a scheduled naval exercise with the US and Japanese navies off the US Pacific island of Guam. It was reported in the media that US and Japanese naval officials visited India in March 2013 to discuss coordination for the trilateral exercise. The Indian defence ministry first indicated a preference for holding the exercise off the coast of the Japanese island of Okinawa. Then it took the view that war games should be kept to the bilateral level for the time being in deference to Chinese sensibilities.²²

The Elephant in the Room

Thus it is evident that in the narrative of the India-Japan relationship China has been the elephant in the room. No wonder, therefore, China was the key component of the discussion between the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and his Japanese counterpart, Naoto Kan during the visit of the former to Japan in October 2011. This prompted a leading strategic analyst of an Indian daily, Prमित Pal Chaudhary, to remark that "the prime ministers of India and Japan talked the language of strategy through a round of Chinese whispers." Foreign Secretary Ms. Nirupama Rao was quoted as saying that the two prime ministers "exchanged views on China" and that their discussions covered strategic security and economic issues. The two countries, she said, shared their experiences in handling China, "We both wish to see the peaceful rise of China", she added. The two sides discussed how China could be engaged and drawn into cooperation. It was reported that India shared with Japan its mechanism of border talks with China.²³

As China is wary of the closer strategic proximity between India and Japan, this discomfort was evident in the Chinese media after Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's visit to Japan in 2011. Japan's decision to allow its companies to take part in arms development projects with countries other than the US and the \$15 billion currency swap deal between India and Japan are a cause of concern

to China. China Daily quoted ShiYing, a researcher at the China Institute of International Studies in Beijing, "In terms of political safety, (Japan) wants to counter China by linking with countries such as the US, India and Australia. But on the other hand, it is aware of the fact that Sino-Japanese relations are a prerequisite for its quest to become a normal country. So personally, I think this is itself contradictory", *China Daily* quoted Zhao Gancheng, director at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies. Nonetheless, Liu Jianguo, an expert on Japan studies at the Tsinghua University, said Tokyo's incentives are primarily economic.²⁴

New Delhi's Calibrated Approach

Given the persistent security distrust between Japan and China and conscious of Chinese wariness, New Delhi has been sensitive to the Chinese consternation about the evolving security and strategic relationship between India and Japan. Moreover the timing of the growing strategic and security relationship with Japan (a close ally of US) coincided with India's growing proximity to the US and signing of the Indo-US nuclear deal. It was against this backdrop that that New Delhi made it clear that the India-Japan strategic relations are not aimed against China in so many words. India thus, scrupulously avoided any reference in the text of the India-Japan declaration to 'the new security challenges' a sobriquet that forms part of Japan's strategic partnership with Australia, and which is an euphemism for China's assertiveness. It must also be recalled that immediately after signing the security declaration with Japan, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh said in Tokyo that the increase in India's bilateral relation with China in the last year alone was 'more than the whole of total trade with Japan'. The message was clearly meant for Beijing. Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh further emphatically said that economic relations and security cooperation with Japan 'would not be at the cost of any third country, least of all China'.²⁵ It is in this backdrop that India is trying to strike a fine balance in its strategic engagement with Japan while keeping Chinese sensitivities in mind.

This can be discerned from the comments expressed by leading Chinese scholars working on India. For example, when Prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh visited Japan earlier in October 2010, before his arrival in Hanoi to participate in the East Asian Summit meeting, where he later met and interacted with his Chinese counterpart, the *Global Times*, known for its strong opinion, commented that 'containing China' was the motivation behind Dr. Singh's East Asia tour. Contrasted with this rather pessimistic assessment, Prof. Rong Ying, Vice-President of China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) said, 'At the government level, and at the level of scholars here who study India, we are very aware of India's good interaction with the regional countries and the 'Look East' policy, which has been announced for a long time'. Referring to Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit and sounding a note of optimism, he

further said, 'This meeting is very significant, as it has become increasingly important for both sides to better communicate their interests.' He added, 'Both governments agree that the relationship is of importance beyond bilateral issues, and has strategic and global significance. In areas like G-20 cooperation, global economic governance and climate change, the two countries can really show to the public and the world at large that that they can work together. By doing so, we can also help build strategic trust, which is particularly important in a fast changing regional environment'.²⁶

It was against this backdrop that the first ever US-Japan-India Trilateral meeting took place in Washington in the third week of December 2011. Commenting on the event, the People's Daily Online said that the meeting held at the Assistant Secretary level is believed to be a part of the current US efforts to carry out its "pivot to Asia Policy", which aims at consolidating the US predominance in Asia. The Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Liu Weimin, when asked to comment on the event, said "The United States, Japan and India are countries with great influence in the Asia Pacific region. We hope the trilateral meeting will be conducive to regional peace and security."²⁷ As a matter of trust and transparency it is understood that India appraised China about the US-Japan-India trilateral.

Security and strategic relationship between India and Japan were accelerated after the border incursion on 15th April in LAC between India and China, when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Japan in the last week of May 2013. It may be noted that Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh hailed Japan as a "natural and indispensable partner in our quest for stability and peace in the vast region in Asia that is washed by the Pacific and Indian Ocean". He further said, "Our defence and security dialogue, military exercise and defence technology should grow". As usual Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's visit to Japan was closely followed and carefully commented by the Chinese media. The People's Daily slammed Japan calling it a "petty burglar", for what it saw as an attempt on Tokyo's part to get India inside the ring of strategic partners to counter China.²⁸ While Beijing avoided directly criticizing India, yet in another article in Global entitled "India gets close to Japan at its own peril" made a dig at India. The article said, "... as an embodiment of the 'look east policy', India has strengthened economic, strategic and security cooperation with countries like Japan, South Korea and Vietnam. It has interfered in the South China Sea disputes in a high-profile manner against the backdrop of the US pivot to Asia. Some Indian scholars acknowledge that some parts of the 'look east' policy target China".²⁹

India-South Korea Strategic Partnership

The evolving India-South Korea strategic partnership is yet another aspect of India's renewed 'Look East Policy' in the Asia-Pacific. India elevated its relationship with Republic of Korea during the visit of President Lee to India in January 2010. In pursuance with the elevation of their relationship to strategic

level, New Delhi has set up a defence wing in its embassy in Seoul. India's Defence Minister A.K. Antony visited Seoul in September, 2010, and exchanged views on defence and security issues. The defence cooperation between the two countries was given an impetus during the visit of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to Seoul in March 2010. During the visit, both sides agreed to continue high-level exchange between the defence establishments of the two countries, undertake activities as mutually agreed for deepening bilateral defence relations, and to explore the possibilities of joint-ventures in research and development, and manufacture of military equipment, including through the transfer of technology and co-production. Seoul evinced interest to increase cooperation with India in military and defence industry, including naval ships, aircrafts and ship-building.

