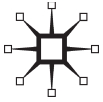


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I N T R O D U C T I O N

*The Reconfiguration of American Primacy in
World Politics: Prospects and Challenges for the
US Rebalance toward Asia*

HUGO MEIJER

The Obama administration has launched a series of diplomatic, military, and economic initiatives as well as issued a number of public pronouncements that over time have come to shape and define the so-called US “pivot” (or “rebalance”) toward the Asia Pacific.¹ After a decade of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, this policy shift signaled a new direction for US foreign policy in the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, existing public debates and analyses have so far tended to oversimplify key aspects of the policy. First, they have focused almost exclusively on the military dimension of the rebalance.² Second, the US rebalance toward Asia has often been depicted, in a rather reductive manner, as a US “grand strategy” of military containment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).³ Washington, it is argued, is tightening its alliances and enhancing its military capabilities across the Asia Pacific in order to contain the rise of China, its most likely future military near peer competitor. This book aims at countering these misconceptions by bringing to light the breadth and complexity of what is a diplomatic, military, and economic repositioning of the United States toward (and within) the Asia Pacific.

At the diplomatic level, the region has received a remarkably high level of attention with a host of presidential and cabinet-level visits. During the first term of the Obama administration, for instance, Secretary of

State Hillary Clinton made far more visits to East Asian countries than each of her three predecessors did.⁴ The administration complemented these bilateral visits with a renewed emphasis on American multilateral engagement in the region, especially with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). Washington signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) with ASEAN, attended for the first time and then joined the EAS in 2010 and 2011, respectively, and stepped up meetings with regional foreign ministers at the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). At the ARF meeting in Hanoi in mid-2010, in light of growing tensions over conflicting territorial claims between the PRC and various littoral countries in the South China Sea, Secretary Clinton affirmed that the United States had a “national interest” in freedom of navigation, in maintaining the region open for international commerce and trade, and in the respect of international law in the South China Sea.⁵ In October 2011, in an article titled “America’s Pacific Century,” Secretary Clinton outlined a number of key lines of action for a multifaceted US policy in the region including strengthening bilateral security alliances, deepening diplomatic and economic relationships with emerging powers such as China, engaging with regional multilateral institutions, expanding trade and investment, and forging a broad-based military presence.⁶ It is in this article that the term “pivot” toward Asia was first used, but it thereafter raised concerns among a number of American allies and partners that the United States might pivot *away from* Europe or the Middle East, and the US administration therefore decided to rename the policy as a “rebalance” rather than a “pivot” to the Asia Pacific.⁷ In November 2011, in an address delivered in front of the Australian Parliament, President Obama stressed that he had made the “deliberate and strategic decision” that the United States “as a Pacific nation [...] will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future.”⁸ Concomitantly with these initiatives, numerous public statements by the president and his key advisers on Asian affairs signaled the desire to maintain a continued cross-governmental and high-profile diplomatic attention to the Asia Pacific throughout the first and second Obama administrations. Beyond the president himself and Vice President Joe Biden,⁹ speeches, interviews, and Congressional testimonies on the US pivot to Asia were given by successive national security advisers (Tom Donilon and Susan Rice),¹⁰ senior directors for Asia at the National Security Council (Jeffrey Bader and Evan Medeiros),¹¹ secretaries of state (Hillary Clinton and, to a lesser extent, John Kerry),¹² secretaries of defense (Leon Panetta and Chuck Hagel),¹³ and assistant secretaries

of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Kurt Campbell and Daniel Russel).¹⁴

In the military realm, the Department of Defense released, in January 2012, its new Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG) *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, intended to reshape the Pentagon's priorities and capabilities in an era of budgetary constraints and after a decade of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It unambiguously stated:

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. Accordingly, while the US military will continue to contribute to security globally, *we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia Pacific region.*¹⁵ (Emphasis in the original)

