

# Security Challenges

Volume 12 Number 3 (2016)

# Security Challenges

ISSN 1833 – 1459

## EDITORS:

Dr Andrew Carr      Dr Greg Raymond      Iain Henry  
*Managing Editors*  
editor@kokodafoundation.org

Robert Wylie  
*Consulting Editor Defence Industry Policy*  
r.wylie@adfa.edu.au

Geoff Hunt  
*Production Editor*  
wamboohunt@yahoo.com.au

## EDITORIAL BOARD:

*Robert Ayson*  
Victoria University  
Wellington, New Zealand

*Sam Bateman*  
University of Wollongong  
Wollongong, Australia

*Rod Lyon*  
ASPI  
Canberra, Australia

*Leszek Buszynski*  
Strategic and Defence  
Studies Centre, Australian  
National University

*Eliot Cohen*  
John Hopkins University,  
Washington, DC, USA

*Ralph Cossa*  
Pacific Forum CSIS  
Honolulu, Hawaii, USA

*Bates Gill*  
CEO, US Studies Institute,  
The University of Sydney

*Gerald Hensley*  
Former Secretary of Defence  
New Zealand

*Ramesh Thakur*  
Asia-Pacific College of  
Diplomacy, Australian  
National University

*Andrew Mack*  
Simon Fraser University  
Vancouver, Canada

*Andrew O'Neill*  
Director, Griffith Asia Institute,  
Griffith University,  
Brisbane, Australia

*Rizal Sukma*  
Centre for Strategic and  
International Studies  
Jakarta, Indonesia

*William Tow*  
Department of International  
Relations, Australian National  
University

*Akio Watanabe*  
Research Institute for Peace  
and Security  
Tokyo, Japan

Project Management and Cover: Qote Canberra (02) 6162 1258

Published and distributed by: The Kokoda Foundation

2/10 Kennedy St

(PO Box 4060), Kingston ACT 2604

T: (02) 6295 1555

E: [manager@kokodafoundation.org](mailto:manager@kokodafoundation.org)

W: [www.securitychallenges.org.au](http://www.securitychallenges.org.au)

F: (02) 6169 3019

© The Kokoda Foundation. All rights reserved. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review as permitted by the Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, transmitted or disseminated in any form or by any means without prior written permission. Inquiries should be made to the publisher.

All articles published in *Security Challenges* are fully peer-reviewed. Any opinions and views expressed are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Kokoda Foundation or the editors of *Security Challenges*.

*Security Challenges* is indexed on EBSCOhost™ 

## ARTICLES

### THE PIVOT – 5 YEARS ON

*H. D. P. Envall*

Japan's 'Pivot' Perspective: Reassurance, Restructuring, and the Rebalance.... 5

*See Seng Tan*

Facilitating the US Rebalance: Challenges and Prospects for Singapore as America's Security Partner..... 20

*Allan Behm*

The 'Pivot': A Twentieth Century Solution to a Twenty-First Century Problem? .. 34

*Feng Zhang*

Challenge Accepted: China's Response to the US Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific 45

### ARTICLE

*Timothy J. Blizzard*

The PLA, A2/AD and the ADF: Lessons for Future Maritime Strategy..... 61

## Editors' introduction

In November 2011 President Barack Obama addressed the Australian Parliament and proclaimed he had 'made a deliberate and strategic decision...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 Obama promised that America would keep its 'commitments, including our treaty obligations to allies'. As it was five years since the Pivot to Asia was announced, this special edition intended to assess the Pivot's progress and prospects.

As we go to print, the presumption that the Pivot policy would continue has been placed in doubt by the election of Donald Trump as United States President. Nonetheless, we believe that the United States relationship with the Asia Pacific will continue to be of vital importance. From this standpoint understanding how this relationship has developed over the past five years remains an area of significant policy and scholarly interest. Therefore we stand by the contributions of our four authors below, written from a range of different national perspectives and critical standpoints.

H. D. P. Envall considers **Japan's** reaction, and explains why it has been a strong supporter of America's Pivot to the Asia-Pacific.

Presenting an analysis of **Singapore's** stance, See Seng Tan suggests that Singapore's backing for the rebalance is but the most recent demonstration of the city-state's longstanding support for America's regional presence.

Allan Behm offers an **Australian** perspective on the Pivot. He writes that 'the Pivot' was already out of date when it was announced, and that it is neither clear nor robust enough to guide US policy through the difficult strategic tides that will characterise the next decade or so.

Looking at how **China** has perceived US policy, Feng Zhang argues that Chinese policy elites regard the US rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region as a major strategic challenge that must be met with a determined yet patient response

This issue also contains an article on Australian defence planning. Timothy J. Blizzard looks at China's anti-access area denial strategy, and argues that adapted for Australian purposes, it offers an effective and achievable method of maritime operations.

Andrew Carr, Greg Raymond and Iain Henry  
Managing Editors,  
November 2016.

# Japan's 'Pivot' Perspective: Reassurance, Restructuring, and the Rebalance

H. D. P. Envall

Japan has been a strong supporter of America's 'pivot', or 'rebalance', to the Asia-Pacific. Why has it responded in such a way? Japan's established position in the region naturally makes it a keen supporter of the status quo and thus of the US-led order. Yet this does not fully explain Japan's support. This article contends that to understand Japan's position, it is necessary to more closely consider how Japan views the rebalance's probable strategic benefits and costs. In fact, increasingly difficult Sino-Japanese relations have led Japan to reassess such costs and benefits, with Japan becoming more anxious to ensure that the United States continues to provide strategic reassurance to the region, even if this means that Japan is required to restructure its own security role in return. In turn, Japan's security restructuring has important implications not only for its national security but also for wider regional stability.

Japan has proved a key supporter of America's 'pivot', or 'rebalance', to the Asia-Pacific. Of all America's allies and partners in the region, Japan has arguably adopted the most proactive response to America's strategic readjustment. Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, speaking in the United States in April 2015, stated that Japan's policies would "complement" the US rebalance and that Japan supported America's rebalancing efforts "first, last, and throughout".<sup>1</sup> More importantly, what Japan has done thus far in putting its promises into practice represents a major shift for the country's security policy, and challenges many of the accepted norms of Japan's defence politics. The country's prohibition on collective self-defence and its self-image as a "peace state" with a restricted defence force are just two key examples.<sup>2</sup>

What has driven Japan's response to the pivot? As an established great power, but one that is declining in relative position, Japan is a wholeheartedly status quo power. Its main security preference, therefore, is

---

<sup>1</sup> Shinzo Abe, 'Remarks by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at a Symposium hosted by Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA', Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 29 April 2015, <japan.kantei.go.jp/97\_abe/statement/201504/1210942\_9918.html> [Accessed 20 October 2016]; Shinzo Abe, "'Toward an Alliance of Hope'—Address to a Joint Meeting of the US Congress by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe", Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 29 April 2015, <japan.kantei.go.jp/97\_abe/statement/201504/uscongress.html> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

<sup>2</sup> For two recent studies examining changing norms of Japanese security, see Bhubhindar Singh, *Japan's Security Identity: From a Peace State to an International State* (London: Routledge, 2013); and Andrew L. Oros, *Normalizing Japan: Politics, Identity, and the Evolution of Security Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

for the US-led 'San Francisco' order based on America's alliances and partnerships, especially the US-Japan alliance, to be maintained throughout the region. Japan's response to the rebalance stems from a basic assessment that the rebalance represents the most advantageous way for Japan to maintain its preferred regional order. Still, in preferring the San Francisco order, Japan is not unique. Many countries in the Asia-Pacific currently face the challenge of adapting to a more contested regional order. In order to explain why Japan has been shifting its own security posture in conjunction with the rebalance, this article argues that it is also necessary to examine how Japan perceives the likely strategic benefits and costs of the rebalance in the context of its particular strategic challenges.

Japan faces an increasingly problematic relationship with the main challenger to the regional order, the People's Republic of China. Because of this, Japan has come to view its security challenges as especially acute. This strategic apprehension has, in turn, reshaped how Japan views the costs and benefits of supporting the rebalance and pursuing a greater security role in the region. For Japan, the rebalance offers a new security compact with the United States: a reinvigorated US commitment to Japanese security (reassurance) in return for Japan assuming this more active security role in support of the American-led order. This compact represents a wider version of the 'trade-off' central to the realignment of the US–Japan alliance, especially since the 1990s, which is based around the United States updating its security guarantee to Japan (reassurance) in return for Japan upgrading its role in the alliance (greater burden-sharing).<sup>3</sup>

In making this argument, the article proceeds in three stages. First, it lays out the evolution of Japan's strategic environment in the decade leading up to the rebalance, with an emphasis on how Japan has sought to adapt its own security posture to meet the uncertainties of this era. It then explains how the particulars of the rebalance have been perceived in Japan, especially in terms of the implications of the rebalance's military dimension for Japan's own security role. Finally, before concluding, it shows how Japan has responded in practice to the rebalance in terms of reforming its own foreign and defence policies.

## Japan's Strategic Background

Japan's strategic thinking in the early 2000s was the product both of the global events in this period, notably the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, as well as Japan's struggles in the 1990s to develop a new international role. The end of the Cold War had presented a number of strategic challenges to Japan. The country's previous strategy—what came to be known as the Yoshida Doctrine—had been to focus on economic

---

<sup>3</sup> See Tomohiko Satake, 'The New Guidelines for Japan–US Defense Cooperation and an Expanding Japanese Security Role', *Asian Politics & Policy*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2016), pp. 28-29.

development and rely on the alliance with the United States for security.<sup>4</sup> In the post-Cold War period, however, such a low-key approach seemed unsuited to Japan's ambition of becoming a leading nation; it also failed to protect the country from American criticism of Japan as a security 'free rider', especially in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War and American criticism of Japan as only capable of "checkbook diplomacy".<sup>5</sup>

Japan's response came in the form of its ambition to be a "normal nation" (*futsū no kuni*). This meant taking on more great-power responsibilities and being more active in international institutions, especially through the United Nations (UN). Key proponents of this 'new normal' pushed for a globalist vision of Japan whereby past restrictions on action abroad would be loosened so long as Japan worked within the UN framework.<sup>6</sup> This globalist vision was challenged, however, by security tension in Northeast Asia during the 1990s (e.g., by the 1993-94 North Korean nuclear crisis and the 1998 North Korean missile crisis), leading Japan to cooperate further with the United States to revitalise the alliance. This approach was also undermined by Japan's diplomatic failures at the UN in the late 1990s, especially in pursuing sanctions against India and Pakistan over their 1998 nuclear tests.<sup>7</sup>

The events of 9/11 further weakened the globalist approach. Japan now faced a security environment characterised by new asymmetrical, non-state threats. At the same time, the United States was engaged in conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq and sought contributions from allies and partners. Accordingly, Japan shifted emphasis from multilateralism back to US-centric bilateralism and from a globalist vision of the nation's security role to a revisionist one. Conservatives within the Liberal Democracy Party (LDP), led by Prime Minister Jun'ichirō Koizumi, began to revise Japan's postwar security posture, beginning with its capacity to assist the United States and moving to a reform of Japan's own institutions. Japan now became a player in the US 'war on terror', supporting the US military in the Indian Ocean and, eventually, providing Self Defense Forces for humanitarian operations in Iraq.<sup>8</sup> Japan also became a more active player in the alliance, cooperating

<sup>4</sup> Michael J. Green, 'Balance of Power', in Steven K. Vogel (ed.), *US-Japan Relations in a Changing World* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2002), pp. 12-14; H. D. P. Envall, 'Clashing Expectations: Strategic Thinking and Alliance Mismanagement in Japan', in Yoichiro Sato and Tan See Seng (eds), *United States Engagement in the Asia Pacific: Perspectives from Asia* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2015), pp. 66-67.

<sup>5</sup> Michael J. Green, *Japan's Reluctant Realism: Foreign Policy Challenges in an Era of Uncertain Power* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> H. D. P. Envall, *Japanese Diplomacy: The Role of Leadership* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), pp. 77-78.

<sup>7</sup> Satu P. Limaye, 'Tokyo's Dynamic Diplomacy: Japan and the Subcontinent's Nuclear Tests', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2000), pp. 332-5. See also H. D. P. Envall, 'Japan's India Engagement: From Different Worlds to Strategic Partners', in Ian Hall (ed.), *The Engagement of India: Strategies and Responses* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), pp. 44-46.

<sup>8</sup> Richard J. Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 94-99. See also Tomohito Shinoda, *Koizumi*

with the United States on ballistic missile defence and engaging in a broader integration and 'realignment' of alliance capabilities.<sup>9</sup>

This new revisionist approach to national security was shaped, therefore, both by ideology and the regional environment. Ideologically, Koizumi pursued a security agenda that sought to refashion the normative framework of Japan's security politics to ensure that it became more open to a wider security transformation.<sup>10</sup> Koizumi's successor, Abe, was even more committed to this reorientation of the country's security politics, as demonstrated by his wish for a "recovery of independence" for Japan and his pursuit of constitutional reform.<sup>11</sup> In terms of the regional context, Japan's relations with China came under increasing strain. Although the trade relationship prospered, on the political front Japan began adopting a more hardline stance on history issues and a strategic posture centred more on balancing China.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the two sides had already begun to compete more for diplomatic influence around Asia, while also engaging in disputes over resource exploration in the area surrounding the disputed Senkaku (or Diaoyu) Islands.<sup>13</sup>

The nature of both factors—domestic ideology and regional security context—did shift in the late 2000s, however. In Japan, the electoral victory of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in 2009 meant that the ideological drive of Koizumi, which had already slowed after Abe stepped down in 2007, stalled entirely. The DPJ-led government under Yukio Hatoyama sought instead to adopt a strategy based around multilateral institutions: for example, it proposed an East Asian Community initiative to further regional

---

*Diplomacy: Japan's Kantei Approach to Foreign and Defense Affairs* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2007), pp. 86-98, 113-32; H. D. P. Envall, 'Transforming Security Politics: Koizumi Jun'ichiro and the Gaullist Tradition in Japan', *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2008), art. 3, <[www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2008/Envall.html](http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2008/Envall.html)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

<sup>9</sup> Kent E. Calder, *Pacific Alliance: Reviving US-Japan Relations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 147-8.

<sup>10</sup> Samuels, *Securing Japan*, pp. 74-77; Envall, 'Transforming Security Politics'.

<sup>11</sup> Shinzō Abe, *Utsukushii Kuni e* [Towards a Beautiful Country] (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 2006), p. 29. See also H. D. P. Envall, 'Abe's Fall: Leadership and Expectations in Japanese Politics', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2011), pp. 157-8; Rikki Kersten, 'Japanese Security Policy Formation: Assessing the Koizumi Revolution', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 65, no. 1 (2011), pp. 12-13.

<sup>12</sup> On Sino-Japanese economic relations, see Björn Jerdén and Linus Hagström, 'Rethinking Japan's China Policy: Japan as an Accommodator in the Rise of China, 1978-2011', *Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2011), p. 232.

<sup>13</sup> Regarding regional diplomatic competition, see Mike M. Mochizuki, 'Japan's Shifting Strategy toward the Rise of China', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 30, nos. 4-5 (2007), pp. 756-7; Takashi Terada, 'Forming an East Asian Community: A Site for Japan-China Power Struggles', *Japanese Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2006), pp. 5-17. For the dispute over resource exploration in the East China Sea, see James Manicom, *Bridging Troubled Waters: China, Japan, and Maritime Order in the East China Sea* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), pp. 145-7.

relations. Hatoyama's key idea was the concept of *yūai* (fraternity) through which Japan would engage with the region "as a nation located in Asia" (*Ajia ni ichi suru kokka toshite*),<sup>14</sup> and act "as a bridge between China and the US".<sup>15</sup> This represented a type of Asianism based in no small part on the globalist thinking of the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> On the China front, Abe and his immediate successors in the LDP had already sought to improve the relationship; when the DPJ gained power, it too pursued improved relations with China. A delegation of more than 500 DPJ politicians and officials travelled to China in late 2009 in an attempt to improve relations and build closer ties between the DPJ and the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>17</sup>

Yet these shifts proved transient, with two factors in particular shaping their demise. On the one hand, Hatoyama and the DPJ's Asianist-style vision of a more autonomous Japan and a more equal alliance combined with the new government's inexperience to damage relations with the United States.<sup>18</sup> At times during early 2010 it seemed that the alliance might be about to fall apart.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the DPJ's attempts to improve relations with China were undermined by the security crises that occurred in the region during 2010. In particular, the ramming of a Japanese Coast Guard vessel by a Chinese fishing boat in September led to diplomatic tensions and China restricted the export of rare earth metal exports to Japan. The chances of improving relations with China were significantly diminished. The Japanese government's hope to act as a regional bridge

<sup>14</sup> The *yūai* concept was laid out in Yukio Hatoyama, 'Sofu, Ichirō ni mananda 'yūai' toiu tatakai no hatajirushi' [The Fighting Banner of 'Fraternity' Learnt from my Grandfather, Ichirō], *Voice*, September 2009. See also H. D. P. Envall and Kiichi Fujiwara, 'Japan's Misfiring Security Hedge: Discovering the Limits of Middle-Power Internationalism and Strategic Convergence', in William T. Tow and Rikki Kersten (eds), *Bilateral Perspectives on Regional Security: Australia, Japan and the Asia-Pacific Region* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 62-64.

<sup>15</sup> Takashi Yokota, 'The Real Yukio Hatoyama; Japan's New Prime Minister Could Be Asia's First "Third Way" Leader', *Newsweek*, 28 September 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Regarding the Democratic Party of Japan's Asianism, see Daniel Sneider, 'The New Asianism: Japanese Foreign Policy under the Democratic Party of Japan', *Asia Policy*, no. 12 (2011), pp. 99-129. See also Rikki Kersten, 'Stretching the Japan-US Alliance', in William T. Tow and Brendan Taylor (eds), *Bilateralism, Multilateralism and Asia-Pacific Security: Contending Cooperation* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 45-47.

<sup>17</sup> Envall and Fujiwara, 'Japan's Misfiring Security Hedge', p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> Tomohito Shinoda, *Contemporary Japanese Politics: Institutional Changes and Power Shifts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 168-82; H. D. P. Envall and Kerri Ng, 'The Okinawa "Effect" in US-Japan Alliance Politics', *Asian Security*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2015), pp. 231-3.

<sup>19</sup> H. D. P. Envall, 'Underplaying the "Okinawa Card": How Japan Negotiates its Alliance with the United States', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 67, no. 4 (2013), p. 392. Speculation on the alliance's demise was prominent on both sides during this period. For Japanese perspectives, see Kyōji Yanagisawa, Jitsurō Terashima, Hirota Ōno, Jun'ichi Furuyama, Kayoko Ikeda, Rei Shiba and Chikako Ueki, *Datsu-Domei Jidai: Sari Kantei de Iraku no Jieitai o Tokatsu shita Otoko no Jisei to Taiwa* [The Era of an Unwinding Alliance: Conversations and Reflections of the Man who Oversaw the SDF in Iraq from the Prime Minister's Residence] (Kyoto: Kamogawa Shuppan, 2011), pp. 13-45.

disappeared. Instead, Japan quickly returned to the traditional bedrock of its strategic approach—the bilateralism of the US alliance.<sup>20</sup>

## Japan's Perception of the Rebalance

Japan's strategic context at the time that President Barack Obama announced America's 'pivot' to the Asia-Pacific in November 2011 was therefore one of considerable uncertainty, in terms of both the regional security environment and the alliance itself. The United States announced the rebalance even as Japan was already reorienting its strategic outlook in response to changing regional challenges. In particular, Japan had foreshadowed a major strategic readjustment in its 'National Defense Program Guidelines' (NDPG) released in December 2010.<sup>21</sup> From Tokyo's perspective, as Tomohiko Satake and Yusuke Ishihara note, these policies fitted with, and automatically contributed to, the US rebalance strategy.<sup>22</sup>

The major factor shaping Japan's strategic rethinking at this time was the deterioration in Sino-Japanese relations. Japanese policymakers and analysts now saw China as engaged in a "form of creeping expansionism"; its tactics were "intended to intimidate" and constituted overbearing or "coercive behavior" (*iatsuteki na furumai*).<sup>23</sup> Obtaining a higher level of security reassurance from the United States had become a policy priority. Japan itself had in part contributed to this problem. The former nationalist Governor of Tokyo Shintarō Ishihara had played a prominent role by campaigning to purchase islands in the Senkaku chain. This prompted the DPJ-led government to nationalise the islands, which in turn caused further diplomatic problems with Beijing. China had become increasingly assertive on the territory issue and further incidents, such as when Chinese frigates attached their radar onto Japanese ships near the disputed islands, intensified Japan's perceptions of China as a threat.<sup>24</sup>

However, the decline in Sino-Japanese relations cannot simply be attributed to individual incidents or issues, such as the tensions surrounding the Senkakus. First, Sino-Japanese relations had already deteriorated before the events of 2010. Second, China's post-2010 assertiveness has not been

---

<sup>20</sup> Envall, 'Clashing Expectations', p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, 'National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2011 and Beyond', 17 December 2010, <[www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/d\\_policy/pdf/guidelinesFY2011.pdf](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/pdf/guidelinesFY2011.pdf)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

<sup>22</sup> Tomohiko Satake and Yusuke Ishihara, 'America's Rebalance to Asia and its Implications for Japan-US-Australia Security Cooperation', *Asia-Pacific Review*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2012), p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Masashi Nishihara, 'Japan Should Stand Firm on the Senkaku Islands Dispute', *AJISS-Commentary*, no. 164 (6 November 2012); "'Seiji no Genba", *Nichū Reisen* (3): Yasukuni ni Genin Surikaeru' ['Politics on Site', the Sino-Japanese Cold War, part 3: Sidestepping Yasukuni as a Cause], *Yomiuri Shinbun* [Yomiuri Newspaper], 6 February 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas U. Berger, 'Stormy Seas: Japan-China Clash over Senkakus Hard to Avoid', *Oriental Economist*, vol. 81, no. 1 (2013), pp. 14-16; Itsunori Onodera, 'Extra Press Conference by the Defense Minister', Ministry of Defense, 5 February 2013, <[www.mod.go.jp/e/pressconf/2013/02/130205a.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/pressconf/2013/02/130205a.html)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

limited to its relations with Japan, but included disputes with Vietnam, the Philippines, and others.<sup>25</sup> Third, Sino-Japanese strategic rivalry has not been limited to the East China Sea: increased competition between the two powers has now existed around the Indo-Pacific for some time.<sup>26</sup> Overall, this shift has resulted in a hardening of Japan's negative perceptions of China.<sup>27</sup> Japanese analysts increasingly focus on China's "new assertiveness" and believe that it shows "little room for compromise".<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the view of the Japanese Ministry of Defense is that China is attempting to change the regional status quo "by coercion based on its own assertions incompatible with the existing order of international law".<sup>29</sup>

In this context, the US rebalance has offered reassurance to Japan across political, economic, and military dimensions. As President Obama explained in November 2011, the United States, "as a Pacific nation", would play a "long-term role" in shaping the region in "close partnership" with friends and allies.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton argued that a key task for US foreign policy was to "lock in a substantially increased investment ... in the Asia-Pacific region".<sup>31</sup> This initial 'pivot' would become a 'rebalance' as it became clear that the pivot concept raised questions as to where the United States was pivoting from and criticism that it implied the United States had at some earlier point disengaged from Asia.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, as Georg Löfflmann explains, the rebalance remains, in essence, a "geopolitical refocusing" intended to fortify American engagement

<sup>25</sup> 'The South China Sea: Not the Usual Drill', *The Economist*, 10 May 2014; 'The South China Sea: China v the Rest', *The Economist*, 26 March 2016; Gregory Poling, 'Beijing's South China Sea Strategies: Consolidation and Provocation', *East Asia Forum*, 28 March 2014, <[www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/03/28/beijings-south-china-sea-strategies-consolidation-and-provocation/](http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/03/28/beijings-south-china-sea-strategies-consolidation-and-provocation/)> [Accessed 20 October 2016]; Ben Otto, 'Indonesia's Widodo Wades Into South China Sea Dispute', *Wall Street Journal*, 23 June 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Mochizuki, 'Japan's Shifting Strategy', pp. 756-7; Terada, 'Forming an East Asian Community', pp. 5-17.

<sup>27</sup> Michael D. Swaine, Mike M. Mochizuki, Michael L. Brown, Paul S. Giarra, Douglas H. Paal, Rachel Esplin Odell, Raymond Lu, Oliver Palmer and Xu Ren, *China's Military and the US-Japan Alliance in 2030: A Strategic Net Assessment* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013), p. 117.

<sup>28</sup> National Institute for Defense Studies, *NIDS China Security Report 2013* (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2014), p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2016* (Tokyo: Japan Ministry of Defense, 2016), Section 3 China, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Barack Obama, 'Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament', Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, 17 November 2011, <[www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

<sup>31</sup> Hillary Clinton, 'America's Pacific Century', *Foreign Policy*, 11 October 2011, <[www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas\\_pacific\\_century](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

<sup>32</sup> For example, see Kenneth Lieberthal, cited in Fred Dews, 'Pivot, Rebalance, or Reinvigorate? World Matter in US Strategy Toward Asia', *Brookings Now*, 21 April 2014, <[www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2014/04/21/pivot-rebalance-or-reinvigorate-words-matter-in-u-s-strategy-toward-asia/](http://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2014/04/21/pivot-rebalance-or-reinvigorate-words-matter-in-u-s-strategy-toward-asia/)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

with, and protect American leadership in, the Asia-Pacific.<sup>33</sup> Reassurance, therefore, sits at its core.

The military dimension of the rebalance has received much attention and been particularly important to Japan.<sup>34</sup> Yet each of the three broad military goals outlined by the United States—revising its own strategic posture towards the region; strengthening its key security partnerships in the region, especially its alliances; and building up its security capabilities in the region—has presented Japan with challenges as well as opportunities.<sup>35</sup> The act of juggling not always consistent goals has led to Japanese concerns that this goal of reassurance may be diluted. How would the United States be able to diversify its strategic posture without undermining its commitment to key partnerships?<sup>36</sup> Japanese analysts have understood this challenge from the outset. Satake observed in 2012 that US defence cutbacks, in that they could lead to a decrease in US deployments in the region, might send the message that the rebalance was targeted at burden-sharing—having allies and partners do more for their own security—as well as, or rather than, reassurance.<sup>37</sup>

This has in turn created policy dilemmas for Japan. On the one hand, Japan wants reassurance that the rebalance would not affect America's security guarantee as part of the alliance. This has played out in the form of repeated calls for the United States to publicly confirm that the Senkakus did indeed come under the provisions of the US–Japan Security Treaty.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, Japan has hopes for further realignments to the US–Japan alliance, especially on the issue of America's military presence in Japan. The transfer of US Marines from Okinawa to Guam and elsewhere contributes to a force posture “more geographically distributed, operationally resilient and politically sustainable”.<sup>39</sup> But it also implies a drawdown in America's presence, which could leave a ‘power vacuum’ in Northeast Asia.