Conclusion

India's calibrated approach to its engagement in the Asia-Pacific can be understood in the larger context of the dynamics of its complex relationship with its largest neighbour China with whom it still has an unresolved border dispute and there is a persistent security dilemma; its historical, political and economic linkages with the countries of the region, the geo-strategic significance of the sea lanes of communication which are so essential to its energy security and maritime trade and its strategic relationship with the US and Japan in particular. USA and India should also, together, calibrate their bilateral dialogue as how best to deal with China. The interest of US and China are intertwined, so also the interest of India and China, though not in a similar manner, or to the same extent. There are communication and dialogue mechanisms between US and China, and also between India and China. Maybe a trilateral mechanism among US, China and India can dispel a lot of strategic mistrust and suspicion, and promote better understanding and cooperation between and among US, China and India. Both USA and China know very well that India follows strategic autonomy in its foreign policy and that it cannot be used against China. Tension was built up in the Asia-Pacific in the backdrop of the leadership transition in China, which has been completed since then; and the Presidential elections in the USA and elections in both Japan and Republic of Korea. Now that the political transitions in these countries have been completed, and there is a degree of order and stability, it is hoped that all the major players in the region will greatly cherish peace and stability in the region.

In fact there are signals indicating the changing approach to 'Pivot to Asia' and India's expected role therein. For example recently in an interaction at the American Enterprise Institute, the United States Chief of Army Staff General Raymond T Odierno said, "One of the things we have to remember is that they (India) maintain their own strategic autonomy...where you get into a policy of containment is when you start having large land forces forward stationed in countries-and that is not our plan.." Reinforcing the point further, he asserted "...So ours is not to contain China, ours is to build better support for the United

States Pacific Command and to see it tends to ensure that we don't get into conflict, we don't build animosity between all the major powers in Asia-Pacific... as you look to Asia-Pacific, it's about competition for limited resources, it's about making sure that everyone is able to sustain their sovereignty and meet their own interests".³⁰ This spirit was reiterated on 19th August, 2013 when the Chinese Defence Minister Chang Wanquan visited USA and met with US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel in Washington when two sides pledged to strengthened bilateral military cooperation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I

Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament

Parliament House, Canberra, Australia

November 17, 2011

President Obama: Prime Minister Gillard, Leader Abbott, thank you both for your very warm welcome. Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, members of the House and Senate, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for the honor of standing in this great chamber to reaffirm the bonds between the United States and the Commonwealth of Australia, two of the world's oldest democracies and two of the world's oldest friends.

To you and the people of Australia, thank you for your extraordinary hospitality. And here, in this city—this ancient “meeting place”—I want to acknowledge the original inhabitants of this land, and one of the world's oldest continuous cultures, the First Australians.

I first came to Australia as a child, traveling between my birthplace of Hawaii, and Indonesia, where I would live for four years. As an eight-year-old, I couldn't always understand your foreign language. (Laughter). Last night I did try to talk some “Strine.” (Laughter). Today I don't want to subject you to any earbashing. I really do love that one and I will be introducing that into the vernacular in Washington. (Laughter).

But to a young American boy, Australia and its people—your optimism, your easy-going ways, your irreverent sense of humor—all felt so familiar. It felt like home. I've always wanted to return. I tried last year—twice. But this is a Lucky Country, and today I feel lucky to be here as we mark the 60th anniversary of our unbreakable alliance.

The bonds between us run deep. In each other's story we see so much of ourselves. Ancestors who crossed vast oceans—some by choice, some in chains. Settlers who pushed west across sweeping plains. Dreamers who toiled with hearts and hands to lay railroads and to build cities. Generations of immigrants who, with each new arrival, add a new thread to the brilliant tapestry of our nations. And we are citizens who live by a common creed—no matter who you are, no matter what you look like, everyone deserves a fair chance; everyone deserves a fair go.

Of course, progress in our society has not always come without tensions, or

struggles to overcome a painful past. But we are countries with a willingness to face our imperfections, and to keep reaching for our ideals. That's the spirit we saw in this chamber three years ago, as this nation inspired the world with a historic gesture of reconciliation with Indigenous Australians. It's the spirit of progress, in America, which allows me to stand before you today, as President of the United States. And it's the spirit I'll see later today when I become the first U.S. President to visit the Northern Territory, where I'll meet the Traditional Owners of the Land.

Nor has our progress come without great sacrifice. This morning, I was humbled and deeply moved by a visit to your war memorial to pay my respects to Australia's fallen sons and daughters. Later today, in Darwin, I'll join the Prime Minister in saluting our brave men and women in uniform. And it will be a reminder that—from the trenches of the First World War to the mountains of Afghanistan—Aussies and Americans have stood together, we have fought together, we have given lives together in every single major conflict of the past hundred years. Every single one.

This solidarity has sustained us through a difficult decade. We will never forget the attacks of 9/11, that took the lives not only of Americans, but people from many nations, including Australia. In the United States, we will never forget how Australia invoked the ANZUS Treaty—for the first time ever—showing that our two nations stood as one. And none of us will ever forget those we've lost to al Qaeda's terror in the years since, including innocent Australians.