That same month, the Pentagon also released the Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) that establishes the guiding precepts and capabilities necessary to overcome anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) threats.¹⁶ Although the JOAC document explicitly states that it “is not an operational plan or strategy for a specific region or adversary,” in the existing literature the ability to contest US preeminence across the global commons (i.e., the high seas, air, space, and cyberspace) through anti-access/area-denial capabilities is largely associated with China (and to a lesser extent Iran).¹⁷ In particular, the Pentagon's Air-Sea Battle concept, a subcomponent of JOAC, identifies the specific means and requirements to preserve the US ability to project power and maintain freedom of action in the global commons in the face of A2/AD threats, including in the Asia Pacific.¹⁸ The administration has also sought to strengthen and update existing formal military alliances with Australia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand, while diversifying and deepening its diplomatic and security cooperation with partners such as Indonesia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Vietnam. Washington announced, among other initiatives, the re-posturing of the US Navy from the existing 50/50 percent split between the Pacific and the Atlantic to a 60/40 split between those two oceans by 2020, the transfer of several elements of US forces based in Okinawa to Guam, the upgrading of its missile defense posture, the deployment of marines to Darwin in Australia (as part of what is meant to become a 2,500-strong rotational force), the deployment of littoral combat ships

to Singapore, and signed an enhanced defense cooperation agreement with the Philippines.¹⁹ These steps aim to redistribute and disperse American forces across the Asia Pacific, making US defense posture in the region more agile, flexible, and financially sustainable.

On the economic front of the rebalance, the Obama administration has taken a variety of steps aimed at “tapping into the economic dynamism of the East Asia Pacific,” which Washington considers as “vitaly important for US interests.”²⁰ Since 2000, Asia has indeed become the second-largest export market for the United States, after the North American region.²¹ In 2009, the two-way merchandise trade between the United States and Asia was approximately \$1 trillion a year, representing 27 percent of total American merchandise trade with the world versus 19 percent with the European Union.²² Furthermore, between 2008 and 2012, the 22 percent growth in US trade with the East Asia-Pacific region largely outpaced the 13 percent increase in global US trade and, in the same period, US exports of goods and services to the region rose by 31 percent, reaching almost \$555 billion.²³

In light of the growing economic attractiveness of the Asia-Pacific region, the national, bilateral, and multilateral economic initiatives taken by the US government include the expansion of American exports to the region under the National Export Strategy²⁴; launching a process by which US foreign aid to East Asian countries would be increased by 7 percent²⁵; the conclusion of the second largest existing US free-trade agreement—after the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—with the Republic of Korea, the seventh-largest US trading partner²⁶; and the continued negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free-trade agreement. The TPP includes the United States, Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam (but not China) and could potentially lead to a regional free-trade area across the Asia Pacific.²⁷ It seeks to create a comprehensive and high standards free trade agreement that would liberalize international trade across the Pacific.²⁸ In particular, Washington’s major economic interests in the TPP—which might become the largest US free-trade agreement to date—stem from the fact that the region hosts 40 percent of the world’s population, produces close to 60 percent of global GDP, includes many of the world’s fastest growing economies, and has become a critical part of global supply chains.²⁹ In addition, since the 2008 collapse of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Doha round, regional free-trade agreements appear more promising than multilateral trade negotiations at the WTO.³⁰ Indeed, in parallel with the TPP, the United States is

also negotiating the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the European Union. The TTIP seeks to increase market access through the elimination of barriers to trade and investment and to enhance transatlantic regulatory coherence. Although the United States and the EU already represent approximately 40 percent of world's GDP, 47 percent of global trade, and have two-way investments exceeding \$3.7 trillion (in 2013), the full potential of the transatlantic economic relationship has not yet been reached because of regulatory barriers.³¹ As US Trade Representative Michael Froman puts it, Washington's trade policy seeks to position the United States "at the center of a web of agreements that will provide unfettered access to nearly two-thirds of the global economy."³² In other words, the United States has a key strategic interest in being at the conjunction and center of these two potentially massive Pacific and Atlantic free-trade areas.