---

<sup>33</sup> Georg Löffmann, ‘The Pivot between Containment, Engagement, and Restraint: President Obama's Conflicted Grand Strategy in Asia’, *Asian Security*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2016), p. 95.

<sup>34</sup> For instance, see Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks, Mark Cancian, Zack Cooper and John Schaus, *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence, and Partnerships* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2016).

<sup>35</sup> David J. Berteau, Michael J. Green and Zack Cooper, ‘Assessing the Asia-Pacific Rebalance’ (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 2014), pp. 15-17.

<sup>36</sup> Douglas Stuart and William T. Tow, ‘Setting the Context’, in William T. Tow and Douglas Stuart (eds), *The New US Strategy Toward Asia: Adapting to the American Pivot* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Tomohiko Satake, ‘US Rebalancing Toward the Asia-Pacific and Japan–US Dynamic Defense Cooperation’, *Briefing Memo*, no. 169 (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, October 2012), pp. 1-2.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Clinton: Senkakus Subject to Security Pact’, *Japan Times*, 25 September 2010. See also William T. Tow and H. D. P. Envall, ‘The US and Implementing Multilateral Security in the Asia-Pacific: Can Convergent Security Work?’ *IFANS Review*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2011), pp. 60-1.

<sup>39</sup> Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee’, 27 April 2012, p. 1, <[www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/pdfs/joint\\_120427\\_en.pdf](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/pdfs/joint_120427_en.pdf)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

To fill this vacuum, Japan would have to continue developing its own island defence (*tōsho bōei*) policy for the country's south-west islands (e.g., the Senkakus).<sup>40</sup>

Decisions made with respect to one area of the rebalance, therefore, can easily intrude into and even undermine other areas. For Japan, developing policies to offset such problems has become a priority. Japan's perspective of the rebalance, therefore, is that while the United States is indispensable, Japan is also integral to its success. As Minister of Defense Itsunori Onodera noted in 2013, "the rebalance cannot be realized without cooperation by its allies and partners".<sup>41</sup> Indeed, US officials may also be coming to the view that Japan has become America's "most trustworthy" ally in the region.<sup>42</sup>

Japan's ambition to offset weaknesses in the rebalance has been present from its inception. In 2012, for example, as the United States and Japan made their Marines relocation announcement, they also stated that the "deterrence capabilities of the Alliance would be strengthened through Japan's efforts" as well as through bilateral efforts aimed at "dynamic defense cooperation".<sup>43</sup> Dynamic defence cooperation would encompass bilateral cooperation across a number of key areas, including: joint training; joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance activities; and the shared use of defence facilities.<sup>44</sup> Japan has also subsequently raised questions about America's capacity to allocate sufficient resources to the rebalance in order to boost its capabilities in the region.<sup>45</sup> As Ken Jimbo observes, America's dual commitments to reducing the role of nuclear weapons while also maintaining extended nuclear deterrence inevitably worries allies such as Japan. Japan's opposition to any move on America's part to a "no first use" policy can be understood in this light.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, although the military dimension of the rebalance has been a central concern to Japanese policymakers, the economic and diplomatic dimensions have also had some impact. Undoubtedly, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a key piece in the economic dimension of the rebalance, with US

---

<sup>40</sup> Satake and Ishihara, 'America's Rebalance to Asia', p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> Itsunori Onodera, 'Defending National Interests: Preventing Conflict', 1 June 2013, <[www.iiss.org/-/media/Documents/Events/Shangri-La%20Dialogue/sld13/Speeches/Onodera.pdf](http://www.iiss.org/-/media/Documents/Events/Shangri-La%20Dialogue/sld13/Speeches/Onodera.pdf)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

<sup>42</sup> Michael J. Green, Peter J. Dean, Brendan Taylor and Zack Cooper, 'The ANZUS Alliance in an Ascending Asia', *Centre of Gravity Series*, no. 23 (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, July 2015), p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee', p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Satake and Ishihara, 'America's Rebalance to Asia', pp. 13-14.

<sup>45</sup> Berteau et al., 'Assessing the Asia-Pacific Rebalance', p. 21.

<sup>46</sup> Ken Jimbo, 'US Rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific: A Japanese Perspective', in Tow and Stuart (eds), *The New US Strategy Toward Asia*, pp. 78-79. See also 'Japan Seeks Talks with US Over "No First Use" Nuclear Policy Change', *Japan Times*, 15 July 2016.

officials viewing it as another pillar to strengthen the integration of the United States with its allies and partners in the region.<sup>47</sup> Economically, Japan has come to understand the rebalance chiefly in the context of the TPP and its geoeconomic and geostrategic implications. Although initially reluctant to join the TPP, Japan views it as a means to constrain China's emerging economic leadership in the region, maintain America's leading role, and potentially even restore somewhat Japan's own position as a regional economic leader.<sup>48</sup> Diplomatically, Japan has viewed the rebalance as complementary to its own ideas of engaging more actively across the Indo-Pacific region, but especially in Southeast Asia. Jimbo argues that maintaining the sea lanes through East Asia, and over the East and South China Seas, is particularly important for Japan, both commercially and strategically.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, the role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a key player in cooperating on mutual interests in Southeast Asia is also vital.

## Japan's Response to the Rebalance

How has Japan sought to resolve these challenges as it responds to the rebalance? Japan's strategic restructuring began almost immediately following the downturn in relations with China in 2010 and were carried out by the DPJ-led government. These early changes were incremental rather than transformational and were intended to build on previous policy developments, such as the changes outlined in the 2004 NDPG. The DPJ did not mean to take on controversial reforms to Japanese security institutions, such as revising Article 9 (the peace clause) of the Constitution.<sup>50</sup>

The importance of the 2010 NDPG centred on its introduction of the "Dynamic Defense Force" (DDF) and "gray-zone" concepts along with its emphasis on increasing cooperation with the United States and responding to attacks on "offshore islands".<sup>51</sup> The DDF concept planned to restructure the Self Defense Forces to ensure their future capabilities were focused around greater versatility, flexibility and mobility. The idea of 'grey-zone' disputes referred to those conflicts that did not necessarily meet the traditional definition of war but which involved substantial conflict beneath this level and which could easily escalate into a war-like conflict. Also significant was the ambition laid out in the 2010 NDPG to restructure the Self Defense Forces in order to strengthen its functions with a view to dealing

---

<sup>47</sup> Michael Wesley, 'Trade Agreements and Strategic Rivalry in Asia', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 69, no. 5 (2015), p. 487.

<sup>48</sup> Saori N. Katada, 'At the Crossroads: The TPP, AIB, and Japan's Foreign Economic Strategy', *AsiaPacific Issues*, no. 125 (May 2016).

<sup>49</sup> Jimbo, 'US Rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific', p. 85.

<sup>50</sup> Government of Japan, 'National Defense Program Guidelines, FY 2005-', 10 December 2014. See also Swaine et al., *China's Military*, p. 110.

<sup>51</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, 'National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2011'.

with threats emerging to the south-west of Japan (as opposed to the Cold War threats seen as coming from the north).<sup>52</sup> Indeed, this policy pre-empted part of what Japan would need to do in order to engage with the rebalance shortly thereafter, especially in terms of filling the ‘power vacuum’ left by the drawdown in the US presence in Okinawa.

The DPJ loss in the December 2012 elections to the LDP-led coalition meant the return to the prime ministership of Abe. This in turn hastened the return of the revisionist, more transformational approach to security policy, but one that was still aligned with the rebalance. Abe’s government substituted the DDF idea with a new concept based around the idea that Japan would make a “proactive contribution to peace”. A key plank in the Japanese government’s subsequent security plans, this ambition of proactively contributing to peace was outlined in the 2013 National Security Strategy (NSS). The key objectives would be: to increase the country’s deterrence capabilities, to deepen the US–Japan alliance, and to strengthen the country’s diplomacy around the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>53</sup> These objectives obviously closely match America’s rebalance objectives of capability building, partnership strengthening and strategic diversification.

In pursuing these similar goals, the Japanese government introduced an array of institutional and policy changes in order to restructure the country’s overall security posture. A key reform was to establish a National Security Council (NSC) in late 2013. The NSC, in addition to developing the 2013 NSS, was also tasked with setting out a five-year plan for defence procurements and given responsibility for coordinating overall Japanese security policy as well as acting as a central crisis management agency. The agency has been led by Shōtarō Yachi, a close advisor to Abe.<sup>54</sup> Under the Abe government, Japan also reversed previous declines in defence spending, albeit cautiously, and loosened restrictions on weapons exports. The shift in defence spending included a 2.9 per cent increase for 2014, a 2.8 per cent increase for 2015, and a 1.5 per cent increase for 2016. Abe also committed to plans to buy F-35 fighters, Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft, new destroyers, more amphibious assault vehicles and new maritime patrol aircraft. In late 2015, Japan launched its second Izumo-class helicopter carrier, the *Kaga*, to follow the launch of the *Izumo* in 2013. As part of the shift of forces towards the south-west, the Abe government sought to increase its troop presence on Japanese islands in the East China Sea.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 13. See also Shinoda, *Contemporary Japanese Politics*, pp. 197-201; as well as Envall and Ng, ‘The Okinawa “Effect”’, p. 229.

<sup>53</sup> Government of Japan, ‘National Security Strategy’, 17 December 2013, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Auslin, ‘Japan’s New Realism: Abe Gets Tough’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 95, no. 2 (2016), p. 129; Yuichi Hosoya, ‘The Role of Japan’s National Security Council’, *AJISS-Commentary*, no. 199 (17 June 2014); Envall, ‘Clashing Expectations’, p. 77.

<sup>55</sup> Auslin, ‘Japan’s New Realism’, pp. 130-1.

On the alliance, Japan has continued the process of reform pursued since 2010, especially by jointly developing a new set of 'Guidelines for US–Japan Defense Cooperation' in 2015. Under these new Guidelines, Japan and the United States aim to focus their cooperation on achieving seamless joint responses, creating synergies between their national policies, approaching the alliance through a 'whole-of-government' framework, cooperating together with other partners, and developing a global outlook for the alliance.<sup>56</sup> The Guidelines focus heavily on the defence of Japan, identify space and cyber as two key areas for cooperation, and include provisions on cooperation over equipment acquisitions and management.<sup>57</sup> An alliance coordination mechanism is intended to underpin this cooperation between the two countries' military forces across these areas of cooperation, including for gray zone contingencies, with a view to achieving even greater *ittai* (integration). Significantly, as Satake argues, the Guidelines represent an update of the US-Japan alliance 'trade-off' involving reassurance in return for burden-sharing.<sup>58</sup>

Perhaps the most important change within this restructuring process, however, has been the government's decision to carry out a 'reinterpretation' of the Constitution. In particular, the Abe government has been able to shift the previous interpretation of the Constitution's Article 9, which prohibited Japan from exercising its right to collective self-defence (i.e., to come to the defence of an ally or partner if they are under attack), to a new interpretation which allows this right, if only under certain circumstances. The government issued this reinterpretation in July 2014 after negotiations between the LDP and its coalition party, Kōmeitō.<sup>59</sup> These negotiations led to a set of restrictions on when force could be used in the defence of an ally or partner. These included Japan's survival being threatened, its people's right to liberty and happiness endangered, no other means being available, and the use of force being restricted to a minimum. Nonetheless, the agreement between the ruling parties meant that the necessary legislation had sufficient support in the Diet and was enacted in September 2015.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, 'The Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation', 27 April 2015, p. 1, <[www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/anpo/pdf/shishin\\_20150427e.pdf](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/anpo/pdf/shishin_20150427e.pdf)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

<sup>57</sup> Yuki Tatsumi, '4 Takeaways From the New US–Japan Defense Guidelines', *The Diplomat*, 29 April 2015, <[thediplomat.com/2015/04/4-takeaways-from-the-new-us-japan-defense-guidelines/](http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/4-takeaways-from-the-new-us-japan-defense-guidelines/)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

<sup>58</sup> Satake, 'The New Guidelines', pp. 28-29. On the alliance coordination mechanism, see p. 32. See also Japan Ministry of Defense, 'The Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation'.

<sup>59</sup> Toko Sekiguchi, 'Japan Ruling Bloc Agrees on Steps to Boost Military's Role', *Wall Street Journal*, 11 May 2015. For an overview of Abe's thinking, see Rikki Kersten, 'Abe and Constitutional Revision: Round Two', *East Asia Forum*, 21 February 2013, <[www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/02/21/abe-and-constitutional-revision-round-two/](http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/02/21/abe-and-constitutional-revision-round-two/)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

<sup>60</sup> Jeffrey W. Hornung and Mike M. Mochizuki, 'Japan: Still an Exceptional US Ally', *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 1 (2016), p. 98; Rikki Kersten, 'Contextualising Australia-Japan Security Cooperation: The Normative Framing of Japanese Security Policy', *Australian Journal of*

Outside the military dimension, Japan has also responded to the economic and diplomatic parts of the rebalance. The TPP has come to form a crucial plank in Abe's ambitions for achieving economic reform at home; it has also come to represent an important mechanism by which to ensure America's ongoing engagement in the region beyond simply the military. In April 2013, the government shifted the emphasis of its economic diplomacy from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to the TPP.<sup>61</sup> For Japan, the influence of China in the RCEP and its flavour as an Asia-focused rather than more Asia-Pacific grouping (in terms of the absence of the United States from the RCEP) have also made the TPP more appealing. According to Saori Katada, this shift represents a major turning point in Japanese foreign policy and, indeed, is an attempt by Japan to continue as a "pivotal state" in the region.<sup>62</sup>

Diplomatically, Japan has adopted a different approach under Abe to engaging with the Asia-Pacific region. Tokyo now views the region more in the context of the US rebalance. As Ryo Sahashi argues, policymakers in Tokyo have increasingly seen the country's relations in Southeast Asia "through the prism of the US alliance".<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, this bilateral perspective that has crept into Tokyo's regionalism under Abe has had a strongly *minilateral* flavour, as opposed to the more multilateral focus adopted by the previous DPJ-led government. Japan now seeks to take a more active role in 'intra-spoke' collaboration with America's allies and partners around the Indo-Pacific, including countries such as Vietnam, the aim being to create 'capacity building' around the region.<sup>64</sup>

This fits with the view that the region is increasingly subject to strategic rivalry, which in turn requires Japan to bolster America's alliance system.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, Japan has pursued closer relations with countries such as

---

*International Affairs*, vol. 70, no. 1 (2016), pp. 10-11. See also H. D. P. Envall, 'Economic and Security Reform in Japan: Harder than It Looks', *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, no. 277 (19 August 2014).

<sup>61</sup> Jeffrey D. Wilson, 'Mega-Regional Trade Deals in the Asia-Pacific: Choosing Between the TPP and RCEP?', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2015), p. 352.

<sup>62</sup> Saori Katada, 'Amerika no TPP Seikaku to Nihon' [America's TPP Policy and Japan], *Kokusai Mondai* [International Affairs], no. 644 (2015), p. 33. See also Mireya Solis and Saori N. Katada, 'Unlikely Pivotal States in Competitive Free Trade Agreement Diffusion: The Effect of Japan's Trans-Pacific Partnership Participation on Asia-Pacific Regional Integration', *New Political Economy*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2015), pp. 155-77.

<sup>63</sup> Ryo Sahashi, 'Japan's Vision for the East Asian Security Order', *East Asia Forum*, 23 February 2016, <[www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/02/23/japans-vision-for-the-east-asian-security-order/](http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/02/23/japans-vision-for-the-east-asian-security-order/)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

<sup>64</sup> Ken Jimbo, 'Japan Should Build ASEAN's Security Capacity', *AJISS-Commentary*, no. 150 (30 May 2012); Nguyen Manh Hung, 'Shared Concerns about China Bring Vietnam and Japan Closer', *East Asia Forum*, 2 June 2016, <[www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/06/02/shared-concerns-about-china-bring-vietnam-and-japan-closer/](http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2016/06/02/shared-concerns-about-china-bring-vietnam-and-japan-closer/)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

<sup>65</sup> H. D. P. Envall and Ian Hall, 'Are India and Japan Potential Members of the Great Power Club?', in Joanne Wallis and Andrew Carr (eds), *Asia-Pacific Security: An Introduction* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), p. 74.

Australia through strategic partnerships.<sup>66</sup> It has also participated actively in developing new US-centred partnerships such as the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue between the United States, Japan and Australia. Abe's own preference, outlined in 2012, has been to create a security "diamond" covering the Indo-Pacific region with the aim of safeguarding "the maritime commons" of this area.<sup>67</sup> The growth of such partnerships can be uncertain, however, as demonstrated by the backward steps in the relationship between Japan and Australia following a failed deal for Japan to sell submarines to Australia.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

This article has examined Japan's response to the US policy of pivoting, or rebalancing, to the Asia-Pacific. In particular, it has sought to explain why Japan has given such strong support to the rebalance. The primary drivers of Japan's response have been its role as a status quo power in Asia and its preference for the US system of alliances to remain at the heart of the region's international order. Yet, as this article has shown, to understand why Japan has transformed elements of its own grand strategy to work more closely within the rebalance, it is necessary to understand how Japan's changing strategic situation interacts with its perceptions of the rebalance. The argument presented here has been that Japan has responded to the compact implicit in the rebalance, which is to offer strategic reassurance in return for security restructuring, in a different way now that the country's strategic circumstances are becoming more challenging. Japan now faces immediate territorial and wider systemic challenges by China. Indeed, these have increased substantially since 2010.

As such, Japan has come to attach particular importance to the extent to which the rebalance will deliver strategic reassurance. Where there are contradictions in the rebalance that throw the level of this reassurance into doubt, Japan has sought to develop reinforcement policies of its own. In some ways, it might be argued that Japan views the rebalance as not going far enough in reinforcing the US presence in the Asia-Pacific. As outlined earlier, Japan has sought greater clarity on the US commitment to defend the Senkakus, fretted about the possible emergence of a 'power vacuum' in Northeast Asia in the wake of a dispersal of US forces, and proposed closer cooperation amongst like-minded regional partners. Japan's proactive response has been most apparent, however, in its response to the other side

---

<sup>66</sup> H. D. P. Envall and Ian Hall, 'Asian Strategic Partnerships: New Practices and Regional Security Governance', *Asian Politics & Policy*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2016), pp. 93-5.

<sup>67</sup> Shinzo Abe, 'Asia's Democratic Security Diamond', *Project Syndicate*, 27 December 2012, <[www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe](http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe)> [Accessed 20 October 2016].

<sup>68</sup> In terms of the failed submarine deal, see Nick Bisley and H. D. P. Envall, 'The Morning After: Australia, Japan, and the Submarine Deal that Wasn't', *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, no. 346 (7 June 2016).

of the rebalance compact—Japan’s own strategic restructuring. The focus here has been on reforming Japan’s defence decision-making bodies, reversing the downward trend in capability development, boosting Japan’s strategically focused diplomacy, increasing Japan’s role in the alliance with the United States, and loosening the self-imposed restriction on its freedom to act militarily abroad. Taken together, these constitute a significant transformation of Japan’s grand strategy which well illustrates Japan’s commitment to the US-led order.

The potential longer-term implications of these changes are significant for both Japan and the Asia-Pacific region. Japan has obtained a greater level of reassurance regarding America’s security guarantee. Yet its commitment to becoming a more active security player exposes it to a level of strategic risk that it has not experienced in the postwar period. Even as it builds up its independent security capabilities, it may find that it has less bargaining power in terms of withstanding US demands to take a more active security role. In other words, it now enjoys less strategic autonomy. At the same time, its capacity to manage its relationship with China may be further diminished. Japan may find returning to a hedging strategy based around engagement and soft balancing more difficult now that it is viewed as such a key supporter of the rebalance in the region. For the Asia-Pacific more widely, a stronger Japan underpinning an accepted US-led order may have a stabilising effect and encourage China to return to a more consultative approach to the region’s security flashpoints. Conversely, greater Sino-Japanese and Sino-American rivalry, both of which may emerge out of the containment inherent in the rebalance, could exacerbate mutual threat perceptions, heighten the risk of conflict escalation, and leave the Asia-Pacific more unstable overall. Japan is being transformed through its response to the rebalance; in the coming years, Japan’s strategic reorientation may transform Asia-Pacific security as well.

*H. D. P. Envall is a research fellow in the Department of International Relations at the Australian National University. [david.envall@anu.edu.au](mailto:david.envall@anu.edu.au)*

# Facilitating the US Rebalance: Challenges and Prospects for Singapore as America's Security Partner

See Seng Tan

This article assesses the extent to which Singapore has been willing to facilitate the rebalancing strategy of the United States, despite a number of challenges it has had to face as a consequence of its strategic choice. It argues that Singapore's backing for the rebalance is but the most recent demonstration of the city-state's longstanding support for America's forward presence. While this policy has engendered problems for Singapore, including incurring China's ire, these problems are unlikely to change Singapore's fundamental belief in the importance of America's strategic guarantee to the Asia-Pacific and Singapore's role in support of that.

Singapore has made a careful strategic choice to welcome and encourage the US rebalance (or pivot) to Asia.<sup>69</sup> If anything, since the end of the Cold War and considerably more than any Southeast Asian country has hitherto done, Singapore has proactively and progressively worked to facilitate and ensure the continuation of a robust US diplomatic and military presence in the region. Moreover, it has done so at its own expense vis-à-vis its ties with regional neighbours such as China, as well as the unwelcome attention its closeness with the United States has drawn from extremist non-state elements that harbour anti-US views. Although US-Singapore ties were enhanced in 2012 by way of a Strategic Partnership Dialogue established between the two countries, the upgrade arguably did not represent a major change in policy and/or strategic direction, but rather constituted a key development along a relatively continuous and stable growth trajectory dating back to the Cold War era. Such enhancements, in the words of a former US ambassador to Singapore, help make "a good working

---

<sup>69</sup> This argument does not challenge the idea that Singapore practices hedging, if by that we mean the city-state's reliance on the United States for its security while engaging deeply with China for economic reasons. Kwik Cheng-Chwee, 'The Essence of Hedging: Malaysia and Singapore's Response to a Rising China', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 30, no. 2 (August 2008), pp. 159-85. See Seng Tan, 'Faced with the Dragon: Perils and Prospects in Singapore's Relationship with China', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2012), pp. 245-65.

relationship even better”.<sup>70</sup> Needless to say, there have been bumps along the way, but nothing which the strength of their security partnership could not handle.

## No Rebalance Without Regional Partners

With the prospect of reduced US military involvement in the Middle East and Southwest Asia looming, in November 2011 US President Barack Obama formally declared his administration’s intention to rebalance America’s foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific region. Against the mistaken view held by some that the rebalance constituted a “return” to Asia, architects of the strategy such as Kurt Campbell were quick to insist that whilst the United States never actually left, the rebalance, for all intents and purposes, represented “a vast and dynamic increase in US focus and depth of engagement in the region”.<sup>71</sup> And if the prospect of an imminent rise in US engagement was to be predicated upon a desire for a peaceful, stable and economically prosperous region—a vision America shares with other Asia-Pacific countries—then what the United States presumably expected from its regional partners was an active commitment on their part in building, supporting and sustaining the US rebalancing effort.

However, the intellectual debate over America’s rebalancing strategy has for the most part focused on whether the rebalance has been effective politically, militarily or economically, or, for that matter, whether the promised intensification in US engagement has been fully realised.<sup>72</sup> On the one hand, developments such as Chinese assertiveness in the East and South China Seas (including land reclamation efforts in the latter) and the prospect of participation in the world’s largest trade pact, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), furnished justification and motivation for the United States to implement its rebalance strategy. On the other hand, there are a host of things that compete with the rebalance for US attention and resources, ranging from Russia’s annexation of Crimea and intervention in

---

<sup>70</sup> Patricia L. Herbold, ‘Singapore—Strategic and Economic Partner: How the United States Benefits’, Remarks by the Ambassador, Washington Policy Center, 27 March 2007, <[singapore.usembassy.gov/sp\\_singapore\\_strategic\\_and\\_economic\\_partner.html](http://singapore.usembassy.gov/sp_singapore_strategic_and_economic_partner.html)> [Accessed 14 September 2016].

<sup>71</sup> Kurt Campbell and Brian Andrews, ‘Explaining the US ‘Pivot’ to Asia’, *Programme Paper, Americas* 2013/01 (London: Chatham House, August 2013), p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Michael Auslin, ‘Assessing the U.S. “Rebalance” to Asia: Trends and Prospects for American Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region’, Statement before the U.S.–China Economic and Security Review Commission On ‘China’s New Leadership and Implications for the United States’, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 7 February 2013, <[www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/-assessing-the-us-rebalance-to-asia\\_085943192571.pdf](http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/-assessing-the-us-rebalance-to-asia_085943192571.pdf)> [Accessed 6 September 2016]; Robert Ross, Christopher Clarke and Michael Swaine, ‘A Critical Assessment of U.S. Rebalancing to Asia’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 14 December 2012, <[carnegieendowment.org/2012/12/13/critical-assessment-of-u.s.-rebalancing-to-asia-event-3903](http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/12/13/critical-assessment-of-u.s.-rebalancing-to-asia-event-3903)> [Accessed 6 September 2016]; and, David Shambaugh, “Assessing the US “Pivot” to Asia”, *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2013), pp. 10-19.

Ukraine, the emergence of ISIS (or ISIL) in the Middle East, to the effects of defence cuts on the ability of the US military to respond to strategic challenges.<sup>73</sup> On the domestic front, the two frontrunners in the US presidential election, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, have both questioned the benefits membership in the TPP—at least in its current incarnation, for Clinton—would supposedly yield for America; moreover, a Trump presidency could spell the end of the rebalance given Trump's dismissive attitude towards America's allies.<sup>74</sup>

Crucial as the predominantly US-centric terms of the foregoing debate are, their net effect, however, has been a relative lack of attention paid to the contributions of America's regional partners in enabling, supporting and sustaining its rebalance. And when such attention has been accorded to America's Southeast Asian partners, the emphasis has mostly been on efforts by the United States and other international actors to build and enhance the capacities of Southeast Asian countries so as to enable them to be more competent contributors to, and effective participants in, the region's economic and security life.<sup>75</sup> Against that backdrop, this article looks at the US rebalance from the other side: the role played by Singapore in assisting America to implement the rebalance. Not unlike its Southeast Asian counterparts, Singapore has benefited from the renewed US attention to, and emphasis on, the region.<sup>76</sup>

## From Dependent to Partner

At the end of the Cold War, Singapore faced the alarming prospect of a US military withdrawal from Southeast Asia following the closure of US bases in the Philippines in 1991, as a consequence of the staunch nationalism of the Philippines Senate and the volcanic eruption at Mount Pinatubo which

---

<sup>73</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence, and Partnerships: An Independent Review of U.S. Defense Strategy in the Asia-Pacific* (Washington, DC: CSIS, January 2016), pp. vi-vii.