And that's why, as both the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader indicated, we are determined to succeed in Afghanistan. It is why I salute Australia—outside of NATO, the largest contributor of troops to this vital mission. And it's why we honor all those who have served there for our security, including 32 Australian patriots who gave their lives, among them Captain Bryce Duffy, Corporal Ashley Birt, and Lance Corporal Luke Gavin. We will honor their sacrifice by making sure that Afghanistan is never again used as a source for attacks against our people. Never again.

As two global partners, we stand up for the security and the dignity of people around the world. We see it when our rescue workers rush to help others in times of fire and drought and flooding rains. We see it when we partner to keep the peace—from East Timor to the Balkans—and when we pursue our shared vision: a world without nuclear weapons. We see it in the development that lifts up a child in Africa; the assistance that saves a family from famine; and when we extend our support to the people of the Middle East and North Africa, who deserve the same liberty that allows us to gather in this great hall of democracy.

This is the alliance we reaffirm today—rooted in our values; renewed by every generation. This is the partnership we worked to deepen over the past three years. And today I can stand before you and say with confidence that the alliance between the United States and Australia has never been stronger. It has been to our past; our alliance continues to be indispensable to our future. So here, among

close friends, I'd like to address the larger purpose of my visit to this region—our efforts to advance security, prosperity and human dignity across the Asia Pacific.

For the United States, this reflects a broader shift. After a decade in which we fought two wars that cost us dearly, in blood and treasure, the United States is turning our attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region. In just a few weeks, after nearly nine years, the last American troops will leave Iraq and our war there will be over. In Afghanistan, we've begun a transition—a responsible transition—so Afghans can take responsibility for their future and so coalition forces can begin to draw down. And with partners like Australia, we've struck major blows against al Qaeda and put that terrorist organization on the path to defeat, including delivering justice to Osama bin Laden.

So make no mistake, the tide of war is receding, and America is looking ahead to the future that we must build. From Europe to the Americas, we've strengthened alliances and partnerships. At home, we're investing in the sources of our long-term economic strength—the education of our children, the training of our workers, the infrastructure that fuels commerce, the science and the research that leads to new breakthroughs. We've made hard decisions to cut our deficit and put our fiscal house in order—and we will continue to do more. Because our economic strength at home is the foundation of our leadership in the world, including here in the Asia Pacific.

Our new focus on this region reflects a fundamental truth—the United States has been, and always will be, a Pacific nation. Asian immigrants helped build America, and millions of American families, including my own, cherish our ties to this region. From the bombing of Darwin to the liberation of Pacific islands, from the rice paddies of Southeast Asia to a cold Korean Peninsula, generations of Americans have served here, and died here—so democracies could take root; so economic miracles could lift hundreds of millions to prosperity. Americans have bled with you for this progress, and we will not allow it—we will never allow it to be reversed.

Here, we see the future. As the world's fastest-growing region—and home to more than half the global economy—the Asia Pacific is critical to achieving my highest priority, and that's creating jobs and opportunity for the American people. With most of the world's nuclear power and some half of humanity, Asia will largely define whether the century ahead will be marked by conflict or cooperation, needless suffering or human progress.

As President, I have, therefore, made a deliberate and strategic decision—as a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future, by upholding core principles and in close partnership with our allies and friends.

Let me tell you what this means. First, we seek security, which is the foundation of peace and prosperity. We stand for an international order in which the rights and responsibilities of all nations and all people are upheld. Where international law and norms are enforced. Where commerce and freedom of

navigation are not impeded. Where emerging powers contribute to regional security, and where disagreements are resolved peacefully. That's the future that we seek.

Now, I know that some in this region have wondered about America's commitment to upholding these principles. So let me address this directly. As the United States puts our fiscal house in order, we are reducing our spending. And, yes, after a decade of extraordinary growth in our military budgets—and as we definitively end the war in Iraq, and begin to wind down the war in Afghanistan—we will make some reductions in defense spending.

As we consider the future of our armed forces, we've begun a review that will identify our most important strategic interests and guide our defense priorities and spending over the coming decade. So here is what this region must know. As we end today's wars, I have directed my national security team to make our presence and mission in the Asia Pacific a top priority. As a result, reductions in U.S. defense spending will not—I repeat, will not—come at the expense of the Asia Pacific.

My guidance is clear. As we plan and budget for the future, we will allocate the resources necessary to maintain our strong military presence in this region. We will preserve our unique ability to project power and deter threats to peace. We will keep our commitments, including our treaty obligations to allies like Australia. And we will constantly strengthen our capabilities to meet the needs of the 21st century. Our enduring interests in the region demand our enduring presence in the region. The United States is a Pacific power, and we are here to stay.

Indeed, we are already modernizing America's defense posture across the Asia Pacific. It will be more broadly distributed—maintaining our strong presence in Japan and the Korean Peninsula, while enhancing our presence in Southeast Asia. Our posture will be more flexible—with new capabilities to ensure that our forces can operate freely. And our posture will be more sustainable, by helping allies and partners build their capacity, with more training and exercises.

We see our new posture here in Australia. The initiatives that the Prime Minister and I announced yesterday will bring our two militaries even closer together. We'll have new opportunities to train with other allies and partners, from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean. And it will allow us to respond faster to the full range of challenges, including humanitarian crises and disaster relief.

Since World War II, Australians have warmly welcomed American service members who've passed through. On behalf of the American people, I thank you for welcoming those who will come next, as they ensure that our alliance stays strong and ready for the tests of our time.

We see America's enhanced presence in the alliance that we've strengthened: In Japan, where our alliance remains a cornerstone of regional security. In Thailand, where we're partnering for disaster relief. In the Philippines, where we're increasing ship visits and training. And in South Korea, where our commitment to the

security of the Republic of Korea will never waver. Indeed, we also reiterate our resolve to act firmly against any proliferation activities by North Korea. The transfer of nuclear materials or material by North Korea to states or non-state entities would be considered a grave threat to the United States and our allies, and we would hold North Korea fully accountable for the consequences of such action.