Finally, the linkages between this deeper US economic engagement in the Asia Pacific and its security implications should be emphasized. First, growing trade flows pass through potential flashpoints such as the Strait of Malacca and territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Second, besides unresolved territorial disputes, multiple security challenges continue to be potential sources of instability in the Asia Pacific, such as interstate military competition, growing rivalry over energy and natural resources, nuclear proliferation and piracy—among others.³³ From Washington's standpoint, these concerns require the maintenance of American military preeminence in order to guarantee regional stability and sustained, open access to Asia's sea-lanes of communications and to the global commons. As the Pentagon's 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) puts it, "Our economic strength is closely tied to a stable international order, underwritten by the US military's role and that of our allies and partners in ensuring freedom of access and the free flow of commerce globally."³⁴

Central Themes of the Book

The Pivot to Asia or the Hopelessness of Containment

Four core themes emerge from the contributions to this volume. The first is the hopelessness of a US containment strategy against the People's Republic of China in the post-Cold War era. As previously mentioned, most of the public debates on the rebalance have overemphasized, when not focused exclusively on, its military component and

have tended to describe it as an American grand strategy of military containment of the People's Republic of China. This book shows the twofold fallacy of these analyses. First, although the military dimension of the pivot is undoubtedly important, it is but one facet—and not necessarily the most innovative—of the US rebalance, together with its diplomatic and economic components. Second, the American pivot to Asia is not an attempt by the United States to militarily contain the People's Republic of China in the same way it did with the USSR during the Cold War. In a globalized economy where potential rivals are also economically interdependent and in which political ideologies do not crystallize into competing blocs, even if Washington wanted to contain China it would not be able to do so.³⁵ As Jeffrey Bader, former senior director for Asia at the National Security Council, succinctly puts it:

Washington [does] not seek the containment of China, as was the case with the Soviet Union [...] because of the hopelessness of pursuing such a policy toward a country that [is] much more profoundly integrated into the global system. [...] Containment in the style of US policy toward the Soviet Union after World War II [is] not a plausible option.³⁶

Instead, the United States is redirecting its foreign policy attention, priorities, and resources—in the post-Iraq/Afghanistan wars period—toward the world's most strategically sensitive and economically dynamic region. In the words of former secretary of state Hillary Clinton, “The future of politics will be decided in Asia, not Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States will be right at the center of the action.”³⁷ As this book shows, while China's strategic and economic clout certainly is a central concern for US policymakers, the American pivot to the Asia Pacific is driven by a much broader and complex set of political, strategic, and economic objectives.

The Multidimensionality of the Rebalance

Besides the hopelessness of a containment strategy vis-à-vis China, the multidimensionality of the US rebalance to the Asia Pacific is the second core theme of this volume. The pivot is a multifaceted and steadily evolving foreign policy undertaking that relies upon the linkage and articulation of the diplomatic (both bilateral and multilateral),

military, and economic dimensions. As shown in this volume, the US rebalance is characterized by the heterogeneity and multiplicity of its domestic and international drivers and of its policy objectives. Its drivers include the growing economic weight of the Asia-Pacific region in the international political economy and the rising military and economic influence of China within it³⁸; the gradual withdrawal of US military forces from Afghanistan and Iraq; and budgetary constraints that require a rehierarchization of US foreign policy priorities. Within this changing strategic context, Washington pursues multiple objectives. The overarching ambition of the rebalance to the Asia Pacific is to preserve American primacy in world politics, while avoiding the risk of war associated, throughout history, with the rise of new powers. Accordingly, Washington is reconfiguring its diplomatic, military, and economic assets in light of the shifting global center of strategic and economic gravity from the West to the East in the twenty-first century. To do so, the United States seeks to ensure regional stability in East Asia by bolstering and dispersing US military presence in the region, by reassuring Washington's allies and partners of the credibility of its commitments, and by fostering webs of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic and economic relations across the region. The enhanced American engagement in East Asia is also meant to allow US companies to take advantage of major economic opportunities in Asia thereby generating revenues, investments, and growth for the US domestic economy, which is also the foundation of American military preeminence. It is in the broader framework of this "Asia policy" that America's foreign policy toward China must be understood. In light of the mixture of cooperation and competition that characterizes Sino-American relations, the United States is pursuing a differentiated sector-by-sector approach across the multiple issues on the bilateral diplomatic agenda (e.g. nuclear proliferation, energy security, terrorism, climate change, military modernization, cyber security, financial reform, etc.). Washington has sought to expand the areas of potential cooperation with Beijing while managing the areas of bilateral differences and frictions.³⁹ As explained by Daniel Russel, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs:

