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Institut mezinárodních studií

Jan Liška

**Pivot to Asia: What, Why and Whither? The  
Not So New Obama's Asia Policy**

*Diplomová práce*

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Autor práce: Bc. Jan Liška

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Jana Sehnálková

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## **Bibliografický záznam**

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## **Abstrakt**

Pivot neboli Rebalancování do Asie, je zahraničně politická iniciativa vyhlášená administrativou prezidenta Obamy na konci roku 2011. Jádrem této politiky tvoří prohlášení, že Spojené státy uznávají Asii-Pacifik jakožto nejdynamičtější světový region a motor světové ekonomiky, a že právě tady se rozhodne o budoucnosti globální politiky. Spojené státy – jakožto pacifická velmoc – pak budou v centru dění. Pivot do Asie je v zásadě zastřešujícím názvem pro celou sérii iniciativ, které USA v oblasti spustila. Jedná se o iniciativy nejrůznějšího typu – od posilování bilaterálních vztahů se zeměmi v oblasti, přes ekonomické iniciativy typu Trans-Pacifického partnerství a aktivní participaci v regionálních multilaterálních organizacích, po přesunu části vojenských kapacit Spojených států z jiných regionů do Asie-Pacifiku. Pivot do Asie byl vítán některými státy v regionu, nicméně Čína, nejsilnější regionální hráč, ho kritizovala, neboť měla pocit, že je Pivot zaměřen proti ní. Pivot do Asie funguje už takřka tři roky. Ze své původní podoby se vyvinul do jiné, méně konfliktní vůči Číně. Nicméně, vzhledem k stupňujícím se rozmíškám v Jihočínském a Východočínském moři, někteří odborníci pochybují o prospěšnosti Pivotu. Kromě toho také existují obavy o udržitelnost Pivotu kvůli pokračujícím škrtkům v obraném rozpočtu a závazkům jinde ve světě. V této diplomové práci zkoumám Pivot jako celek ve snaze odpovědět na tři zásadní otázky: Co přesně je Pivot? Proč byl Pivot spuštěn? Jaká bude jeho budoucnost?

## **Abstract**

Pivot or Rebalance to Asia-Pacific is a foreign policy launched by the Obama administration at the end of 2011. The essence of the Pivot is that the U.S. recognizes Asia-Pacific as the most dynamic and fastest growing region in the world that will decide the future of global politics and that the U.S. – as a Pacific power – is going to be

right at the center of the action. The policy is best described as a set of initiatives ranging from strengthening the U.S. bilateral ties in the area and rebalancing some of the U.S. military assets from other theatres Asia-Pacific to engaging the regional multilateral organizations and negotiating new trade deals – especially the Trans-Pacific Partnership – to foster the regional prosperity. The Pivot to Asia policy, is however, quite controversial as while it is welcome by some Asian countries, it is criticized by China that sees it as an attempt to contain its rise. The policy has now been in place for almost three years. It has evolved since its launch to be less conflictual towards China, however amid the continuing Chinese disputes with its neighbors over the maritime claims at China`s maritime periphery, some observers still question the efficiency of the policy. Moreover, with the continued defense budget cuts, many question that the U.S. is going to be able to sustain its plans. In this thesis, I thoroughly examine the first three years of the Pivot policy in order to answer the three key question. What exactly is the Pivot? Why was the Pivot policy launched? What will become of the Pivot in the future?

## **Klíčová slova**

Spojené státy, bezpečnost, vzestup Číny, Asie-Pacifik

## **Keywords**

United States, security, rise of China, Asia-Pacific

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Jan Liška

<b>TEZE Diplomové práce</b>
<b>Jméno:</b> Jan Liška
<b>Email:</b> liska.jan@email.cz
<b>Semestr:</b> II. (LS 2012/2013)
<b>Akademický rok:</b> 2012/2013
<b>Název práce:</b> Pivot to Asia: What, Why and Whither? The Not So New Obama's Asia Policy
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<b>Vedoucí diplomového semináře:</b> PhDr. Jan Bečka, Ph.D.
<b>Vedoucí práce:</b> Mgr. Jana Sehnálková D.
<b>V čem se oproti původnímu zadání změnil cíl práce?</b> The objectives of the diploma thesis remain the same: to analyse the changing role of the United States in the defined region, especially its security aspects.
<b>Jaké změny nastaly v časovém, teritoriálním a věcném vymezení tématu?</b> I have decided to focus my analysis on Obama's Asia policy, the so called "Pivot" or "Rebalance" to Asia. The Pivot was launched at the end of 2011 and it is an ongoing policy.
<b>Jak se proměnila struktura práce (vyjádřete stručným obsahem)?</b> The structure has changed substantially given that the whole focus of the thesis has shifted, the structure of the thesis should now be as follows: 1. Theoretical chapter (neoclassical realism) 2. What is the Pivot 3. Why the Pivot 4. Whither? Future of the Pivot
<b>Jakým vývojem prošla metodologická koncepce práce?</b> Hence the focus is on the relative power (shift) in Asia-Pacific. Greater attention is being paid also to the domestic drivers of the Pivot Policy.
<b>Které nové prameny a sekundární literatura byly zpracovány a jak tato skutečnost ovlivnila celek práce?</b> Secondary Resources - Books David Shambaugh (ed.), Tangled Titans: the United States and China (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), Kindle edition. Ian Storey, Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The search for security (New York: Routledge, 2011). Robert G. Sutter, U.S.-Chinese Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), Kindle edition.  Academic Articles

Hugh De Santis, "The China Threat and the "Pivot" to Asia", *Current History* 111, No. 9 (2012): 209-215, <http://www.currenthistory.com/> (accessed July 10, 2014).

David Shambaugh, „A New China Requires A New China Strategy, (2010), *Current History* 109, No. 9 (2010): 219-226, <http://www.currenthistory.com/> (accessed June 10, 2012).

David W. Barno, Nora Bensahel and Travis Sharp, "Pivot but Hedge: A Strategy for Pivoting to Asia While Hedging in the Middle East", *Orbis* 56, no. 2 (2012): 158-176. Available online at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2012.01.002> (Accessed: 7. 1. 2013).

Bonnie S. Glaser, "Pivot to Asia: Prepare for Unintended Consequences", Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2012 Global forecast. Available at: <http://csis.org/publication/pivot-asia-prepare-unintended-consequences> (accessed July 10, 2014).

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"Cooperation Over The Pacific", *Beijing Review* 55, no. 2 (2012): 2-3 [www.ebscohost.com](http://www.ebscohost.com) (Accessed: 7. 1. 2013).

"Globe: Hillary's 'Asia-Pacific Dream.'", *Chinascop*, no 55 (2012): 30-31, [www.ebscohost.com](http://www.ebscohost.com) (Accessed: 7. 1. 2013).

Leon Hadar, "America's Long-Delayed Pacific Century", *National Interest* November 21, 2011. Available at: <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/americas-long-delayed-pacific-century-6175> (Accessed: 7. 1. 2013).

Jane Perlez, "Panetta Outlines New Weaponry for Pacific", *New York Times* June 1, 2012, Available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/02/world/asia/leon-panetta-outlines-new-weaponry-for-pacific.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/02/world/asia/leon-panetta-outlines-new-weaponry-for-pacific.html?_r=0) (Accessed: 7. 1. 2013).

Charakterizujte základní proměny práce v době od zadání projektu do odevzdání tezí a pokuste se vyhodnotit, jaký pokrok na práci jste během semestru zaznamenali (v bodech):

I've read some new books a number of articles that helped me make a clearer picture of what exactly I want to write about in my thesis. Based on the new input I have adjusted the time scope of the thesis. I still need to go through a lot more resources to be able to determine the exact structure and the conclusions of the thesis. I also need to work further on the methodology.

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## Introduction

The past few years – even here on the other side of the world – we have been hearing more and more about the Asia-Pacific. The media have been full of rise of China and American decline. Indeed China – who seemed to be almost unscathed by the global financial crisis – has become in everybody’s eyes the emerging power that could one day eclipse the world’s last remaining superpower – the United States. It was under these circumstances when the Obama administration has with a lot of ado introduced its Pivot to Asia-Pacific filling the media with claims of the U.S. being “back in Asia” and “there to stay.”

The topic of this diploma thesis is the Pivot (also known as Rebalance) to Asia. Pivot to Asia is an overall Asia-Pacific policy of the United States launched by the Obama administration at the end of 2011 that heralds the “American Pacific Century<sup>1</sup>” It is an ongoing policy envisioned as the U.S. Asia policy for this decade. In this thesis, I examine the launch of the Pivot policy and how it has been going so far. I analyze the strategic reasoning behind the Pivot launch and I discuss the future of the policy.

I have chosen this thesis topic for a simple reason. It is important to understand Asia-Pacific because as Hillary Clinton wrote in the article “America’s Pacific Century” in *Foreign Affairs* that launched the Pivot policy: “the Asia-Pacific has become a key driver of global politics.”<sup>2</sup> Like it or not – this is where large part of global politics will be decided. However, to understand the dynamics of this key region we have to understand – what is perhaps the most important bilateral relationship of today – the Sino-American relationship. Due to China’s rise to prominence, any current Asia policy has to also be a China policy. This is all the more true for the U.S. Asian policies as the two countries are “tangled together in innumerable ways – strategically, diplomatically, economically, socially, culturally, environmentally, regionally, internationally, educationally, and in many other domains”<sup>3</sup> says David Shambaugh in the preface of *Tangled Titans* – one of the latest book on Sino-American relations. Understanding Sino-American relationship is of paramount importance to anyone who wishes to

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<sup>1</sup> Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, *Foreign Policy* 189 (2011): 56, Available at: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas\\_pacific\\_century](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century) (Accessed September 17, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> *ibidem.*

understand Asia-Pacific. The U.S. Pivot to Asia is, in one way or the other, largely what defined the Sino-American relations ever since the launch of the policy at the end of 2011, it is therefore crucial to understand what the Pivot is, why it came to be and what will become of it, which is the topic of this thesis.

Shortly after the launch of the Pivot policy, some observers have noted that the United States has announced the “return to Asia” while in fact it has never left,<sup>4</sup> which prompted me to ask a series of question, which I also ask myself in the thesis as my research questions. Firstly: What is the Pivot to Asia? What initiatives are part of the Pivot to Asia? Is the Pivot a radical new policy redefining the U.S. foreign policy – is it a paradigm shift? Secondly: Why did the Obama administration come up with the Pivot policy? What is the reasoning behind the Pivot? Why was it introduced the way it was – as a high profile policy redefining the U.S. priorities for the decade to come? And thirdly: Based on the development of the policy so far, what will likely become of the Pivot? Will it retain its prominence? My hypothesis prior to writing this thesis was that the Pivot was launched as perhaps something more revolutionary than it truly was and that the reason it was launched was in some way connected to the rise of China.