We see America's enhanced presence across Southeast Asia—in our partnership with Indonesia against piracy and violent extremism, and in our work with Malaysia to prevent proliferation; in the ships we'll deploy to Singapore, and in our closer cooperation with Vietnam and Cambodia; and in our welcome of India as it “looks east” and plays a larger role as an Asian power.

At the same time, we'll reengage with our regional organizations. Our work in Bali this week will mark my third meeting with ASEAN leaders, and I'll be proud to be the first American President to attend the East Asia Summit. And together, I believe we can address shared challenges, such as proliferation and maritime security, including cooperation in the South China Sea.

Meanwhile, the United States will continue our effort to build a cooperative relationship with China. All of our nations—Australia, the United States—all of our nations have a profound interest in the rise of a peaceful and prosperous China. That's why the United States welcomes it. We've seen that China can be a partner from reducing tensions on the Korean Peninsula to preventing proliferation. And we'll seek more opportunities for cooperation with Beijing, including greater communication between our militaries to promote understanding and avoid miscalculation. We will do this, even as we continue to speak candidly to Beijing about the importance of upholding international norms and respecting the universal human rights of the Chinese people.

A secure and peaceful Asia is the foundation for the second area in which America is leading again, and that's advancing our shared prosperity. History teaches us the greatest force the world has ever known for creating wealth and opportunity is free markets. So we seek economies that are open and transparent. We seek trade that is free and fair. And we seek an open international economic system, where rules are clear and every nation plays by them.

In Australia and America, we understand these principles. We're among the most open economies on Earth. Six years into our landmark trade agreement, commerce between us has soared. Our workers are creating new partnerships and new products, like the advanced aircraft technologies we build together in Victoria. We're the leading investor in Australia, and you invest more in America than you do in any other nation, creating good jobs in both countries.

We recognize that economic partnerships can't just be about one nation extracting another's resources. We understand that no long-term strategy for growth can be imposed from above. Real prosperity—prosperity that fosters innovation, and prosperity that endures—comes from unleashing our greatest economic resource, and that's the entrepreneurial spirit, the talents of our people.

So even as America competes aggressively in Asian markets, we're forging the economic partnerships that create opportunity for all. Building on our historic trade agreement with South Korea, we're working with Australia and our other APEC partners to create a seamless regional economy. And with Australia and other partners, we're on track to achieve our most ambitious trade agreement yet, and a potential model for the entire region—the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

The United States remains the world's largest and most dynamic economy. But in an interconnected world, we all rise and fall together. That's why I pushed so hard to put the G20 at the front and center of global economic decision-making—to give more nations a leadership role in managing the international economy, including Australia. And together, we saved the world economy from a depression. And now, our urgent challenge is to create the growth that puts people to work.

We need growth that is fair, where every nation plays by the rules; where workers rights are respected, and our businesses can compete on a level playing field; where the intellectual property and new technologies that fuel innovation are protected; and where currencies are market driven so no nation has an unfair advantage.

We also need growth that is broad—not just for the few, but for the many—with reforms that protect consumers from abuse and a global commitment to end the corruption that stifles growth. We need growth that is balanced, because we will all prosper more when countries with large surpluses take action to boost demand at home.

And we need growth that is sustainable. This includes the clean energy that creates green jobs and combats climate change, which cannot be denied. We see it in the stronger fires, the devastating floods, the Pacific islands confronting rising seas. And as countries with large carbon footprints, the United States and Australia have a special responsibility to lead.

Every nation will contribute to the solution in its own way—and I know this issue is not without controversy, in both our countries. But what we can do—and what we are doing—is to work together to make unprecedented investments in clean energy, to increase energy efficiency, and to meet the commitments we made at Copenhagen and Cancun. We can do this, and we will.

As we grow our economies, we'll also remember the link between growth and good governance—the rule of law, transparent institutions, the equal administration of justice. Because history shows that, over the long run, democracy and economic growth go hand in hand. And prosperity without freedom is just another form of poverty.

And this brings me to the final area where we are leading—our support for the fundamental rights of every human being. Every nation will chart its own course. Yet it is also true that certain rights are universal; among them, freedom

of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, and the freedom of citizens to choose their own leaders.

These are not American rights, or Australian rights, or Western rights. These are human rights. They stir in every soul, as we've seen in the democracies that have succeeded here in Asia. Other models have been tried and they have failed—fascism and communism, rule by one man and rule by committee. And they failed for the same simple reason: They ignore the ultimate source of power and legitimacy—the will of the people. Yes, democracy can be messy and rough—I understand you mix it up quite well during Question Time. (Laughter). But whatever our differences of party or of ideology, we know in our democracies we are blessed with the greatest form of government ever known to man.

So as two great democracies, we speak up for those freedoms when they are threatened. We partner with emerging democracies, like Indonesia, to help strengthen the institutions upon which good governance depends. We encourage open government, because democracies depend on an informed and active citizenry. We help strengthen civil societies, because they empower our citizens to hold their governments accountable. And we advance the rights of all people—women, minorities and indigenous cultures—because when societies harness the potential of all their citizens, these societies are more successful, they are more prosperous and they are more just.

These principles have guided our approach to Burma, with a combination of sanctions and engagement. And today, Aung San Suu Kyi is free from house arrest. Some political prisoners have been released, and the government has begun a dialogue. Still, violations of human rights persist. So we will continue to speak clearly about the steps that must be taken for the government of Burma to have a better relationship with the United States.

This is the future we seek in the Asia Pacific—security, prosperity and dignity for all. That's what we stand for. That's who we are. That's the future we will pursue, in partnership with allies and friends, and with every element of American power. So let there be no doubt: In the Asia Pacific in the 21st century, the United States of America is all in.

Still, in times of great change and uncertainty, the future can seem unsettling. Across a vast ocean, it's impossible to know what lies beyond the horizon. But if this vast region and its people teach us anything, it's the yearning for liberty and progress will not be denied.