<sup>74</sup> Justin Sink, 'Obama Backs Trade Deal Despite Clinton, Trump Opposition', *Bloomberg*, 3 August 2016, <[www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2016-08-02/obama-says-he-won-t-abandon-trade-deal-opposed-by-clinton-trump](http://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2016-08-02/obama-says-he-won-t-abandon-trade-deal-opposed-by-clinton-trump)> [Accessed 7 September 2016]; David E. Sanger and Maggie Haberman, 'Donald Trump Sets Conditions for Defending NATO Allies Against Attack', *The New York Times*, 20 July 2016, <[www.nytimes.com/2016/07/21/us/politics/donald-trump-issues.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/21/us/politics/donald-trump-issues.html)> [Accessed 7 September 2016].

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, Lyle J. Morris, 'Obama Doubles-down on Maritime Capacity Building in Southeast Asia', *Asia-Pacific Bulletin*, no. 333 (15 December 2015), <[www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb333\\_0.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=35431](http://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb333_0.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=35431)> [Accessed 7 September 2016]; Prashanth Parameswaran, 'US Boosting ASEAN Capacity Amid South China Sea Tensions', *The Diplomat*, 10 October 2015, <[thediplomat.com/2015/10/us-boosting-asean-capacity-amid-south-china-sea-tensions/](http://thediplomat.com/2015/10/us-boosting-asean-capacity-amid-south-china-sea-tensions/)> [Accessed 7 September 2016]; and, Yigal Kerszenbaum, 'Building Capacity in Southeast Asia—and Turning a Profit', The Rockefeller Foundation, 14 April 2016, <[www.rockefellerfoundation.org/blog/building-capacity-in-southeast-asia-and-turning-a-profit/](http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/blog/building-capacity-in-southeast-asia-and-turning-a-profit/)> [Accessed 7 September 2016].

<sup>76</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, 'Advancing the US-Singapore Strategic Partnership', *The Diplomat*, 30 July 2016, <[thediplomat.com/tag/singapore-us-rebalance/](http://thediplomat.com/tag/singapore-us-rebalance/)> [Accessed 12 September 2016].

damaged Clark Airbase. The Singaporean perspective of the United States differed markedly from that in the wake of the British withdrawal east of Suez (including Singapore) during the late 1960s.<sup>77</sup> At that point, Singapore's founding Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, memorably lamented the supplanting of the British presence by US policy in the light of what Lee saw as dubious American actions in Indochina, particularly in Laos, during the Indochina War.<sup>78</sup> However, Lee came to believe in the need for the United States—even as it withdrew from Vietnam—to maintain a naval presence in the region in order to balance against both the Soviet Union and China.<sup>79</sup> For that matter, it has been suggested that Singaporean leaders used Soviet support for Vietnam to portray the latter's occupation of Cambodia as an example of Soviet expansionism in order to draw the attention of the Americans.<sup>80</sup> And while US ambivalence vis-à-vis Southeast Asia allowed the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to emerge as a regional actor in its own right, Singapore continued to urge successive US administrations against strategic neglect of the region. As Lee reminded the United States of its importance to the security and stability of Southeast Asia during a visit to Washington in April 1986:

Southeast Asians are more acutely aware of the uncertainties of US policies than other regions of the world. They remember the American retrenchment in the 1970s followed by a decade of self-doubt. Hence ASEAN countries drew towards each other to seek greater strength in self-reliance. They found that together in ASEAN, they could better overcome their problems; but they still need the United States to balance the strength of the Soviet ships and aircraft. The renewal of self-confidence in America has reassured us that America will help maintain the peace and stability of the region. It is this balance of power which has enabled the free market economies to thrive.<sup>81</sup>

In the view of Singapore, had the Americans abnegated responsibility to counterbalance against the Soviets during the Cold War—and arguably the Chinese in the post-Cold War period—the region would have turned out vastly different and considerably less hospitable than it is today. Much as Singapore's leaders rued America's failed effort in Vietnam, they conceded that the long-drawn campaign furnished ASEAN and its member states the

---

<sup>77</sup> Toni Schönenberger, 'The British Withdrawal from Singapore and Malaysia: Influence of the Labour Party on the Decision', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 3, no. 2 (September 1981), pp. 113-25.

<sup>78</sup> Ang Cheng Guan, *Lee Kuan Yew's Strategic Thought* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 26-27.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>80</sup> Shaun Narine, *Explaining ASEAN: Regionalism in Southeast Asia* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), p. 45.

<sup>81</sup> Lee Kuan Yew quoted in Amitav Acharya and See Seng Tan, 'Betwixt Balance and Community: America, ASEAN, and the Security of Southeast Asia', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2006), pp. 37-38.

time and opportunities they otherwise would not have had to develop both the regional organisation and their respective domestic economies.<sup>82</sup>

With the end of the Cold War and the forced closure of US bases in the Philippines, Singapore openly supported a strong US presence by signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in November 1990. This granted the Americans access to an airbase at Paya Lebar and port at Sembawang in the city-state. Singapore also welcomed the relocation, from the Philippines to Singapore, of a logistical unit that supports US Pacific Command (PACOM) activities in the Western Pacific theatre.<sup>83</sup> A subsequent addendum to the 1990 MOU granted the US Navy access to Singapore's then newly built Changi Naval Base, a facility large enough to dock aircraft carriers (even though Singapore does not own any). In a 1992 address in New York, Lee Kuan Yew justified Singapore's facilitation of the US military's forward presence and his country's proactive support for America's continued role as the region's "central player":

No alternative balance can be as comfortable as the present one with the US as a major player. But if the US economy cannot afford a US role, then a new balance it will have to be. However, the geopolitical balance without the US as a principal force will be very different from that which it now is or can be if the US remains a central player.<sup>84</sup>

Crucially, this policy stance of vigorous support and advocacy for America as the region's strategic guarantor did not change with Lee's transition to ostensibly more advisory positions in the Singapore Cabinet, first as 'Senior Minister' (1990-2004) and subsequently as 'Minister Mentor' (2004-11). As Bernard K. Gordon correctly predicted in the 1990/1991 issue of *Foreign Affairs* concerning Lee's voluntary relinquishment of the premiership, "Lee's departure from office will have no impact on US-Singapore relations".<sup>85</sup>

East Asia in the early to mid-1990s hosted the rapid emergence of a multilateral security architecture centring upon ASEAN. Together with fellow ASEAN countries and other stakeholders of that architecture, especially

---

<sup>82</sup> As Goh Chok Tong, who succeeded Lee Kuan Yew as prime minister, acknowledged, "The US involvement in Vietnam bought precious time for the ASEAN countries to put their house in order and to lay the foundation for the grouping to develop into a cohesive organization. ASEAN economies began to take off, spurred by US investments and a friendly American market". Cited in Emrys Chew, 'Southeast Asia: From Manifest Destiny to Shared Destiny', in Richmond M. Lloyd (ed.), *American Foreign Policy: Regional Perspectives*, Ruger Papers no. 4 (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, 2009), p. 131.

<sup>83</sup> The unit is awkwardly named: Commander, Logistics Group Western Pacific/Task Force 73, or COMLOG WESTPAC.

<sup>84</sup> In that same speech, Lee dismissed the prospect of India or Japan as replacement security providers and reasoned as follows, "So why not stick with what has worked so far? The US presence has maintained peace on the high seas of the Pacific since 1945. The American presence, in my view, is essential for the continuation of international law and order in East Asia". Cited in Ang, *Lee Kuan Yew's Strategic Thought*, p. 73.

<sup>85</sup> Bernard K. Gordon, 'The Asian-Pacific Rim: Success at a Price', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 70, no. 1 (1990/1991), p. 142.

Australia and Japan, Singapore worked to secure and strengthen America's political-strategic commitment to the region through ensuring the latter's regular participation in a series of multilateral dialogue and consultative mechanisms.<sup>86</sup> But Singapore's leaders clearly did not envision multilateralism as an alternative to, or replacement for, a stable regional balance of power. Treating the region's slew of multilateral dialogue processes as an adjunct to America's Asian alliances, they acknowledged the potential inherent in those processes to build mutual understanding and confidence, but did not promote them as a substitute for a US-led balance of power.<sup>87</sup> It is worth noting that US-Singapore ties in the 1990s were marred by developments such as Singapore's frank support for Asian values and its strong backing for China in the wake of the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989, for which the Chinese government was roundly condemned by the international community. It bears noting that Singapore registered grave concern over the crackdown by Beijing on the protests; for example, Lee Kuan Yew conceded that he and his entire ministerial team had been "shocked, horrified and saddened by this disastrous turn of events", mistaken in their belief that the Chinese government would have applied "the doctrine of minimum force ... to quell civil disorder".<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, although the Clinton administration's insistence that East Asian economies affected by the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 had to adopt structural adjustment policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) became a sore point between the United States and a number of ASEAN countries, it did not adversely affect US-Singapore ties. This was because Singapore continued to embrace the so-called "Washington consensus" of globalisation and liberalisation.<sup>89</sup>

## Building an "Indispensable" Partnership

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the United States, Southeast Asians worried over their region being unfairly depicted as the "second front" in the war on terrorism.<sup>90</sup> With Singapore rumoured as the second iconic target of terror networks following New York—presumably because of its close ties with America and the inviting presence of US economic interests and military

---

<sup>86</sup> See Seng Tan, *Multilateral Asian Security Architecture: Non-ASEAN Stakeholders* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 110-129.

<sup>87</sup> See Seng Tan, 'America the Indispensable Power: Singapore's Perspective of America as a Security Partner', *Asian Politics & Policy*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2016), p. 125.

<sup>88</sup> 'Statement by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew on the events in Beijing', Prime Minister's Office, 5 June 1989, Release No. 12/JUN02-0/89/06/05, <[www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/lky19890605.pdf](http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/lky19890605.pdf)> [Accessed 15 September 2016].

<sup>89</sup> Chia Siow Yee, 'The Asian Financial Crisis: Singapore's Experience and Response', *ASEAN Economic Bulletin*, vol. 15, no. 3 (December 1998), pp. 297-308.

<sup>90</sup> John Gershman, 'Is Southeast Asia the Second Front?', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 81, no. 4 (2002), pp. 60-74.

personnel based in Singapore<sup>91</sup>—counter-terrorism cooperation grew between the two countries and added a new dimension to an already substantive bilateral partnership.<sup>92</sup> Singapore-based facilities such as the naval base at Changi were employed by US forces en route to Afghanistan, and were used in various counter-terrorism operations.<sup>93</sup> It was presumably on the basis of this growing partnership that President George W. Bush invited Singapore in 2003 to become a major non-NATO ally, which the latter declined owing to the political sensitivities with neighbouring countries such a decision would likely have engendered.<sup>94</sup> That same year, Singapore joined the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (for interdicting the transport of nuclear materials) and was the first country in Asia to join the Container Security Initiative (for US pre-inspection of shipments bound for America) and the US Department of Energy's Megaports Initiative (for the enhancement of detection capabilities for special nuclear and other radioactive materials in seaborne cargo). In 2004, the bilateral free trade pact signed by the two countries the year before entered into force; by 2007, US exports to Singapore reportedly grew to almost half of America's total exports to China.<sup>95</sup>

In 2005, the two countries upgraded their security partnership through the establishment of the US-Singapore Strategic Framework Agreement—which identified Singapore as a “major security cooperation partner of the United States”—that covered, inter alia, joint exercises, cooperation on UN peacekeeping operations and access to US defence technology. Between 2003 and 2008, the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) deployed a total of five Landing Ship Tanks (LST), five KC-135R tanker aircraft, and one C-130 transport aircraft to Iraq as part of Operation Blue Orchid.<sup>96</sup> Between 2007 and 2013, the SAF contributed nearly five hundred troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. The responsibilities undertaken by the Singaporean troops included providing construction and medical services, conducting weapons locating via radar and imagery analysis, operating unmanned aerial vehicles, and training the Afghan

---

<sup>91</sup> Frank Lavin, 'Enemies at the Gates: Security Lessons from a Foiled Embassy Attack', *Foreign Affairs*, 29 November 2012, <[www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138457/frank-lavin/enemies-at-the-gates](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138457/frank-lavin/enemies-at-the-gates)> [Accessed 14 September 2016].

<sup>92</sup> Damien Cheong and Kumar Ramakrishna, "Singapore-US Cooperation on Counterterrorism and National Security", *RSIS Commentaries*, no. 134/2013, 18 July 2013, <[www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/CO13134.pdf](http://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/CO13134.pdf)> [Accessed 14 September 2016].

<sup>93</sup> As US Ambassador Patricia Herbold noted in 2007, "We also greatly appreciate all of the diplomatic and material support Singapore has provided for Iraq". Herbold, 'Singapore—Strategic and Economic Partner'.

<sup>94</sup> See Seng Tan, 'The United States: Still Singapore's Indispensable Partner?', *Asia Pacific Bulletin*, no. 295, 10 December 2014.

<sup>95</sup> Herbold, 'Singapore—Strategic and Economic Partner'.

<sup>96</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Partnering to Rebuild: Operation Blue Orchid: The Singapore Armed Forces Experience in Iraq* (Singapore: MINDEF Public Affairs, 2010).

security forces.<sup>97</sup> The level of familiarity, interoperability and access afforded by the closeness of the US-Singapore security relationship was most evident during joint humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunamis in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in the United States in 2005. As Congressman Joe Wilson acknowledged in a speech at the US House of Representatives on 21 September 2005, “After playing a critical role in the tsunami relief efforts earlier this year, the Republic of Singapore was one of the first countries that understood the devastation in our nation and immediately reached out to help those left in Katrina’s wake”.<sup>98</sup>

In tangible terms, what Singapore has accomplished since President Obama’s enunciation of the rebalance would suggest an increased determination by the city-state to actively support America’s strategy towards the Asia-Pacific. In February 2012, Singapore and Washington jointly established the US-Singapore Strategic Partnership Dialogue (SPD), an annual arrangement which a former US ambassador to Singapore has described as a “move up a weight class” for the bilateral relationship.<sup>99</sup> Within the terms of the US-Singapore Third Country Training Program, both countries agreed to jointly establish technical assistance training programs for developing countries including in the lower Mekong sub-region to help build capacity, narrow the development gap, and deepen regional integration.<sup>100</sup> The agendas of subsequent SPDs have included issues such as the TPP, the relevance of the region’s evolving multilateral architecture to regional stability and the management of growing challenges (such as the environment and climate change, cyber-security and water management), the importance for all countries in the region to resolve their disputes by peaceful means in accordance with international law (including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea), and the need to exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities in the South China Sea.<sup>101</sup> The SPD process can

<sup>97</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Two Thousand, Two Hundred and Sixty-Three Days 2007–2013: Operation Blue Ridge: The SAF’s Six-Year Mission in Afghanistan* (Singapore: Ministry of Defence, 2013).

<sup>98</sup> Cited in Gail Wan, ‘RSAF Provides Assistance in Katrina’s Wake’, *Cyber Pioneer*, 5 October 2005 (last updated 1 October 2012), <[www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/resource/library/cyberpioneer/topics/articles/features/2005/oct05\\_fs.print.noimg.html](http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/resource/library/cyberpioneer/topics/articles/features/2005/oct05_fs.print.noimg.html)> [Accessed 15 September 2016].

<sup>99</sup> David Adelman, ‘The US-Singapore Strategic Partnership: Bilateral Relations Move up a Weight Class’, *The Ambassadors Review*, Spring 2012, <[www.americanambassadors.org/publications/ambassadors-review/spring-2012/the-us-singapore-strategic-partnership-bilateral-relations-move-up-a-weight-class](http://www.americanambassadors.org/publications/ambassadors-review/spring-2012/the-us-singapore-strategic-partnership-bilateral-relations-move-up-a-weight-class)> [Accessed 7 September 2016].

<sup>100</sup> ‘Joint Statement of the United States-Singapore Strategic Partners Dialogue’, Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 January 2012, <[www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/overseasmission/phnom\\_penh/press\\_statements\\_speeches/embassy\\_news\\_press\\_releases/2012/201201/press\\_201201\\_3.html](http://www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/overseasmission/phnom_penh/press_statements_speeches/embassy_news_press_releases/2012/201201/press_201201_3.html)> [Accessed 15 September 2016].

<sup>101</sup> See, ‘Joint Statement of 2nd United States-Singapore Strategic Partnership Dialogue’, Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 January 2014, <[www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/media\\_centre/press\\_room/pr/2014/201401/press\\_20140127.html](http://www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/media_centre/press_room/pr/2014/201401/press_20140127.html)> [Accessed 15 September 2016]; and ‘Joint Statement on the Third United States-Singapore Strategic Partnership Dialogue’, Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 14 February 2015, <[www.mfa.gov.sg/content/](http://www.mfa.gov.sg/content/)

therefore be viewed as the comprehensive institutionalisation of bilateral cooperation in areas hitherto not formally covered by the 2005 Strategic Framework Agreement.

Another key mutual concern discussed at the annual SPD meetings was the dire need to address the challenges posed by violent extremism and foreign terrorist fighters, as evidenced by the emergence of ISIS in the Middle East. These trends have significant implications for the Southeast Asian region, whether through the importation of violence to Southeast Asia by fighters returning to their home countries or the emulation of ISIS-style violence by home-grown extremists.<sup>102</sup> In 2014, Singapore announced its decision to join thirty-three other nations in Operation Inherent Resolve, a multinational coalition to combat ISIS, and was the first Southeast Asian country to join the US-led Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. In 2016, the Singaporean prime minister announced the addition of a “modest contribution”—a medical support team supported by soldiers from the SAF’s Army Deployment Force (ADF)—to Singapore’s existing contributions to the anti-ISIS effort (i.e. air-to-air refuelling and imagery analysis).<sup>103</sup>

Rotational deployments of US military assets to Singapore have also been taking place. In June 2012, following a bilateral meeting on the margins of the annual Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD) defence forum in Singapore, the defence ministers of the two countries announced that Singapore had agreed to allow the US Navy to deploy four new warships—the Littoral Combat Ships (LCSs)—to Singapore, but stressed the vessels would not be permanently based there and their crews would live aboard during ship visits.<sup>104</sup> (For that matter, Singapore’s commitment to host the SLD, initiated back in 2002 by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, equally reflects the Singapore government’s facilitation, among other things, of the US rebalance through providing a regular platform for the US Secretary of Defense to visit and engage the region. Indeed, it was at the 2012 SLD where then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta took the

---

mfa/media\_centre/press\_room/pr/2015/201502/press\_20150214.html> [Accessed 15 September 2016].

<sup>102</sup> Jeremy Au Yong, ‘Singapore, US Pledge to Boost Cooperation in Anti-Terror Fight’, *The Straits Times*, 15 February 2016, <[www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/singapore-us-pledge-to-boost-cooperation-in-anti-terror-fight](http://www.straitstimes.com/world/united-states/singapore-us-pledge-to-boost-cooperation-in-anti-terror-fight)> [Accessed 15 September 2016]; Joseph Chinyong Liow, ‘ISIS Goes to Asia: Extremism in the Middle East Isn’t Only Spreading West’, *Foreign Affairs*, 19 September 2014, <[www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142004/joseph-chinyong-liow/isis-goes-to-asia](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142004/joseph-chinyong-liow/isis-goes-to-asia)> [Accessed 15 September 2016].

<sup>103</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, ‘Singapore to Deepen Role in Islamic State Fight’, *The Diplomat*, 3 August 2016, <[thediplomat.com/2016/08/singapore-to-deepen-role-in-islamic-state-fight/](http://thediplomat.com/2016/08/singapore-to-deepen-role-in-islamic-state-fight/)> [Accessed 15 September 2016].

<sup>104</sup> ‘Singapore Agrees To Host Four New US Warships’, *Radio Australia*, 3 June 2012, <[www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/2012-06-03/singapore-agrees-to-host-four-new-us-warships/954312](http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/2012-06-03/singapore-agrees-to-host-four-new-us-warships/954312)> [Accessed 7 September 2016].

opportunity to advance the justification for the rebalancing strategy).<sup>105</sup> The inaugural SPD reviewed the comprehensive array of areas spanning security, defence, education, trade and environment in extant cooperative arrangements between Singapore and the United States. In July 2016, Singapore welcomed the arrival of two P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft from the US Seventh Fleet, whose purported *raison d'être* for deployment was to participate in exercises relating to search-and-rescue, anti-piracy and HADR. According to a Singaporean defence analyst, the surveillance plane deployments reflected Singapore's desire for the United States to remain engaged in regional security and its regard for America as its primary security partner. What Singapore is doing, that analyst continued, "is practically facilitating the US (in its) rebalancing to Asia".<sup>106</sup> These developments underscore, from the American perspective, the important role played by Singapore in support of the US rebalance.

## Challenges and Drawbacks

Despite the strong partnership forged between them, the two countries have nonetheless encountered problems in their bilateral ties. Needless to say, the US and Singapore governments have not always seen eye to eye. For instance, Singapore has long taken umbrage at US criticisms of Singapore's perceived lapses in democracy and human rights,<sup>107</sup> as well as the latter's purported failure to address human trafficking within its own borders.<sup>108</sup> In 1988, a US diplomat was expelled from Singapore for allegedly having

<sup>105</sup> 'Remarks by Secretary Panetta at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore', US Department of Defense, 2 June 2012, <[archive.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=5049](http://archive.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=5049)> [Accessed 16 September 2016].

<sup>106</sup> Collin Koh of the Singapore-based S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) cited in Jeremy Koh, 'US Surveillance Planes Deployed Here till Next Month for Exercises', *The Straits Times*, 30 July 2016, <[www.straitstimes.com/singapore/us-surveillance-planes-deployed-here-till-next-month-for-exercises](http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/us-surveillance-planes-deployed-here-till-next-month-for-exercises)> [Accessed 15 September 2016].

<sup>107</sup> For example, the US State Department's 2014 report on Singapore's human rights record noted the following: "The government has broad powers to limit citizens' rights. The government could and did censor the media (from television shows to websites) if it determined that the content would undermine social harmony or criticized the government. The Internal Security Act (ISA) permits preventive detention without warrant, filing of charges, or normal judicial review; in recent years, the government has used it against alleged terrorists and not against persons in the political opposition". The report went on to cite the following "additional human rights problems": "Caning is an allowable punishment for some crimes; restrictions existed on free speech and assembly; government intimidation led to self-censorship by journalists; there were some limited restrictions of freedom of religion and some restrictions on labor rights". See, US Department of State, *Singapore 2014 Human Rights Report*, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 (Washington, DC: US Department of State, 2014), p. 1 <[www.state.gov/documents/organization/236686.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/236686.pdf)> [Accessed 16 September 2016].

<sup>108</sup> In 2015, Singapore retained, for the fifth year in a row, its Tier 2 position—i.e., has not fully complied with US laws on human trafficking but is making "significant efforts" to do so—in the US Department of State's 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, which drew a sharp riposte from the Singapore side. Aw Cheng Wei, 'US Annual Trafficking Report Not an Accurate Representation: Singapore', *The Straits Times*, 29 July 2015, <[www.straitstimes.com/singapore/manpower/us-annual-trafficking-report-not-an-accurate-representation-singapore](http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/manpower/us-annual-trafficking-report-not-an-accurate-representation-singapore)> [Accessed 16 September 2016].

“meddled” in local politics through cultivating disgruntled Singaporeans as potential opposition candidates.<sup>109</sup> Singapore leaders and policymakers have been critical of America’s social order and Western individualism more generally. As Lee Kuan Yew once bemoaned, “The expansion of the right of the individual to behave or misbehave as he or she pleases has come at the expense of orderly society.”<sup>110</sup> For Lee and likeminded Singaporean public intellectuals, American-style individualism stands at odds with the dire need for communal solidarity which a society as multi-ethnic and multi-religious as Singapore’s requires in order to preserve the national peace. The enduring question of Palestinian suffrage, a sticking point for many in Southeast Asia’s Muslim constituencies (including Singapore’s)—and an ostensible driver of Islamic militancy via vicarious identification—has also led to quiet dissatisfaction over Washington’s pro-Israel stance.<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, given the extent and depth of their security cooperation, snags and squabbles have inevitably occurred in US-Singapore ties. For example, the relative congruence and coordination in counter-terrorism and security policy between the two countries did not stop the Americans from censuring the Singaporeans for allegedly not having done enough. A 2013 report published by the US State Department criticised Singapore’s bilateral and multilateral engagement on counter-terrorism intelligence and law enforcement cooperation as “inconsistent and marked by a transactional mind-set that impeded the development of broad, deep, and predictable agency-to-agency relationships”. Whilst acknowledging that bilateral counter-terror collaboration has proven successful from time to time, the report however concluded that “Singapore appeared to provide selective cooperation dependent upon the issue”.<sup>112</sup> In response, the Singapore government said it was “surprised and disappointed” by the US comments, “particularly so given the close relationship and cooperation between [their] countries and agencies in the area of counterterrorism”. The Singaporeans argued that the US report not only furnished an inaccurate depiction of the

---

<sup>109</sup> Edwin Lee, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008), p. 470.

<sup>110</sup> Lee Kuan Yew: *The Grandmaster’s Insights on China, the United States, and the World*, Interviews and Selections by Graham Allison and Robert D. Blackwill (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), p. 28.

<sup>111</sup> As Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong told a Washington Beltway audience in 2007, “American policies in the Middle East also impact Southeast Asia. The Israel-Palestine conflict stirs up strong passions in Muslim communities worldwide, including in Southeast Asia. If the United States can bring about progress on this problem, it will address perceptions of American unilateralism and one-sidedness, help America to build trust and credibility, and make it easier for countries with large Muslim populations to deepen relations with America”. See, ‘Speech by Mr. Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of Singapore, at the Asia Society Washington Center / US-ASEAN Business Council Joint Gala Dinner, May 3 2007, in Washington, DC’, Embassy of the Republic of Singapore, 3 May 2007, <[www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/overseasmission/washington/newsroom/press\\_statements/2007/200705/press\\_200705\\_01.html](http://www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/overseasmission/washington/newsroom/press_statements/2007/200705/press_200705_01.html)> [Accessed 16 September 2016].