"There are those who argue that Cold War-like rivalry is inevitable and that the United States and China are condemned to a zero-sum struggle for supremacy, if not conflict. I reject such mechanistic thinking. [...] This deterministic analysis overlooks the role of leaders who have the ability to set policy and to shape

relationships. It gives short shrift to the fact that our two economies are becoming increasingly intertwined, which increases each side's stake in the success of the other. It undervalues the fact that leaders in Washington and Beijing are fully cognizant of the risk of unintended strategic rivalry between an emerging power and an established power and have agreed to take deliberate actions to prevent such an outcome. And it ignores the reality of the past 35 years—that, in spite of our differences, US-China relations have steadily grown deeper and stronger—and in doing so, we have built a very resilient relationship.”⁴⁰

The US government therefore aims to stabilize the US-China bilateral relationship to provide incentives for mutual restraint and to avoid an upward spiral of military competition with potentially destabilizing regional and international consequences.

Continuity and Discontinuity in the US Rebalance toward Asia

The blending of elements of both continuity and discontinuity in the US rebalance to Asia constitutes the third major theme of this book. The United States has been engaged in the Asia-Pacific region since the eighteenth century, initially mainly through commercial ties.⁴¹ Over time, US commercial interests evolved into territorial ambitions and its victory in the Spanish-American War led to the annexation of the Philippines in 1898. By the end of the nineteenth century, the American Pacific empire consisted of Alaska, Hawaii, the Philippines, and American Samoa. The twentieth century has been a century of wars for the United States in the Pacific, with wars against Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. After World War II and throughout the Cold War, Washington developed and maintained a network of mostly bilateral alliances with Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, and Thailand as well as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO).⁴² In the post-Cold War era, the successive administrations of George H. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush all sought to strengthen the US presence and engagement in the Asia Pacific and to uphold US leadership by maintaining a regional balance of power favorable to US interests and by furthering American economic interests through extended trade and investments.⁴³ The Obama administration's rebalance toward Asia therefore builds on the foundations of a long-standing US diplomatic, military, and economic presence in the region.

At the same time, this policy shift is characterized by several areas of discontinuity. First, relative to previous policies, the pivot to Asia is a more extensive and coordinated foreign policy effort aimed at providing a coherent and durable US approach to the region in line with the shifting center of gravity of American interests and at integrating, as previously emphasized, diplomatic, economic, and military means. Second, the rebalance puts a greater focus on Southeast Asia than previous administrations, while maintaining (as shown in chapter 6) a strong US political-military presence in Northeast Asia—as has been the case since the end of World War II and during the Cold War. In other words, Washington is not only rebalancing toward the Asia Pacific, it is also rebalancing within the Asia Pacific, from Northeast to Southeast Asia.⁴⁴ This is meant, amongst other things, to bolster the capacity of the United States to ensure maritime security in Southeast Asia in the face of China's assertiveness in the South China Sea, of growing tensions over territorial disputes, and of nontraditional security threats (chapter 7).⁴⁵ The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review stresses that the Pentagon “will continue our contributions to the US rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region [and] as part of our broader efforts for stability in the Asia-Pacific region, the United States will maintain a robust footprint in Northeast Asia while enhancing our presence in Oceania and Southeast Asia.”⁴⁶ Third, the Obama administration has publicly stressed its ambition to put greater diplomatic emphasis than previous administrations on US engagement in Asian multilateral institutions, such as ASEAN and the EAS, although questions have been raised on the extent to which, so far, this increased focus on East Asian multilateralism is substantive or stylistic (chapter 2). Fourth, the rebalance heightens the role of economic diplomacy in the panoply of instruments of US foreign policy toward the Asia Pacific, which reflects the changing political economy of American interests in the region (chapter 4). Finally, when compared to the Cold War period and also, to some extent, to previous post-Cold War US administrations, the role of Europe in Washington's strategic calculus has changed considerably. On the one hand, Washington has come to consider Europe as a region that does not experience major security threats anymore and that should therefore be increasingly able to react autonomously to the security challenges arising in its own neighborhood (chapter 8)—although the continued inability of the EU to respond coherently to crises such as those in Libya or in Ukraine could modify or temper this perception. In this context, the US rebalance toward Asia might be seen as an attempt to encourage (or compel) the Europeans to move

beyond their decades-long free riding on US military power and, in the words of Anand Menon, “to entice Europeans out of their geostrategic retirement.”⁴⁷ On the other hand, the US pivot to Asia has raised questions on both sides of the Atlantic about the desirability and feasibility of a concurring European rebalance to Asia, not only in the diplomatic and economic dimensions, but also in the security realm—especially as far as nontraditional security threats are concerned (chapter 9).⁴⁸