It's why women in this country demanded that their voices be heard, making Australia the first nation to let women vote and run for parliament and, one day, become Prime Minister. It's why the people took to the streets—from Delhi to Seoul, from Manila to Jakarta—to throw off colonialism and dictatorship and build some of the world's largest democracies.

It's why a soldier in a watchtower along the DMZ defends a free people in the South, and why a man from the North risks his life to escape across the border. Why soldiers in blue helmets keep the peace in a new nation. And why

women of courage go into brothels to save young girls from modern-day slavery, which must come to an end.

It's why men of peace in saffron robes faced beatings and bullets, and why every day—from some of the world's largest cities to dusty rural towns, in small acts of courage the world may never see—a student posts a blog; a citizen signs a charter; an activist remains unbowed, imprisoned in his home, just to have the same rights that we cherish here today.

Men and women like these know what the world must never forget. The currents of history may ebb and flow, but over time they move—decidedly, decisively—in a single direction. History is on the side of the free—free societies, free governments, free economies, free people. And the future belongs to those who stand firm for those ideals, in this region and around the world.

This is the story of the alliance we celebrate today. This is the essence of America's leadership; it is the essence of our partnership. This is the work we will carry on together, for the security and prosperity and dignity of all people.

So God bless Australia. God bless America. And God bless the friendship between our two peoples. (Applause).

Thank you very much.

Source: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>, (Accessed on February 07, 2014)

Appendix II

America's Engagement in the Asia-Pacific

*Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State
Kahala Hotel, Honolulu, HI*

October 28, 2010

Aloha. The original idea for this speech is that we were going to do it outside. And if you saw the front page of the newspaper this morning where I was being greeted by Admiral Willard with my hair straight up in the wind – (laughter) – we decided we didn't want another story about my hair. (Laughter.) So we appreciate the hotel accommodating us and allowing us to meet inside, although granted the lure of the beauty of Hawaii is right out those doors.

I want to thank the senator for his introduction, but much more than that, for his friendship, his leadership, and his service to our country. There isn't anyone active in public service today who has done more in more capacities to really represent the American dream and to firmly root it in the soil of his native Hawaii and to represent, in the very best American tradition, the soldier, the Medal of Honor winner, the senator, and just an all-around wonderful man. (Applause.) And of course, it's absolutely a treat to see him here with Irene and to have a chance to see both of them is a special pleasure for me.

I also want to recognize Congresswoman Mazie Hirono who is here. Thank you so much Mazie. (Applause.) And Mayor Peter Carlisle – Mayor, thank you for being here. (Applause.) I think both Senator Akaka and Congressman Djou were unable to come, but I want to recognize Senator Colleen Hanabusa who is here. Thank you so much Colleen for coming. (Applause.) And when you've been in and around American politics as long as my husband and I have been, you make a lot of friends over the years. And I'm so pleased that George Ariyoshi and John and Lynne Waihee and Ben Cayetano are here as well. Those are wonderful friends who we served with and got to know over the years. (Applause.) And I want to recognize Admiral Willard, our PACOM commander; Australian ambassador to the U.S., Kim Beazley. I know there are also students from the East-West Center, and there are some high school students. And I thank the students particularly for being here and all of the sponsors of this occasion.

I'm delighted to return to Hawaii. As Charles Morrison said, my trip last time was cut short by the terrible earthquake in Haiti. But this is the birthplace of our President and America's bridge to the East, and it is where I am kicking off a seven-country tour of the Asia-Pacific region.

I've been looking forward to this trip for some time. From Hawaii it will be onto Guam and then Vietnam and Cambodia, then Malaysia and Papua New Guinea, New Zealand, Australia, and American Samoa. It is an itinerary that reflects Asia's diversity and dynamism. And it complements the route that President Obama will take in just a few weeks when he visits India, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea. Together, the President and I will cover a significant portion of this vital region at a pivotal moment, after nearly two years of intensive engagement. And everywhere we go, we will advance one overarching set of goals: to sustain and strengthen America's leadership in the Asia-Pacific region and to improve security, heighten prosperity, and promote our values.

Through these trips, and in many other ways, we are practicing what you might call "forward-deployed" diplomacy. And by that we mean we've adopted a very proactive footing; we've sent the full range of our diplomatic assets – including our highest-ranking officials, our development experts, our teams on a wide range of pressing issues – into every corner and every capital of the Asia-Pacific region. We have quickened the pace and widened the scope of our engagement with regional institutions, with our partners and allies, and with people themselves in an active effort to advance shared objectives.

This has been our priority since Day One of the Obama Administration, because we know that much of the history of the 21st century will be written in Asia. This region will see the most transformative economic growth on the planet. Most of its cities will become global centers of commerce and culture. And as more people across the region gain access to education and opportunity, we will see the rise of the next generation of regional and global leaders in business and science, technology, politics, and the arts.

And yet, deep-seated challenges lurk in Asia. The ongoing human rights abuses inflicted by the military junta in Burma remind us there are places where progress is absent. North Korea's provocative acts and history of proliferation activities requires a watchful vigilance. And military buildups matched with ongoing territorial disputes create anxieties that reverberate. Solutions to urgent global problems, like climate change, will succeed or fail based on what happens in Asia. This is the future taking shape today – full of fast-paced change, and marked by challenges. And it is a future in which the United States must lead.

Because the progress we see today is the result not only of the hard work of leaders and citizens across the region, but the American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines who protect borders and patrol the region's waters; the American diplomats who have settled conflicts and brought nations together in common cause; the American business leaders and entrepreneurs who invested in new markets and formed trans-Pacific partnerships; the American aid workers who helped countries rebuild in the wake of disasters; and the American educators and students who have shared ideas and experiences with their counterparts across the ocean.

Now, there are some who say that this long legacy of American leadership in

the Asia-Pacific is coming to a close. That we are not here to stay. And I say, look at our record. It tells a very different story.