<sup>112</sup> US Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2012* (Washington, DC: US Department of State, 2013), p. 53.

relations that Singaporean security services have with their US counterparts, but that it fundamentally misunderstood Singapore's "deep commitment" towards international cooperation.<sup>113</sup>

Beyond the context of the bilateral relationship, Singapore's support for the rebalance has created other difficulties for itself. In particular, Singapore has found its usually strong relations with China complicated by what Beijing perceives charily as Singapore's propensity to pick the United States over China where the South China Sea disputes are concerned.<sup>114</sup> This has especially been the case since 2010, with the rise in Chinese assertiveness presumably in response to perceived US interference in the South China Sea disputes. For example, in the wake of comments by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in early August 2016 regarding the Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling against Chinese claims of sovereignty over the South China Sea, the Chinese foreign ministry issued this rejoinder: "China hopes that Singapore ... can maintain an objective and fair position as the coordinator of China and ASEAN dialogue relations, so as to advance Sino-Singapore relations and healthy and stable China-ASEAN ties".<sup>115</sup> Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin went a step further with a veiled warning: "As Singapore is not a claimant in the South China Sea, we hope that the Singapore Government, on the condition of not interfering in South China Sea issues, will actively promote cooperation between China and ASEAN".<sup>116</sup>

Notwithstanding their desire and support for maritime access, the careful way in which Singapore leaders have approached American statements and actions regarding US freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) in the South China Sea reveals their concern not to rile the Chinese unnecessarily. Allowing that the United States has a right to protect its interests, Singapore Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen nonetheless urged in late 2015 that "'incidents' [at sea] would not be good for the region".<sup>117</sup> The Singaporeans

<sup>113</sup> 'Singapore "Surprised and Disappointed" by US Comments on Counter-Terrorism Cooperation', *Today*, 17 July 2013, <[www.todayonline.com/singapore/singapore-surprised-and-disappointed-us-comments-counter-terrorism-cooperation?singlepage=true](http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/singapore-surprised-and-disappointed-us-comments-counter-terrorism-cooperation?singlepage=true)> [Accessed 16 September 2016].

<sup>114</sup> Cheng Bifan, 'Singapore Has Picked the Wrong Target in Its Balance of Powers Strategy: *Global Times* Commentary', *The Straits Times*, 9 June 2016, <[www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/singapore-has-picked-the-wrong-target-in-its-balance-of-powers-strategy-global-times](http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/singapore-has-picked-the-wrong-target-in-its-balance-of-powers-strategy-global-times)> [Accessed 12 September 2016].

<sup>115</sup> Cited in Cheong Koh Ping, 'China Asks Singapore To 'Respect' Its Position on South China Sea Ruling', *The Straits Times*, 6 August 2016, <[www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-asks-singapore-to-respect-its-position-on-south-china-sea-ruling-and-asean](http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/china-asks-singapore-to-respect-its-position-on-south-china-sea-ruling-and-asean)> [Accessed 12 September 2016].

<sup>116</sup> Cited in 'Chinese Social Users Lash Out at Singapore Over S. China Sea Dispute', *Today*, 23 August 2016, <<http://www.todayonline.com/china/chinese-social-media-users-lash-out-singapore-over-s-china-sea-dispute>> [Accessed 12 September 2016].

<sup>117</sup> Chong Ja Ian, 'South China Sea Series—Freedom of Navigation Operations: Better Quiet Resolve', *RSIS Commentaries*, no. CO15236, 6 November 2015, <[www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-](http://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-)

also worry over the proclivity of some US Congressional members, and occasionally the White House as well, to pressure China in ways that could perceptibly upset the status quo. To that end, they have spoken up on behalf of the Chinese as and when they felt it warranted. One example is the visit of Singapore Foreign Minister, Kasiviswanathan Shanmugum, to Washington in early 2012, when Singapore felt that US officials had engaged in gratuitous anti-China rhetoric.<sup>118</sup> Once, when asked what risks might a contentious Sino-US relationship pose to trade-dependent Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong noted that much of what happens to Singapore depends on the state of relations between the two major powers, because if that were to sour, “a lot of things [could] go wrong” for Singapore and the region.<sup>119</sup>

More fundamentally, Singapore’s facilitation of the US rebalance has been taken by the Chinese, fairly or otherwise, to connote the city-state’s support for the US-led “containment” of China’s rise. According to one view, Singapore, in the eyes of the Chinese, is not unlike a deceptive “overseas relative” because even though China willingly granted business priorities to Singapore, it has been disappointed with Singapore’s “military alliance” with the United States, “which may contain ‘the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation’”.<sup>120</sup> This suspicion over Singapore’s ostensible duplicity is equally characteristic of aspects of the Chinese media. For example, Lee Kuan Yew once complained about the unfortunate predilection of the conservative Chinese press to translate the phrase “to balance” (*pingheng*) as “to conscribe” (*zhiheng*), hence denoting containment.<sup>121</sup> Such mistakes have aroused Chinese anger unnecessarily. Yet this challenge and the difficulties discussed above have neither diluted nor dissuaded the belief and commitment which Singapore has invested in and to the US rebalance.

---

publication/rsis/co15236-south-china-sea-series-freedom-of-navigation-operations-better-quiet-resolve/#.V9umG03\_qM8> [Accessed 16 September 2016].

<sup>118</sup> Zhou Hao, ‘DC Rhetoric Draws Singapore Ire’, *Global Times*, 10 February 2012, <[www.globaltimes.cn/content/695357.shtml](http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/695357.shtml)> [Accessed 16 September 2016].

<sup>119</sup> David Schlesinger, ‘Singapore Needs US and China To Solve Issues’, *Reuters*, 2 November 2010, <[news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20101102-245393.html](http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne%2BNews/Singapore/Story/A1Story20101102-245393.html)> [Accessed 16 September 2016].

<sup>120</sup> The author of this perspective concluded by asking “whether Singapore without Lee Kuan Yew can continue to enjoy its enviable role as an honest broker by declining to choose sides” in the face of growing China-US competition and tensions in Southeast Asia. Sun Xi, ‘China and Singapore are Distant Relatives at Best’, *The Globalist*, 20 December 2015, <[www.theglobalist.com/china-and-singapore-are-distant-relatives-at-best/](http://www.theglobalist.com/china-and-singapore-are-distant-relatives-at-best/)> (Accessed 13 October 2016).

<sup>121</sup> ‘On Power and Stabilising Forces’, *The Straits Times*, 17 May 2010, cited in See Seng Tan and Oleg Korovin, ‘Seeking Stability in Turbulent Times: Southeast Asia’s New Normal?’, in Daljit Singh (ed.), *Southeast Asian Affairs 2015* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015), p. 10.

## Conclusion

This article has highlighted the extent to which Singapore has been willing to facilitate the rebalancing strategy of the United States, despite a number of challenges it has had to face as a consequence of its strategic choice. In return, the Obama administration has acknowledged the Singaporean effort on multiple occasions. When Prime Minister Lee visited Washington in August 2016, President Obama feted him with a state dinner and referred to Singapore as “an anchor of [the American] presence in the region” and to their bilateral relationship as a “solid-rock partnership”, whilst during his visit to Singapore in June 2016, US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter insisted that America has “no better friend than Singapore” in the region.<sup>122</sup> However, as this article has argued, Singapore’s backing for the rebalance is but the most recent demonstration of support for America’s forward presence and belief in the importance of America’s strategic guarantee to the Asia-Pacific region. Overcoming its initial reservations over US policy during the Indochina war, Singapore has grown from being a tacit security dependent of the United States, to becoming America’s fully fledged, even indispensable, security partner. To be sure, just how enduring this partnership will prove in the foreseeable future depends in part on the outcome of the upcoming US presidential election. Even then, it is probably unlikely in the event of a Trump victory that a Trump administration would wish to reverse the course taken by the US–Singapore security partnership and undo the progress it has hitherto achieved.

*See Seng Tan is Professor of International Relations at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, and concurrently Deputy Director and Head of Research at the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies at the RSIS. [issstan@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:issstan@ntu.edu.sg).*

---

<sup>122</sup> ‘As it happens: President Obama hosts PM Lee at the White House’, *Channel News Asia*, 2 August 2016, <[www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/as-it-happens-president/3004710.html](http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/as-it-happens-president/3004710.html)> [Accessed 12 September 2016]; Jermyn Chow, ‘US has “no better friend than Singapore” in the region, says Defence Secretary Carter’, *The Straits Times*, 3 June 2016 <[www.straitstimes.com/singapore/us-has-no-better-friend-than-singapore-in-the-region-defence-secretary-carter](http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/us-has-no-better-friend-than-singapore-in-the-region-defence-secretary-carter)> [Accessed 16 September 2016].

# The 'Pivot': A Twentieth Century Solution to a Twenty-First Century Problem?

Allan Behm

'The Pivot', as formulated by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2011, is likely to become the keystone of the Clinton administration's strategic policy in the Asia-Pacific region. This commentary essay argues that 'the Pivot' was already out of date when it was announced, and that it is neither clear nor robust enough to guide US policy through the difficult strategic tides that will characterise the next decade or so. As such, it is more hope than plan. 'The Pivot' views the region through the lens of US strategic primacy—a primacy that is increasingly challenged by China, and Russia for that matter. The much-vaunted 'international rules based order' is an artefact of the immediate post World War Two dispensation, and unless US policy is able to accept that China, and Russia, expect to have a place at the rules-setting table, 'the Pivot' has little chance of success.

For experienced politicians, policy by mantra is a standard trick of the trade. Speaking at Japan's National Press Club in Tokyo on 23 February 1990, then-US Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney redefined the strategic role of the United States in Asia as that of a 'balancing wheel' that would regulate the conduct of strategic relations in Asia.<sup>123</sup> Exactly how the 'balancing wheel' entered the strategic lexicon is uncertain, though it quickly caught on as a defining and incisive expression of a regenerated US strategic interest in Asia and an intention to be a significant player in Asia's strategic future.

For their part, regional defence and foreign ministers searching for a strategic security blanket happily appropriated the term as they took comfort in this novel expression of a US security guarantee to its Asian allies. So, for instance, Gareth Evans, speaking at the 'Asia Players' session at the Davos World Economic Forum in 1995 characterised Cheney's formulation as "universally accepted".<sup>124</sup> Interestingly, just a few weeks later, in a speech to the Asia-Australia Institute in Sydney, Evans glossed this

---

<sup>123</sup> Hon. Richard B. Cheney, 'To Remain in Asia', *Speaking of Japan*, vol. 11, no. 114 (June 1990), pp. 1-8.

<sup>124</sup> Senator the Hon. Gareth Evans, 'The Birth of an Asia Pacific Community', speech at World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland, 28 January 1995, <[foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/1995/birth.html](http://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/1995/birth.html)> [Accessed 27 September 2016].

universal acceptance as obtaining “more in private than in public statements”.<sup>125</sup>

Not one to be left behind in attaching himself to popular support for US pronouncements, Evans’s successor, Alexander Downer, used one of his first speeches as Foreign Minister to announce “[the United States] is the region’s balancing wheel and overwhelmingly a positive force for regional stability”.<sup>126</sup> More than a decade later, Downer was even more fulsome in his unstinting support for Cheney’s mantra. In his 2007 Monash APEC Lecture, Downer had this to say. “The truth is that the United States has an enormous role to play in Asia—an enormous role. It is, to use a phrase, [sic] that was enormously popular in the 1980s, the ‘balancing wheel’ of East Asian security.”<sup>127</sup> Leaving aside the slight error in dating Cheney’s ‘balancing wheel’ concept, Downer demonstrated just how enduring such terms can be, even though their meaning is so imprecise and their effect so difficult to measure.

A quarter of a century later, no one refers to the ‘balancing wheel’ strategy. Like most convenient but ultimately meaningless mantras, it reached its use-by date at about the time Downer was giving his Monash APEC Lecture and was consigned to the dustbin of outmoded thinking.

So, what is a balancing wheel, and how could the concept lend any substance to US strategic policy? In the science and technology of chronometry and horology, the balance wheel (or, in British parlance, the balance) has a precise meaning and utility. The balance wheel converts the energy stored in the torsion spring into regulated movements of the escapement, that in turn set in motion the elements of a clock that allow for the precise measurement of time. Prior to the development of quartz and atomic clocks, the balance wheel was the essential element providing accuracy and reliability to chronometers.

The term ‘balancing wheel’, when applied to global strategy, offers an interesting insight into the mindset of the strategic policymaker. To employ elements of a clock as the driving analogy for complex strategic systems suggests a highly structuralist approach to strategic policymaking. Moreover, it implies an order and logic to strategic affairs that simply fail to match the reality of international strategic relations. Strategic relationships

---

<sup>125</sup> Senator the Hon Gareth Evans, ‘Australia in East Asia and the Asia Pacific: Beyond the Looking Glass’, fourteenth Asia Lecture, Asia-Australia Society, Sydney, 20 March 1995, <foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/1995/looking.html> [Accessed 27 September 2016].

<sup>126</sup> The Hon Alexander Downer MP, ‘Australia and Asia: Taking the Long View’, address to the Foreign Correspondents’ Association, Sydney, 11 April 1996, <foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/1996/asia-long.html> [Accessed 27 September 2016].

<sup>127</sup> The Hon Alexander Downer MP, ‘How Can APEC Build Regional Prosperity?’, 2007 Monash APEC Lecture, Melbourne, 19 April 2007, <www.apec.org.au/docs/07\_MAL.pdf> [Accessed 27 September 2016].

are essentially unpredictable and chaotic. They are amoral and anomic. There are no inherent 'rules'. The only rules that might govern strategic relationships are those that are generated as an artefact of diplomacy, negotiation, compromise and agreement. Changes in power relationships change the rules, and major changes in power relationships (more commonly described as strategic discontinuities) have profound strategic consequences, as Philip Bobbitt details in his magisterial study *The Shield of Achilles*.<sup>128</sup>

What, then, were the strategic consequences of the 'balancing wheel' strategy? Fundamentally, there were none. The United States persevered with a status quo approach to its strategic relationships in Asia, maintaining its security alliances with Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Thailand and Australia through the usual talks, dialogues and the occasional military exercise, and pursuing a cautious and rather formal diplomacy with the remaining Indo-Chinese and South East Asian states. If the 'balancing wheel' policy was intended in some way to contain or constrain China, it failed abysmally. China's international political and strategic position continued to grow in parallel with its economic expansion, the meteorology of the bilateral relationship with the United States affecting both parties equally. The occasional glow of agreement and harmony was inevitably followed by the shadow of disagreement and disharmony, the relationship constantly driven by suspicion and mistrust.

Nor did the 'balancing wheel' strategy generate any significant change in US force disposition or force projection. Again, the United States maintained a status quo force posture in the Pacific, continuing to invoke President Nixon's 1969 Guam Doctrine to encourage the nations of Asia to do more to build their self-defence capacities and rely less on the military power of the United States to guarantee their security. While the Guam Doctrine was essentially targeted at a US domestic audience increasingly hostile to conscription and fatigued by the war of attrition in Vietnam, its strategic effect was not seen until the ignominious withdrawal of the US Embassy staff from Saigon in 1975. Far from achieving 'peace with honor', Nixon's strategy set in train the defeat of the military might of the United States.

If the 'balancing wheel' strategy was designed in part at least to 'seal the deal' after more than a decade of painstaking reconstruction of the US diplomatic and strategic position in Asia following the Vietnam fiasco, it failed on that account, too. Important regional players such as Indonesia and Malaysia continued to keep the US military at arms length, while Vietnam demonstrated that economic growth and political and strategic independence could be pursued without any reliance on the military power of the United States.

---

<sup>128</sup> Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace and the Course of History* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

So, one might ask, what has the 'balancing wheel' to do with the 'pivot'? The answer is that they are both manifestations of the same thing—a solution in search of a problem. The central issue here is that many US strategists and their alliance partner colleagues simply have not understood the strategic dynamics of Asia (and perhaps the strategic dynamics of the global environment more generally). It is a twentieth century mindset grappling with a twenty-first century problem.

Writing in *Foreign Policy* in 2011, the then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton unveiled the US 'pivot' strategy.

As the war in Iraq winds down and America begins to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the United States stands at a pivot point. ... This kind of pivot is not easy, but we have paved the way for it over the past two-and-a-half years, and we are committed to seeing it through as among the most important diplomatic efforts of our time.<sup>129</sup>

While Clinton introduced the new strategy by way of reference to the opportunity presenting itself to the United States to focus on things other than Iraq and Afghanistan, the core of the policy is the recognition that "the Asia-Pacific has become a key driver of global politics".<sup>130</sup>

Like 'balancing wheel', the term 'pivot' is an important concept in mechanics. A 'pivot point' is the centre of support for a rotating system, where 'to pivot' is to turn with minimum friction. Just as Cheney's 1990 expression revealed a structuralist mindset regarding the global strategic operating system implying both order and logic, so too does Clinton's use of the term 'pivot'. It is as though strategic dynamics were governed by laws analogous to Newtonian physics—universal, systematic and immutable. In this construct, the US pivot to Asia will apply the force necessary to constrain China's strategic ambitions while supplying the energy needed to boost the flagging morale of its alliance partners.

It would be comforting if the world of strategic calculation operated according to such rules: actions and reactions would be predictable, and order could be maintained through relatively simple adjustments in strategic power settings. Unfortunately, however, the facts do not fit the theory. Far from constraining—or even containing—China, the pivot has generated precisely the opposite result. It has energised China into extending its strategic buffer strategy into the South China Sea, and, far from reassuring players such as the Philippines' President Duterte, has actually set him on a path to accommodation with and appeasement of China.

The 'pivot' concept has found expression in many US policy pronouncements since 2011. But there is probably no more enthusiastic a

---

<sup>129</sup> Hillary Clinton, 'America's Pacific Century', *Foreign Policy*, 11 October 2011.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

proponent of the 'pivot' strategy than Kurt Campbell, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs from 2009 to 2013 and is credited with being one of the architects of the 'pivot'. His extended advocacy of the 'pivot',<sup>131</sup> mordantly described by the *Financial Times* reviewer as "an extended job application, should Clinton emerge victorious in this year's presidential election",<sup>132</sup> argues that the 'pivot' is essential if the United States is to maintain its long-term economic, political and strategic engagement with Asia. So far, so good. Campbell also sees the 'pivot' as a critical US response to China's growing strategic importance in Asia and its current penchant for an over-assertive approach to creating a strategic buffer in the South China Sea and managing its various territorial disputes. While Campbell does not advocate a crude containment strategy with respect to China, his combination of stepped-up diplomatic and military investment in Asia comes perilously close to containment in effect if not by design.

Campbell's book elicited a critical review by Hugh White, professor of strategic studies at the Australian National University and a long-term associate of Campbell.<sup>133</sup> The review in turn provoked an entertaining exchange of views between Campbell and White, studied politesse masking a measure of confected sarcasm. The nub of White's commentary addresses the fact that, if China is the principal aim of the 'pivot', Campbell's argument does not address the nature of China's strategic ambitions, their legitimacy or their acceptability to regional states. Nor, in White's view, is the book clear about the US objectives in Asia. For White, the pivotal (the term is used without irony!) strategic issue is the place of China in the Asian, indeed global, strategic dispensation and its refusal to accept a status quo based on US strategic primacy. So the question becomes less one of a 'pivot' and more one of the lengths to which the United States is prepared to go to ensure its ability to sanction Chinese ambition. It is a fair point.

For his part, Campbell appears to take umbrage at White's impertinence, rejecting his "stark and rather crude reading of Asia's politics" and dismissing his world view as "overriding and rigid".<sup>134</sup> He argues that the central objective of the 'pivot' is to bolster Asia's rules-based "operating system".

---

<sup>131</sup> Kurt M. Campbell, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (New York: Twelve, 2016).

<sup>132</sup> James Crabtree, *Financial Times*, 24 June 2016, <[www.ft.com/content/4c87c648-3497-11e6-ad39-3fee5ffe5b5b](http://www.ft.com/content/4c87c648-3497-11e6-ad39-3fee5ffe5b5b)> [Accessed 8 October 2016].

<sup>133</sup> Hugh White, 'Book Review "The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft" by Kurt Campbell', *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 4 July 2016, <[www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2016/07/04/Book-review-The-Pivot-The-Future-of-American-Statecraft-in-Asia-by-Kurt-Campbell.aspx#disqus\\_thread](http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2016/07/04/Book-review-The-Pivot-The-Future-of-American-Statecraft-in-Asia-by-Kurt-Campbell.aspx#disqus_thread)> [Accessed 29 September 2016].

<sup>134</sup> Kurt Campbell, "'The Pivot': A Reply to Hugh White", *The Interpreter* (The Lowy Institute blog), 5 July 2016, <[www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2016/07/05/The-Pivot-A-reply-to-Hugh-White.aspx](http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2016/07/05/The-Pivot-A-reply-to-Hugh-White.aspx)> [Accessed 29 September 2016].

Built in the aftermath of the Second World War, this system consists of a complex set of legal, security, and practical arrangements that have underscored four remarkable decades of Asian prosperity and security, liberating hundreds of millions from poverty. At its heart are time-tested principles: freedom of navigation, sovereign equality, transparency, peaceful dispute resolution, sanctity of contracts, free trade, and cooperation on transnational challenges. This is a system that has served us all extraordinarily well and should be preserved.<sup>135</sup>

And it is this view that seems to substantiate White's subsequent claim that there is no ostensible difference between the Asian 'operating system' and the old status quo reflecting US primacy.<sup>136</sup>

For its many words and occasional repetitiveness, Campbell clearly establishes the 'pivot' for what it is: a reassertion of US strategic primacy in Asia and a reinforcement of a rules-based system developed, moderated and interpreted by the United States. The paramountcy of US interests is assumed, consistent with the exceptionalism that has characterised US foreign and defence policy since the Monroe Doctrine was extended to East Asia by virtue of Commodore Perry's excursion to secure US commercial rights in Japan in the 1850s.

The importance of the 'pivot' strategy has been amplified in commentary by a number of US allies. To take just one example: in his thoughtful *Foreign Affairs* essay in 2013 (published after his prime ministership and his resignation as Foreign Minister) Kevin Rudd accepted the intent and the force of the 'pivot'.

Debate about the future of U.S.-Chinese relations is currently being driven by a more assertive Chinese foreign and security policy over the last decade, the region's reaction to this, and Washington's response—"pivot," or "rebalance," to Asia.<sup>137</sup>

Rudd's qualification of the 'pivot' as a 'rebalance' is significant. Australian ministers have been somewhat less full throated than their US counterparts in promoting the 'pivot', preferring instead the less dramatic but more anodyne 'rebalance'. So, for instance, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, addressing the Japan Press Club in February 2016, noted that "the stability underwritten by the United States and the institutions and rules-based order put in place in the post-Second World War period cannot be guaranteed in perpetuity", and went on to say that Japan and Australia "have welcomed the US rebalance to Asia, and the increased US presence and its strategic

---

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Hugh White, "'The Pivot': Yes, It is All about China", *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 7 July 2016, <[www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2016/07/07/The-Pivot-Yes-it-is-all-about-China.aspx#disqus\\_thread](http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2016/07/07/The-Pivot-Yes-it-is-all-about-China.aspx#disqus_thread)> [Accessed 29 September 2016].

<sup>137</sup> The Hon Kevin Rudd, 'A New Road Map for U.S.-Chinese Relations', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 2 (March-April 2013), p. 9. It is important to note that Rudd goes on in his essay to argue for a more nuanced and agile 'post pivot' approach to managing the China-US strategic relationship.

reassurances of its commitments to our region".<sup>138</sup> It is important here to recognise the implicit link between the 'rules-based order' and the strategic reassurances of the United States.

Of course, Bishop is not the only observer to prefer 'rebalance' as a more neutral description of US strategic policy in Asia. In an authoritative and supportive 2013 study of the US 'pivot' approach to Asia released by the Elliott School of International Affairs and the Sigur Center for Asian Studies at George Washington University, the team of analysts titled their work *Balancing Acts: The U.S. Rebalance and Asia-Pacific Security*.<sup>139</sup> This study offers a measured defence of the 'pivot', establishing in objective terms the strategic rationale for the policy, the responses of regional actors, and the possible constraints on the policy's success in realising its objectives. The study is prescient in recognising the critical role that the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) will play in underpinning both trade harmonisation in the Pacific and the future pre-eminence of the United States in the economic affairs of the Pacific. This is a constraint fully appreciated by Kurt Campbell. The unwillingness of the US Congress to ratify the treaty, together with the ambiguous support of Hillary Clinton as one presidential contender and the opposition of Donald Trump as the other, combine to cast serious doubt on the TPP as a critical enabler of the 'pivot'.

But what the study fails to come to grips with is the fundamental assumption that has underpinned US foreign and defence policy for more than a century and a half: the right of the United States to primacy. This assumption was as important in legitimising Cheney's 'balancing wheel' as it has been in lending authority to Clinton's 'pivot'. Whether it is termed 'manifest destiny' or 'American exceptionalism', a right to primacy informed the transaction of US foreign and strategic policy in the Middle East and Afghanistan during the presidency of George W. Bush (neither he nor the American people were well served by the neocons who believed that democracy could be imposed upon the Islamic world), and continues to inform the strategic policy of the Obama administration. This is nowhere more evident than in the final sentence of President Obama's 2015 National Security Strategy, which declares "[a] core element of our strength is our ... certainty that American leadership in this century, like the last, **remains indispensable**" (emphasis added).<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>138</sup> The Hon. Julie Bishop, 'Address to the National Press Club, Japan', 16 February 2016, <[foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/Pages/2016/jb\\_sp\\_160216a.aspx?w=tb1CaGpkPX%2FIS0K%2Bg9ZKEg%3D%3D](http://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/Pages/2016/jb_sp_160216a.aspx?w=tb1CaGpkPX%2FIS0K%2Bg9ZKEg%3D%3D)> [Accessed 29 September 2016].

<sup>139</sup> Robert G. Sutter, Michael E. Brown and Timothy J. A. Adamson, with Mike E. Mochizuki and Deepa Ollapally, 'Balancing Acts: The U.S. Rebalance and Asia-Pacific Security' (Washington: George Washington University, August 2013), <[www2.gwu.edu/~sigur/assets/docs/BalancingActs\\_Compiled1.pdf](http://www2.gwu.edu/~sigur/assets/docs/BalancingActs_Compiled1.pdf)> [Accessed 29 September 2013].