### ***Methodology, Outline, Literature***

At this point, it is important to define some of the key terms I am using throughout my analysis and to introduce the methods and framework of my analysis. Essentially, in this thesis I am analyzing the Pivot to Asia as a more or less coherent foreign policy. The theoretical approach I am taking – as I will elaborate on in chapter one – is the one of neoclassical realism. Adhering to its principles, I study the ins and outs of the Pivot in a great detail in order to be able to provide as plausible explanation as possible of the reasoning behind the Pivot and to be able to give an educated guess about its future. That being said, I do not pay equal attention to all parts of the Pivot policy. Adhering to the realist logic assumption of power-centrism, the main focus of my thesis is on the security dimension of the Pivot. My secondary focus lies with the economic dimension of the policy, as the economic power is the foundation of the military power. Other

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<sup>3</sup> David Shambaugh (ed.), *Tangled Titans: the United States and China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), Kindle edition, location 248 of 8334.

<sup>4</sup> “Cooperation Over The Pacific”, *Beijing Review* 55, no. 2 (2012): 2 [www.ebscohost.com](http://www.ebscohost.com) (Accessed: 7. 1. 2013).

aspects of the Pivot are not the focus of my analysis, although I mention them when they seem particularly relevant.

Regarding the terms I use, I should – first of all – make clear that unless stated otherwise, I am using the terms Pivot and Rebalance as synonyms, even though as I elaborate on in chapter 2.3, the Obama administration has eventually abandoned the usage of the term “Pivot” in favor of “Rebalance.” The term “Pivot” has, nevertheless, still persisted in the media discourse as the more dominant of the two<sup>5</sup> and it is under this name the policy first became known, so I believe it’s appropriate to keep using it as long as one clearly states it covers the whole span of the policy, not just until the administration has stopped using it.

Second of all, the policy and my analysis are set on Asia-Pacific, however, it should be stated what it means, because the Obama administration uses the term in a broader sense than usual. Asia-Pacific, at least for the purpose of the Pivot policy and my analysis stretches between the Indian subcontinent to the western shore of the Americas.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to the traditional view, the Pivot has connected South Asia and East Asia in one region and one broad strategy, which is one of the things the Pivot is often commended for.<sup>7</sup> That being said, the bulk of this analysis focuses on East Asia as that’s where China is and it is my view that the Pivot is primarily about China. More specifically, my primary focus is on the rim of China – China’s maritime periphery.

Third, the timeframe of my analysis is essentially end of 2011 when the Pivot was launched to spring of 2014 when President Obama carried out his latest trip to Asia up to date. However, in the third chapter of my analysis, where I try to find the reasons

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<sup>5</sup> Fred Dews, “Pivot, Rebalance, or Reinvigorate?: Words Matter in U.S. Strategy toward Asia”, *Brookings Institute*, April 21, 2014 (Remarks by Kenneth Lieberthal at the “Crisis in Crimea: Implications for U.S. Response in East Asia” on April 18, 2014). Available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/brookings-now/posts/2014/04/pivot-rebalance-reinvigorate-words-matter-us-strategy-toward-asia> (Accessed July 17, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Barak Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament” (President Obama’s speech before the Australian Parliament, Canberra, Australia, Nov. 17, 2011) Available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>, (Accessed September 17, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Mark E. Manyin et al., “Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration’s ‘Rebalancing’ Toward Asia”, *Congressional Research Service Report* (2012), p. 10. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42448.pdf> (Accessed: July 10, 2014).

why the Pivot was launched, I examine the regional security situation in Asia-Pacific before end of 2011 going as far back as the early 2000s.

The thesis has four chapters. Chapter one is theoretical, it introduces the basic assumptions as well as some of the specific concepts I am using in my analysis. Chapter two – the largest part of my thesis – examines what is the Pivot. It has four subchapters, the first one zooms in on the launch of the Pivot, introducing the original concept of the policy as well as some of the immediate reactions and criticism. The second subchapter is about the first year of the Pivot, showing how the Pivot worked and what implications it brought for the stability and prosperity of the region. The third subchapter focuses on the shift in the Pivot policy that came with the second Obama administration and examines the transformed Pivot all the way through to Obama’s spring 2014 Asia trip. The final subchapter of the second chapter depicts what’s new and what’s old on the Pivot in order to determine how “game changing” the policy in fact was. The third chapter is all about the rationale behind the Pivot launch, following the logic of realist thinking, it examines the power and threat balance shifts in the region in the 2000s and the early 2010s in order to determine, whether the rise of China was the reason behind the Pivot. The fourth and final chapter discusses the future of the Pivot based on the challenges at hand during spring and summer 2014.

In this thesis, I work with a number of primary sources. As primary sources for this thesis, I use several speeches by high officials of the Obama administration including President’s speech in front of the Australian Parliament in Canberra,<sup>8</sup> which along with the Secretary of State Clinton’s article in *Foreign Policy*<sup>9</sup> – which I also treat as a primary source for the case of the Pivot policy – launched the whole policy. Further primary sources I use are mostly speeches by high officials, which either further explained or somewhat modified the Pivot policy including the two speeches by National Security Advisor Thomas E. Donilon,<sup>10</sup> the Georgetown University speech by

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<sup>8</sup> Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament”.

<sup>9</sup> Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, p. 56-63.

<sup>10</sup> Tom Donilon, “Remarks by National Security Advisor Tom Donilon – As prepared for Delivery: “President Obama’s Asia Policy and the Upcoming Trip to Asia“, (Speech by National Security Advisor Tom Donilon at the Center for Strategic & International Studies, Washington, D.C., November 15, 2012), Available At: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/11/15/remarks-national-security-advisor-tom-donilon-prepared-delivery> (Accessed September 17, 2013); and Tom Donilon, “Remarks by Tom Donilon, National Security Advisor to the President: “The U.S. in Asia Pacific in 2013“, (Speech by National Security Advisor Tom Donilon to the Asia Society, New York, March 11, 2013), Available At:

his successor Susan Rice<sup>11</sup> and the speech by Deputy Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter at the Asia Society.<sup>12</sup> Finally, a key primary source I use and one of the very few official documents to the Pivot/Rebalance policy there is, the new U.S. defense strategy “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century defense.”<sup>13</sup>

The vast majority of what I write about in this thesis has not happened more than three years ago. For this reason, there are not yet many books that deal specifically with the Pivot Policy *Asian Strategic Review 2014: US Pivot and Asian Security*<sup>14</sup> being one of the very few exceptions. There is, however, a plenty of literature on the U.S.-China relations. I have used two of the latest ones, *Tangled Titans: the United States and China*<sup>15</sup> and *U.S.-Chinese Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present*.<sup>16</sup> For some additional insight into China and Southeast Asia, I have also drawn from Shambaugh’s *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*<sup>17</sup> and Storey’s *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The search for security*<sup>18</sup> respectively.

Fortunately, there is a number of academic articles and other sources – produced mostly by one of the Asia focused or security focused think-tanks – available. I use materials from several *Brookings* and other think-tanks’ conferences that debate especially the sustainability of the Pivot policy like for instance the Richard C. Bush III<sup>19</sup> remarks on the Asia’s response to the Pivot<sup>19</sup> or Lieberthal’s excellent analysis of

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<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/03/11/remarks-tom-donilon-national-security-advisory-President-united-states-a>, (Accessed September 17, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Susan Rice, “America’s Future in Asia: Remarks As Prepared for Delivery by National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice” (Speech by National Security Advisor Susan Rice at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., November 20, 2013) Available at: [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/11/21/remarks-prepared-delivery-national-security-advisor-susan-e-rice\\_](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/11/21/remarks-prepared-delivery-national-security-advisor-susan-e-rice_) (Accessed December 10, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Ashton B. Carter, “The U.S. Strategic Rebalance to Asia: A Defense Perspective” (Speech by Deputy Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter at the Asia Society, New York, August 1, 2012). Available at: <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1715> (Accessed December 10, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century defense” (2012), *Defense Strategy Guidance Document*, January 5, 2012, 8 p. Available at: [http://www.defense.gov/news/defense\\_strategic\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/defense_strategic_guidance.pdf), (Accessed September 17, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> S. D. Muni and Vivek Chadha (eds.), *Asian Strategic Review 2014: U.S. Pivot and Asian Security* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> David Shambaugh (ed.), *Tangled Titans*.

<sup>16</sup> Robert G. Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations: Perilous Past, Pragmatic Present* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), Kindle edition.

<sup>17</sup> David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), Kindle edition.

<sup>18</sup> Ian Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The search for security* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Richard C. Bush III, “The Response of China’s neighbors to U.S. “Pivot” to Asia” (Remarks by Richard C. Bush III from the Brookings event Understanding the U.S. Pivot to Asia, January 31,

the importance of the name of the policy “Pivot, Rebalance, or Reinigorate.”<sup>20</sup> I have also found the George Washington University project “Balancing acts: The U.S. Rebalance and Asia-Pacific Stability”<sup>21</sup> most inspiring. Of the more traditional journal articles, I have found De Santis’ “The China Threat and the “Pivot” to Asia”<sup>22</sup> to have a brilliant insight into the Pivot policy. Finally, I have also used a number of *Congressional Research Service* reports – on the issues ranging from the TPP<sup>23</sup> to the Chinese maritime claims<sup>24</sup> – most helpful.

I have also drawn a lot of information and some comments from non-academic article, interviews, websites and other sources, especially regarding the most recent issues, like for example in the case of the “5 takeaways from Obama’s trip to Asia”<sup>25</sup> *CNN* article regarding the President’s 2014 Asia trip and regarding some of the Pivot’s critiques in the popular discourse like in the case of “American Doesn’t Need a Pivot to Asia”<sup>26</sup>

Finally, in the theoretical chapter of my thesis, I draw mostly classic realist texts like Mearsheimer’s *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*<sup>27</sup> or Rose’s “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy”.<sup>28</sup> I also take into account some of the critiques of realism like Wivel’s famous “Explaining why state X made a certain move last

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2012). Available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/speeches/2012/01/31-us-pivot-bush>, (Accessed September 17, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Dews, “Pivot, Rebalance, or Reinvigorate?”.