This book therefore seeks to examine contemporary policy changes by contextualizing them within the broader and underlying historical dynamics that have affected the US engagement in the Asia Pacific (including changing patterns in the global political economy, the exacerbation of interstate historical tensions and rivalries in East Asia, the US relative military disengagement from the European continent since the end of the Cold War, etc). It will be shown that the pivot should be seen as a cumulative evolution rather than as a radical departure in US foreign policy in the Asia Pacific.

The Domestic and International Challenges to the American Pivot to Asia

The domestic and international challenges that could overshadow Washington’s objectives in the Asia Pacific constitute the fourth and final central theme that emerges from these pages. Domestically, the chief potential obstacles to the pivot are bureaucratic, budgetary, and political. Maintaining the bureaucratic momentum behind such a large and cross-governmental policy initiative might prove challenging over time. Several of the key actors initially behind this policy initiative, such as Kurt Campbell (chapter 1) and others (Jeffrey Bader, Hillary Clinton, Tom Donilon, and James Steinberg), have left government. Key individuals are all the more central and influential in tightly centralized foreign policy decision-making processes, such as the one established by President Obama in the White House—that was described by former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates as “by far the most centralized and controlling in national security of any I had seen since Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger ruled the roost.”⁴⁹ This is why, with the departure of Hillary Clinton in 2013, questions have been raised, for instance, on the extent to which the pivot would receive the same degree of steady attention and forceful advocacy by Secretary of State John Kerry, or whether he would put more emphasis on the Middle East and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, at the expense of the pivot.⁵⁰

Two other domestic constraints pose a considerable challenge to the sustainability of the US rebalance toward Asia: the increasingly polarized, if not dysfunctional, US political system, and major budgetary constraints, in particular the sequestration process. Despite the overall bipartisan consensus among Republicans and Democrats in Congress on US foreign policy in Asia (which is quite an exception when compared to other policy areas), ideological polarization and a divided government have resulted in major gridlock in Washington, DC—exemplified by the general government shutdown in October 2013.⁵¹ This, in turn, has had budgetary repercussions that may hamper the implementation of the pivot to Asia. The 2011 Budget Control Act (BCA) required across-the-board automatic reductions (sequestration) in most federal defense and nondefense discretionary programs for fiscal year (FY) 2013 plus additional cuts each year through FY 2021.⁵² These cuts have affected both US foreign affairs and defense budgets and could thereby adversely impact the pivot to Asia. The BCA requires a reduction of \$487 billion in projected defense spending over ten years starting in FY 2012 and has instituted a sequestration mechanism imposing cuts of about \$50 billion annually.⁵³ A report by the General Accountability Office (GAO) evaluates the impact of sequestration on the Department of Defense's resources in a reduction of about \$37 billion in discretionary appropriations and about \$37.4 million in direct spending.⁵⁴ The Pentagon's comptroller general specifies that the Army's \$179 billion budget will be cut by \$7.6 billion, the Navy's \$173 billion budget will be cut by \$10.7 billion, and the Air Force's \$154 billion budget will be cut by \$10 billion.⁵⁵ These budget cuts and the sequester have raised significant concerns on the affordability of the US pivot to Asia among both civilian and military officials (chapter 3).⁵⁶ Katrina McFarland, the assistant secretary of defense for acquisition, told a defense industry conference in 2014 “right now, the pivot is being looked at again, because candidly it can't happen”—although she then issued a clarification stressing that the pivot requires difficult budget decisions but the “rebalance to Asia can and will continue.”⁵⁷ At a Congressional hearing, Adm. Samuel J. Locklear, commander of US Pacific Command (PACOM), explained his concerns with the impact of budgetary constraints on the rebalance as follows:

Budget uncertainty has hampered our readiness and complicated our ability to execute long-term plans and to efficiently use our resources. [...] They ultimately reduce our readiness, our ability

to respond to crisis and contingency as well as degrade our ability to reliably interact with our allies and partners in the region. [...] potentially eroding our historic dominance in both capability and capacity.⁵⁸

Overall, domestic factors such as bureaucratic politics, budgetary cuts, and political gridlock may significantly constrain the US government's room for maneuver and undercut the affordability of the pivot to Asia.

The rebalance also faces international challenges. First, ever since the announcement of the pivot to Asia, doubts have been raised about the feasibility of this foreign policy undertaking in the face of major crises in the Middle East (including the rise of Daesh, or ISIL, in Iraq and in Syria) or the Russian-Ukrainian standoff (chapter 10) that might divert US diplomatic attention and resources away from the pivot to Asia—something that is vehemently contested by US policymakers.⁵⁹ A second challenge is the potential perception by some US allies and partners, most notably in Europe and the Middle East, that the United States *de facto* seeks to pivot *away* from the Middle East and Europe toward the Asia Pacific.⁶⁰ US officials have repeatedly sought to counter this perception. During a meeting in Germany, Secretary Kerry stated that “we are paying attention to Asia, and so are you [Europeans], but we’re not doing it at the expense of Europe, not at all.”⁶¹ For former secretary of defense Leon Panetta, “the bottom line is that Europe should not fear our rebalance to Asia; Europe should join it.”⁶² Similarly, in the words of Vice President Joe Biden: “Europe is the cornerstone of our engagement with the rest of the world and is the catalyst for our global cooperation. It’s that basic. Nothing has changed.”⁶³ Nonetheless, especially in a context of budget cuts, the “zero-sum” notion that greater foreign policy attention and resources to one region necessarily entail less to another may be hard to die. A third challenge is the need for Washington to constantly fine tune and strike a balance between the need to reassure its Asian allies through strengthened bilateral alliances and defense capabilities and the risk that these initiatives could foster a sense of encirclement, or containment, by the PRC. Although the US rebalance toward Asia does not seek to contain China, as previously emphasized, such moves could heighten the Chinese leadership’s perception that Washington’s policy is targeted against the PRC, thereby prompting anxieties in Beijing about a US strategy of containment as well as regional concerns about intensified US-China competition.⁶⁴ From this perspective, according to Robert Ross, “the risks of

the pivot become obvious. The new US policy unnecessarily compounds Beijing's insecurities and will only feed China's aggressiveness, undermine regional stability, and decrease the possibility of cooperation between Beijing and Washington."⁶⁵ Nonetheless, while China's political elites might share a common strategic diagnosis of the pivot, competing views exist within these elites about how to react to the US policy shift (chapter 5). As Robert Sutter et al. explain, the strategic challenge for Washington is therefore to find

the right balance between two competing sets of regional interests. On the one hand, many countries in the region want strategic reassurance from the United States, and they favor a robust, multidimensional US presence in the region. On the other hand, a robust US presence will be seen by many in Beijing as a US-led containment strategy directed at China. The challenge for the United States is to provide strategic reassurance to allies, friends, and other regional powers without provoking a strategic backlash from China.⁶⁶

A final challenge for Washington is how to enhance its engagement in the region without prompting "moral hazard" behaviors by its allies and partners—such as the Philippines or Vietnam (chapter 7)—that might feel emboldened by a strengthened US presence and therefore become increasingly confrontational and risk-taking in their foreign and defense policy vis-à-vis China, with potentially destabilizing regional consequences.⁶⁷

To sum up, considerable challenges—both domestic and international—may hinder the success, if not the very survival, of the US pivot to Asia, which has been portrayed as the potential hallmark of Barack Obama's foreign policy legacy.⁶⁸

Chapter Outline

The twofold structure of the volume allows to analytically break down the pivot into its component parts and to elucidate, on the one hand, the *rationale* of the US rebalance toward Asia (section 1) and, on the other, its *consequences* for key actors in the Asia Pacific and for the European Union (section 2). The first section of the book assesses the heterogeneous international and domestic drivers and the policy objectives of the US rebalance toward Asia by bringing to light the multiple

diplomatic, military, and economic dimensions at play in this policy shift as well as their mutual linkages.