<sup>140</sup> President Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington: White House, February 2015) p. 29, <[www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf)> [Accessed 30 September 2016].

This position is argued throughout the President's strategic policy pronouncement with a certainty and confidence that characterises virtually all high level US statements, from State of the Union addresses to debates between presidential contenders. Essentially, the international rules-based order is an artefact of US policy. This is how President Obama put it.

Our leadership has also helped usher in a new era of unparalleled global prosperity. Sustaining our leadership depends on shaping an emerging global economic order that continues to reflect our interests and values. ... We must be strategic in the use of our economic strength **to set new rules of the road**, strengthen our partnerships, and promote inclusive development. ... We will shape globalization so that it is working for **American** workers. ... We will **ensure** tomorrow's global trading system is consistent with our interests and values by seeking **to establish and enforce rules** through international institutions and regional initiatives and by addressing emerging challenges like state-owned enterprises and digital protectionism (emphasis added, and note the oblique reference to China).<sup>141</sup>

In this view, US leadership, and the strategic predominance on which it is based, is the driving force of any global order, old or new, and it is the duty of the United States to create the new rules. And there is little indication that anyone else has a role other than accepting what the United States proposes. President Obama continued as follows.

We have an opportunity—and obligation—to **lead the way** in reinforcing, shaping, and where appropriate, creating the rules, norms, and institutions that are the foundation for peace, security, prosperity, and the protection of human rights in the 21st century. The modern-day international system currently relies heavily on an international legal architecture, economic and political institutions, as well as alliances and partnerships the United States and other like-minded nations established after World War II. Sustained by robust American leadership, this system has served us well for 70 years, facilitating international cooperation, burden sharing, and accountability. ... [T]he vast majority of states do not want to replace the system we have. Rather, they look to America for the leadership needed **to both fortify it and help it evolve** (emphasis added).<sup>142</sup>

The issue here is not whether the United States actually has the moral and political authority it claims (China and Russia reject US paramountcy) or whether the allies of the United States accept its leadership (they do). The issue is that the United States considers that it has an inherent right to primacy and that the right to primacy, declared or not, underpins all US foreign and defence policy. It is an ingrained belief that goes to the heart of the strategic competition between the United States and China at the macro-policy level and to the difference of view between Kurt Campbell and Hugh White at the micro-policy level. And it is a critical problem for the 'pivot' or 'rebalance'.

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

In passing, it is important to note that 'manifest destiny' is not a policy. It is just an idea, and while the neocons appear to find it attractive, it is one that historically many Americans have disputed. There has long been a strong tendency to isolationism among Republican Americans, while many US liberals favour a more inclusive and permissive approach to the formulation of US foreign and strategic policy. But among contemporary strategic policymakers the primacy of US power does appear to prevail.

Like all other nations, the United States has no option but to strive to protect and promote its interests, wherever they are engaged. That requires agility and flexibility, an ability to make good strategic decisions quickly, to capture opportunities where they arise and to mitigate threats when and where they occur. It is less a question of 'rebalancing' the strategic assets available to it by redistributing military forces from the Middle East (where US popular support for military operations has evaporated) to the north Pacific and east Asia. Rather, it is a question of envisaging a new world order—and its operating rules—that accepts the fundamental change that China's ascent represents. In that world order, China's power is increasingly less local and regional as it becomes more globally distributed—an inevitable consequence of its 'one belt, one road' strategy. And in that new world order, China demands the same right to make the rules as the United States and its allies claim.<sup>143</sup> This is the subordinate problem with the 'pivot'.

It has become something of a convention for many commentators on the US-China strategic relationship to view the issue in binary terms: as a zero-sum game, in which either the United States or China 'wins'; regional states will need to make a choice between Beijing or Washington, trading off their economic interests against their security interests, or *vice versa*; China is becoming more aggressive while the United States is 'running out of puff'. And there are others who more darkly forecast that, like Rome, the United States will decline and fall, while China's rise to the top is inevitable.<sup>144</sup> These are gross oversimplifications, mirroring a structuralist and mechanist worldview that ignores the randomness of events, the arbitrary choices of many decision-makers, the volatility of community sentiment, the force of ideology and the seductive power of nationalism. They also overlook the enormous originality and resilience of the United States.

In this fast-moving and freewheeling environment, Hobbesian concepts such as 'political geometry' and structuralist expressions such as 'security architecture' fail to capture the instability and transience of events, the nature of ambiguity and the impact of strategic discontinuities. This is part of

---

<sup>143</sup> The legitimacy of China's interest in being a rule maker rather than a rule taker is the most significant conceptual difficulty facing the long-term realisation of the 'pivot'. See Allan Behm, 'Beware an Unhappy Dragon', *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 29 July 2016, <[www.aspistrategist.org.au/beware-unhappy-dragon/](http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/beware-unhappy-dragon/)> [Accessed 30 September 2016].

<sup>144</sup> See, for instance, Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

the problem facing US policymakers: China's ascendancy represents a major strategic discontinuity that the current rules-based international order is simply unable to address. And it will continue to be a strategic discontinuity until China properly incorporates itself within the system of rule-making states without feeling itself to be constrained or contained by a US franchise that is unable to accept its legitimate strategic aspirations and ambition. This is the biggest issue with which the 'pivot' will need to deal if the strategy is to be successful.

There is no doubt that the United States has the diplomatic skills, economic strength and military assets to manage its longer-term strategic interests in the Pacific as the region continues to grow in economic and strategic importance. The question that hangs over the realisation of 'pivot' is whether the United States has the political will to address the critical issue of China's role in the development of the new regional strategic order. This demands vision, imagination, patience, perseverance and, above all, leadership at the highest level if the United States is to rise above the zero-sum game that is playing itself out at present. A distracted or uninterested President, a hostile Congress, a disengaged Secretary of State and a military leadership more focused on demonstrations of power and sabre-rattling than in managing and/or solving disputes could singly or in combination render the 'pivot' effectively meaningless.

The real problem generated by terms such as 'pivot' and 'rebalance' is that they appear to offer an answer to a question that has not been fully considered—a solution in search of an issue. Instead of attempting to bolster the old status quo, the United States needs to focus its energies on creating a new one that meets the interests of all engaged parties, not simply or principally those of the United States. This, it would appear, is not quite in character for the United States, or at least for its current crop of policymakers.

This, perhaps, is where the allies of the United States have a particular and constructive role to play. The traditional US alliance model is US leadership and allies' followership. Whether it was Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt's fawning 'all the way with LBJ' (US President Johnson) in 1966 or British Prime Minister Tony Blair's craven enthusiasm for the Iraq war in 2003, the allies of the United States have generally been expected to follow along meekly behind the United States, ostensibly in return for the hitherto unquantified benefit of US strategic protection. Such behaviour does not reflect a partnership between equals, but rather a level of dependency where one party calls the tune and the other dances as required. As the history of US engagement in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrates very clearly, the preparedness of its allies to fall in line has not served US political or strategic interests well. In any properly balanced and well-managed alliance, it is as much the duty of allies to advise and warn as it is to support and comfort. This principle applies as much to the 'pivot' as it might have to

the decision by Australia and Britain, among others, to support the United States in its destruction of Saddam Hussein and, as a consequence, the destruction of Iraq.

Whether the 'pivot' is a strategic game-changer or simply another buzzword masking ambiguity and uncertainty depends ultimately on two deeply interrelated factors, touched upon earlier in this essay. First, is the United States able to accept China as a legitimate player in Asia's strategic affairs and, in consequence acknowledge that China has legitimate strategic interests? And second, is the United States able to manage its interlocking set of regional alliances in a way that leverages the position, interests and regional relationships of its partners? And if the answer to those questions is 'yes'—and it should be—does the US leadership have the vision and political will to exercise those skills? And if the answer to that question is yes—and it should be—a 'paradigm shift' is needed that will render the 'pivot' obsolete.

The pace of strategic change in the Asia-Pacific is too fast, too multi-dimensional and too unpredictable for structuralist ideas like 'balancing wheel', 'pivot' and 'rebalance' to have much enduring effect. Inevitably, the United States will be, and needs to be, engaged strategically in Europe, in the Middle East, in Africa and in its own hemisphere. Russia will continue to challenge US policy in both Europe and Asia. With its global interests, the United States will need to retain its global strategic positioning, and to achieve this in a world of economic and political uncertainty, rising technology costs and the consequences of demographic changes on its ability to raise, sustain and maintain military forces, the United States will require diplomatic and military capabilities that are agile, flexible and decisive. It will need alliances that are equally agile, flexible and decisive. Such an outcome is more likely to result from a comprehensive and proactive re-imagining of the strategic possibilities of the twenty-first century than from a more limited 'pivot' to Asia that reflects twentieth century conventions.

*Allan Behm is a widely respected writer and commentator on defence and security matters. He is Chair of the Canberra Writers Festival and CEO of FearLess, a not-for-profit working with people who have post traumatic stress injury, and their families. He is a former head of the International Policy and Strategy Divisions of the Department of Defence. behm@kpond.com.*

# Challenge Accepted: China's Response to the US Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific

Feng Zhang

Chinese policy elites regard the US rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region as a major strategic challenge that must be met with a determined yet patient response. Chinese leadership under President Xi Jinping still seeks long-term stability with the United States by proposing to build a new model of great power relationship. On the other hand, however, Beijing has significantly revamped its strategy toward countries on its regional periphery by both pivoting toward the Eurasian continent and by developing a new resolve to protect its interests in maritime Asia. These indirect counterstrategies reveal the novelty and significance of China's multifaceted response to the US rebalance.

In October 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced a "pivot" to the Asia-Pacific region in a prominent article published in *Foreign Policy*, reaffirming America's strong commitment to continued regional leadership.<sup>145</sup> One month later, in a speech to the Australian Parliament, President Barack Obama echoed this "pivot" message by declaring that "The United States is a Pacific power, and we are here to stay".<sup>146</sup> In January 2012, the US Department of Defense released a strategic blueprint for the Joint Force in 2020, announcing that "*we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region*".<sup>147</sup> By that point, the "pivot" or "rebalance" toward the Asia-Pacific had become the Obama administration's settled Asian strategy.

According to Kurt M. Campbell, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs during Obama's first term in office and the chief architect behind the "pivot", this strategy wants to fulfil America's "traditional post-World War II role in the region, keeping credible its alliance commitments, and sustaining Asia's 'operating system' (the complex legal, security, and

---

<sup>145</sup> Hillary Clinton, 'America's Pacific Century', *Foreign Policy*, 11 October 2011, <foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/> [Accessed 2 October 2016].

<sup>146</sup> The White House, 'Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament', 17 November 2011, <www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament> [Accessed 2 October 2016].

<sup>147</sup> United States Department of Defense, *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Defense, 2012), p. 2, emphasis in original, <archive.defense.gov/news/Defense\_Strategic\_Guidance.pdf> [Accessed 2 October 2016].

practical arrangements that have underscored four decades of prosperity and security)".<sup>148</sup> It is a comprehensive and integrative strategy that includes

bolstering traditional alliances, forging new partnerships, engaging regional institutions, diversifying military forces, defending democratic values, embracing economic statecraft, and developing a truly multifaceted and comprehensive approach to an increasingly assertive and capable China.<sup>149</sup>

In her article, Clinton declared that "a thriving America is good for China and a thriving China is good for America".<sup>150</sup> Obama affirmed that the United States welcomed the rise of a peaceful and prosperous China.<sup>151</sup> Similarly, Campbell argues that "the Pivot is primarily about increasing ties to Asia, not containing China".<sup>152</sup> Toward China, the strategy is "perhaps best understood as a mixture of reassurance and resolve that underscore elements of cooperation and competition respectively".<sup>153</sup> He claims that "building a constructive and productive relationship with China has been an important part of the Pivot ever since it was first announced", and "China's official response to the Pivot was no knee-jerk reaction driven by concern over US intentions but instead a reasonable and measured decision to wait and see how US policy would evolve".<sup>154</sup>

Campbell seems to argue that the rebalance strategy has been a success overall, even in the area of China policy. This article sets out to evaluate this argument. It tests Campbell's claim that China's reaction to this strategy has been restrained and measured. It further assesses the efficacy of the strategy as a mixed approach of both reassurance and resolve toward China. I start with an analysis of China's assessment of the nature of the rebalance strategy. The following sections outline two major Chinese responses: to push for "a new model of great power relationship" with the US in order to stabilise the bilateral relationship, and to roll out a significantly revamped strategy towards countries on China's periphery in order to counter the strategic challenges from the US rebalance.

Campbell is correct that China's reaction to the rebalance has not been hysterical or aggressive. But in assessing the reaction as restrained, he vastly underestimates the novelty and consequences of China's multifaceted response. Far from seeing the rebalance as a benign reassurance about building a constructive relationship with China, Chinese policy elites consider it a major strategic challenge that must be met with a determined yet patient response.

---

<sup>148</sup> Kurt M. Campbell, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (New York: Twelve, 2016), p. 7.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Clinton, 'America's Pacific Century'.

<sup>151</sup> The White House, 'Remarks by President Obama'.

<sup>152</sup> Campbell, *The Pivot*, p. 22.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 26.

## A Calm Assessment

Influential Chinese analysts appreciate the compelling logic behind America's rebalance strategy. Yuan Peng, a senior analyst at the prestigious China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) in Beijing, accords the rebalance historical significance because it follows major trends in world development while speaking to America's necessary reliance on the Asia-Pacific region for its own development in the present era. The rebalance is thus not just a simple tactical shift peculiar to the Obama administration, but a major strategic choice connecting US diplomatic history with contemporary reality and involving all major aspects—diplomatic, military, security and economic—of US statecraft.<sup>155</sup> Such an assessment is not dissimilar from Campbell's own rationale for proposing the "pivot".

Some Chinese analysts are tempted to criticise the rebalance as America's latest attempt to "contain" China. Indeed, plenty of nationalistic and hardline voices inside China decry America's entire post-Cold War policy toward China as nothing less than a Cold War-style "containment". Sophisticated analysts, however, appreciate the nuances of US policy and understand the logic behind the rebalance strategy. They do not consider the rebalance to be a containment strategy, but rather an attempt to "balance" China's rise and maintain US regional leadership.<sup>156</sup> What America characterises as "balancing" China's rise, however, is seen by China as a hegemonic attempt to entrench the inherent imbalance of the post-Second World War Asia-Pacific regional order—that is, to maintain America's regional dominance.<sup>157</sup>

Thus Campbell is right that cool heads have prevailed in elite Chinese assessments of the rebalance. But such cool-headedness does not mean Chinese indifference or inaction. In fact, while recognising that containing China is not the United States's intention, Chinese analysts almost universally regard hedging against and competing with China as a dominant motivation of the rebalance.<sup>158</sup> Some find it offensive that the Obama

<sup>155</sup> Yuan Peng, 'Xunqiu zhongmei yatai liangxing hudong' [In Search of Constructive US-China Interactions in the Asia-Pacific Region], *Guoji anquan yanjiu* [Journal of International Security Studies], no. 1 (2013), p. 60.

<sup>156</sup> The view of Xue Li, a prominent foreign policy expert based at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economy and Politics, is representative in this regard. See Xue Li, 'Meiguo zaipingheng zhanlüe yu zhongguo "yidai yilu"' [America's Rebalance Strategy and China's 'One Belt, One Road'], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* [World Economy and Politics], no. 5 (2016), pp. 62, 65.

<sup>157</sup> Liu Guozhu, 'Meiguo "yatai zaipingheng" zhanlüe mianlin de tiaozhan' [The Challenges of America's 'Asian Rebalance Strategy'], *Meiguo yanjiu* [The Chinese Journal of American Studies], no. 3 (2014), p. 98.

<sup>158</sup> Ruan Zongze, 'Meiguo "yatai zaipingheng" zhanlüe qianjing lunxi' [An Analysis of the Prospects of the US Asian Rebalance Strategy], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* [World Economy and Politics], no. 4 (2014), p. 10. Ruan, a leading American foreign policy expert, is the Deputy Dean of the China Institute of International Studies in Beijing, a think tank directly supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

administration has adopted a global strategy of retrenchment to make way for an assertive Asia-Pacific regional strategy of rebalance in order to concentrate on dealing with China's rise and reinvigorating America's regional hegemony.<sup>159</sup> If the administration's global strategy is restrained, its Asia-Pacific regional strategy is certainly not.

Leading Chinese analysts argue that the rebalance has comprehensively challenged China's interests in the security, diplomatic, economic and strategic domains. Yuan Peng asserts that in the security domain, the US redeployment of 60 per cent of its naval and air force assets to the Asia-Pacific region and a series of military plans targeting China are challenging China's near-sea defence system. Unrestrained bilateral and multilateral military exercises around China's periphery have aggravated China's regional security environment. Significant deployment of new military assets in the region, including in Australia, Guam, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore and South Korea, has cast a long shadow over the China-US military relationship. In the diplomatic domain, by strengthening its existing alliance system and developing a new networked approach to regional partnerships, the rebalance has increased diplomatic pressure on China. Yuan also charges the rebalance strategy for contributing to recent tensions between China and its neighbours in territorial and maritime disputes. In the economic domain, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) initiative has not only disrupted the existing tempo of East Asian economic integration but also presented a completely new challenge to China's East Asian economic strategy. In the strategic domain, the rebalance, by virtue of its increased strategic investment in the Asia-Pacific, has raised China's suspicions of US strategic intentions and intensified its efforts to counter US moves, resulting in the deepening of the already very deep strategic distrust between the two countries.<sup>160</sup>

These concerns about the rebalance's challenge to Chinese interests are widespread among Chinese policy elites. Contrary to Campbell's claim, Fu Ying, a high-profile former vice foreign minister, points out that the "intentions of the U.S. military alliances in the Asia-Pacific remain a particular source of concern for China", especially after the "pivot".<sup>161</sup> More ominously, the rebalance has actually served to bolster the hardliners' assertion about a hegemonic US bent on keeping China down.<sup>162</sup> To some, the rebalance is

---

<sup>159</sup> Wang Hao, 'Guodu kuozhang de meiguo yatai zaipingheng zhanlüe jiqi qianjing lunxi' [America's Over-expanded Asia-Pacific Rebalance Strategy and Its Prospects], *Dangdai yatai* [Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies], no. 2 (2015), p. 7.

<sup>160</sup> Yuan, 'Xunqiu zhongmei yatai liangxing hudong', p. 58.

<sup>161</sup> Fu Ying, 'How China Sees Russia', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 95, no. 1 (2016), p. 104.

<sup>162</sup> See, for example, Wang, 'Guodu kuozhang de meiguo yatai zaipingheng zhanlüe jiqi qianjing lunxi'; Ruan, 'Meiguo "yatai zaipingheng" zhanlüe qianjing lunxi'; Yang Yi, 'Meiguo yatai lianmeng tixi yu zhongguo zhoubian zhanlüe' [US Asia-Pacific Alliance and China's Regional Periphery Strategy], *Guoji anquan yanjiu* [Journal of International Security Studies], vol. 31, no. 3 (2013), pp. 127–38; Lin Hongyu and Zhang Shuai, 'Chaoyue kunjing: 2010 nian yilai zhongmei anquan boyi jiqi yingxiang' [Beyond Dilemma: The Security Game Between China

but the latest manifestation of America's "Cold War mentality" that only serves to raise tension in Asia-Pacific regional politics.<sup>163</sup>

## A New Model of Great Power Relationship

Despite these negative perceptions, no serious analyst—save for the extreme hardliners—has advocated a head-on collision with the United States. In part, this is because the Chinese policy establishment correctly recognises the multifaceted nature of the rebalance strategy and its fundamental difference from a pure "containment" strategy against China. Direct confrontation with the United States therefore does not make sense. More importantly, China has grown significantly more confident since 2008 and has been developing its own policy ideas toward the United States and the Asia-Pacific region. Chinese foreign policy is no longer entirely reactive to outside events or pressures. Beijing is keenly aware of the importance of developing its own initiatives in major strategic arenas to shape a regional environment more favourable to its interests. Toward the United States, a major innovation is the proposal to develop "a new model of great power relationship" (*xinxing daguo guanxi*) between the two countries.

In February 2012, during a visit to the United States, then Vice-President Xi Jinping proposed building a new model of great power relationship between China and the United States for the first time. In July 2013, during a famous "shirtsleeves" summit with President Obama at the Sunnylands estate in California, President Xi outlined three key components of such a relationship: "no conflict" and "no confrontation", mutual respect, and win-win cooperation. The two countries agreed to expedite negotiation over a bilateral investment treaty and to begin consultation on confidence-building measures between the two militaries. During the November 2014 Xi-Obama summit in Beijing, Xi proposed six major directions for developing a new relationship. The two countries issued a joint statement on tackling climate change, signed two memoranda on establishing confidence-building measures between the two militaries, and agreed to continue negotiations over a bilateral investment treaty.<sup>164</sup>

By 2012, when the Chinese idea of a new model of great power relationship began to be articulated, the Obama administration had already instigated its

---

and the United States since 2010), *Guoji anquan yanjiu* [Journal of International Security Studies], vol. 33, no. 2 (2015), pp. 61–80; Li Qingsi, 'Meiguo yatai zaipingheng zhanlüe xia de dongya diqu geju' [East Asian Regional Order under America's Asian Rebalance Strategy], *Meiguo yanjiu* [The Chinese Journal of American Studies], no. 3 (2014), pp. 115–17; Liu, 'Meiguo "yatai zaipingheng" zhanlüe mianlin de tiaozhan'.

<sup>163</sup> Li, 'Meiguo yatai zaipingheng zhanlüe xia de dongya diqu geju', p. 117.

<sup>164</sup> Da Wei, 'Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi: gainianhua yu caozuohua' [A New Type of Great Power Relationship between China and the United States: Conceptualisation and Operationalisation], *Guoji zhengzhi kexue* [Quarterly Journal of International Politics], no. 1 (2015), pp. 4–5.

rebalance strategy in a prominent manner. China could not have missed this. Yet, rather than feeling compelled to respond with confrontation, it instead proposed no confrontation, mutual respect and cooperation. It still wanted to clarify its strategic intention of seeking long-term stability and cooperation with America and to reduce US suspicion of the uncertainty of China's long-term strategic ambitions.<sup>165</sup>

Underneath such immediate policy objectives, however, is a deeper historical and conceptual rationale. After 2010, when China became the world's second largest economy after the United States, Chinese leaders began to appreciate the acute strategic dilemmas facing a rising China in an international order still largely dominated by the United States and its allies. The discussion about China-US relations came to be framed in the context of a relationship between a rising power and a hegemonic power. In particular, Chinese leaders worry about the offensive realist logic of the "tragedy of great power politics" and its implications for China-US relations.<sup>166</sup> President Xi has raised his concern with the so-called "Thucydides Trap"<sup>167</sup>—the dangers of war when a rising power rivals a ruling power—several times in public. Chinese leaders want to transcend fatalistic realist predictions about great power conflict. The concept of a new type of great power relationship is their attempt to rise above the fatalistic variants of realist international relations theories.<sup>168</sup> Thus, this concept has deep historical and conceptual underpinnings as well as immediate policy motivations.

China's proposal for building a new type of great power relationship with the United States carries a serious cooperative spirit. But it should not be mistaken for unconditional cooperation. Among the three key components of the concept, "no conflict" and "no confrontation" communicates China's bottom line. Beijing recognises that conflict and confrontation will not only derail the China-US bilateral relationship, but also destabilise and damage the Asia-Pacific regional order to the detriment of every country including China.

But while stability is important, mutual respect for each other's core interests and major concerns are vital too, and this second component of the concept—mutual respect—is probably the most significant and controversial aspect of the Chinese proposal. Beijing is signaling, in effect, that the United States must now respect China's interests and treat it as an equal great power. The message, then, is that China would no longer bend to US pressure and accommodate its demands and interests, as occurred, for

---

<sup>165</sup> Lin and Zhang, 'Chaoyue kunjing', p. 66.

<sup>166</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

<sup>167</sup> Graham Allison, 'The Thucydides Trap: Are the US and China Headed for War?' *The Atlantic*, 24 September 2015, <[www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/)> [Accessed 3 October 2016].

<sup>168</sup> Da, 'Zhongmei xinxing daguo guanxi', p. 11.

example, during the 1990s when it was significantly weaker than the United States. Alongside the cooperative spirit, there is also a newfound determination and resolve to safeguard and protect China's vital interests, perhaps even at the cost of conflict when necessary. Some of the "core interests" that China identifies—especially the preservation of an authoritarian political system ruled by the Chinese Communist Party—run counter to basic American values. Other "core interests" in territorial sovereignty and security, including the traditional focus on Taiwan, Xinjiang and Tibet, but possibly also an expansion of new interests in the East and South China Seas, are making US strategists nervous. This explains, in a big part, the Obama administration's reluctance to endorse this concept as a roadmap for future relations.

The Chinese proposal to build a new model of great power relationship with the United States is not a direct, reactive response to the US rebalance. One cannot run a causal chain from the rebalance to this proposal. The proposal has its own diverse motivations, concerns and initiatives peculiar to Chinese policy thinking at this precise historical moment. In particular, it embodies a proactive effort to shape US expectations about China's rise. Rather than just letting the United States shape the contours of China's rise, which has so often been the case in the past, Beijing now believes that the rise of China has made possible an interactive process of the two countries mutually shaping each other's expectations, calculations, and responses. But the proposal—especially the "mutual respect" component—contains essential principles about the ways in which China might respond to the rebalance. In other words, Chinese policy elites see the concept as broad enough to incorporate a range of responses to US policies, rendering a specific, targeted response to the rebalance unnecessary.

## Periphery Strategy

In October 2013, China held its first conference on diplomacy toward countries on its periphery. President Xi emphasised the need to strive for achievement in periphery diplomacy (*zhoubian wajijiao*), so as to secure a favourable regional environment for China's development. Attended by representatives from the party, local and central government, the military, state-owned enterprises and the diplomatic corps, this conference was a milestone event in raising the profile of periphery diplomacy in the history of Chinese foreign policy. The distinguished scholar Yan Xuetong argues that the conference indicated a strategic shift of Chinese foreign policy from "keeping a low profile" to "striving for achievement".<sup>169</sup>

It is hard to claim that this conference was somehow a response to the US rebalance. Two US-related considerations, however, are important for

---

<sup>169</sup> Yan Xuetong, 'From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement', *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2014), pp. 153–84.

understanding the significance of this conference. First, since the end of the Cold War, the major preoccupation of Chinese foreign policy has always been the United States. This is understandable given America's preponderant position both in the global system and in the Asia-Pacific regional order and its menacing ability to affect major Chinese interests in a variety of ways. Holding the periphery-diplomacy conference suggested that China was lowering the priority of US policy while simultaneously raising the importance of regional diplomacy in its overall foreign policy framework. This does not mean, however, that periphery policy has now taken precedence over US policy in either conceptualisation or practice. In any case, elite debates about the respective positions of and the relationship between these two policy areas still remain inconclusive. But it does mean that China has reduced its obsession with the United States and is acquiring a broader conception and a more ambitious design for its overall foreign policy. Such a reduced fixation with the United States because of a greater strategic ambition may help explain China's calm—although not indifferent—assessment of the US rebalance.