<sup>21</sup> Robert G. Sutter, et all, „Balancing Acts: The U.S. Rebalance and Asia-Pacific Stability“, *George Washington University’s Elliot School of International Affairs & Sigur Center for Asian Studies*, August 2013, 49 p. Available at: [http://www2.gwu.edu/~sigur/assets/docs/BalancingActs\\_Compiled1.pdf](http://www2.gwu.edu/~sigur/assets/docs/BalancingActs_Compiled1.pdf) (accessed July 10, 2014)

<sup>22</sup> Hugh De Santis, “The China Threat and the “Pivot” to Asia”, *Current History* 111, No. 9 (2012): 209, <http://www.currenthistory.com/> (accessed July 10, 2014)

<sup>23</sup> Ian F. Fergusson et all, „The Trans-Pacific Partnership Negotiations and Issues for Congress“, *Congressional Research Service Report* (2013) 59 p. Available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42694.pdf> (accessed July 10, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Ronald O’Rourke, “Maritime Territorial and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Disputes Involving China”, *Congressional Research Service Report* (2014), 77 p. Available at: <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42784.pdf> (accessed July 10, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Kevin Liptak, “5 takeaways from Obama’s trip to Asia”, *CNN*, April 29, 2014. Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/29/politics/obama-asia-trip/> (accessed July 10, 2014)

<sup>26</sup> Michael Auslin, “America Doesn’t Need a Pivot to Asia”, *The Wall Street Journal*, August 27, 2012. Available at: <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10000872396390444506004577614941100974630> (Accessed: 7. 7. 2013).

<sup>27</sup> John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Gildeon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy”, *World Politics* 51, No. 1 (1998): 144-172. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org> (accessed July 10, 2014)

Tuesday”<sup>29</sup> and finally I also use the textbook *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*.<sup>30</sup>

## 1. Theoretical perspectives of foreign policy

Foreign policy analysis (FPA) can mean one of two things, either a mostly independent intellectual domain – a research approach that was especially flourishing in the 60s and 70s,<sup>31</sup> or a part of a wider field of international relations (IR). In this thesis, I always use the term in the broader second sense. This has important implications. When I speak of foreign policy theory, I speak in effect of the applicable parts of theories of international relations – realism, liberalism, constructivism and post-structuralism – not only of the three branches of classic decision-making analysis heavy FPA theory derived from the paradigmatic works by Richard Snyder et al., James Rosenau, and Harold and Margaret Sprout.<sup>32</sup> There are, of course, many ways how to approach a foreign policy case within an IR theory based on the choice of variables, level of analysis,<sup>33</sup> disciplinary grounding and cetera. For my analysis of Asia pivot policy – for reasons I will elaborate on in the second part of this chapter – I have chosen to ground my analysis in the realist theory, more specifically in the neoclassical realism.

### 1.1. Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical realism is a way of thinking that stems from the classical realism starting with it Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian war from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, but it also takes from neorealism. In a sense, it is a synthesis of centuries of realist thinking. It strives to strike the precious balance between universal theoretical concepts of neorealism and the detailed accounts of specific foreign policies of the classical realism. Before I can, however, introduce the framework of neoclassical realism, it is important

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<sup>29</sup> Anders Wivel, “Explaining why state X made a certain move last Tuesday: the promise and limitations of realist foreign policy analysis”, *Journal of International Relations & Development* 8, No. 4 (2005): 355-380. Available at: <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed July 10, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, and Tim Dune (eds.), *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, and Tim Dune (eds.), *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 3-4.

<sup>32</sup> Valerie M. Hudson, „The history and evolution of foreign policy analysis“ in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, ed. Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, and Tim Dune (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 14-27.

<sup>33</sup> See: J. David Singer, “The Level-of-Analysis Problem of International Relations”, *World Politics* 14, No. 1 (1961): 77-92, <http://www.jstor.org> (accessed July 10, 2014).



to remind of the basic premises of realism itself and to briefly introduce other schools of realism that the neoclassical realism is based on.

Realist thinking is based on some core ideas about the world. These core ideas accepted by all realists can be described by three basic assumptions: groupism, egoism and power-centrism.<sup>34</sup> These have important implications on thinking about foreign policy and international relations, specifically: “that main groups with which people identify – be they tribes, city-states, empires, or nation-states – will exert a major influence on human affairs; that the group’s collective interest, however defined, will be central to its politics; that necessity as the group interest defines it will trump any putatively universal morality and ethics; and thus that humankind is unlikely ever to wholly transcend power politics through the progressive power of reason.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, if we accept the three core assumptions – groupism, egoism, and power-centrism – then politics is likely to be conflictual unless there is some sort of a central authority that would enforce order. The absence of a central authority in IR then creates a condition the realists call anarchy where any state can possibly use force to get what it wants.<sup>36</sup> Those are the ideas all realist thinking is based on, every school of realist thought, however, works with these assumptions differently and arrives therefore to different conclusions about the international system and foreign policy.<sup>37</sup>

What we now call classical realist thought spreads from Thucydides until the middle years of the Cold War. It is not really a well-defined field of thought – it’s more a number of great thinkers trying to translate the practical knowledge of foreign policy into general theories. While it was not always clear, whether their theories generally applied, their writings were always very well grounded in the knowledge of a specific case of practical foreign policy.<sup>38</sup> In short, the analyses of the classical realists were mostly based on practical politics.

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<sup>34</sup> William C. Wohlforth, „Realism and foreign policy“ in *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, ed. Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, and Tim Dune (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> Wohlforth, „Realism and foreign policy“, p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 38.

<sup>37</sup> Anders Wivel, “Explaining why state X made a certain move last Tuesday: the promise and limitations of realist foreign policy analysis”, *Journal of International Relations & Development* 8, No. 4 (2005): 355-356. <http://www.proquest.com> (accessed July 10, 2014)

<sup>38</sup> Wohlforth, „Realism and foreign policy“, p. 38.

Neorealism or structural realism, on the other hand, is in its essence a very theory based, abstract approach. It is a deductive top-down theoretical framework created by Kenneth Waltz in his *Theory of International Politics* (1979). Essentially, it's all about the underlying conditions or the structure of the international relations and its implications. There are two major subschools of structural realism based on the different conceptualizations of the core assumption of realism. Those who like Waltz himself believe that the anarchic structure of the international system leads states to maximize their security, and that conquest is difficult and conflict in modern age therefore less likely than before<sup>39</sup> belong to the school of defensive realism. Offensive realists like Mearsheimer, on the other hand, believe that in the anarchy of the international system of today states in order to maximize their security tend to maximize their power thereby becoming threats to other states making the prospect of conflict much more likely than in the case of defensive realism.<sup>40</sup> As Anders Wivel, however, points out, neither one of these schools has due to their highly abstract nature the capacity to explain "why state x made a certain move last tuesday"<sup>41</sup> "The link between general assumptions about the international system and foreign policies of individual states is unspecified: neorealists cannot explain why states behave differently when subject to the same structural pressure."<sup>42</sup>

Neoclassical realism is a subschool of realism that seeks to rectify the imbalance between the general and the particular of the previous realist schools. Neoclassical realists "argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist. They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical."<sup>43</sup> Neoclassical realism stresses out that foreign policy is conducted by actual human beings<sup>44</sup> and that while "the relative material

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<sup>39</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory", *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, No. 4 (1988): 615-628, <http://www.jstor.org> (accessed July 10, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

<sup>41</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 121, quoted from Wivel, "Explaining why state x made a certain move last Tuesday", p. 356.

<sup>42</sup> Wivel, "Explaining why state x made a certain move last Tuesday", p. 356.

<sup>43</sup> Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", p. 146..

<sup>44</sup> Wivel, "Explaining why state x made a certain move last Tuesday", p. 358.

power establishes the basic parameters of a country's foreign policy,"<sup>45</sup> the decisions in foreign policy are heavily affected by the elites' "perceptions of relative power and perception of intent, state motivations and how the values of the leaders interact with their cost-benefit analysis in economic and security affairs in the formulation of foreign policy."<sup>46</sup> This approach, of course, is not without its perils. In analyzing foreign policy one has to examine power assessments, which are very difficult to reliably reconstruct.<sup>47</sup> One has to examine each foreign policy case in great detail in order to present a quality neoclassical realist analysis. The resultant analysis is therefore highly contextual. The neoclassical realists do not seek to create a single universal theory of international politics, more so, they seek to better explain the individual foreign policies using the best applicable (realist) concepts and theories.<sup>48</sup>

## **1.2. The Case of the Pivot**

Neoclassical realism seems to be a good fit for analyzing Obama's Pivot to Asia for two reasons. First, many scholars argue that the Pivot to Asia was simply a manifestation of the U.S. reaction to the rise of China – a classic realist argument. Second, the U.S. military projection in Asia-Pacific is still unmatched. For this reason, I believe that it is fair to assume that a perception of a power shift also had to do with the policy. Finally, the explanation of the Pivot launch wouldn't be complete without taking account of the domestic politics in the U.S. A combined approach is necessary to explain the Pivot. Neoclassical realism is a natural fit. Following the logic of neoclassical realism, I first study in great detail what the Pivot is, in order to be able to identify the correct independent variables in the international system and the key intervening factors from the domestic politics to then come up with a plausible explanation of why was the Pivot launched and to be able to have an educated guess what will become of it.

## **1.3. Applicable Theoretical Concepts**

As I have shown, neoclassical realism is a highly contextual approach that allows the scholar to pick and choose theoretical concepts within the realist thinking that are best fit to explain the policy at hand. For the case of Pivot to Asia, I believe the classic realist concepts of balance of power and balance of threat are most helpful in explaining the

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<sup>45</sup> Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", p. 146.

<sup>46</sup> Wivel, "Explaining why state x made a certain move last Tuesday", p. 358.

<sup>47</sup> William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War", *International Security* 19, No. 3 (1994-95): 127, <http://www.jstor.org> (accessed July 10, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> Wohlforth, "Realism and foreign policy", p. 40.

reasoning behind the Pivot. Arguably the best known theoretical proposition of realism – the balance of power theory – says that in the anarchic international system where states might resort to force states are likely to guard themselves against the possibility that another state amasses enough power to compel or eliminate them. States respond by either building up their own power (internal balancing) or by searching for new allies or attempting to strengthen their existing alliances (external balancing). As states always look forward, the balancing might actually occur before they are threatened.<sup>49</sup> The balance of threat theory complements the balance of power one. It argues that states will balance against threats. By a combination of aggregate (military and economic) power, geography and (aggressive) behavior states become threats and are balanced against even though they might not necessary be threats strictly in the balance of power sense.<sup>50</sup> As I will show in chapter three, I believe these two theoretical concepts can help to explain much of the reasoning behind the Pivot.