Michael McDevitt examines the origin and evolution of the rebalance in chapter 1 by analyzing the motivations and objectives behind the Obama administration's decision to launch a rebalance strategy. He then compares these initiatives with those of previous administrations in order to assess the extent to which the pivot constitutes a departure from past US East Asian strategy, showing that the intellectual foundations of the rebalance preceded the Obama administration. The chapter argues that the pivot is not a radical departure in American foreign policy toward Asia, but rather an effort to maintain US prominent position in the region that has become the world's economic and political center of gravity.

In chapter 2, See Seng Tan scrutinizes the diplomatic dimension of the pivot and, in particular, US engagement with Asian multilateral institutions (e.g. APEC, ASEAN, and EAS) in the context of the historically ambivalent US relationship to multilateralism in the region. He argues that the United States has indeed long privileged bilateral alliances in the region instead of substantially engaging East Asian multilateral institutions and that the recent emphasis on Asian multilateralism is more stylistic than substantive. The chapter shows that, in its diplomatic dimension, the US rebalance does not constitute a watershed rupture from previous policies despite the claims that Barack Obama would be the first Pacific president and that he would significantly increase Washington's focus on the region's multilateral processes.

Benjamin Jensen and Eric Shibuya explore the military dimension of rebalance arguing that it is a “retcon”—for “retroactive continuity” (chapter 3). In other words, the Obama administration has sought to provide an ex post coherent rationale for a range of initiatives, many of which predated the Obama administration. They first examine the main decisions made by the Obama administration in the military dimension of the pivot, as well as the reaction of the various military services to the policy (Navy, Air Force, Army, Marine Corps), and then contextualize these initiatives showing that many actually resulted from ideas set in motion in the 2000s. They conclude that, also in the military realm, not only is this policy shift “more continuity than revolution” but major fiscal constraints might hamper the ability of the United States to implement this retcon military rebalance.

The economic facet of the rebalance is explored by Guillaume de Rougé in chapter 4. By focusing upon the Trans-Pacific Partnership

and the key economic and security challenges for the US-China relationship, he argues that Washington seeks to embed China into a dense network of bilateral and multilateral relations across the region, both in the economic and security spheres, in order to reduce the risk of military escalation. He shows that in light of the changing political economy of the Asia-Pacific region, the rebalance represents a “re-adjustment in the complex ‘web of linkages’ between the security and economic components of American presence in the Asia Pacific since the end of WWII.” The overall picture that emerges from the first section of this volume is one of cumulative evolution—rather than radical discontinuity—from previous American foreign policies in the Asia Pacific.

The second section of the volume investigates the regional reactions to this composite policy shift in Northeast and Southeast Asia, Russia, and Europe. In examining the Chinese perspectives on the US rebalance toward Asia, Mathieu Duchâtel and Emmanuel Puig characterize the assessment of and the reactions to the pivot by China’s foreign and defense policy elites (chapter 5). Two core findings emerge from their study. First, it brings to light the internal disagreements and heterogeneous perspectives within the Chinese academic and policy community on the rationale and consequences of the US pivot to Asia, as well as on the role of China in it. Second, the chapter shows that one of China’s main reactions to the American pivot to Asia has taken place in the ideological realm. Specifically, under Xi Jinping, the development of the concept of “new type of great power relations”—and the gradual abandonment of Deng Xiaoping’s “hide your capabilities and keep a low profile” guideline—has been one of China’s key responses to the US rebalance toward Asia.

In chapter 6, Young Kim provides a comparative assessment of the reactions to the rebalance of America’s two key allies in the Northeast Asian security architecture: Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). He analyzes and contrasts the perspectives of Seoul and Tokyo on the motivations of the US pivot and its impact upon their respective conceptions of defense and foreign policy requirements. While in South Korea both the elite and general public tend to be relatively ambivalent about the US pivot out of concern that it might exacerbate Sino-American tensions at the expense of Seoul’s interests, Kim stresses the considerable degree of convergence in the politico-strategic and economic interests of Washington and Tokyo, where the US rebalance is perceived as a safeguard for Japan against potential threats originating from its Chinese and North Korean neighbors.