Second, the rebalance may have unwittingly contributed to China's awareness of the importance of regional diplomacy and its consequent determination to pursue an activist policy toward regional countries. Many Chinese analysts perceive that a key purpose of the rebalance is to sow discord between China and its Asia-Pacific neighbours so that America can profit from the deterioration of China's regional relationships. A logical response, therefore, is to significantly improve and expand China's friendly relations with regional countries, depriving the United States of the opportunity to drive a wedge between China and its neighbours.<sup>170</sup>

Viewed from the perspective of China's periphery diplomacy, Beijing has carried out a two-pronged approach to deal with the rebalance's challenge to its interests: a Chinese "pivot" toward the Eurasian continent and a new resolve to protect its interests in maritime Asia-Pacific, in both the economic and security domains. China's economic and security policies embodied by this approach cannot be seen as a direct response to the US rebalance—they are not reducible to a simple China-US competition in the vast Asian region. But behind these policies, one inevitably sees various shades of the US factor in Chinese considerations.

### **THE CHINESE "PIVOT" TO EURASIA**

In October 2012, roughly one year after the US announcement of a "pivot" toward the Asia-Pacific, the prominent scholar Wang Jisi argued for a rebalance of China's geopolitical strategy. He suggested that at a time when the US was pivoting toward the east, and major power centres like Russia, India, and the European Union (EU) were also "looking east", China should not limit its strategic purview to maritime Asia, but should instead have a

---

<sup>170</sup> Ruan, 'Meiguo "yatai zaipingheng" zhanlüe qianjing lunxi', p. 18.

strategic plan of its own, a “pivot to the west” (*xijin*). Such a “pivot” would help build a more balanced relationship with the United States and contribute to developing China-US strategic trust. Wang believes that China-US competition in East Asia was increasingly becoming “zero-sum”. But in the vast heartland of the Eurasian continent stretching from Central Asia to the Middle East to South Asia, great potential exists for China-US cooperation in a range of fields including investment, energy, counter-terrorism, non-proliferation and regional stability, without any major risk of military confrontation between the two countries.<sup>171</sup>

This very influential article set off a heated debate among Chinese analysts about China’s geostrategic focus in the new era, and is sometimes credited with contributing to President Xi’s new policy idea of ‘One Belt, One Road’ (OBOR). It is clear that Wang’s argument about a Chinese “pivot to the west” was in part motivated by the US “pivot” to the Asia-Pacific. And if his idea had indeed affected the Chinese government’s conceptualisation of OBOR (which is quite possible given Wang’s influence in policy circles), then OBOR should be seen, at least in part, as an indirect and unintended consequence of the US rebalance strategy.

In any case, Beijing rolled out OBOR with great fanfare. In a visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013, Xi proposed building a ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’, an overland Eurasian economic network linking China with Asian, European, and Middle Eastern countries. One month later, during a visit to Indonesia, Xi advanced a parallel idea of building a ‘Maritime Silk Road for the Twenty-First Century’, a maritime economic network running from the Chinese coast to the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and all the way to Oceania and littoral Europe. Wang’s idea of a “pivot to the west” focuses only on the Eurasian continent. Xi’s OBOR is much more ambitious by incorporating an additional maritime theatre. It is variously seen inside China as the Xi administration’s signature economic policy initiative and even as a grand strategy combining national development imperatives with foreign policy activism.<sup>172</sup>

OBOR is, at its core, a foreign economic strategy. Chinese motivations range from exporting its excess industrial capacity, to making better use of its vast foreign-exchange reserves, to securing safer sources of energy supply, to promoting China’s “strategic depth” in key industries and enhancing national security. But, strategically, it is also an answer to the TPP, the major economic pillar of the US rebalance. This is another sense

<sup>171</sup> Wang Jisi, “‘Xijin”, zhongguo diyuan zhanlüe de zaipingheng’ (‘Pivot toward the West’, the Rebalance of China’s Geopolitical Strategy), *Huanqiu shibao* (The Global Times), 17 October 2012, <[opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion\\_world/2012-10/3193760.html](http://opinion.huanqiu.com/opinion_world/2012-10/3193760.html)> [Accessed 4 October 2016].

<sup>172</sup> Feng Zhang, ‘China as a Global Force’, *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2016), pp. 117–25, at p. 120.

in which OBOR can be seen, in part, as China's geopolitical counteroffensive to the US rebalance.<sup>173</sup>

China is “pivoting” toward the Eurasian heartland both with and beyond OBOR. This is particularly true in its relations with Russia and Europe. During the Xi administration, China has notably consolidated what was already a robust relationship based on mutual strategic and economic interests. Although Chinese officials are reluctant to acknowledge the American dimension in the strengthening of the China-Russia relationship, they make it clear that China and Russia need each other's support in major international issues. To Beijing's delight, Moscow overcame its initial hesitation about OBOR and embraced it in 2014.<sup>174</sup> China's interest in having a closer strategic relationship with Russia is at least partly motivated by strategic pressure from the US rebalance in maritime Asia. That the two countries conducted their first joint military exercises in the South China Sea in September 2016 is an outstanding testimony to this concern.<sup>175</sup>

Toward Europe, China has also initiated a “pivot” to deepen economic cooperation. In March 2014, Xi paid a high-profile visit to the EU headquarters in Brussels—the first time in history that a Chinese head of state had formally visited. One month later, China announced its new policy paper on the EU, the first update in ten years. Beijing is now vigorously using the ‘16+1’ forum, a new institutional mechanism for cooperation with Central and East European countries (including eleven EU countries and five EU candidate countries) launched in 2011, to promote OBOR in Europe. The China-EU relationship has reached a higher strategic level, based not just on trade but also on security, advanced technology—including dual-use technology—and food security. If the United States reduces its engagement with Europe, a possible implication of its Asian rebalance given its finite strategic resources, China is sure to strive to fill the void, with OBOR in particular.<sup>176</sup>

### **NEW RESOLVE IN MARITIME COMPETITION**

In one sense, China has responded to the US rebalance to the Asia-Pacific by launching its own rebalance to the Eurasian continent, even though such a rebalance to the west, given its multiple motivations, only qualifies as an indirect consequence of the US rebalance. But, while “pivoting to the west”, China has not reduced—let alone abandoned—its strategic attention to the east, the Asia-Pacific maritime theatre where a traditional great power competition between China and the United States is taking place. OBOR,

---

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>174</sup> Fu, ‘How China Sees Russia’, p. 99.

<sup>175</sup> Brad Lendon and Katie Hunt, ‘China, Russia Begin Joint Exercises in South China Sea’, CNN, 13 September 2016, <edition.cnn.com/2016/09/12/asia/china-russia-south-china-sea-exercises/> [Accessed 4 October 2016].

<sup>176</sup> Theresa Fallon, ‘China's Pivot to Europe’, *American Foreign Policy Interests*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2014), pp. 175–82.

after all, includes both the overland Eurasian theatre and the maritime Indo-Pacific theatre. In the maritime theatre, OBOR, focusing on infrastructure development projects with regional countries, is becoming a pointed response to the TPP.

The bigger and more significant story in this theatre, however, is China's demonstrated resolve to safeguard its national interests, particularly sovereignty and maritime rights in its disputes with its neighbours. Chinese policy elites almost unanimously believe that US intervention in Asian maritime disputes under the banner of the rebalance strategy has significantly complicated the management and resolution of these disputes. Fu Ying's assessment is noteworthy because of her policy role:

Some U.S. allies in the region have made claims on China's sovereign territory and infringed on Chinese maritime rights, hoping that by cozying up to Washington, they could involve the United States in their disputes with Beijing. This is a dangerous path, reminiscent of the "bloc politics" of the Cold War.<sup>177</sup>

Believing that some regional countries are counting on the US rebalance to enhance their interests and make demands on China's sovereignty and maritime rights, Chinese analysts conclude that China must respond with sufficient resolve to protect its own interests and beat these countries' provocations.<sup>178</sup> Failure to do so would not only inflate regional countries' ambitions at the cost of China's interests but also embolden the United States to capitalise on their provocations to enhance the efficacy of the rebalance strategy. Following this logic, it is not difficult to see that the rebalance—especially the US desire to make credible its commitments to its allies in the face of China's rise—actually contributes to a greater Chinese resolve to face down perceived provocations from regional countries, especially when these countries are US allies such as the Philippines.

It appears plain to many Chinese analysts that those countries involved in territorial and maritime disputes with China in recent years are either US allies (Japan and the Philippines) or newly emerging security partners of the United States (India and Vietnam). For these analysts, this cannot be a mere coincidence. Meanwhile, the United States, adopting a nominally 'neutral' position, is in fact supporting and encouraging these countries' positions and policies against China. American policy toward Asian territorial and maritime disputes, halfway between principled neutrality and de facto bias, obsessively motivated by its concern with strategic credibility, is emboldening regional countries' risk-taking behaviour to challenge Chinese interests. The resulting provocations and incidents have brought

---

<sup>177</sup> Fu, 'How China Sees Russia', p. 104.

<sup>178</sup> Lin and Zhang, 'Chaoyue kunjing', p. 66.

diplomatic and security pressure on China, at times even the pressure of war.<sup>179</sup>

One may criticise this kind of argument as self-serving because it conveniently overlooks the Chinese side of the story; for example, China's increasing maritime assertiveness since 2009.<sup>180</sup> Regardless, such arguments are very popular inside China, and the US rebalance has certainly provided ammunition and contributed to their plausibility. To a significant degree, they have also influenced government policy, in particular China's standoff with the Philippines over the Scarborough Shoal in April–June 2012, the oil rig incident with Vietnam in May–July 2014, and the industrial-scale land reclamation and island building in the Spratly Islands since 2014.<sup>181</sup>

None of these events were caused by a single-minded concern with the US rebalance; all of them had complex conditions and motivations. Yet, Chinese analysts and officials always place these events within the broad context of the rebalance. If they want to find a scapegoat, the rebalance is readily available. Even though fair-minded analysts believe that China must also bear part of the blame, they will not let the US rebalance escape their explanatory framework.

Some of China's recent maritime policies have already produced dramatic strategic consequences. Island building, for example, has considerably quickened and exacerbated strategic and military competition between China and the United States, presenting mounting dilemmas for both countries.<sup>182</sup> It is also an area over which the Obama administration has had little control or influence. If one accepts the Chinese argument that significant policies such as island building should be seen within—although not exclusively attributed to—the broad geopolitical context of the US rebalance, then the rebalance has indeed damaged US-China strategic relations, even if that regrettable consequence was produced in an indirect or circuitous way.

## Can the Rebalance Succeed?

China has thus responded to the US rebalance, usually indirectly, in a number of consequential ways. In some sense, a competition has already taken place between the US rebalance and China's periphery strategy.

---

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 70; Wang, 'Guodu kuozhang de meiguo yatai zaipingheng zhanlüe jiqi qianjing lunxi', p. 14.

<sup>180</sup> See Alastair Iain Johnston, 'How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?' *International Security*, vol. 37, no. 4 (2013), pp. 7–48.

<sup>181</sup> See Feng Zhang, 'Assessing China's South China Sea Policy, 2009–2015', *East Asian Policy*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2016), pp. 100–9.

<sup>182</sup> Peter Dutton, 'A Maritime or Continental Order for Southeast Asia and the South China Sea?' *Naval War College Review*, vol. 69, no. 3 (2016), pp. 5–13.

What, then, are Chinese policy elites' assessments of the rebalance's prospects?

Chinese analysts are quick to point out a number of major problems and dilemmas in the rebalance, both in terms of strategic conceptualisation and practical execution. Da Wei, a leading US foreign policy expert at CICIR, perceptively locates a major contradiction in the rebalance's strategic design. The United States wants to deploy the rebalance to enhance relations with China and other Asia-Pacific countries simultaneously. While theoretically possible, this strategic goal is nearly impossible to achieve in practice. The China-US relationship already displays mounting and sometimes intractable differences in a range of difficult policy areas including cyber-security, the South China Sea, human rights and economic ties. But the rebalance strategy only serves to further damage the relationship in strategic domains: the strengthening of America's regional alliance system and its military redeployment cannot but trigger Chinese concerns and opposition; direct intervention in the East and South China Seas disputes hurts major Chinese interests; and the exclusion of China in the TPP reflects a highly competitive, if not overtly anti-Chinese, mentality of the rebalance's economic strategy. These perceptions have led many inside China to conclude that the rebalance is a deliberate strategy of competition with—and even containment against—China. Thus, Da concludes that the improvement of US relations with other Asian countries under the banner of the rebalance actually comes at the cost of sacrificing its relations with China.<sup>183</sup>

This is an insightful and incisive critique of the conceptual malaise of the US rebalance. Both Clinton and Campbell, the main architects behind the rebalance, have tried to argue that the rebalance will enhance America's relationship with the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, including both China and other regional countries. In her 2011 article, Clinton declared that “we will continue to embed our relationship with China in a broader regional framework of security alliances, economic networks, and social connections”.<sup>184</sup> Echoing Clinton, Campbell argues that “embedding China policy ... within a larger Asia policy framework” enables the United States to “more consequentially shape the contours of China's rise”.<sup>185</sup> But they fail to address the contradiction between America's China policy and its policy toward the larger Asian region. Campbell adamantly maintains that the United States should “move away from the kind of ‘China first’ or ‘G-2’

<sup>183</sup> Da Wei and Zhang Zhaoxi, ‘Zhongmei guanxi xinjieduan zhong de zhanlüe shiyu yu zhanlüe wending tansuo’ [The ‘Loss of Language’ in Strategy in a New Era of China–US Relations and an Exploration of Strategic Stability], *Guoji anquan yanjiu* [Journal of International Security Studies], no. 5 (2016), p. 50. See also Liu, ‘Meiguo “yatai zaipingheng” zhanlüe mianlin de tiaozhan’, p. 99.

<sup>184</sup> Clinton, ‘America's Pacific Century’.

<sup>185</sup> Campbell, *The Pivot*, p. 198.

approach that has often dominated US policy toward Asia".<sup>186</sup> But in going to the other extreme of embedding China strategy in a larger regional framework, the rebalance has actually deprived the United States of any distinctive China strategy at all. That is the puzzle that has rattled Chinese elites—the United States does not seem to have a China strategy under the Obama administration, especially during its second term.

Because of their perception of this flaw, Chinese elites believe that the rebalance's mixed approach of both reassurance and resolve is bound to fail. To Chinese eyes, it is all resolve and no reassurance. A prominent analyst alleges that the United States' approach of compromising Chinese interests while claiming to only act at regional countries' invitation is double-faced and damaging to its reputation.<sup>187</sup> The rebalance is strongly motivated by a US concern with the credibility of its strategic commitments in Asia, and thus should appear reassuring to its allies. Yet, a Chinese foreign ministry official holds that it can reassure neither China nor its allies, at least not in terms of the current level of US strategic investment. And the "resolve" part of the strategy is also failing—or at least rendered ineffective—because apparent US resolve is only going to steel greater Chinese determination in this era of growing Chinese power and confidence.<sup>188</sup>

Chinese analysts believe that the goal of shaping or even harnessing China's rise, if this is indeed one of the goals of the rebalance strategy, is not being achieved. On the contrary, the strategy has triggered a series of indirect and unintended consequences by stimulating a vigorous Chinese strategy toward countries on its regional periphery while striving to develop a new model of relationship with America.<sup>189</sup> The rebalance, in this reading, makes both the US and China worse off in terms of their strategic trust, but in fact damages US interests more than it does Chinese interests. Even from a purely US perspective, by deepening US-China strategic distrust and raising tension in the Asia-Pacific, it is not clear that the rebalance is serving fundamental US interests.<sup>190</sup>

The rebalance is also seen as facing other sorts of dilemmas and constraints. First, Chinese analysts accuse it of deepening Asia's geopolitical divide by forcing them to choose between China and America, a choice most Asian countries are unwilling to make. Second, the rebalance, "hijacked" by the US military-industrial complex, is seen as increasingly militarised to the detriment of America's economic involvement in Asia. Third, Chinese analysts worry that the rebalance is being exploited by US regional allies and may "bring fire onto America itself", raising its strategic burdens. American obsession with credibility is emboldening regional

---

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>187</sup> Ruan, 'Meiguo "yatai zaipingheng" zhanlüe qianjing lunxi', p. 12.

<sup>188</sup> Author interview with Ministry of Foreign Affairs official, Beijing, 9 September 2016.

<sup>189</sup> Wang, 'Guodu kuozhang de meiguo yatai zaipingheng zhanlüe jiqi qianjing lunxi', p. 17.

<sup>190</sup> Liu, 'Meiguo "yatai zaipingheng" zhanlüe mianlin de tiaozhan', p. 102.

countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam and Japan to increase risk-taking behaviour to challenge Chinese interests and test America's security commitments, trapping it in a precarious strategic quandary. In this sense, the rebalance has exposed the flaws and risks of the US Asian alliance system. Fourth, as so often argued, the rebalance is raising China's strategic awareness and weakening China-US strategic trust. Finally, Chinese analysts observe that the strategy is being challenged both inside and outside the United States on multiple grounds, and it is not clear whether America can focus its attention on and devote sufficient resources to the rebalance given its global strategic commitments and resource constraints.<sup>191</sup> Chinese analysts thus conclude that the rebalance is facing very uncertain prospects. Even if future US administrations carry it forward, adjustments are necessary to ensure its success, if success is ever an obtainable goal.

But if the US rebalance is faltering, it is unlikely that China can declare victory in this multifaceted and sometimes circuitous competition. By both pivoting to Eurasia and engaging in an intensifying strategic competition with the United States in maritime Asia, China may be in danger of strategic overstretch. If Wang's original argument about a "pivot to the west" was meant to rebalance China's strategic focus so that China does not overly extend itself on multiple fronts, Chinese strategy under Xi seems to be producing exactly the kind of strategic overstretch that Wang and a number of other Chinese scholars have feared. If the United States has overly extended itself through the rebalance, and if China is overstretched through direct and indirect responses to the rebalance, then the outcome will be a 'lose-lose' competition for both. That is hardly a reassuring prospect for the future of the Asia-Pacific order at a time of great geopolitical uncertainty.

## Conclusion

Campbell is correct in his suggestion that China has not taken a tit-for-tat confrontational approach toward the military component of the US rebalance strategy by, for example, creating a sphere of influence in Asia. Beijing has been trying to enhance strategic communication and trust with the United States through nearly 100 inter-governmental channels symbolised by the annual Strategic and Economic Dialogue. It is striving to build a new model of great power relationship with the United States in good faith (although not necessarily with the right strategy). Chinese leadership under President Xi has shown great determination to seek and maintain long-term stability of the China-US relationship.

On the other hand, however, China has also demonstrated impressive novelty in developing indirect counterstrategies and in communicating great resolve to protect its interests. It is here that Campbell—and many other US

---

<sup>191</sup> Ruan, 'Meiguo "yatai zaipingheng" zhanlüe qianjing lunxi', p. 15.

strategists—have vastly underestimated the strategic consequences of the rebalance on China’s perceptions of and strategies toward America and the Asian region. Beijing has significantly revamped its strategy toward countries on its regional periphery by both pivoting toward the Eurasian continent and by developing a new resolve to protect its interests in maritime Asia. The OBOR and Beijing’s maritime assertiveness are two major aspects of this revamped regional strategy.

This new regional strategy cannot be seen as a direct causal consequence of the rebalance. Nor indeed should the proposal for a new model of great power relationship be seen in this way. But the rebalance has affected Chinese strategic thinking in indirect and subtle ways and influenced China-US strategic interactions as a result. It has prompted China to think more widely and deeply about its overall strategic design, producing a kind of “system effect”<sup>192</sup> from their interactions. The overall outcome is a deterioration of the China-US relationship. The effects of the rebalance on Chinese policy are thus multifaceted and dynamic, with unintended consequences common to complex strategic interactions.

In the most general way, Campbell’s claim that China’s response has been “reasonable and measured” is plausible.<sup>193</sup> But he might well have added “determined and decisive” to encompass the multifaceted nature of China’s response and to capture China’s new strategic resolve. The rebalance has largely failed as a mixed strategy of reassurance and resolve toward China. Far from “building a constructive and productive relationship with China”, as Campbell intended it to be,<sup>194</sup> the rebalance has instead contributed to China-US strategic distrust and stimulated China to strive for new strategic adventures in Asia. It is not clear who will win and who will lose. It may be a ‘lose-lose’ outcome for both countries.

*Feng Zhang is a Fellow in the Department of International Relations at the Australian National University’s Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs and an adjunct professor at the National Institute for South China Sea Studies in China. [feng.zhang@anu.edu.au](mailto:feng.zhang@anu.edu.au)*

---

<sup>192</sup> Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>193</sup> Campbell, *The Pivot*, p. 26.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

# The PLA, A2/AD and the ADF: Lessons for Future Maritime Strategy

Timothy J. Blizzard

Over the past two decades the PLA has developed an operational concept designed to deny US naval forces use of vast areas of ocean. Dubbed Anti Access/Area Denial (A2/AD), this operational concept leverages technological developments in long range anti-maritime weapons, networking and sensors to target naval forces, with precision, over a large portion of the western Pacific. Utilising a case study of the methods, systems and organisation the PLA has wielded to forge such a formidable A2/AD capability over the past two decades, this article contends that A2/AD offers Australia significant opportunities to offset the naval superiority the PLA holds over the ADF, and is thus a desirable, effective and achievable method of operations upon which the nation's wider maritime strategy can be founded.

## **A2/AD and the ADF's Future Maritime Strategy**

This article argues that A2/AD is both a desirable and achievable concept of operations for the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and could well serve as the foundation for a wider strategic doctrine designed to deal with the threat of high intensity, great power conflict in East Asia. Essentially an evolution of current 'Sea-Air Gap' doctrinal concept, A2/AD shifts the emphasis from the denial of sea control in areas close to the Australian littorals to an area encompassing most of the Indonesian archipelago. This both prevents hostile naval formations from standing off and hinders manoeuvre by denying vast areas of strategically and operationally significant geography to enemy amphibious and strike forces.

From an operational viewpoint the ADF and People's Liberation Army (PLA) face nearly identical challenges, and thus the leverage of technological trends to locally offset aggregate naval superiority, as exemplified by the Chinese, is a low cost and low risk approach to ensure the ADF is capable of defending Australia against a superior opponent. Additionally, achieving a formidable A2/AD capability is neither cost prohibitive, considering the elements already in place, nor does it require a drastic force structure alteration. Indeed, with the foundational elements of the kill chain implemented, reasonably large portions of the ADF could theoretically still undertake expeditionary warfare and allied operations in other areas or even theatres, without compromising the defensive system.

Australia is part of an Asian security architecture which has been regionally dominant for over seventy years. As a treaty ally of the United States, Australia enjoys the benefits of an indirect link to a wider security network via a number of US mutual defence arrangements, which include Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan. Australia is a member of the Five Power Defence Arrangements committing it to security cooperation with Malaysia and Singapore, and enjoys a close bilateral security relationship with Japan. Thus, although only two of these bilateral treaty commitments include mutual defence clauses,<sup>195</sup> given Australia's deep integration with virtually all of South East Asia, and our close alliance with the world's premiere maritime power, the question may arise as to why the ADF even needs an independent maritime strategy. If the likelihood of direct armed attack on Australia, especially in a bilateral context, is low, why should the Australian people devote time, energy and resources to countering such an unlikely threat?

Unfortunately, the geostrategic environment Australia has enjoyed over the past seven decades is rapidly changing. For the first time since 1945, a significant naval power has emerged in East Asia which is not integrated into the US-led regional security architecture.<sup>196</sup> Additionally, this power is a strategic competitor of the United States. This 'major power adversary' is the PLA. The ADF now has to contend with the possibility of confronting a major maritime power, with bilateral naval superiority, operating in our northern approaches. In terms of pure military capability, it is the greatest threat the Australian military has had to contend with since the fall of Imperial Japan. Obviously, given the numerous treaty commitments and security architecture with which Australia is engaged, it is unlikely that the ADF should expect to face such a threat alone. However, in the event of a general conflict, clearly it is the government's expectation that the ADF is capable of providing sufficient capability to independently defend the Australian theatre in all *reasonable* contingencies:

The first Strategic Defence Objective is to deter, deny and defeat any attempt by a hostile country or non-state actor to attack, threaten or coerce Australia. The Government is providing Defence with the capability and resources it needs to be able to independently and decisively respond to military threats, including incursions into Australia's air, sea and northern approaches.<sup>197</sup>

---

<sup>195</sup> Australia has mutual defence treaty (ANZUS) which includes the United States and New Zealand.

<sup>196</sup> Estimates put total PLA(N) strength at some 85 Destroyers and 85 Frigates, all of modern design, by 2020. See Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS Report, RL33153, Congressional Research Service, 17 June 2015.

<sup>197</sup> Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2016), p. 17.

Indeed, the 2009 Defence White Paper clearly stated that even in the event of a general regional conflict the defence of Australia would primarily rely on sovereign capabilities.<sup>198</sup> This is not an uncontroversial objective,<sup>199</sup> and clearly not something which would apply in the extreme cases of nuclear attack or drastic bilateral overmatch.<sup>200</sup> If the Australian Government is serious about the above commitment as, arguably, it should be, given the potential limitations of allied capability to assist in the early stages of any conflict, then a clear operational concept must be formulated in order to impose severe costs on that 'major power adversary', should they initiate operations against Australia.