## 2. What Is Pivot to Asia

The “Pivot to Asia” or “Asia-Pacific Pivot”<sup>51</sup> policy was first introduced by the Obama administration at the end of 2011 in a *Foreign Policy* article, which stated: “the future of politics will be decided in Asia, not Afghanistan or Iraq, and the United States will be right at the center of the action.”<sup>52</sup> It was presented as a new, high-level, broad, multi-dimensional policy. The essence of the new policy was that Asia-Pacific region is and from that point forward always will be the most important region for the U.S. However, given the all-encompassing nature of the policy, it is not surprising that the policy has been evolving since it was first introduced. As Ely Ratner points out the policy is defined by a series of articles and speeches rather than official documents.<sup>53</sup> Specifically, Secretary of State Clinton’s article in *Foreign Policy*,<sup>54</sup> President Obama’s speech in front of the Australian Parliament<sup>55</sup> both in November 2011 and the two national

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<sup>49</sup> Wothlforth, „Realism and foreign policy“, p. 41.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>51</sup> The official terminology has since then evolved into talking about “rebalancing” rather than “pivoting” towards Asia-Pacific, which I will talk about in the next chapter.

<sup>52</sup> Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”.

<sup>53</sup> Ely Ratner, “The False Cry of the Pivot Deniers: The Rebalancing to Asia is real and the president is not there right now to salvage a phantom policy.”, *Foreign Policy* 192 (2014), [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/04/25/the\\_false\\_song\\_of\\_the\\_pivot\\_deniers\\_obama\\_administration\\_asia](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/04/25/the_false_song_of_the_pivot_deniers_obama_administration_asia) (accessed July 10, 2014)

<sup>54</sup> Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, p. 56-63.

<sup>55</sup> Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament”.

security advisors' (Tom Donilon<sup>56</sup> and Susan Rice<sup>57</sup>) in 2013 were the most defining of the policy so far. In this chapter, I will show how the Pivot policy was first envisioned, how it evolved throughout the almost three years since then and finally assess how different it was from the policies in place before November 2011 or rather if the Pivot was a paradigm change.

## **2.1. The Launch of the Pivot**

The policy was first formally introduced in Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's *Foreign Policy* article "America's Pacific Century"<sup>58</sup> on November 10, 2011 followed directly by President Obama's trip to Asia during which he gave a speech in front of the Australian Parliament<sup>59</sup> and later attended the East Asia Summit becoming the first ever U.S. President to have done so.<sup>60</sup> Subsequently, the relevant parts of the policy became a part of the new U.S. security strategy<sup>61</sup> released by the Department of Defense at the beginning of 2012. Obama's administration declared that "As the war in Iraq winds down and America begins to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the United States stands at a pivot point."<sup>62</sup> After spending immense resources in Iraq and Afghanistan in the last decade, "the United States is turning our attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region,"<sup>63</sup> which it recognizes as "a key driver of global politics."<sup>64</sup> "Stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the western shores of the Americas, the region spans two oceans – the Pacific and the Indian – that are increasingly linked by shipping and strategy. It boasts almost half the world's population. It includes many of the key engines of the global economy, as well as the largest emitters of greenhouse gases. It is home to several of our key allies and important emerging powers like China,

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<sup>56</sup> Tom Donilon, "Remarks by Tom Donilon, National Security Advisor to the President: "The U.S. in Asia Pacific in 2013 "", (Speech by National Security Advisor Tom Donilon to the Asia Society, New York, March 11, 2013), Available At: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/03/11/remarks-tom-donilon-national-security-advisory-president-united-states-a>, (Accessed September 17, 2013).

<sup>57</sup> Susan Rice, "America's Future in Asia: Remarks As Prepared for Delivery by National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice" (Speech by National Security Advisor Susan Rice at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., November 20, 2013) Available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/11/21/remarks-prepared-delivery-national-security-advisor-susan-e-rice>, (Accessed December 10, 2013).

<sup>58</sup> Clinton, "America's Pacific Century", p. 56-63.

<sup>59</sup> Obama, "Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament".

<sup>60</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>61</sup> "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century defense" (2012), *Defense Strategy Guidance Document*, January 5, 2012. Available at: [http://www.defense.gov/news/defense\\_strategic\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/defense_strategic_guidance.pdf). (Accessed September 17, 2013).

<sup>62</sup> Clinton, "America's Pacific Century", p. 56.

<sup>63</sup> Obama, "Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament".

<sup>64</sup> Clinton, "America's Pacific Century", p. 56

India, and Indonesia.”<sup>65</sup> The President Obama emphasized: “As the world’s fastest-growing region – and home to more than half the global economy (...) Asia will largely define whether the century ahead will be marked by conflict or cooperation, needless suffering or human progress.”<sup>66</sup> The President has “therefore made a deliberate and strategic decision – as a Pacific nation the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future by upholding core principles and in close partnership with our allies and friends.”<sup>67</sup>

The Pivot as it was introduced at the end of 2011 had six key parts of the policy that were to be addressed through what Secretary Clinton called “forward-deployed diplomacy” – dispatching the full range of U.S. diplomatic assets including the highest-ranking officials to every corner of Asia-Pacific in order to work along the lines of: “strengthening bilateral security alliances; deepening our working relationships with emerging powers, including with China; engaging with regional multilateral institutions; expanding trade and investment, forging a broad-based military presence; and advancing democracy and human rights.”<sup>68</sup> I argue that these six policy lines of the U.S. diplomatic efforts can be simplified into three key dimensions – security, economy and values.

Four out of six policy lines the Secretary of State mentions have to do with security dimension of the Pivot. Strengthening bilateral alliances, deepening working relationships with emerging powers, engaging with regional multilateral institutions and forging a broad-based military presence all have security implications. The new U.S. security strategy states: “We will emphasize our existing alliances, which provide a vital foundation for Asia-Pacific security.”<sup>69</sup> Specifically, upgrading alliances and enhancing joint programs with Japan, South Korea, Australia, Philippines, Thailand is mentioned as one of the cornerstones of the Pivot policy and of security and stability in Asia.<sup>70</sup> “We will also expand our networks of cooperation with emerging partners throughout the Asia-Pacific to ensure collective capability and capacity for securing common

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<sup>65</sup> Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, p. 56.

<sup>66</sup> Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament”.

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>68</sup> Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, p. 58.

<sup>69</sup> “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century defense” (2012), *Defense Strategy Guidance Document*, January 5, 2012. Available at: [http://www.defense.gov/news/defense\\_strategic\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/defense_strategic_guidance.pdf), (Accessed September 17, 2013).

interests”<sup>71</sup>. The U.S. is to reach out to China, India, Indonesia, Singapore, New Zealand, Malaysia, Mongolia, Vietnam, Brunei and even Burma given some conditions continue being met.<sup>72</sup> The partnership with India is to serve as a regional economic anchor and a provider of security for the broader Indian Ocean region.<sup>73</sup> Of course, a lot is being said about China. In fact almost one fifth of “America’s Pacific Century”<sup>74</sup> is dedicated to complex nature of the Sino-American relations both in bilateral and regional context. The article says: “Some in our country see China’s progress a threat to the United States; some in China worry that America seeks to constrain China’s growth. We reject both those views. The fact is that a thriving America is good for China and a thriving China is good for America.”<sup>75</sup> However, while conveying the same message, the new U.S. defense strategy also emphasizes that: “the growth of China’s military power must be accompanied by greater clarity of its strategic intentions in order to avoid causing friction in the region.”<sup>76</sup> – adding a bit of an edge. At the same time, the U.S. became more active in the regional multilateral organizations such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, or East Asia Summit, where President Obama addressed issues such as proliferation and maritime security, including cooperation in the South China Sea.<sup>77</sup> Finally, a large part of the Pivot was also military deployment and redeployment. The President reassured the allies in the region that the planned military budget cuts are not going to be at the expense of Asia-Pacific.<sup>78</sup> Quite on the contrary, as part of the pivot launch, the U.S. announced the deployment of 2500 marines in the new U.S. military base in Darwin, Australia, the deployment of littoral combat ships in Singapore, and intensified ship visits and cooperation with the Philippines.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, there is also a second dimension to the military redeployment or rebalance, the United States is also shifting its strategic assets within Asia – while maintaining a strong strategic posture in the traditional Northeast Asia they are increasing their presence in Southwestern Pacific.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, p. 60.

<sup>71</sup> „Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership“, p. 2..

<sup>72</sup> Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, p. 60.

<sup>73</sup> „Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership“, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem, p. 60.

<sup>76</sup> Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership“, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament”.

<sup>78</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>79</sup> Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, p. 60

<sup>80</sup> Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament”.

The economic dimension of the Pivot policy consisted of probably the second largest pack of initiatives. The U.S. pushed forward with a number of both bilateral and multilateral initiatives; and also what Secretary Clinton calls “minilateral” projects.<sup>81</sup> From the bilateral and minilateral projects the U.S.-Korean free trade agreement,<sup>82</sup> the Lower Mekong Initiative<sup>83</sup> and the Pacific Islands Forum<sup>84</sup> stand out the most. On the multilateral front, the U.S. intensified its efforts within APEC and perhaps most importantly (re)launched the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).<sup>85</sup> The TPP<sup>86</sup> is arguably the most ambitious trade agreement to date. It dates back to 2005, when Singapore, New Zealand, Chile and Brunei started trade liberalizing negotiations, in 2008 the United States still under the Bush administration entered the negotiation. The Obama administration vastly expanded the scope of the whole project. Until the end of 2011 Malaysia, Australia, Peru and Vietnam joined the negotiations.<sup>87</sup> Later on in 2012 and 2013 respectively, Canada, Mexico and Japan also joined the negotiations making TPP potentially the largest free trade area in the world. Moreover, the quality of the proposed agreement has been upgraded as well according to the United States Trade Representative website TPP is to become a “21<sup>st</sup> century trade agreement” as it is to tackle issues such as rules on state-owned enterprises, intellectual property rights, digital economy and environmental and labor standards.<sup>88</sup> Notably, China – the largest trading partner of most the negotiating parties – wasn’t and still is not part of the negotiations. The U.S. claims the door are open for China to join the negotiations, however the inclusion of intellectual property rights and state enterprises rules makes China joining very unlikely.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, p. 59.

<sup>82</sup> “The U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement”, The United States trade representative official website, <http://www.ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/korus-fta> (Accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>83</sup> “Lower Mekong Initiative”, United States State Department official website, <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/mekong> (Accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>84</sup> “Pacific Island Forum”, Pacific Island Forum official website, <http://www.forumsec.org/> (Accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>85</sup> Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament”.

<sup>86</sup> “Trans-Pacific Partnership”, The United States trade representative official website, <http://www.ustr.gov/tpp> (Accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>87</sup> De Santis, “The China Threat and the “Pivot” to Asia”, p. 209.

<sup>88</sup> “Trans-Pacific Partnership”.

<sup>89</sup> De Santis, “The China Threat and the “Pivot” to Asia”, p. 209.