For the past 21 months, the Obama Administration has been intent on strengthening our leadership, increasing our engagement, and putting into practice new ways of projecting our ideas and influence throughout this changing region. We've done all this with a great deal of support from leaders on both sides of the political aisle who share our vision for America's role in Asia. Together, we are focused on a distant time horizon, one that stretches out for decades to come. And I know how hard it is in today's political climate to think beyond tomorrow. But one of my hopes is that in Asia and elsewhere we can begin doing that again. Because it took decades for us to build our infrastructure of leadership in the world, and it will take decades for us to continue and implement the policies going forward.

So now, at the start of my sixth trip to Asia as Secretary of State, I am optimistic and confident about Asia's future. And I am optimistic and confident about America's future. And I am optimistic and confident about what all of these countries can do together with American leadership in the years ahead.

So today, I'd like briefly to discuss the steps that the Obama Administration has taken to strengthen the main tools of American engagement in Asia: our alliances, our emerging partnerships, and our work with regional institutions. And I will describe how we are using these tools to pursue this forward-deployed diplomacy along three key tracks: first, shaping the future Asia-Pacific economy; second, underwriting regional security; and third, supporting stronger democratic institutions and the spread of universal human values.

Let me begin where our approach to Asia begins – with our allies. In a vast and diverse region, our bonds with our allies – Japan, Korea, Australia, Thailand, and the Philippines – remain the foundation for our strategic engagement. These alliances have safeguarded regional peace and security for the past half century and supported the region's remarkable economic growth. Today we are working not just to sustain them but to update them, so they remain effective in a changing world.

That starts with our alliance with Japan, the cornerstone of our engagement in the Asia-Pacific. This year, our countries celebrated the 50th anniversary of our Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. But our partnership extends far beyond security. We are two of the world's three biggest economies, the top two contributors to reconstruction in Afghanistan, and we share a commitment to leading on major global issues from nonproliferation to climate change. To ensure that the next fifty years of our alliance are as effective as the last, we are broadening our cooperation to reflect the changing strategic environment. I covered the full range of issues that we face together in my two-hour discussion and then my remarks with the foreign minister from Japan yesterday.

This year also marked a milestone with another ally: the 60th anniversary of the start of the Korean War, which Secretary Gates and I commemorated in

Seoul this past summer. And in two weeks, our presidents will meet in Seoul when President Obama travels there for the G-20 summit.

Our two countries have stood together in the face of threats and provocative acts from North Korea, including the tragic sinking of the Cheonan by a North Korean torpedo. We will continue to coordinate closely with both Seoul and Tokyo in our efforts to make clear to North Korea there is only one path that promises the full benefits of engagement with the outside world—a full, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization.

The alliance between South Korea and the United States is a lynchpin of stability and security in the region and now even far beyond. We are working together in Afghanistan, where a South Korean reconstruction team is at work in Parwan Province; in the Gulf of Aden, where Korean and U.S. forces are coordinating anti-piracy missions. And of course, beyond our military cooperation, our countries enjoy a vibrant economic relationship, which is why our two Presidents have called for resolving the outstanding issues related to the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement by the time of the G-20 meeting in Seoul.

Next year marks another celebration – the 60th anniversary of the alliance between Australia and the United States. In two weeks, I will finish my tour of this region with a visit to Australia for the 25th anniversary of the Australia-U.S. ministerial; it's called AUSMIN. And Secretary Gates and I will meet with our counterparts, Foreign Minister Rudd and Defense Minister Smith. And I – we'll also meet with Julia Gillard, Australia's first woman prime minister, and have a chance not only to consult with the leaders, but also to give a policy address about the future of the alliance between Australia and the U.S.

With our Southeast Asian allies, Thailand and the Philippines, the United States is working closely on an expanding range of political, economic, environmental, and security-related issues. This summer, we launched our Creative Partnership Agreement with Thailand, which brings together Thai and American universities and businesses to help develop the innovative sectors of the Thai economy. With the Philippines, we will hold our first ever 2+2 Strategic Dialogue this coming January. And last month, I had the pleasure of joining President Aquino in signing a Millennium Challenge Compact to accelerate economic development and decrease poverty in the Philippines.

With each of our five allies in the region, what began as security alliances have broadened over time and now encompass shared actions on many fronts. And we will continue to ask ourselves the hard questions about how to strengthen the alliances further, tailoring them for each relationship to deliver more benefits to more of our people.

Beyond our alliances, the United States is strengthening relationships with new partners. Indonesia is playing a leading role in the region and especially in regional institutions. As chair of ASEAN next year, Indonesia will host the 2011 East Asia Summit. And as the creator of the Bali Democracy Forum, it is a leading advocate for democratic reforms throughout Asia. Our two presidents

will formally launch our new Comprehensive Partnership Agreement during President Obama's visit to Indonesia next month.

In Vietnam, we are cultivating a level of cooperation that would have been unimaginable just 10 years ago. Our diplomatic and economic ties are more productive than ever, and we've recently expanded our discussion on maritime security and other defense-related issues. Vietnam also invited us to participate as a guest at the East Asia Summit for the first time this year. That opens up a critical new avenue for cooperation. And though we still have our differences, we are committed to moving beyond our painful past toward a more prosperous and successful relationship.

Few countries punch as far above their weight as Singapore, and we're working together to promote economic growth and integration, leveraging Singapore's leadership in ASEAN and the role it has played in negotiating the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And in Malaysia and New Zealand, our diplomats and development experts are bringing their talents to bear and building stronger ties on every level, including increased trade, people-to-people exchanges, and efforts to strengthen the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

In a crowded field of highly dynamic, increasingly influential emerging nations, two, of course, stand out – India and China. Their simultaneous rise is reshaping the world and our ability to cooperate effectively with these two countries will be a critical test of our leadership. With growing ties between our governments, our economies, and our peoples, India and the United States have never mattered more to each other. As the world's two largest democracies, we are united by common interests and common values.

Earlier this year, we launched the U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue. And one of the core issues we addressed is India's growing engagement and integration into East Asia, because we believe that India is a key player in this region and on the global stage. That's why President Obama is also beginning his own major trip to Asia next week with a stop in India. His trip will bring together two of our top priorities – renewed American leadership in Asia and a U.S.-India partnership that is elevated to an entirely new level.