Such a drastic shift in the geostrategic landscape with which Australia must contend poses fundamental challenges to long-established Australian strategic doctrine, and the ADF's core military doctrine which underpins wider national strategy. Australia has experienced five dominant doctrinal paradigms, at the strategic level, since Federation.<sup>201</sup> Each of these strategic eras reflects a particular threat, conflict or wider geostrategic circumstance which dominated Australian planning and strategy. The watershed between these eras is often the termination of a conflict or the emergence of a new threat. This process is clearly evident in the transition from forward defence to 'Defence of Australia' as outlined in the 1976 Defence White Paper,<sup>202</sup> released at the conclusion of the decade-long Vietnam War. The strategic doctrine of forward defence, which had been dominant since the Korean War, was designed to counter the threat of revolutionary communism destabilising South East Asia and installing unfriendly governments in the region.<sup>203</sup> The end of the Vietnam War, combined with the revolution in western relations with China, fundamentally shifted Canberra's strategic outlook, practically removing the threat of communist subversion from Australian strategic calculus. What emerged from that transition was a strategic doctrine which emphasised self-reliance in the provision of fundamental Australian security.<sup>204</sup> Since 1975, it has been a core assumption of Australian defence planning that it is both Australia's responsibility and within the nation's resources to provide for its own defence in all but the most extreme of circumstances, as is evidenced by a series of White Papers.

<sup>198</sup> Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), p. 65.

<sup>199</sup> Paul Dibb, '2016 Defence White Paper: Solid Policy with Funding to Match', *The Australian*, 11 March 2016.

<sup>200</sup> Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, p. 50.

<sup>201</sup> Peter Edwards, *Learning from History: Some Strategic Lessons from the 'Forward Defence' Era*, ASPI Strategy series (Barton: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2015), p. 5.

<sup>202</sup> Department of Defence, *Australian Defence* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1976), p. 10.

<sup>203</sup> Edwards, *Learning from History*, p. 5.

<sup>204</sup> Department of Defence, *Australian Defence*, p. 10.

The collapse of governance in East Timor and the emergence of global Islamic extremism, in 1999 and 2001 respectively, brought an end to Defence of Australia as a strategically dominant doctrinal paradigm. The contribution to the Global War on Terror repositioned Australia as a globally relevant military actor when engaged in coalition with the United States.<sup>205</sup> Additionally, the violence and political instability in Dili during the 1999 independence referendum exposed the divergence of Australian and US interests in the region,<sup>206</sup> and the need for Australia to act independently in the 'arc of instability' throughout Oceania.<sup>207</sup> These operations illustrated the need to move to a hybrid strategic model, one which emphasised the capability for expeditionary warfare—unilaterally within the region and in concert with the United States and other partners globally—in addition to the foundational security provided by the ADF in the Australian theatre. This shift in strategic doctrine has produced a drastic increase in the ADF's ability to project power, with what is now a regionally dominant amphibious capability and a much more flexible and deployable army.<sup>208</sup>

We are almost certainly in the midst of another strategic watershed in 2016. The end of the Global War on Terror, in combination with the emergence of the PLA as a regional competitor to US naval dominance, has challenged the fundamental strategic assumptions upon which the current hybrid model was formulated. A realistic appraisal of Australia's strategic environment over the last forty years reveals a relatively benign region, integrated into a stable geopolitical order and utterly dominated by US naval power. However, this metric will drastically shift over the next three decades. The Australian strategic community now has to contend with the prospect of a major naval power in East Asia which, through a combination of Anti-Access/Area Denial capabilities and blue water naval assets, has the potential to pose a strategically significant conventional threat to the Australian mainland, even whilst engaged in a general conflict with the United States. Clearly, considering the US alliance and the stated US expectation of active Australian participation in any serious conflict,<sup>209</sup> the ADF and wider Australian strategic community must formulate a new strategic doctrine—underpinned by a concurrent concept of operations—designed to successfully engage in a high intensity conflict in the Asia Pacific, including our northern approaches, against an enemy which may

---

<sup>205</sup> Robert Hill, 'The War in Iraq ADF Operations in the Middle East in 2003', Department of Defence, 2004, <[www.defence.gov.au/publications/lessons.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/publications/lessons.pdf)> [Accessed 5 October 2016], p. 10.

<sup>206</sup> For US reactions and support of the operation see Hugh White, 'The Road to INTERFET: Reflections on Australian Strategic Decisions Concerning East Timor, December 1998-September 1999', *Security Challenges*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Autumn 2008), p. 83.

<sup>207</sup> Dennis Rumley, Vivian Forbes and Christopher Griffin, *Australia's Arc of Instability: The Political and Cultural Dynamics of Regional Security* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), p. 1-2.

<sup>208</sup> Ken Gleiman and Peter Dean, *Beyond 2017: The Australian Defence Force and Amphibious Warfare*, ASPI Strategy series (Barton: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, July 2015), p. 21.

<sup>209</sup> Jan Van Tol, *AirSea Battle: A Point-of-Departure Operational Concept* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010), p. 51

enjoy local naval superiority. Thus the current 'deterrence'-based doctrinal model may need to shift to a 'defence'-based military doctrine, where we cannot expect current capabilities to effectively prevent hostile action by a great power within the context of a wider conflict, and thus must focus tactics, assets and capabilities towards the conduct of a high intensity, defensive naval campaign in our primary area of operations.<sup>210</sup>

Predicting the course of future conflict is a difficult task, one which is nearly impossible to achieve with perfect accuracy. However, an evaluation of the relationship between strategic objectives and relative capabilities reveals incentives which will likely restrict military actions. Such an evaluation of the strategic environment in the western Pacific reveals some very dangerous trends. Beijing's immediate strategic objectives rest in the domination of its near seas, including the long-term subjugation of Taiwan, as part of a wider goal of displacing US regional hegemony, which it clearly views as hostile to its long-term interests. In line with these longstanding strategic objectives the PLA is building substantial joint maritime capabilities which, by the mid-2020s, will not only provide Beijing with the credible option of achieving its strategic objectives by force, but may be in a position of regional overmatch over forward deployed US and allied forces. This is the first factor which will shape any regional conflict. The second is the aggregate superiority of US air and naval forces: the successful intervention of the US Third Fleet would drastically curtail the PLA's ability to operate along the first island chain, as would the deployment of substantial US Air Force strategic and tactical air power to the theatre. Thus, upon the opening of hostilities, these relative capabilities incentivise the following courses of action:

- The PLA will likely wage an aggressive, high intensity naval campaign to gain its strategic objectives while it enjoys local naval superiority.
- Allied basing capable of supporting significant US air power will be primary targets of Chinese air and naval operations in the opening days of any conflict.
- US battle forces—carrier strike groups—will be the targets of the PLA's joint A2/AD complex, rather than the focus of classic, main force encounters for which the PLA Navy (PLA(N)) is not optimised.

This broad analysis is consistent with the assumptions outlined in the US military's original AirSea battle concept, a doctrinal development designed to facilitate the effective delivery of combat capability into the western Pacific in

---

<sup>210</sup> For the dissociation between the three forms of military doctrine—'offensive', 'defensive' and 'deterrent'—see: Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 16.

the face of the PLA's A2/AD architecture. As stated by Benjamin Schreer,<sup>211</sup> one of the potentially decisive advantages Australia can provide the United States is access to high quality military facilities which are well placed to contest PLA(N) operations in the South China Sea. This reveals a confronting likelihood: in any regional conflict between the United States and China, Australia's northern basing infrastructure will most probably be a high priority target for the PLA, given the threat US strategic air power poses to its operations. Whatever the conflict's proximate cause, be it deliberate attack, miscalculation in the Ryukus or a formal Taiwanese declaration of independence, Beijing simply cannot ignore the possibility of potentially decisive amounts of US air power being staged from northern Australia. Additionally, given the above capability metrics, without large-scale forward deployed forces, primarily air power, the United States will possibly not be in a position to offer significant assistance during the first week of conflict. Obviously the threat to our northern basing is only magnified in any bilateral contingency, should the isolationist political trends personified by Donald Trump gain ascendancy in United States, for example.

In the event of such a general regional conflict, Australia's maritime geography limits the major threats to Australian security to maritime forces, given the logistical constraints of land-based air power. Key Australian infrastructure is simply far beyond the effective reach of much the PLA Air Force's (PLA(AF)) strategic air power, as even when equipped with the long-ranged CJ-20 Air Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM),<sup>212</sup> the H-6M based at Hainan Island is only able to strike Darwin at maximum range, well beyond the capability of escorting fighters and overflying the Philippines and Indonesia. Thus, the only realistic means by which the PLA can project strategically significant power against Australia is by surface forces and submarines.<sup>213</sup> The PLA's submarine fleet is not currently optimised for land attack missions, although instalment of the CJ-10 on a limited number of nuclear attack units is certainly a possibility.<sup>214</sup> Thus the primary threat arises in the form of surface formations. The PLA(N) is currently testing its first operational aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning*, a 60,000 ton Kuznetsov class, which is apparently the basis for the PLA(N)'s indigenous aircraft carrier series, of which there is at least a single unit in production, possibly two. This indigenous series should rival the *Liaoning* in displacement and air wing size. Given the observed level of investment to date, a fair estimate of PLA(N) carrier strength in 2030-35 is four fleet carriers, and enough destroyers and frigates to form four carrier strike group equivalents, in

---

<sup>211</sup> Benjamin Schreer, *Planning the Unthinkable War: 'AirSea Battle' and its implications for Australia*, ASPI Strategy series (Barton: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2013), p. 7.

<sup>212</sup> Ian Easton, 'The Assassin Under the Radar: China's DH-10 Cruise Missile Program', *Futuregram* 09-005, Project 2049 Institute, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>213</sup> Ballistic missiles are clearly a threat as well but, given the ranges involved, unless WMDs are utilised the PLA is unlikely to use ICBMs with the requisite mass to achieve the necessary effects with conventional warheads.

<sup>214</sup> O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, p. 14.

addition to numerous surface action groups.<sup>215</sup> Additionally, the PLA has announced plans for a blue water amphibious capability, in the form of an indigenously designed landing helicopter dock (LHD), named the Type 081.<sup>216</sup> Reportedly, three are already under construction.<sup>217</sup> Consequently, the most likely threat the ADF could face in the event of a general conflict in East Asia will be PLA(N) carrier strike group equivalents operating against the RAAF's northern basing infrastructure and the port facilities in Darwin,<sup>218</sup> and amphibious strike groups<sup>219</sup> conducting amphibious operations to secure island bases in the Indonesian archipelago in order to defend maritime communications. Clearly Australia is unlikely to face the full weight of any great power's naval forces, given other commitments. Thus, a realistic objective is joint ADF forces having the ability to successfully engage a single formation equivalent to a carrier strike group and/or an amphibious strike group operating in our northern approaches.

A2/AD is an attractive concept of operations for such a defensive strategic doctrine. Combining wide area Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities and long range weapons in a networked Command, Control, Communications and Computers (C4) complex, A2/AD is an operational concept designed to deny access and use of vast areas of operationally significant maritime geography to an opposing naval force. In principle, its core innovation is the dramatically increased range at which large naval formations can be effectively engaged by defensive missile forces. Ironically, the local naval superiority the PLA(N) is expected to enjoy in the opening phases of any conflict with the United States is a direct result of the PLA's vast A2/AD complex, which has significantly complicated the planned reinforcement of the Seventh Fleet from the continental United States. Indeed, the leverage of long range systems to deny access and disrupt the operations of forward deployed forces has been a key technological offset utilised by the PLA to counter overwhelming aggregate US naval superiority. In just two short decades China's A2/AD capability has generated drastic reappraisals of fundamental US naval doctrine from the American strategic community,<sup>220</sup> and even calls for the abandonment of the

---

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>216</sup> The Type 081 should displace about 20,000 tons, and thus be roughly equivalent to the Mistral class LHD. 'Type 081 Aviation Assault Ship (LPH / LHA)', GlobalSecurity.org, <[www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/type-81-lha.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/type-81-lha.htm)> [Accessed 3 October 2016].

<sup>217</sup> O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization*, p. 36.

<sup>218</sup> Gleiman and Dean, *Beyond 2017*, p. 21.

<sup>219</sup> Susan Hutchins, William Kemple, David Kleinman and Susan Hocevar, 'Expeditionary Strike Group: Command Structure Design Support', 10th International Command and Control Research & Technology Symposium, Naval Postgraduate School, 2005, Monterey, p. 4. In the US Navy an Expeditionary (Amphibious) Strike Group is an autonomous naval formation designed to conduct amphibious operations, usually based around a USMC battalion landing team, amphibious warfare vessels, major surface combatants and a submarine.

<sup>220</sup> Seth Cospey, Bryan McGrath and Timothy Walton, *Sharpening the Spear: The Carrier, the Joint Force, and High-End Conflict* (Washington, DC: Hudson Institute, 2015).

Ford Class CVN.<sup>221</sup> Yet in no metric whatsoever is the PLA(N) close to being comparable to the US Navy (USN) in aggregate terms. The level of success the PLA has achieved in developing an A2/AD capability, the similar operational challenges which confront the PLA and ADF in the event of high-end conflict, and the leverage of long-term trends in wide area, land based surveillance and weapons systems to locally offset significant naval inferiority, all warrant significant attention given the strategic and operational challenges the ADF faces in the Asia Pacific.

### **Case Study: The Development of the PLA's A2/AD Complex in the Western Pacific 1995-2015.**

The PLA's answer to the operational challenge posed by the entrance of US battle forces into the Taiwan Strait during the crisis of 1996, established over the last two decades, has been the development of an integrated A2/AD system.<sup>222</sup> This battle network is comprised of the combination of Anti-Ship Cruise Missile (ASCM) armed maritime strike aircraft, medium range ballistic missiles (MRBM), dedicated C4 facilities and a layered, wide area ocean surveillance system. This system leverages developments in long range precision weapons and wide area sensor networks to allow precision targeting of US and allied basing and maritime forces out to the second island chain, with the intent of deterring the entrance of US reserve forces from the continental United States in the event of a military confrontation, and restricting the operation of forward deployed forces.<sup>223</sup> It is the development of this A2/AD system which has provided the first real challenge to the operational mobility, and thus utility, of US carrier strike groups since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Over the last ten years the PLA has leveraged technological developments in two types of weapon systems to drastically increase the potential reach and lethality of the kinetic threat to US battle forces in the western Pacific. The weapon which has undoubtedly garnered the most public attention is the ballistic missile. A development of the DF-21C MRBM, which is designed to strike US basing on Okinawa and mainland Japan, the primary technological breakthrough the PLA has made in this arena is the DF-21D, Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile (ASBM). The ASBM is a key element in the development of the A2/AD concept, as the fielding of a weapon with an 800+ nautical mile (nm) range and a flight time measured in minutes has

---

<sup>221</sup> Noel Williams, 'The US Navy's Self-Imposed Blockade', War on the Rocks, 19 October 2015, <[warontherocks.com/2015/10/the-u-s-navys-self-imposed-blockade/](http://warontherocks.com/2015/10/the-u-s-navys-self-imposed-blockade/)> [Accessed 3 October 2016].

<sup>222</sup> Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security developments Involving the PRC, Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2015, p. 78.

<sup>223</sup> The second island chain, as defined in Chinese naval strategy, is an arbitrary line running from northern Japan, through the Marianas to Guam and West Papua, see N. Li, 'The Evolution of China's Naval Strategy and Capabilities: From "Near Coast" and "Near Seas" to "Far Seas"', *Asian Security*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2009), p. 129.

considerably complicated US naval operations in the western Pacific, requiring the development of significant technological and tactical countermeasures.<sup>224</sup> The DF-21D was apparently tested against a land target in western China in 2013, though to date no successful engagement of a moving target at sea has been reported.<sup>225</sup> Perhaps of equal operational significance is the PLA's ASCM capability: the YJ-18 ASCM is currently being fielded on several destroyer and submarine classes in PLA(N) service.<sup>226</sup> When launched from subsurface platforms, the YJ-18 is designed to strike US naval formations from beyond the reach of their outer anti-submarine warfare (ASW) perimeter, with targeting cued from the wider battle network. The development of the YJ-12 ASCM has significantly improved the PLA(AF)'s maritime strike capability by allowing strike aircraft to achieve a launch range well beyond the defensive surface-to-air-missile (SAM) umbrella.<sup>227</sup> These weapons have drastically increased the reach and lethality of PLA anti-maritime forces, which at the very least will move the operational stations of USN battle forces further from Taiwan, and thus substantially degrade their ability to intervene given the limited range and persistence of USN tactical air power.

As much as the development of the PLA's missile arsenal has potentially changed the game in the western Pacific, it is only the last link in the A2/AD kill chain: weapons are useless without timely and accurate detection, location and classification of US battle forces. The Chinese Ocean Surveillance System (COSS) aims to achieve the necessary ISR capability by applying two echelons of sensors, each with multiple systems. The first echelon is designed to detect shipping by utilising a wide area search, the second to achieve precise classification and higher resolution track data to support the relevant missile forces.<sup>228</sup> Two primary systems constitute the PLA's first echelon sensors: a Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) and Electronic Intelligence (ELINT) satellite constellation and a Sky Wave radar network. The current foundation of the COSS's space-based ISR capability is the Yaogan constellation. Launched since 2006, it includes five SAR and

---

<sup>224</sup> Cospey et al., *Sharpening the Spear*, p. 57.

<sup>225</sup> Robert Johnson, 'China's Successfully Tests "Carrier Killer" Missile In The Gobi Desert', *Business Insider Australia*, 26 January 2013, <[www.businessinsider.com.au/chinas-carrier-killer-missile-test-proves-df-21d-lives-up-to-name-2013-1](http://www.businessinsider.com.au/chinas-carrier-killer-missile-test-proves-df-21d-lives-up-to-name-2013-1)>

<sup>226</sup> Michael Pilger, *China's New YJ-18 Antiship Cruise Missile: Capabilities and Implications for U.S. Forces in the Western Pacific*, US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Staff Research Report, 28 October 2015, p. 2. The YJ-18 is a long range, sea skimming ASCM, with a 290 nm (530 km) range and a terminal attack speed of Mach 3. It is roughly equivalent to the SS-N-27B/SIZZLER ASCM, which is fielded on eight of China's twelve Russian-built Kilo class SSKs.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. Essentially an enlarged Kh-31, the YJ-12 provides the PLA with a standoff capability approaching 200 nm (370 km).

<sup>228</sup> Jonathan Solomon, 'Defending the Fleet from China's Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile: Naval Deception's Roles in Sea-Based Missile Defense', Master of Arts Thesis, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University, 2011, p. 11.

fifteen ELINT satellites.<sup>229</sup> These satellites provide COSS with wide area, all weather surveillance: each cluster of ELINT satellites provides a passive sensor footprint of some 3,500 km, though these are inherently limited by target Emissions Control (EMCON) procedures. The five SAR Yaogan's make a sweep of the western Pacific roughly every four hours.<sup>230</sup> In combination, the SAR and ELINT constellations provide 24/7 surveillance of the western Pacific, which is, however, inherently intermittent. The other primary long range, wide area surveillance system is the PLA's Over The Horizon–Backscatter (OTH-B) radar system. The OTH-B system is located in the Guangzhou Military Region, has a 60 degree field of view and a rough footprint stretching from the south of Kyushu to Mindanao, projecting roughly 2,000 km into the western Pacific.<sup>231</sup> The combination of the five SAR satellites, the ELINT Yaogan clusters and OTH-B theoretically provide the PLA with a dense and redundant method of detecting shipping. However, none of these first echelon sensors can reliably provide target classification, or likely even generate or hold a track of sufficient resolution to allow a missile strike, hence the need for a second echelon of sensors which have much higher resolution, but a much smaller sensor footprint.

Second echelon sensors in COSS are divided into two classes, orbital platforms and aircraft. The orbital arm of the second echelon consists of five Electro Optical (EO) imaging satellites, each with orbital paths designed to take them over the western Pacific during daylight hours. The EO Yoagans provide COSS with target verification and classification, in addition to high fidelity track data which, in turn, improves the accuracy of OTH-B via Coordinate Registration. Combined with the BeiDou navigational satellite constellation, these EO satellites can achieve precise geo-location of an identified target whilst the orbital path permits. The other major arm of COSS second echelon sensors are Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). These systems provide several benefits in comparison to space-based systems in both persistence and responsiveness. Unlike satellites a terrestrial platform can maintain a track for extended periods, providing the central command with continual strike quality targeting data. Unlike satellites, however, these platforms are far more vulnerable to tactical air power and surface to air missiles.

---

<sup>229</sup> S. Chandrashekar and Soma Perumal, *China's Constellation of Yaogan Satellites & the Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile – An Update* (Bangalore: International Strategic and Security Studies Programme, 2015), p. ii.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>231</sup> Mark Stokes, 'China's Evolving Conventional Strategic Strike Capability: The Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile Challenge to U.S. Maritime Operations in the Western Pacific and Beyond', Project 2049 Institute, 14 September 2009 p. 19. The Chinese system is unlikely to be as advanced as comparable western radars, with an estimated tracking error of twenty to forty kilometres, compared to US OTHR accuracy of eight to thirty kilometres. Eric Hagt and Matthew Dunin, 'China's Anti Ship Ballistic Missile, Developments and Missing Links', *Naval War College Review*, vol. 62, no. 4 (Autumn 2009), pp. 92-94.

As can be seen this complex of overlaying sensors and platforms is necessary to achieve near real-time detection, track and classification of naval units within COSS's footprint. Each system has significant strengths and weaknesses, which necessitates the synergistic overlaying of multiple platforms. However, the large inflow of information such a system generates imposes a significant C4 burden on the PLA. This challenge is addressed by the use of a data fusion centre, which is likely located with the PLA Joint Theatre Command.<sup>232</sup> As each system is complementary, managing contacts from SAR, OTH-B and MPA, for example, and fusing the information into a coherent picture is a key element in COSS's role within the A2/AD operational concept, and is critical in allowing PLA command to strike transient targets. Although this centralised command provides significant benefits, it also entails significant vulnerabilities, as either hard or soft decapitation operations could have a drastic influence on the PLA's operational and tactical performance, as would any compromising of the wider C4 complex.

### **Key A2/AD Systems and Capabilities Developed over the Last Two Decades by the PLA:**

- *Wide area, multi-layered, ocean surveillance system:* Two echelons of sensors, one optimised for wide area search and detection of shipping, the second optimised for classification and fire solution generation.
- *Integrated data fusion capability within a dedicated C4 complex:* The ability to manage data inflows from multiple systems and sensors at a centralised data fusion centre is critical in forming a coherent picture of the battle-space, as is the ability to network sensors, decision makers and missile forces.
- *Long range missile forces:* The development and introduction of successive generations of long range anti-ship missiles, staged from land, air, surface and subsurface launch platforms, with an effective engagement footprint projecting 1,000 nm from the Chinese littorals.

### **The ADF and Opportunities for A2/AD Development**

Contesting the 'Sea-Air Gap' with combined naval and air forces has been a core operational objective for the ADF since 1976. Indeed, many of the low cost opportunities for A2/AD development in an Australian context exist because of the investment in the infrastructure and technologies developed in the post-Vietnam War era. However, when the infamous Defence of Australia white paper was being developed in the early 1970s, the only conceivable conventional surface threat existed in the submarine-heavy

---

<sup>232</sup> Solomon, 'Defending the Fleet from China's Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile', p. 11.

Soviet Pacific Fleet, which posed a remote threat to continental Australia. Then, as now, Australia's South East Asian neighbours are not major maritime powers, and even in coalition lack even the potential capability to establish the requisite sea control to begin amphibious operations in Australia's north. Thus, within that context, a range limited maritime strike capability founded on platforms like the F/A-18A Hornet and Harpoon missile was more than adequate.<sup>233</sup> As outlined in earlier sections, the development of blue water naval capabilities by the PLA(N) has rendered the tactical and operational rationale behind the current concept of operations practically obsolete. Put simply, the current maritime strike system is not optimised to engage integrated naval formations with organic fighter cover, Airborne Early Warning (AEW), defensive vessels as formidable as the Type 52D Destroyer, and long range strike systems. Strike radius is the key weakness in Australia's ability to defend our northern basing infrastructure—arguably one of the nation's physical centres of gravity in any major conflict—at both the tactical and operational levels.

## Long Range Missile Forces

As discussed in the previous sections one of the main technological developments the PLA has leveraged to further its A2/AD capability is advances in longer range weapons. The increased reach of maritime strike platforms and land based missile forces are key enablers in restricting access of US battle forces to optimum operational positions. The ADF's primary ASCM is the AGM-84C Harpoon Block II missile. The Harpoon is a lightweight, subsonic, relatively short-range weapon, which utilises a low altitude attack profile to approach target vessels from below the radar horizon.<sup>234</sup> Its tactical utility is, however, being significantly eroded by the increasingly capable surface formations with which the Harpoon will have to contend, and the future development of active homing SAM systems. For the first time since the missile's introduction into active service, western navies face a potential challenge of striking naval formations with organic fighter cover and AEW: the proliferation of AEW helicopters such as the Z-18J and Ka-31<sup>235</sup> has considerably increased the target formation's radar horizon,<sup>236</sup> which in combination with organic fighter support drastically complicates the tactical employment of Harpoon class ASCMs. The deployment of fixed wing naval AEW will only increase the target's sensor

---

<sup>233</sup> The F-111 provided much greater range than the F/A-18A, but was both relatively low in numbers and vulnerable to fighter defences.

<sup>234</sup> For information on the Harpoon, see Randy Jackson, 'Harpoon Block II', *Boeing Backgrounder*, 2013.

<sup>235</sup> See 'China Has Developed a New Military Transport Helicopter Z-18', Defence Blog, 6 January 2015, <[defence-blog.com/news/china-has-developed-a-new-military-transport-helicopter-z-18.html](http://defence-blog.com/news/china-has-developed-a-new-military-transport-helicopter-z-18.html)> and 'Chinese Military Aviation: Helicopters III', <[chinese-military-aviation.blogspot.com.au/p/helicopters-iii.html](http://chinese-military-aviation.blogspot.com.au/p/helicopters-iii.html)> [Accessed 5 October 2016].

<sup>236</sup> A Z-18J on station at 4,000 m altitude would provide the PLA(N) with a radar horizon of 273 km, well beyond the Harpoon's maximum launch range providing ample opportunity for defending fighters to intercept inbound strike formations.

footprint. In addition to the technological and force structure factors which are eroding the Harpoon's tactical viability, its range also limits its value at the operational level when being utilised in an A2/AD operational concept.

The RAAF's seventy-one Classic Hornets will be replaced by the F-35A between 2016 and 2022, and with their departure the Harpoon will be limited to the F/A-18F (and P-8), which will be removed from service by 2030.<sup>237</sup> The Harpoon will not be integrated on the F-35A.<sup>238</sup> Hence, whether the ADF adopts A2/AD as an operational concept or not, the RAAF needs a new missile. Given the significant cost of integrating a weapon onto a tactical fighter,<sup>239</sup> the ADF is very unlikely to select a system that other F-35 users are not utilising. This leaves three realistic possibilities. The first is the AGM-154C1 Joint Stand-Off Weapon (JSOW).<sup>240</sup> The AGM-154C1 adds a moving target capability to the already operational AGM-154C by integrating Link 16 and improving its seeker software, to include shipping.<sup>241</sup> Although the AGM-154C1 has several advantages in terms of cost, scale and currency in the RAAF, it imposes significant tactical limitations. As the weapon is not internally powered, in order to achieve Harpoon-like ranges the launch platform must remain at high altitude, leaving itself, and the JSOW, reasonably vulnerable to defensive fighters and semi-active SAM systems, many of which, like the HQ-9, have comparatively larger engagement footprints.