The third dimension of the policy can be described as values or principles. A great deal<sup>90</sup> of the two launching texts of the Pivot is dedicated to topics such as human rights or democracy promotion. The President uses the term “human rights” three times in his speech, the Secretary ten times in a text that is about two-and-a-half times longer than the speech. Both do so at least one specifically in regard to China. “When we see reports of public-interest lawyers, writers, artists, and others who are detained or disappear, the United States speaks up, both publicly, and privately, with our concerns about human rights. We make the case to our Chinese colleagues that deep respect for international law and more open political system would provide China...”<sup>91</sup> Similarly, President Obama emphasized: “We will do this [enhance cooperation with Beijing], even as we speak candidly to Beijing about the importance of upholding international norms and respecting the universal human rights of the Chinese people.”<sup>92</sup> However, when we jump to 2013, we can see that in National Security Advisor Tom Donilon’s speech,<sup>93</sup> the term human rights does not even appear once and even a known human rights champion Susan Rice who succeeded Donilon as National Security Advisor chooses a relatively mild tone regarding human rights and China: “As we diversify the ways in which we do business with China, we will continue to champion respect for the rule of law, human rights, religious freedom and democratic principles. These are the common aspirations that all people share.”<sup>94</sup> Based on this I would argue that the administration has dialed down on this dimension of the policy. Regardless, as this analysis is written primarily from the realist point of view, this part of the policy is not my focus and I will henceforth largely ignore it.

The Pivot immediately spurred controversy on both sides of the Pacific. The reactions coming from Asia were mixed. The U.S. closest allies in the region like Australia or Japan, or friendly countries like India welcomed the increased U.S. military and diplomatic presence in the area saying it will increase security and stability. The rest of Asia-Pacific countries like Indonesia, Malaysia or even Singapore were more careful due to the uncertainty of how China would react.<sup>95</sup> As the director of the Center

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<sup>90</sup> About 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the President’s speech and about 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the Secretary of State’s article are about values and principles and don’t specifically mention the economy.

<sup>91</sup> Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”, p. 57.

<sup>92</sup> Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament”.

<sup>93</sup> Donilon, “The U.S. in Asia Pacific in 2013”.

<sup>94</sup> Rice, “America’s Future in Asia”.

<sup>95</sup> Bush “The Response of China’s neighbors to U.S. “Pivot” to Asia”.

for East Asia Policy Studies by the Brookings Institute Richard C. Bush III explains given the geopolitical and economic conditions of Asia-Pacific “the fundamental reality is that all Asian countries want to have good relations with the United States *and* with China”<sup>96</sup> That is why the Chinese reaction to Pivot is arguably the most important one. The initial reaction coming from China ranged “from measured skepticism to harsh criticism.”<sup>97</sup> *Globe* magazine (publishing in Chinese), which operates under the official Xinhua News Agency, published a response to “America’s Pacific Century” titled “Hillary’s ‘Pacific Dream’” in which it criticized Clinton’s article as being “far from reality” and having “hegemonic hierarchic thinking and a Cold War mentality” aimed against China.<sup>98</sup> *People’s Daily’s* editorial in early 2012 warned in its title “Obama, Not Afraid of Breaking Your Back Pivoting to Asia?”<sup>99</sup> using arguments similar to *Globe’s*. The *Beijing Review’s* reaction was milder wondering why the U.S. is announcing the “return to Asia” when it has in fact never left and saying that while the pivot will likely “touch upon China’s national interests, deepen strategic misperceptions and affect Sino-U.S. relations (...) judging from the past China-U.S. relations during the Obama administration, Washington does not simply identify Beijing as an opponent or threat, but often as a partner,”<sup>100</sup> adding that they “hope the United States can play a constructive role and respect China’s core interests in the Asia-Pacific region.”<sup>101</sup> The latter represents an official Chinese government position, while the former represents other voices coming from China.<sup>102</sup> Given China’s response to the initial form of the Pivot policy the other Asian countries assumed a stance that can be summarized in the three observations the Singapore Prime Minister made about the U.S. Pivot and U.S. presence in the region in his interview with Fareed Zakaria at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2012: “One, the United States has had a long-term and benign impact on East Asia. Two, he was glad to see renewed engagement even as he recognized that China was wary and watchful about underlying American intentions.

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<sup>96</sup> Bush “The Response of China’s neighbors to U.S. ‘Pivot’ to Asia”.

<sup>97</sup> Avery Goldstein, “U.S.-China Interactions in Asia“, in *Tangled Titans: the United States and China*, ed. David Shambaugh (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), Kindle edition, location 5516 of 8334.

<sup>98</sup> “Globe: Hillary’s ‘Asia-Pacific Dream.’”, *Chinascoped*, no 55 (2012): 30-31, [www.ebscohost.com](http://www.ebscohost.com) (Accessed: 7. 1. 2013)

<sup>99</sup> Quoted from: Wen Liu, “From Pivot to Rebalance: The Weight of Words in U.S. Asia Policy”, *Context China*, March 22, 2013, Available at: <http://contextchina.com/2013/03/from-pivot-to-rebalance-the-weight-of-words-in-u-s-asia-policy/> (Accessed: 7. 7. 2013).

<sup>100</sup> “Cooperation Over The Pacific”, p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>102</sup> Sutter, et all, “Balancing Acts”, p. 17.

And third, he hoped that the United States would be able to sustain this initiative over time.’’<sup>103</sup>

Meanwhile, the reactions to the Pivot inside of the United States were equally as diverse. Some welcomed it as something long overdue noting this is in fact America’s second go around at the Pacific century; “America’s Pacific Century” was declared once before by President Bill Clinton at the 1993 Seattle APEC meeting, which he hoped to transform in the primary vehicle of cooperation and progress in Asia-Pacific.<sup>104</sup> It however didn’t materialize then and it certainly didn’t during the George W. Bush presidencies consumed by War on Terror. Others were generally welcoming but more careful pointing out the continuous need for commitment in the Middle East and elsewhere.<sup>105</sup> Others still were outright critical. According to David Shambaugh’s 2010 article a part of the U.S. Asia/China strategy since the George W. Bush years has been “strategic hedging” against China by creating a system of military relationships along China’s periphery<sup>106</sup> making China increasingly uneasy.<sup>107</sup> Strengthening ties with allies along with the new military deployments – a prominent part of the Pivot policy – can definitely be perceived as hedging against China. Scholars who do see it that way often warn before the “unintended consequences” of antagonizing China calling for a firm but a more careful approach.<sup>108</sup>

## **2.2. The First Year of the Pivot**

The Pivot to Asia was officially launched at the end of 2011, however, its wide scope and at least in certain regards a little ambiguous nature, it took a few months, until the dust settled and the full scale of the Pivot became clear to observers inside and outside the United States alike. For instance, it was clear from “Sustaining U.S. Global

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<sup>103</sup> Lee Hsien-Loong, “The Outlook for East Asia” (Interview with the Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Hsien-Loong by Fareed Zakaria at the World Economic Forum in Davos, January 26, 2012). Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncOkGbfN7s> (Accessed September 17, 2013)

<sup>104</sup> Leon Hadar, “America’s Long-Delayed Pacific Century”, *National Interest* November 21, 2011. Available at: <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/americas-long-delayed-pacific-century-6175> (Accessed: 7. 1. 2013).

<sup>105</sup> David W. Barno, Nora Bensahel and Travis Sharp, “Pivot but Hedge: A Strategy for Pivoting to Asia While Hedging in the Middle East”, *Orbis* 56, no. 2 (2012): 158-176. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2012.01.002> (Accessed: 7. 1. 2013).

<sup>106</sup> David Shambaugh, „A New China Requires A New China Strategy, (2010), *Current History* 109, No. 9 (2010): 220, <http://www.currenthistory.com/> (accessed June 10, 2012).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 222.

<sup>108</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser, “Pivot to Asia: Prepare for Unintended Consequences”, *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, 2012 Global forecast. Available at: <http://csis.org/publication/pivot-asia-prepare-unintended-consequences> (accessed July 10, 2014).

Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense”<sup>109</sup> that the U.S. military will redeploy part of their assets from other theatres to Asia-Pacific, however it took another few months until information like that the U.S. Navy is going to move 10 percent of its assets from the Atlantic to the Pacific was made public by Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta at the *IJSS* conference in Singapore in June 2012<sup>110</sup> and it wasn’t until August when a comprehensive account of the redeployment was finally given by Deputy Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter in his speech at the Asia Society in New York.<sup>111</sup> By that point, however, the policy already ran in some serious trouble. With the Chinese once again stepping up their marital claims,<sup>112</sup> the U.S. Congress fighting one bitter budget battle after another and the 2012 U.S. election and the leadership transition themed 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Chinese Communist party both looming at the horizon, the Pivot came under fire from multiple directions. The two most hotly debated topics were the sustainability of the Pivot given the defense budget cuts and whether the policy has brought greater stability or in fact instability to the area.

The Budget Control Act of 2011 required the Defense Department to save \$487 billion over the next ten years. Moreover, if not budget deal was reached until the end of 2012 the sequestration – automatic across the board (including defense) cuts in spending – would be initiated.<sup>113</sup> Simply put, despite the President’s and other officials’ reassurances that the defense budget cuts as the U.S. “puts our fiscal house in order”<sup>114</sup> will not come at the expense of Asia-Pacific<sup>115</sup> the policy still came under fire by the *Heritage Foundation*<sup>116</sup> and other conservative think-tanks and political pundits<sup>117</sup> for being underfinanced. “The Obama administration is trying to do it on the cheap. Pivot

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<sup>109</sup> „Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership“, p. 2.

<sup>110</sup> Jane Perlez, “Panetta Outlines New Weaponry for Pacific”, *New York Times* June 1, 2012, Available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/02/world/asia/leon-panetta-outlines-new-weaponry-for-pacific.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/02/world/asia/leon-panetta-outlines-new-weaponry-for-pacific.html?_r=0) (Accessed: 7. 1. 2013)

<sup>111</sup> Ashton B. Carter, “The U.S. Strategic Rebalance to Asia: A Defense Perspective” (Speech by Deputy Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter at the Asia Society, New York, August 1, 2012). Available at: <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1715> (Accessed December 10, 2013).

<sup>112</sup> Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, location 3943 of 7718.

<sup>113</sup> “Budget Control Act of 2011”, *One Hundred and Twelfth Congress of the United States of America* (An Act of the U.S. Congress), Available at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112s365enr/pdf/BILLS-112s365enr.pdf> (Accessed December 20, 2013)

<sup>114</sup> Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament”.

<sup>115</sup> Ibidem and Carter, „The U.S. Strategic Rebalance to Asia“.

<sup>116</sup> Bruce Klinger and Dean Cheng, “U.S. Asian Policy: America’s security Commitment to Asia needs more Forces”, *The Heritage Foundation*, August 7, 2012, Available at: <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/08/americas-security-commitment-to-asia-needs-more-forces> (accessed July 10, 2014).