Now, the relationship between China and the United States is complex and of enormous consequence, and we are committed to getting it right. Now, there are some in both countries who believe that China's interests and ours are fundamentally at odds. They apply a zero-sum calculation to our relationship. So whenever one of us succeeds, the other must fail. But that is not our view. In the 21st century, it is not in anyone's interest for the United States and China to see each other as adversaries. So we are working together to chart a positive, cooperative, and comprehensive relationship for this new century.

There are also many in China who believe that the United States is bent on containing China, and I would simply point out that since the beginning of our diplomatic relations, China has experienced breathtaking growth and development. And this is primarily due, of course, to the hard work of the Chinese

people. But U.S. policy has consistently, through Republican and Democratic administrations and congresses supported this goal since the 1970s. And we do look forward to working closely with China, both bilaterally and through key institutions as it takes on a greater role, and at the same time, takes on more responsibility in regional and global affairs. In the immediate future, we need to work together on a more effective approach to deal with North Korea's provocations to press them to rebuild ties with the South and to return to the Six-Party Talks.

On Iran, we look to China to help ensure the effective implementation of global sanctions aimed at preventing Iran from pursuing its nuclear ambitions. On military matters, we seek a deeper dialogue in an effort to build trust and establish rules of the road as our militaries operate in greater proximity. On climate change, as the world's two largest emitters of greenhouse gases, we have a shared responsibility to produce tangible strategies that improve energy efficiency and advance global climate diplomacy.

On currency and trade, the United States seeks responsible policy adjustments that have been clearly articulated by Secretary Geithner and a better climate for American businesses, products, and intellectual property in China. Looking beyond our governments, our two countries must work together to increase the number of students studying in each country. And we have an initiative called 100000 Strong to promote that goal. And on human rights, we seek a far-reaching dialogue that advances the protection of the universal rights of all people. We will welcome President Hu Jintao to Washington in early 2011 for a state visit. The United States is committed to making this visit a historic success. And I look forward to meeting with my counterpart, State Councilor Dai Bingguo later this week to help prepare for that trip.

Now, our relationship with our allies and our partners are two of the three key elements of our engagement in the Asia Pacific region. The third is our participation in the region's multilateral institutions. When I was here in Hawaii 10 months ago, I spoke about the importance of strong institutions for Asia's future. And let me simply state the principle that will guide America's role in Asian institutions. If consequential security, political, and economic issues are being discussed, and if they involve our interests, then we will seek a seat at the table. That's why we view ASEAN as a fulcrum for the region's emerging regional architecture. And we see it as indispensable on a host of political, economic, and strategic matters.

The United States has taken a series of steps to build stronger ties with ASEAN, including acceding to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, and opening a U.S. mission to ASEAN. Secretary Gates recently returned from Hanoi where he participated in the ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meeting. President Obama has personally engaged with ASEAN leaders twice to signal how seriously the United States takes our engagement. And we've taken a leading role in the ASEAN Regional Forum, where we have discussed ongoing security issues such as North Korea and the South China Sea. On the latter issue, we are encouraged by China's

recent steps to enter discussions with ASEAN about a more formal, binding code of conduct.

With regard to APEC, we see this as a pivotal moment in which APEC can revitalize its mission and embrace a 21st century economic agenda. And we admire Japan's forward-leaning leadership at this year's APEC. They have defined a new path forward for APEC on trade liberalization and promoted specific efforts to increase business investment in small and medium enterprises.

We have been closely collaborating with Japan to prepare the way for our own leadership of APEC next year, and that will build on the leaders meeting here in Honolulu. And I appreciate the Host Committee members who are here for your support of this important meeting. Our aim is to help APEC evolve into an important, results-oriented forum for driving shared and inclusive, sustainable economic progress.

The United States is also leading through what we call "mini-laterals," as opposed to multilaterals, like the Lower Mekong Initiative we launched last year to support education, health, and environmental programs in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. And we are working through the Pacific Island Forum to support the Pacific Island nations as they strive to really confront and solve the challenges they face, from climate change to freedom of navigation. And to that end, I am pleased to announce that USAID will return to the Pacific next year, opening an office in Fiji, with a fund of \$21 million to support climate change mitigation.

Now, immediately following this speech, I will leave for Hanoi, where I will represent our country at the East Asia Summit. This will be the first time that the United States is participating and we are grateful for the opportunity. I will introduce the two core principles that the Obama Administration will take in its approach to the EAS—first, ASEAN's central role, and second, our desire to see EAS emerge as a forum for substantive engagement on pressing strategic and political issues, including nuclear nonproliferation, maritime security, and climate change.

So these are the primary tools of our engagement—our alliances, our partnerships, and multilateral institutions.

And as we put these relationships to work, we do so in recognition that the United States is uniquely positioned to play a leading role in the Asia Pacific—because of our history, our capabilities, and our credibility. People look to us, as they have for decades. The most common thing that Asian leaders have said to me in my travels over this last 20 months is thank you, we're so glad that you're playing an active role in Asia again. Because they look to us to help create the conditions for broad, sustained economic growth and to ensure security by effectively deploying our own military and to defend human rights and dignity by supporting strong democratic institutions.

So we intend to project American leadership in these three areas—economic growth, regional security, and enduring values. These arenas formed the foundation

of American leadership in the 20th century, and they are just as relevant in the 21st century. But the way we operate in these arenas has to change—because the world has changed and it will keep changing.

The first is economic growth. One theme consistently stands out: Asia still wants America to be an optimistic, engaged, open, and creative partner in the region's flourishing trade and financial interactions. And as I talk with business leaders across our own nation, I hear how important it is for the United States to expand our exports and our investment opportunities in the dynamic markets of Asia. These are essential features of the rebalancing agenda of our administration.

Now, for our part, we are getting our house in order—increasing our savings, reforming our financial systems, relying less on borrowing. And President Obama has set a goal of doubling our exports, in order to create jobs and bring much-needed balance to our trade relationships.