The second realistic option is the Norwegian Joint Strike Missile (JSM). Based on the currently operational Naval Strike Missile, the JSM is a joint venture between Raytheon and the Norwegian defence contractor Kongsberg.<sup>242</sup> The combination of a very small frontal profile, frontal RCS (Radar Cross Section) reduction, low infra-red emissions from the 'microturbo' turbojet engine and passive seeker give the JSM minimal electromagnetic and infra-red signatures, making the missile difficult for shipboard defences to counter. The RAAF has apparently investigated a

<sup>237</sup> Andrew Davies, *ADF Capability Snapshot 2015: Part 1—RAAF*, ASPI Strategic Insight (Barton: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2015), p. 8.

<sup>238</sup> Doug Hayward, 'F-35 Weapon System Overview', Distribution Statement, Lockheed Martin, 2010, p. 12.

<sup>239</sup> Lance Halvorston, 'The F-111C Aircraft for Australia', *Wings*, Summer 2010, p. 18; Nigel Pittaway, 'ADF Weapon Project: JASSM to Enter Service this Year', *Australian Defence Magazine*, 1 November 2011, <[www.australiandefence.com.au/archive/adf-weapons-project-jassm-to-enter-service-this-year-adm-july-2012](http://www.australiandefence.com.au/archive/adf-weapons-project-jassm-to-enter-service-this-year-adm-july-2012)> [Accessed 5 October 2016]

<sup>240</sup> For general JSOW information see 'AGM-154A Joint Standoff Weapon [JSOW]', Federation of American Scientists, <[fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/smart/agm-154.htm](http://fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/smart/agm-154.htm)>.

<sup>241</sup> 'AGM-154 Joint Standoff Weapon (JSOW)' Raytheon, <[www.raytheon.com/capabilities/products/jsow/](http://www.raytheon.com/capabilities/products/jsow/)> [Accessed 5 October 2016].

<sup>242</sup> The JSM is a 400 kg, subsonic ASCM, with a 120 kg titanium warhead. It has a 180 km range. The weapon is specifically designed to fit within the F-35A's internal weapons bay, maintaining the aircraft's Very Low Observability (VLO). See 'Kongsberg's NSM/JSM Anti-Ship & Strike Missile Attempts to Fit in Small F-35 Stealth Bay', *Defence Industry Daily*, 12 November 2015, <[www.defenseindustrydaily.com/norwegian-contract-launches-nsm-missile-03417/](http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/norwegian-contract-launches-nsm-missile-03417/)> [Accessed 5 October 2016] for a full description of the NSM and JSM development and testing.

joint venture with the Royal Norwegian Air Force in integrating the JSM onto the F-35A.<sup>243</sup> The third potential option is Lockheed Martin's Long Range Anti-Ship Missile (LRASM). The LRASM is a development of the Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM) family currently operational with the RAAF and USAF/USN. Leveraging the JASSM-ER variant, the LRASM will have an air launched engagement range of between 500 and 600 nm (930-1,100 km).<sup>244</sup> Critically, the LRASM is designed to leverage advances in autonomous targeting, allowing the missile to operate in heavy EW (electronic warfare) environments, where satellite data-link performance is impaired. The missile is reportedly capable of making approach vector alterations based on defensive dispositions and independent target selection and discrimination.<sup>245</sup>

Obviously the selection of a specific weapon for a tactical fighter is multifaceted process, and all too often research articles and pundits fall into the trap of backing pet projects and systems. Cost, allied interoperability, sustainment, the confidence in resupply, development options and partner collaboration are often as important as tactical capability in making selections. Thus, the analysis made in this paper focuses only upon the rival weapons' utility in an A2/AD operational concept as described above. Given the general utility of the AGM-154C1 in both land and maritime strike, its service with the USN (and probably RAAF) and lack of integration cost, it is very likely said weapon will be operational with RAAF F-35As, whether another ASCM is purchased or not. However, given the weapon's limitations in range and attack profile, it is unsuited to employment against well defended surface formations. Tactically both the JSM and LRASM address the challenge presented by organic fighter and AEW support. However, given the context of this article the LRASM clearly has greater application in any A2/AD system. The LRASM-F-35A combination would allow the RAAF strike naval formations as far as 1,200 nm from its base bases. The JSM-F-35A combination would provide roughly half the strike radius, and thus does little to leverage the ADF's massive sensor footprint. Additionally, LRASM is designed to be utilised by naval vessels, which would increase the reach of RAN frigates, destroyers and potentially submarines by an order of magnitude. Preventing access to operationally significant areas of ocean is a key objective in A2/AD, which only becomes more critical as naval surface forces increase the range at which they pose a threat to Australian

---

<sup>243</sup> 'Norway and Australia to Cooperate on JSM-Development', Government.no, 26 February 2015, <[www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/norge-og-australia-enige-om-jsm-samarbeid/id2397609/](http://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/norge-og-australia-enige-om-jsm-samarbeid/id2397609/)> [Accessed 5 October 2016].

<sup>244</sup> It employs the same 1,000lb BROACH warhead and advanced signature reduction methods as the JASSM — Bryan Clarke, *Commanding the Seas: A Plan To Reinvigorate U.S. Navy Surface Warfare* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2014), p. 25.

<sup>245</sup> Lockheed Martin, 'LRASM', <[www.lockheedmartin.com.au/us/products/LRASM.html](http://www.lockheedmartin.com.au/us/products/LRASM.html)> [Accessed 5 October 2016].

infrastructure.<sup>246</sup> Given the probable operational life of such a system will be measured in decades, whether the LRASM is the specific weapon for the task or not, if the ADF wants to emulate the PLA's advances in this method of operations, long range systems are clearly where the appropriate investment should be made.

### Wide Area Surveillance: JORN and the Need for Orbital ISR

The ADF's primary 'first echelon' sensor is the Jindalee Operational Radar Network (JORN). JORN is an integrated network of three sky wave OTH radars, located in Longreach, Queensland; Alice Springs, Northern Territory; and Laverton, Western Australia.<sup>247</sup> The combined footprint of this array encompasses Papua New Guinea north to Manus Island, the majority of the Indonesian archipelago and a broad swath of Indian Ocean roughly the size of the Bay of Bengal. Much like OTH-B, JORN achieves its massive sensor footprint by bouncing radar beams off the ionosphere. Sky wave radars operate different scan techniques to microwave systems: the radar's footprint is divided into Dwell Interrogation Regions (DIR), which are made up of rectangular range-azimuth resolution cells determined by the total aperture, beam number and frequency. Achieving precise locations within these cells is difficult,<sup>248</sup> and although these inherent resolution limitations are being improved by JP 2025 Phase 6 which will include the application of advanced signal processing technology,<sup>249</sup> JORN should still be considered a first echelon sensor.

Powerful synergies exist between OTH radar systems—such as JORN—and orbital ISR. Despite their massive footprint, sky wave radars face significant resolution problems. Classification of ships by sky wave systems is nearly impossible and as evidenced by Chinese efforts, background clutter is a major challenge.<sup>250</sup> These problems have been addressed in the COSS architecture by the synergistic layering of long range radar and ELINT systems with high-resolution Earth Observation (EO) satellites. The 2009 Defence White Paper declared the government's desire for a dedicated satellite imaging capability,<sup>251</sup> although a sovereign military capability was all

<sup>246</sup> The Type 055 Cruiser/Heavy Destroyer is reportedly under construction for the PLA(N), with a displacement exceeding 10,000 tons and 128 VLS cells, including the YJ-1000 long range ASCM. 'Chinese TV Details Plans for Type 055 Destroyer', <[www.janes.com/article/48738/chinese-tv-details-plans-for-type-055-destroyer](http://www.janes.com/article/48738/chinese-tv-details-plans-for-type-055-destroyer)>

<sup>247</sup> The Longreach and Alice Springs systems cover a 90 degree arc, the Laverton array covers a much larger 180 degrees, providing coverage from nearly 90E/30S to the equator between Borneo and Sulawesi and terminating several hundred kilometres off the east coast of Queensland in the Coral Sea at around 152E. See Giuseppe Fabrizio, 'High Frequency Over the Horizon Radar', IEEE Lecture, Atlanta Georgia, May 2012, p. 24.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>249</sup> Department of Defence, *Defence Capability Plan, 2012* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2012), p. 97.

<sup>250</sup> Fabrizio, 'High Frequency Over the Horizon Radar', pp. 59-61.

<sup>251</sup> Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century*, p. 105.

but abandoned in 2016 White Paper: “Defence’s imagery and targeting capacity will be enhanced through greater access to allied and commercial space-based capabilities, strengthened analytical capability and enhanced support systems”.<sup>252</sup>

Clearly the ADF enjoys significant access to the US EO satellite constellation; however, these systems are not optimised for counter maritime operations.<sup>253</sup> Given JORN’s technological sophistication and massive, equatorial footprint, even greater synergies than the PLA achieved can be leveraged by just a single imaging satellite in ADF service, as the advantages of equatorial orbital mechanics allow a single satellite to make multiple passes per day, up to ten in a twenty-four-hour period.<sup>254</sup> There has been some question as to whether a SAR or EO system would best suit the ADF’s needs. The selection of these systems stems directly from the role the satellite is intended to fulfil, and given the broad area maritime search capability delivered by JORN, wide area search is not a high priority. Classification and resolution of targets identified by JORN is the key capability satellite ISR can provide the ADF in terms of A2/AD. A basic EO satellite would not be prohibitively expensive.<sup>255</sup>

## **Second Echelon ISR: High-Altitude Long-Endurance UAVs and Maritime Patrol Aircraft**

The MPA is a core element in most Naval Ocean Surveillance Systems (NOSS). As discussed previously, the MPA provides an additional layer of second echelon sensors, allowing persistent tracking of maritime targets and the potential for visual or electromagnetic classification at long range. The RAAF’s AP-3C fleet are to be replaced by fifteen P-8A Poseidon aircraft and seven MQ-4C Triton HALE UAVs, though the order for the Tritons has currently not been placed.<sup>256</sup> Although the P-8A will be extremely useful as a long-endurance ELINT platform, in any general conflict these precious aircraft will have ASW tasking, limiting their role in ASuW (anti-surface warfare) operations. This leaves the ADF with the MQ-4C as the primary

---

<sup>252</sup> Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, p. 87.

<sup>253</sup> This access may be restricted in a high intensity conflict simply due to higher allied priorities.

<sup>254</sup> For an explanation of equatorial orbital mechanics see Toto Marnanto Kadri, *Developing an Equatorial Earth Observation Satellite System*, National Institute of Aeronautics and Space – LAPAN Indonesia, COSPAR/IAF Symposium, Vienna, Austria, 12-23 February 2007, p. 8. Davies outlines the geographical advantages Australia enjoys in terms of satellite surveillance: Andrew Davies, ‘Around the World in Ninety Minutes: What an Australian Satellite System Could Do’, *ASPI Policy Analysis*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 21 May 2009, p. 5.

<sup>255</sup> France’s Pleiades system cost ~\$950 million (650 million Euros) for two units, delivers a 1.5 m resolution and a 60 km wide swath. Though, obviously this does not include the costs of establishing ground stations and an air force squadron to operate the system. See Peter B. de Selding, ‘Soyuz Launches French Pleiades Imaging Satellite’, *SpaceNews*, 7 December 2012, <[spacenews.com/soyuz-launches-french-pleiades-imaging-satellite/](http://spacenews.com/soyuz-launches-french-pleiades-imaging-satellite/)> [Accessed 5 October 2016].

<sup>256</sup> Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, p. 94.

tool to fill this link in the surveillance system. Powerful synergies present themselves if JORN and the MQ-4C are used in combination. A track provided by Triton would instantly provide calibration information for JORN, drastically improving resolution and thus geo-location. Relying on ELINT as a reliable means of classification is only possible if the target vessels are transmitting electromagnetic energy in the form of radars, data-links and radios. Strict EMCON procedures can effectively blind ELINT based surveillance systems, evidenced in the failures of the Soviet *Krug* direction finding network induced by USN EMCON tactics,<sup>257</sup> and can be reliably deceived by emulating the emissions of high value targets.<sup>258</sup> However, the operation of naval formations within JORN's estimated footprint would severely limit the opportunity for total EMCON by requiring minimal defensive measures; JORN effectively prevents the most effective counter to wide area ELINT systems as second echelon sensors.<sup>259</sup> This ELINT capability is of greater importance if satellite imagery and JORN's performance are both inhibited by adverse weather. Triton is also equipped with an advanced MFAS AESA (Multi-Function Active Sensor Active Electronically Scanned Array) air to surface radar, which could be used to generate high quality tracks of surface targets, however, this would leave the MQ-4C potentially vulnerable to any forward deployed combat air patrol.

## C4 Requirements

The ADF has already done much of the C4 work necessary to facilitate such a system. As part of plan Jericho the ADF in general and RAAF in particular have invested much into developing a networked and integrated force.<sup>260</sup> Although the ADF has endured persistent difficulties in fully utilising the WGS 6 satellite,<sup>261</sup> once these are resolved the ADF will have full access to wideband, secure satellite communications, which is a critical enabler in supporting very long range ASCMs such as the LRASM. Additionally the effort already ongoing under JP 2008 to facilitate WGS 6 in terms of ground based infrastructure and information dissemination will be foundational in any satellite ISR capability.<sup>262</sup> As described previously, a system of this complexity requires high levels of centralised data fusion, and again the RAAF has already laid the groundwork through the Vigilare C2 system, currently operational at RAAF Tindal. Vigilare fuses information from JORN,

<sup>257</sup> Solomon, 'Defending the Fleet from China's Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile', pp. 41-43

<sup>258</sup> See the use of the AN/ULQ-5 and AN/ULQ-6 blip-enhancers on minesweepers and destroyers in the 1960s. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>259</sup> For basic information on the MQ-4C, see Hairston, *MQ-4C Triton Persistent Maritime Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance*, Distribution Statement A, 2013, San Diego, CA.

<sup>260</sup> Jericho Vision, *Plan Jericho Information Statement*, Royal Australian Air Force, 2015, p. 4.

<sup>261</sup> WGS (Wideband Global Satellite-Communications/SATCOM). Construction of a satellite management station near Geraldton in WA is now seriously behind schedule. See APDR, 'JP 2008—Heading for the Projects of Concern List', *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, 1 April 2014, <[www.asiapacificdefencereporter.com/articles/431/JP-2008-heading-for-the-Projects-of-Concern-list](http://www.asiapacificdefencereporter.com/articles/431/JP-2008-heading-for-the-Projects-of-Concern-list)> [Accessed 5 October 2016].

<sup>262</sup> Department of Defence, *Defence Capability Plan, 2012*, p. 96.

E-7 Wedgetail AEW&C aircraft, civilian air traffic control radars, Army's AN/TPS-77 air search radars, RAN surface vessels and numerous other inputs into a single operational picture.<sup>263</sup> Along with Link-16, this system is a key enabler in facilitating network enabled operations throughout the joint force. However, Vigilare's current focus is air surveillance. In order to facilitate the kind of near real-time NOSS as utilised by the PLA, Vigilare needs to be built upon to provide the same data fusion capabilities across the spectrum of joint maritime operations, managing air, naval and potentially ground forces and threats. This will be critical in synergising JORN, Triton and orbital ISR for counter maritime operations, and thus should be located at the ADF's Headquarters, Joint Operational Command (HQJOC) in Kowen, ACT, as opposed to RAAF Tindal.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

As can be seen, most of the core systems of a formidable A2/AD capability are already either in place or are somewhere in the acquisition pipeline, and all that is realistically required to achieve the said capability is focused investment in the key areas of long range missiles, ISR and C4. Current force structure plans for the RAAF and RAN do not require alteration for the successful adoption of the A2/AD concept of operations. JORN, Triton, an orbital imaging capability and LRASM have a powerfully synergistic relationship, as each amplifies the other's strengths and together dramatically complicates the tactical picture for a hostile naval formation: the detection of a naval formation by JORN would automatically cue an imaging pass by a satellite, resolving the formation into number and type of units, weather permitting. Depending on the exact resolution achieved by CR techniques, JORN could possibly provide track data for a strike package and submarine there and then. If not, then Triton's ability to linger at the very edge of the target's sensor footprint, either passively gathering signals intelligence or moving to slightly closer to make a maximum range radar scan, achieves both classification and high fidelity tracks. Critically the combination of JORN with a second echelon sensor resolves the geo-location problem, providing persistent strike quality track data, information which not only constitutes a firing solution on the formation but drastically reduces AOU limitations. A squadron-sized strike package of F-35As, each armed with two LRASMs, external fuel tanks and flying a low speed-high altitude attack profile should be able to reach a launch point well beyond the typical 590 nm combat radius,<sup>264</sup> achieving a total engagement footprint with a radius of well over 1,000 nm, roughly the same size as the ADF's sensor footprint. Additionally, a single RAN submarine would have an engagement

---

<sup>263</sup> Karinne Logan, 'Air Vigilance: Boeing's Most Advanced Command and Control Solution Is Set to Revolutionize Global Air Defenses—and Comes from Australia', *Boeing Frontiers*, April 2009, p. 33.

<sup>264</sup> For performance parameters of the F-35A, see Jeremiah Gertler, *F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) Program*, CRS report, RL30563, Congressional Research Service, p. 50.

footprint with a comparable diameter. In combination these platforms, missiles and sensors constitute a truly formidable maritime A2/AD capability, comparable in geographical scale—though undeniably not in terms of mass—to the system the PLA has constructed in the western Pacific. Such a system would do much to offset the naval superiority the PLA(N) enjoys over the RAN, and provide an effective means of defending the ADF's northern basing infrastructure.

As stated above, the choice of military systems is about more than capability within a single operational concept: platforms and systems function across the spectrum of operations, and their applicability to high-end war fighting scenarios may not outweigh their lack thereof in low intensity or disaster relief contingencies. Additionally, procurement and through life cost, risk, industry participation, allied interoperability, sustainment and competing operational priorities are all major influences upon procurement decisions. Therefore, the following recommendations only address opportunities for development of an A2/AD system, as revealed through the PLA's experience to date, and thus make the assumption that A2/AD is a strategically desirable operational concept for the ADF.

#### **INVEST IN THE FAR LEFT AND RIGHT OF THE KILL CHAIN**

Several responses to the growing geopolitical challenges Australia faces in the Indo-Pacific have arisen over the past ten years. Professor Ross Babbage argued for a drastic increase in the size of the ADF to a frontline strength of either 300–400 F-35As or/and 20–30 advanced submarines, which presumably can only be funded by a commensurate increase in defence spending.<sup>265</sup> Professor Hugh White advocated the effective abandonment of a capable, though expensive, RAN surface fleet in order to focus investment on 'sea denial', allowing the acquisition of 24 submarines and 200 F-35As.<sup>266</sup> Undeniably these proposed paths would deliver the ADF significant conventional deterrence and a formidable defensive capability. However, their platform-centric nature imposes significant direct and opportunity costs, and are thus probably unlikely to be achievable given current global obligations and the government's commitment to spending 2% of GDP on defence. Nonetheless, even if these platform numbers are achievable or desirable, the lessons of the PLA's A2/AD development seem not to suggest investment in more platforms, but instead to leverage advances in maritime ISR, C4 and longer range missiles. By far these are the areas which would provide the ADF the greatest potential return on investment in terms of offsetting superior naval powers. Investing in the kill chain as a whole is foundational to the wider A2/AD capability, and improving the reach and depth of your sensors, your ability to fuse and

---

<sup>265</sup> Ross Babbage, 'Learning to Walk Amongst Giants: The New Defence White Paper', *Security Challenges*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Autumn 2008), p. 19.

<sup>266</sup> Hugh White, 'A Middling Power: Why Australia's Defence Is All At Sea', *The Monthly Essays*, *The Monthly Magazine*, September 2012.

disseminate information, and the reach of the platforms you have is far more important than total force numbers. If the ADF has the foundational elements of an A2/AD capability in place, in terms of sensors, networking, C2, weapons, logistics, doctrine and basing, total force levels can be raised if the geopolitical situation deteriorates.

### **HIGH-ALTITUDE LONG-ENDURANCE UAV AND ORBITAL ISR ARE KEY SYSTEMS**

Though government has publicly stated an intention to acquire these systems, neither is ordered nor approved at the date of authorship. Current plans are for seven MQ-4Cs which,<sup>267</sup> if we apply the one-third rule,<sup>268</sup> would deliver two systems airborne in a high-end military contingency, assuming no mechanical failures or combat losses. Any reduction in those numbers, to say five units, would leave a mere one-and-a-half airborne on average. That force level seems sub-optimal, given the ADF's immense area of operations. Increasing the number of Tritons to either ten or twelve would significantly increase availability for operational tasking, freeing up the P-8 fleet for ASW. The desire for orbital ISR, so clearly communicated in 2009, has seemingly retreated in 2013 and 2016.<sup>269</sup> Given the relatively low cost of investing in this capability—probably around \$1 billion AUD considering the Canadian RADARSAT<sup>270</sup> and French Pleiades examples—and the considerable synergistic benefits of combining such a system with JORN, sovereign orbital ISR should not be allowed to become a mere unfulfilled desire on the part of Defence. After the WGS integration is successfully completed, this should become a capability priority.

### **EMBRACE THE LONG RANGE WEAPONS REVOLUTION**

A primary technological trend the PLA has exploited in formulating its A2/AD system is the rapid increase the range of anti-ship weapons, be they ASCMs or ASBMs. Whether LRASM is *the* missile for the ADF or not, clearly a weapon of its class is far more desirable than relatively short range, lightweight systems such as the JSM in an A2/AD operational concept. Acknowledging the increasing reach of threat surface formations driven by the regional proliferation of land attack cruise missiles not only requires long range ASCMs, but accepting the fact that geography alone will not provide the protection it once did to the ADF's northern basing. Thus, hardening the RAAF's bare bases by the improvement of aircraft shelters and underground bunkering of munitions and fuel could substantially increase the system's resilience to kinetic attack. The 2016 Defence White Paper's stated intent to

---

<sup>267</sup> Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*.

<sup>268</sup> The 'one-third rule' is a rough approximation of the level of capability a specific unit can sustain continually; typically one third of the total.

<sup>269</sup> Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century*, p. 105; Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2013* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013), p. 79. Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, p. 87.

<sup>270</sup> The Canadian SAR satellite reportedly cost some \$650m including R&D. See Davies, 'Around the World in Ninety Minutes', p. 6.

purchase a Ground Based Air Defence missile system is a welcome improvement in this regard.<sup>271</sup>

The LRASM, perhaps in combination with the dual use AGM-154C1 (and its later derivatives), offers the greatest capability within the operational concept outlined above. If it were to be purchased, serious consideration should be given to its role in RAN surface and subsurface forces. The proliferation of long range ASCMs on PLA(N) surface and subsurface platforms, such as the YJ-18, has dramatically increased both their lethality and responsiveness when operating within an A2/AD architecture. The inclusion of LRASM, particularly on the Collins replacement, offers a powerful capability enhancement which additionally compensates for the conventional submarine's lack of transit speed. It would also provide the surface fleet with a credible offensive role within said operational plan. The 2016 White Paper outlined the desire for the ADF to acquire land-based ASCMs.<sup>272</sup> However, given the size of the ADF's primary area of operations utilising a land based missile is not an optimal means of delivering long range fire: even a land based derivative of the LRASM would only provide roughly half the engagement footprint of an LRASM–F-35A combination. Thus, the only realistic method of utilising these systems in a defensive A2/AD system is their forward deployment into Indonesia, which is an inherently uncertain proposition. The need for short range, land based systems in a defensive contingency seems reasonably redundant if the ADF has the ability to strike naval formations at 1,000 nm from its bare bases. Consequently, this is arguably an unwise investment, unless the intent is to use these systems in conjunction with offensive amphibious operations: the limitations of land based systems, given Australia's geography, makes them more capable offensive tools.

### **Summary of Requirements for the Development of an A2/AD Capability by the ADF**

- *Long range replacement for the Harpoon:* Whether the LRASM is the missile or not, investment in a long range missile for both the RAAF and RAN is a low risk, low cost, A2/AD opportunity.
- *Orbital ISR and Triton should be capability priorities:* An imaging satellite is a key link in the proposed kill chain and is by no means cost prohibitive, and given Triton's unique terrestrial ISR capability, up to twelve systems should be purchased.
- *The development of a new C4 system based on Vigilare:* Centralised data fusion is a key requirement for decision makers within a system which utilises such diverse sensors and platforms, and is critical in

---

<sup>271</sup> Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper*, p. 96.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

limiting Area of Uncertainty limitations, thus facilitating the effective use of missile forces.

Over the next fifteen years the ADF is well placed to deliver an A2/AD system comparable to the PLA's in geographical scope and more than commensurate with Australia's size and wealth, if the appropriate investments are made. The costs of such a system are by no means prohibitive, considering the elements which are already in place, and are certainly achievable given the current budgetary environment. This is of critical importance, as the opportunity cost of investing in these technologies—perhaps \$3 billion of additional expenditure over fifteen years—is comparatively small, as low as 1 per cent of allocated funding in the ten-year period covered by the 2016 Defence White Paper. Thus, A2/AD does not preclude other investment options, such as a nuclear submarine capability for example, and does not require the abandonment of currently planned capabilities. The combination of JORN, Triton, orbital ISR, F-35A, LRASM and an improved C4 capability, founded on Vigilare and Link 16, in addition to the RAN's already formidable future force structure, would pose substantial challenges to any great power operating in our northern approaches, and require the application of disproportionate capabilities and force levels to counter. Additionally, once the bones of the system are in place, it can be scaled up with relative ease via the acquisition of more platforms, should the geopolitical situation deteriorate. Adopting A2/AD as a core operational concept offers the ADF an approach to the unthinkable—a general conflict in the Asia Pacific—which is both monetarily achievable and provides a realistic chance of offsetting Chinese naval superiority within our primary area of operations.

*Timothy J. Blizzard is an historian and PhD student at Macquarie University, specialising in the Roman military. [tim.blizzard@students.mq.edu.au](mailto:tim.blizzard@students.mq.edu.au)*