<sup>117</sup> Auslin, “America Doesn’t Need a Pivot to Asia”.

funding is in danger from sequestration.”<sup>118</sup> “The mandated cuts in the defense budget jeopardize America’s ability to enforce its deter and defeat strategy; sequestration will make clear that any Asian Pivot is mere rhetorical flourish.”<sup>119</sup> While it is clear that these articles are highly political and were perhaps at the time more relevant for the domestic budget debate than the Pivot itself, they nevertheless signaled the start of a debate that is now becoming more prominent (and that I will elaborate on in chapter 4) – the long term sustainability of the Pivot and of the American leadership and military supremacy in Asia-Pacific.

The second, and at least at the time more important debate, was about the effect the Pivot has. Is Asia-Pacific more or less secure because of it? Well, first of all we should point out that the death of Kim Jong Il in December 2011 and the following leadership transition to his son Kim Jong-un at least temporarily froze the six party talks<sup>120</sup> and that Kim Jong-un asserting his grip on power led to escalation of tension in Northeast Asia. However, the Pivot does not really have much to do with that except perhaps for the impact it had on Sino-American relations. However, since China and the U.S. have always had different ideas about how to deal with North Korea I am not going to try to assess that. Where I believe the security impact of the Pivot can be assessed is the rim of China – specifically regarding the maritime disputes in South China Sea and East China Sea. Before I get into that, however, one more thing needs to be mentioned. The first year of the Pivot was a year of leadership transitions, the U.S. Presidential election and the Eighteenth Congress of China’s Communist Party during which President Hu Jintao passed party and military leadership to Xi Jinping both took place in November 2012, there were also elections in the key regional countries such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.<sup>121</sup> With this many elections and other kind of leadership transitions, chances are, the year 2012 was going to be less stable Pivot or no Pivot. That being said, the fact remains that tension between the U.S. and China has increased in 2012. In March, leading China specialists Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi from the *Brookings Institute* have characterized the current relationship between the U.S. and China as “strategic distrust” arguing that “the issue of mutual distrust of long-term

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<sup>118</sup> Auslin, “America Doesn’t Need a Pivot to Asia”.

<sup>119</sup> Klinger and Cheng, “U.S. Asian Policy”.

<sup>120</sup> Goldstein, “U.S.-China Interactions in Asia”, location 5404 of 8334.

<sup>121</sup> Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, location 3951 of 7718.

intentions – termed here “strategic distrust”<sup>122</sup> – has become a central concern in US-China relations” and that it is “potentially very corrosive.”<sup>123</sup> Of course, this strategic distrust was not helped by “sharp and often hyperbolic attacks on Chinese economic and security policies” during the Republican Presidential primaries and later in the election campaign also by President Obama joining the fray publicly referring to China as “an adversary” during the third Presidential debate.<sup>124</sup> At the same time Robert Sutter argues that 2012 has seen “unprecedented demonstrations of Chinese power short of using military force in defense of Chinese claims to disputed territories in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. The measures were accompanied by official Chinese commentary accusing the United States of having fostered the territorial disputes and of using them to advance U.S. influence in the Asian region to the detriment of China.”<sup>125</sup> A number of observers has made the connection between a more assertive China and the Pivot. According to Robert S. Ross, the Pivot was based on “fundamental misreading of China’s leadership. Beijing’s tough diplomacy stemmed not from confidence in its might (...) but from a deep sense of insecurity born of several nerve-racking years of financial crisis and social unrest.” Therefore, “the new U.S. policy unnecessarily compounds Beijing’s insecurities and will only feed China’s aggressiveness, undermine regional stability, and decrease the possibility of cooperation between Beijing and Washington.”<sup>126</sup>

Regardless of the tension and strategic distrust between the U.S. and China the planned redeployment towards Asia-Pacific continued. A number of assets were being redeployed, mostly from the Afghanistan theatre. The largest shift concerned the Navy. Naval reconnaissance, processing, exploitation and dissemination capabilities has been moved from Central Command to Pacific Command and made available for redeployment. Preparations were being made so that there can be a “net increase of one aircraft carrier, four destroyers, three Zumwalt destroyers, ten Littoral Combat Ship, and

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<sup>122</sup> Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, “Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust”, *Brookings Institute*, March 30, 2012, p. vi . Available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2012/03/30-us-china-lieberthal> (accessed July 10, 2014).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49.

<sup>124</sup> Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, location 3960 of 7718.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibidem*, location 3938 of 7718.

<sup>126</sup> Robert S. Ross, “The Problem With the Pivot”, *Foreign Affairs* 90, No. 6 (2012), Available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138211/robert-s-ross/the-problem-with-the-pivot> (accessed July 21, 2013).

two submarines”<sup>127</sup> in Asia-Pacific by 2020. A number of Air Force assets were also shifted from Afghanistan and elsewhere to the Asia-Pacific and preparations were being made for some Army and Marine Corps assets to do the same.<sup>128</sup> However, it is important to note that some of especially the Army and Marine Corps assets are merely returning to their original positions as they were moved due to the wars in the Middle East.<sup>129</sup> On the diplomatic front, the U.S. moved quickly to normalize its relations with Myanmar, and the administration continued its increased participation in the regional multilateral organizations.<sup>130</sup> Meanwhile, on the economic front, reportedly, some progress has been made on the TPP negotiations – which were set to be concluded by the end of 2013<sup>131</sup> – although it is hard to tell exactly how much as all the negotiations are being conducted behind closed door. However, Canada and Mexico joined the negotiating countries further increasing the free trade area under negotiation.

### **2.3. From Pivot to Rebalance**

Given the early reactions to the Pivot, the Obama administration has started to modify the policy almost immediately.<sup>132</sup> It has further evolved through the transition from the first to the second Obama administration. A useful tool to keep track of it is to follow the name shift from “Pivot” to “Rebalance.” When the policy was first launched, Secretary of State<sup>133</sup> used the term Pivot, while the President<sup>134</sup> and the Department of Defense officials<sup>135</sup> were when they were talking about the policy were more inclined to use Rebalance. The media liked the Pivot as perhaps the more dramatic of the two terms and so the term caught on and is still used by most observers to describe the policy.<sup>136</sup> However, as the administration quickly found out the term Pivot proved to have problematic implications. Even leaving Mackinder’s classical pivotal powers theory<sup>137</sup> that can draw unintended associations for Pivot to Asia aside, the term “Pivot” still

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<sup>127</sup> Carter, “The U.S. Strategic Rebalance to Asia: A Defense Perspective”.

<sup>128</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>129</sup> Abhijit Singh, “Restructuring the Maritime “Pivot” – Latest Developments in the US Rebalance to Asia” in *Asian Strategic Review 2014: U.S. Pivot and Asian Security*, ed. S. D. Muni and Vivek Chadha (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2014), p. 52.

<sup>130</sup> De Santis, “The China Threat and the “Pivot” to Asia”, p. 210, 213.

<sup>131</sup> “Trans-Pacific Partnership”.

<sup>132</sup> Richard Weitz, “Pivot Out, Rebalance In”, *The Diplomat*, May 3, 2012. Available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2012/05/pivot-out-rebalance-in/> (accessed July 10, 2014).

<sup>133</sup> Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”.

<sup>134</sup> Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament”.

<sup>135</sup> Carter, “The U.S. Strategic Rebalance to Asia”.

<sup>136</sup> Quoted from: Dews, “Pivot, Rebalance, or Reinvigorate?”.

<sup>137</sup> H. J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History”, *The Geographical Journal* 23, No. 4 (1904): 421-437, <http://www.jstor.org> (accessed July 10, 2014).

raises three uncomfortable questions for the U.S. government. Firstly, if the U.S. now “pivots” to Asia does it make it the center of everything and reduce the rest to mere by-the-by?<sup>138</sup> Secondly, does the “Pivot” mean that the U.S. can only focus on one region at a time? Is there no grand strategy anymore?<sup>139</sup> Thirdly, if U.S. pivots to Asia now, can it pivot again in the future somewhere else?<sup>140</sup> No wonder, the officials quickly stopped accenting “Pivot” and “Return to Asia” and instead started talking about “Rebalance” and stressed out the continuity of the U.S. presence and engagement in Asia.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, with the author of the term “Pivot” Hillary Clinton being replaced as Secretary of State by John Kerry, the term “Pivot” has not been used since in any of the important official speeches,<sup>142</sup> which seemed to have made the Chinese government happy.<sup>143</sup> This might seem like a lot of fuss about mere words, but as leading experts on Asia and China policy teach us: “words and attention matter in Asia policy (...) the idea was to reinvigorate attention paid to the Asia-Pacific region region after enormous focus on – for obvious reasons after 9/11 – Iraq, Afghanistan, and the global war on terror.”<sup>144</sup>

Words do indeed matter, as an important part of the policy is its message, however, it is of course not the only part of it. I argue that with the rhetoric shift towards Obama’s second term also came a shift towards a perhaps more pragmatic, less confrontational stance towards China characterized by efforts to downplay the military aspects of the Pivot/Rebalance. This was perhaps best exemplified during President’s 2012 Southeast Asia visit in November, right after his reelection during which he became the first ever sitting U.S. President to visit Myanmar.<sup>145</sup> The trip received extraordinary U.S. government publicity. National Security Advisor to the President Tom Donilon gave an extra speech in support of the trip at the *CSIS* in Washington,

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<sup>138</sup> Quoted from: Dews, “Pivot, Rebalance, or Reinvigorate?”.

<sup>139</sup> Michael Green and Dan Twining, “Dizzy yet? The pros and cons of the Asia “pivot””, *Foreign Policy* November 21, 2011. Available at: [http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/21/dizzy\\_yet\\_the\\_pros\\_and\\_cons\\_of\\_the\\_asia\\_pivot](http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/21/dizzy_yet_the_pros_and_cons_of_the_asia_pivot) (Accessed: 7. 7. 2013)

<sup>140</sup> Manyin et al., “Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration’s ‘Rebalancing’ Toward Asia”, p. 10.

<sup>141</sup> Richard Weitz, “Pivot Out, Rebalance In”, *The Diplomat*, May 3, 2012. Available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2012/05/pivot-out-rebalance-in/> (Accessed: 7. 7. 2013).

<sup>142</sup> See for example Donilon, ““The U.S. in Asia Pacific in 2013””, or Rice, “America’s Future in Asia”.

<sup>143</sup> Wen, “From Pivot to Rebalance”.

<sup>144</sup> Quoted from: Dews, “Pivot, Rebalance, or Reinvigorate?”.

<sup>145</sup> Peter Baker, “Obama, In an Emerging Myanmar, Vows Support”, *The New York Times*, November 18, 2012. Available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/19/world/asia/obama-heads-to-myanmar-as-it-promises-more-reforms.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/19/world/asia/obama-heads-to-myanmar-as-it-promises-more-reforms.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) (Accessed: 7. 7. 2013).