But achieving balance in those relationships requires a two-way commitment. That's the nature of balance—it can't be unilaterally imposed. So we are working through APEC, the G-20, and our bilateral relationships to advocate for more open markets, fewer restrictions on exports, more transparency, and an overall commitment to fairness. American businesses and workers need to have confidence that they are operating on a level playing field, with predictable rules on everything from intellectual property to indigenous innovation.

When free trade is done right, it creates jobs, lowers prices, fuels growth, and lifts people's standards of living. I mentioned our earlier – I mentioned earlier our hope to complete discussions on the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement to permit its submission to Congress. We are also pressing ahead with negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an innovative, ambitious multilateral free trade agreement that would bring together nine Pacific Rim countries, including four new free trade partners for the United States, and potentially others in the future.

2011 will be a pivotal year for this agenda. Starting with the Korea Free Trade Agreement, continuing with the negotiation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, working together for financial rebalancing at the G-20, and culminating at the APEC Leaders Summit in Hawaii, we have a historic chance to create broad, sustained, and balanced growth across the Asia Pacific and we intend to seize that.

Sustained economic progress relies on durable investments in stability and security—investments the United States will continue to make. Our military presence in Asia has deterred conflict and provided security for 60 years, and will continue to support economic growth and political integration.

But our military presence must evolve to reflect an evolving world. The Pentagon is now engaged in a comprehensive Global Posture Review, which will lay out a plan for the continued forward presence of U.S. forces in the region. That plan will reflect three principles: Our defense posture will become more politically sustainable, operationally resilient, and geographically dispersed.

With these principles in mind, we are enhancing our presence in Northeast Asia. The buildup on Guam reflects these ideas, as does the agreement on basing that we have reached with Japan—an agreement that comes during the 50th anniversary of our mutual security alliance. We have also adopted new defense guidelines with South Korea.

In Southeast Asia and the Pacific, we are shifting our presence to reflect these principles. For example, we have increased our naval presence in Singapore. We are engaging more with the Philippines and Thailand to enhance their capacity to counter terrorists and respond to humanitarian disasters. We have created new parameters for military cooperation with New Zealand and we continue to modernize our defense ties with Australia to respond to a more complex maritime environment. And we are expanding our work with the Indian navy in the Pacific, because we understand how important the Indo-Pacific basin is to global trade and commerce.

Now, some might ask: Why is a Secretary of State talking about defense posture? But this is where the three D's of our foreign policy—defense, diplomacy, and development—come together. Our military activities in Asia are a key part of our comprehensive engagement. By balancing and integrating them with a forward-deployed approach to diplomacy and development, we put ourselves in the best position to secure our own interests and to promote the common interest.

This is true for our forces on the Korean Peninsula maintaining peace and security, our naval forces confronting piracy, promoting free navigation, and providing humanitarian relief for millions of people, and our soldiers and civilians working closely with friends and partners in Southeast Asia to train, equip, and develop capacity for countries to respond swiftly to terrorist threats.

More than our military might, and more than the size of our economy, our most precious asset as a nation is the persuasive power of our values—in particular, our steadfast belief in democracy and human rights.

Our commitment to uphold and project these values is an indispensable aspect of our national character. And it is one of the best and most important contributions we offer the world. So of course, it is an essential element of everything we do in U.S. foreign policy.

Like many nations, we are troubled by the abuses we see in some places in the region. We join billions of people worldwide in calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi; her imprisonment must come to an end. And we are saddened that Asia remains the only place in the world where three iconic Nobel laureates—Aung San Suu Kyi, the Dalai Lama, and Liu Xiaobo—are either under house arrest, in prison, or in exile.

As we deepen our engagement with partners with whom we disagree on these issues, we will continue to urge them to embrace reforms that would improve governance, protect human rights, and advance political freedoms.

And I would like to underscore the American commitment to seek accountability for the human rights violations that have occurred in Burma by

working to establish an international Commission of Inquiry through close consultations with our friends, allies, and other partners at the United Nations. Burma will soon hold a deeply flawed election, and one thing we have learned over the last few years is that democracy is more than elections. And we will make clear to Burma's new leaders, old and new alike, that they must break from the policies of the past.

Now, we know we cannot impose our values on other countries, but we do believe that certain values are universal—that they are cherished by people in every nation in the world, including in Asia—and that they are intrinsic to stable, peaceful, and prosperous countries. In short, human rights are in everyone's interest. This is a message that the United States delivers every day, in every region.

Now, we also know that we have to work with these countries on many issues simultaneously, so we never quit from promoting all of our concerns. We may make progress on the economy or on security or on human rights and not on the other one or two, but we have to have a comprehensive approach. And what I have described today is a mix of old commitments and new steps that we are taking. And through these steps, we will listen, we will cooperate, and we will lead.

Of course, it is the people of Asia who must make the tough choices and it is their leaders who must make an absolutely fundamental choice to improve not just the standard of living of their people but their political freedom and their human rights as well. Asia can count on us to stand with leaders and people who take actions that will build that better future, that will improve the lives of everyday citizens, and by doing so not just grow an economy but transform a country. We make this commitment not just because of what's at stake in Asia, we make this commitment because of what is at stake for the United States. This is about our future. This is about the opportunities our children and grandchildren will have. And we look to the Asia Pacific region as we have for many decades as an area where the United States is uniquely positioned to play a major role in helping to shape that future.

I know how much Hawaii serves as that bridge to the Asia Pacific region, and I know how the very diversity and dynamism of Hawaii says so much about what is possible not only in our own country but in countries throughout the Pacific. So we will continue to stand for what we believe is in America's interest and what we are absolutely convinced is also in the interests of the people of Asia as well. And I look forward to returning to Hawaii for the APEC Leaders Summit when we will take stock of what we have accomplished and how far we have come, and to look to the leaders and people of Hawaii to continue to show us the way.

Thank you all very much. (Applause).

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