Reflecting the previously mentioned rebalance within the Asia Pacific—from Northeast to Southeast Asia (SEA)—Eric Frécon and his coauthor investigate the implications of America’s pivot in SEA (chapter 7). First, the chapter provides a critical assessment of the continuities and discontinuities in US foreign policy toward the region and of the extent to which its goals have evolved in the face of security threats such as territorial disputes, piracy, and China’s growing assertiveness in the South China Sea. It then investigates the variety of nontraditional diplomatic, economic, and security means mobilized by Washington, including the so-called defense diplomacy (e.g., drills and donations), Track 1.5 and Track 2 diplomacy, and police cooperation. In conclusion, the chapter discusses a number of potentially adverse unintended consequence of the US pivot in Southeast Asia, including the alleged likelihood of a regional arms race and the increasingly risk-taking behavior by some US allies and partners.

The impact of the pivot on Europe’s foreign and defense policy and on its interests in Asia is analyzed in chapters 8 and 9, respectively. Jolyon Howorth evaluates how the US rebalance toward the Asia Pacific has affected the prospects for the development of a credible European Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) and for transatlantic relations. He stresses that while in the post-Cold War era the United States has gradually disengaged militarily from the European continent, the EU has proved incapable of providing the political and financial resources required to develop an autonomous CSDP, as reprehended by several US senior official and as stridently epitomized by the crisis in Libya in 2011. He concludes by suggesting that the “Europeanization of NATO”—the deepening of the structural cooperation (and eventual merger) between the CSDP and a reformed NATO—has become the most realistic consequence of the US rebalance toward Asia.

May-Britt Stumbaum investigates the implications of the US pivot for Europe’s interests in the Asia Pacific in the diplomatic, economic, and security/military dimensions. She argues that while Europe’s interests in the region have to a large extent been driven by economic considerations (e.g., stable and open sea-lanes of communication), the EU has nonetheless growing interests in the field of nontraditional security threats as well, including climate change. The question therefore arises of the extent to which the EU can accompany the US policy shift by realizing its own “pivot to Asia” in the area of nontraditional security. Accordingly, the chapter examines the range of instruments that the EU can mobilize to achieve these multiple goals and assesses the extent to which the US rebalance and Europe’s interests in the Asia

Pacific are likely to be characterized by cooperation, coexistence, or competition.

The last chapter of this volume deals with an often neglected actor in the debates on the US pivot to Asia namely Russia. Isabelle Facon analyzes Moscow's perspective on the US rebalance toward the Asia Pacific. While Russia has gradually and steadily enhanced the diplomatic attention and resources devoted to further its security and economic interests in East Asia—thereby implementing its own rebalance toward the Pacific—Moscow has been relatively silent on the consequences of the US pivot to Asia, which contrasts with the generally vocal and critical positions that the Kremlin expresses on many other dimensions of the US diplomacy and security policy. The author shows how the US rebalance toward Asia provides both diplomatic, strategic, and economic opportunities as well as constraints for Moscow's Asia policy, including in the balance that it has managed to strike in its relations with Beijing—between cooperation and hedging. The chapter concludes by assessing the likely consequences of the Russia-Ukraine crisis on Moscow's own rebalance toward the Asia Pacific.

In conclusion, François Godement assesses the prospects and challenges of managing stable and enduring US-China relations in the context of the multidimensional American rebalance toward Asia examined in the preceding chapters. While challenging the hypothesis of the inevitable rise of China and American relative decline, he stresses that it is the competitive currents of Sino-American interdependence and sector-to-sector cooperation on the one hand, and growing strategic competition on the other that will shape the future of the bilateral relationship and the prospects of conflict between the United States and China. If strategic restraint prevails between the established power and the emerging power, as Godement writes in the Conclusion, “the carefully crafted bureaucratic compromises highlighted in this volume will indeed serve as the apex of a new world order to which others will have to adapt.”

Notes

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