D.C.<sup>146</sup> which was quite conciliatory towards China, moreover “the President’s trip was heralded by visits to the region by the secretary of defense and the secretary of state, both of who emphasized the broad and multifaceted reasons for strong and sustained American engagement with Asia. Competition with China was not a prominent feature of their trips.”<sup>147</sup> Finally, the President himself was far less critical of China regarding both currency manipulation issues – for which he criticized China throughout 2011 and 2012 – and the marital claims in South China Sea and East China Sea – even though the President’s visit was taking place “amid China’s repeated extraordinary use of coercive measures and intimidation short of employing military force”<sup>148</sup>

This shift in the Pivot/Rebalance policy towards Obama’s second term as President was also accompanied by some key personal changes, most notably Hillary Clinton was succeeded by John Kerry as the Secretary of State and Chuck Hagel replaced Leon Panetta as the Defense Secretary at the beginning of 2013. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell also left the administration at the beginning of 2013. He was succeeded by Daniel R. Russel. The three of them together with the National Security Advisor to the President Thomas E. Donilon – who left the administration at the end of June to be succeeded by Susan Rice – were together with the President himself the key figures behind the Pivot/Rebalance policy.<sup>149</sup> John Kerry, regarded as atlanticist, has devoted much of his first months in office to issues in the Middle East and to reassuring allies in Europe. Moreover, during his April 2013 trip to South Korea, Kerry mentioned that it was his first visit – even though he has been on the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee for over 20 years<sup>150</sup> – showing that unlike Clinton’s Asia-Pacific is not or at least wasn’t his primary focus. Meanwhile, the new Secretary of Defense Hague who assumed the position right before the budget sequestration cuts to defense spending hit, spent much of his first months in

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<sup>146</sup>Tom Donilon, “Remarks by National Security Advisor Tom Donilon – As prepared for Delivery: “President Obama’s Asia Policy and the Upcoming Trip to Asia” (Speech by National Security Advisor Tom Donilon at the Center for Strategic & International Studies, Washington, D.C., November 15, 2012), Available At: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/11/15/remarks-national-security-advisor-tom-donilon-prepared-delivery> (Accessed September 17, 2013)

<sup>147</sup>Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, location 4122-4130 of 7718

<sup>148</sup>Ibidem.

<sup>149</sup>Sabina Tsai, “Obama’s Second Term in the Asia-Pacific Region: Reflecting on the Past, Looking to the Future”, *Project 2049 Institute*, September 2013, p 17-18. Available at: [http://project2049.net/documents/Tsai\\_Obama\\_Second\\_Term\\_in\\_Asia\\_Pacific\\_Region.pdf](http://project2049.net/documents/Tsai_Obama_Second_Term_in_Asia_Pacific_Region.pdf) (Accessed: 7. 1. 2013).

<sup>150</sup>Sutter, et all, “Balancing Acts”, p. 27.

office dealing with its effects and rebuking concerns – this time coming not only from conservative think-tanks but also from allies in Asia-Pacific – about the U.S. ability to follow through on the previous plans for the military aspect of the Pivot/Rebalance. Secretary Hagel has made an effort to reassure allies and partners in the region via multilateral institutions including the Shangri-La Dialogue, an annual *International Institute for Strategic Studies*’ summit held in June 2013<sup>151</sup> – which is becoming somewhat of a favorite forum for high Defense Department officials.<sup>152</sup>

Even though the new form of the Pivot/Rebalance is connected to the departure of a large portion of its original architects, it is perhaps still best described by one of them, namely Tom Donilon. In his speech to the Asia Society in New York in March 2013 titled “The United States and the Asia-Pacific in 2013”<sup>153</sup> Donilon redefines the Pivot/Rebalance policy along the lines I have already talked about. He says: “the United States is implementing a comprehensive, multidimensional strategy: strengthening alliances; deepening partnerships with emerging powers; building stable, productive, and constructive relationship with China; empowering regional institutions; and helping to build a regional economic architecture that can sustain shared prosperity. (...) Here’s what rebalancing does not mean. It does not mean diminishing ties to important partners in any other region. It does not mean containing China or seeking to dictate terms to Asia. And it is not just a matter of our military presence.”<sup>154</sup> As you can see, compared to Obama’s Canberra speech and Clinton’s Article from 2011, Donilon’s speech is much more down-to-earth, the “values” dimension of the policy seems to be all but gone by now, it is clearly focused on security and economic issues. Moreover, even though China has been asserting its maritime and exclusive economic zone claims quite heavily throughout 2012, Donilon’s comments are very reserved saying that “it is clear that territorial disputes in the resource-rich South and East China Seas will test the region’s political and security architecture. (...) While the United States has no territorial claims there, and does not take position on the claims of others, the United States is firmly opposed to coercion and the use of force to advance territorial claims

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<sup>151</sup> Tsai, “Obama’s Second Term in the Asia-Pacific Region”, p. 20.

<sup>152</sup> Leon Panetta revealed the plans to move 10 percent of the U.S. Navy assets from the Atlantic to the Pacific during the summit a year before then. See: Perlez, “Panetta Outlines New Weaponry for Pacific”.

<sup>153</sup> Donilon,, “The U.S. in Asia Pacific in 2013”.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibidem*.

(...) This includes China”<sup>155</sup> In fact, the only issue with China Donilon really highlights is cybersecurity.

At least as far as China’s maritime disputes and the Sino-American relations go, this new perhaps more mature version of the Pivot/Rebalance seemed to have worked better. Except for ongoing Chinese pressure against the Philippine presence at the Second Thomas Shoal, a submerged shoal in the Spratly Islands, most of 2013 seemed to be relatively more stable than the previous year,<sup>156</sup> when China was pressing its claims hard and the U.S. was responding in kind, supporting its allies – especially Japan – in the disputes.<sup>157</sup> All and all, despite the sequestration defense spending cuts and the foreign policy personal causing some doubts about the strength of the U.S. commitment to the Pivot/Rebalance, with a less agitated (and agitating) China and the TPP negotiations on track to be concluded by the end of the year,<sup>158</sup> the policy and the overall U.S. engagement in Asia-Pacific seemed to have been quite stable in 2013. The positive trend, however, was reversed during fall of 2013. The Obama administration ran into serious trouble at the home front when Congress failed to agree on a federal budget for the fiscal year 2014 or pass a continuing resolution, which resulted in a 16 days long federal government shutdown. The shutdown was a serious blow to the U.S. government’s reputation abroad, as it threatened that if it went on for possibly just a few hours longer, the U.S. could lose its ability to borrow resulting in defaulting on its debt.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, it had serious consequences for the Pivot/Rebalance policy. President Obama – citing difficulties of travel during shutdown – first shortened and eventually cancelled his Asian trip. Due to the trip cancellation, President Obama missed the 2013 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting and the East Asia Summit,<sup>160</sup> which he had

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<sup>155</sup> Donilon,, “The U.S. in Asia Pacific in 2013”.

<sup>156</sup> O’Rourke, “Maritime Territorial and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Disputes Involving China”, 77 p.

<sup>157</sup> Ben Dolven; Shirley A. Kan; and Mark E. Manyin, “Maritime Territorial Disputes in East Asia: Issues for Congress”, *Congressional Research Service* Report (2013) 33 p. Available at: <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42930.pdf> (accessed July 10, 2014)

<sup>158</sup> Donilon,, “The U.S. in Asia Pacific in 2013”.

<sup>159</sup> Paul Taylor, “Analysis: U.S. “soft power” takes a hit over government shutdown”, *Reuters*, October 17, 2013. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/17/us-usa-fiscal-world-analysis-idUSBRE99G0QT20131017> (Accessed: 7. 7. 2013)

<sup>160</sup> David Nakamura, “Obama cancels the rest of Asia trip, citing difficulties of travel during shutdown”, *The Washington Post*, October 4, 2013. Available at: [www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-cancels-the-rest-of-asia-trip-citing-difficulties-of-travel-during-shutdown/2013/10/04/cb1b8f22-2c9c-11e3-b139-029811dbb57f\\_story.html?wpmk=MK0000200](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-cancels-the-rest-of-asia-trip-citing-difficulties-of-travel-during-shutdown/2013/10/04/cb1b8f22-2c9c-11e3-b139-029811dbb57f_story.html?wpmk=MK0000200) (Accessed: November 12, 2013).

committed himself to attend every year.<sup>161</sup> Obama sent the Secretary of State in his stead, but as is symbolized by the official picture of APEC meeting participants – where the Chinese President Xi Jinping stands middle and front, while Kerry waves from the very edge – China was able to set the agenda of the meeting, while the U.S. interests were sidelined.<sup>162</sup>

Moreover, as some observers point out, Asia respects decisive leaders and Obama going back on his word shortly after painting the red line on Syria and the use of chemical weapons and then backing out, made him not appear very decisive.<sup>163</sup> As Tom Donilon said in March: “the most valuable commodity in Washington [is] the President’s time.”<sup>164</sup> The President was not able or willing to commit it to Asia-Pacific in fall 2013. The credibility of the Pivot/Rebalance was once again being questioned,<sup>165</sup> especially given that it was becoming increasingly obvious that with Japan joining the negotiations on the TPP, the negotiations will not be concluded in 2013. Moreover even if they were, the administration still has not managed to secure the Trade Promotion Authority – the so called fast-track option – for the TPP, so that the negotiated terms wouldn’t be challenged by the Congress.<sup>166</sup> The Obama administration tried to get back on track with the Pivot/Rebalance by the means of Susan Rice’s speech<sup>167</sup> – a first speech on Asia policy by a high representative of Obama’s second administration – at Georgetown in November 2013. Rice confirmed the U.S. commitment to Asia-Pacific, highlighting U.S. alliances, economic prosperity and democratic values as the main topics of the Pivot/Rebalance. When it comes to China, she said, the U.S. is looking to: “operationalize a new model of major power relations.” and highlighted the importance of “managing inevitable competition”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Donilon,, “The U.S. in Asia Pacific in 2013”.

<sup>162</sup> Paul Taylor, “Analysis: U.S. “soft power” takes a hit over government shutdown”.

<sup>163</sup> Curtis Chin, “It’s all about face for Obama in Asia: Curtis Chin says after his about-turn on Syria and the cancellation of his trip to Asia, Obama is discovering how damaging conduct that neglect to convey respect and dignify others can be in the region”, *South China Morning Post*, October 8, 2013. Available at: <http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1326464/its-all-about-face-obama-asia> (Accessed: November 12, 2013).

<sup>164</sup> Donilon,, “The U.S. in Asia Pacific in 2013”.

<sup>165</sup> Michael Green, “Obama’s Asia trip and the credibility of the pivot”, *Lowy Interpreter*, October 4, 2013. Available at: <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2013/10/04/Obamas-Asia-trip-and-the-credibility-of-the-pivot1.aspx?COLLCC=2849063164&COLLCC=1082116348&COLLCC=495626065&> (Accessed: November 12, 2013)

<sup>166</sup> Fergusson et al, “The Trans-Pacific Partnership Negotiations and Issues for Congress“, 59 p.

<sup>167</sup> Rice, “America’s Future in Asia”.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibidem*.

Be it a result of perceived weakness of the U.S. commitment or not, following the APEC and EAS meetings and Rice's speech, China once again stepped up its claims in the maritime disputes in South and East China Seas including the following: ongoing Chinese pressure against the Philippine presence at Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands; frequent patrols by Chinese Coast Guard ships at the Senkaku Islands; China's announcement on November 23, 2013, of an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) for the East China Sea that includes airspace over the Senkaku Islands; the incident of December 5, 2013, in which a Chinese navy ship put itself in the path of the U.S. Navy cruiser *Cowpens* forcing the *Cowpens* to change course to avoid collision; the implementation on January 1, 2014, of fishing regulations administered by China's Hainan province applicable to waters constituting more than half of the South China Sea, and the reported enforcements of those regulations with actions that have including the apprehension of non-Chinese fishing boats; land-reclamation activities, publicly reported starting in May 2014, at locations in the South China Sea occupied by China that seem to be the prelude to the construction of new facilities and fortifications on the disputed islands; and moving a large oil rig in May 2014 into waters that are near the Paracels and inside Vietnam's claimed EEZ, and using Chinese Coast Guard and Navy ships to keep the Vietnamese away from the right causing a number of incidents between Chinese and Vietnamese civilian and military ships.<sup>169</sup> The administration responded to these challenges by backing its allies while trying to diffuse the situation,<sup>170</sup> however the tension persisted.

It was amid this heightened tension between Beijing and its neighbors when Obama's latest Asia trip took place. In April, the President visited Japan, Republic of Korea, Philippines and Malaysia. China was not on the visit list despite being the clear "elephant in the room."<sup>171</sup> Much of the political capital of this trip was spent on reassuring allies that the U.S. "has their backs" in their disputes with China. Due to the President's backing down in case of Syria and his reluctance to use force in the case of

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<sup>169</sup> O'Rourke, "Maritime Territorial and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Disputes Involving China", p. 17-18.

<sup>170</sup> Ibidem, p. 19-29.

<sup>171</sup> M. K. Bhadrakumar, "Obama resets the "pivot" to Asia", *Asia Times*, May 9, 2014. Available at: <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/World/WOR-01-090514.html> (accessed July 10, 2014).

Ukraine as well, not everybody was convinced by the President's reassurances.<sup>172</sup> Nevertheless, right prior Obama's visit to Philippines, the administration was able to announce the long awaited Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement – an executive agreement, not a formal treaty, between the two countries – which will see U.S. troops deployed in the Philippines and enhanced cooperation between the two militaries.<sup>173</sup> The overall strategic aspect of the visit was quite successful. However, mere days after the President left Asia, China's launched one of its biggest initiatives to assert its maritime claims up to date – moving the oil rig to Vietnam claimed territory<sup>174</sup> – showing that the Chinese dragon is far from tamed. The second goal of Obama's April Asia trip was to reinvigorate the progress on the TPP negotiations, which – failing to be concluded by the end of 2013 – are now said to be completed in 2014. However, the persisting disagreements between Japan and the U.S. about agricultural protection for beef and rice proved to be a hard nut to crack as the two sides “scrambled to produce evidence of progress, working right up until Obama was about to depart Japan to provide a positive update on the talks.”<sup>175</sup> Indeed, the trade talks were a tough sell during Obama's Asia trip.

The April 2014 Asia trip was the latest landmark in the Pivot/Rebalance policy, as such the reactions to it – much like to the whole policy – ranged from welcoming and encouraging to outright critical. *Foreign Policy* – the platform where the Pivot was launched – published several articles and commentaries in response to the President's trip. Dan Blumenthal in a recent conversation about Obama's Asia trip for the *Foreign Policy* called the Obama's Pivot policy ill-conceived for three reasons. “The United States is a superpower with vital interests in several interlinked regions. There can be no Asia policy without a global strategy. (...) It is not possible for Washington to play a consequential role in Asia while drastically cutting its defense budget and demonstrating an uneven commitment to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (...) No one

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<sup>172</sup> Liptak, “5 takeaways from Obama's trip to Asia”.

<sup>173</sup> Carl Thayer, “Analyzing the US-Philippines Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement”, *The Diplomat*, May 2, 2014. Available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2014/05/analyzing-the-us-philippines-enhanced-defense-cooperation-agreement/> (accessed July 10, 2014).

<sup>174</sup> Shannon Tiezzi, “Amid South China Sea Tensions, Vietnam Seeks Closer Ties with US”, *The Diplomat*, May 29, 2014. Available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2014/05/amid-south-china-sea-tensions-vietnam-seeks-closer-ties-with-us/> (accessed July 10, 2014).

<sup>175</sup> Liptak, “5 takeaways from Obama's trip to Asia”

believes that the pivot is not about China. Why keep up the charade?<sup>176</sup> Mere three days later, the same journal published an article by Ely Ratner in which she points out the “considerable achievements”<sup>177</sup> of the Pivot: successes in trade and development including the Lower Mekong Initiative and the U.S.-ROK FTA; deepening ties with the regional organizations including joining EAS and active participation in ARF; the diplomatic opening with Myanmar; the deployment of additional military assets in the region; and strengthening U.S. alliances in the region. She concluded: “The rebalancing to Asia is real and the President is not there right now to salvage a phantom policy.”<sup>178</sup> The Pivot is real, I agree, but is it also new?

#### **2.4. Pivot to Asia – A New Policy?**

Even though the Pivot was only introduced at the end of 2011, if we read Clinton’s<sup>179</sup> and Obama’s<sup>180</sup> original texts from November 2011, it becomes clear that a number of policies that are to be considered part of the Pivot were already in place by then. This becomes increasingly evident as we explore the areas of continuity and innovation in the Pivot policy. A fairly telling fact is also that Hillary wasn’t even the first Clinton to declare “America’s Pacific Century,” it was introduced once before by President Bill Clinton at the 1993 Seattle APEC meeting.<sup>181</sup> President Clinton’s attempt at the Pacific century, however, was quite short lived. President Obama’s team did a better job at it, but we should keep it mind that at this time, the stakes were much higher than the last time around. Today, Asia-Pacific is the engine of the global economy, hosts the majority of world’s population and is the home of the key emerging powers – first and foremost of China. None of this, however, is a new piece of information and the Pivot didn’t come out of the blue. In fact, the United States has established its presence in Asia-Pacific already in 19<sup>th</sup> century and particularly after World War II and one of the principal conditions for the prosperity of today has been the stabilizing U.S. (military)

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<sup>176</sup> Yuki Yatsumi; Ely Ratner; Dan Blumenthal; Shogo Suzuki; Edward Luttwak; and Wu Jianmin, “Pivot to Asia: “Why Keep up with the Charade?”: A conversation on President Obama’s trip to Tokyo.”, *Foreign Policy* 192 (2014). Available at: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/04/22/chinafile\\_conversation\\_obama\\_tokyo\\_pivot\\_charade](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/04/22/chinafile_conversation_obama_tokyo_pivot_charade) (accessed July 10, 2014).

<sup>177</sup> Ratner, “The False Cry of the Pivot Deniers”.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>179</sup> Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century”.

<sup>180</sup> Obama, “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament”.

<sup>181</sup> Hadar, “America’s Long-Delayed Pacific Century”.

presence in the area ever since World War II.<sup>182</sup> Returning to more recent times, many aspects of the Pivot present an extension rather than transformation of previous policies by the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations.<sup>183</sup> Sutter, et al,<sup>184</sup> Lieberthal<sup>185</sup> and Blumenthal<sup>186</sup> argue that both the administrations essentially used a dual strategy of engaging China while hedging against it by safeguarding its security interests. The Pivot, especially in its later stages can be perceived to do just that except perhaps on a larger scale.<sup>187</sup> Even a lot of the specific initiatives of the Pivot have roots in the previous administrations. “For instance, the in the military sphere, the Administration is accelerating and expanding policies undertaken under President George W. Bush to intensify the U.S. focus on the southern and western parts of the region by carrying out operations there mainly through rotational deployments rather than through deployments of permanent bases. The Obama administration is also expanding Bush-era initiatives such as strengthening relations with existing allies in Asia; negotiating the TPP; and forging new partnerships with India, Indonesia and Vietnam.”<sup>188</sup> Moreover, a number of initiatives introduced as part of the Pivot have been put in motion by the Obama administration pre-November 2011. Obama initiated the new Strategic and Economic Dialogue in 2009, and there were even signs of the military reshuffle.<sup>189</sup> For instance, even before the announcement of the redeployment, the Pentagon was quietly strengthening its forces in the region by deploying half of the new F-22 fighters to Asia-Pacific despite the ongoing commitments in Middle East and Afghanistan.<sup>190</sup>

That being said, not all of the Pivot initiatives were just an expansion of the previous policies. The Pivot brought adjustments in security policy, the new U.S. defense strategy guidelines explained that the U.S. military will be moving away from the counter-insurgency strategies to new 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges including defeating Anti-Access/Area Denial strategies<sup>191</sup> the Chinese military is using.<sup>192</sup> Besides that, the

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<sup>182</sup> Ashley J. Tellis, “U.S.-China Relations in a Realist World” in *Tangled Titans*, location 1882-1890 of 8334 and Sutter, et al, “Balancing Acts”, p. 5.

<sup>183</sup> Sutter, et al, “Balancing Acts”, p. 31-32.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5-7.

<sup>185</sup> Quoted from: Dews, “Pivot, Rebalance, or Reinvigorate?”.

<sup>186</sup> Yatsumi; Ratner; Blumenthal; Suzuki; Luttwak; and Wu, “Pivot to Asia: “Why Keep up with the Charade?”

<sup>187</sup> Lieberthal, quoted from: Dews, “Pivot, Rebalance, or Reinvigorate?”.

<sup>188</sup> Manyin et al., “Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration’s ‘Rebalancing’ Toward Asia”, p. 2.

<sup>189</sup> Sutter, et al, “Balancing Acts”, p. 7.

<sup>190</sup> Weitz, “Pivot Out, Rebalance In”.

<sup>191</sup> “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century defense”.



Pivot also introduced a more integrated strategy including strategic, economic and diplomatic elements and brought a broader vision of regional geography thinking beyond the traditional U.S. focus of East Asia.<sup>193</sup> Finally, compared to the Bush administration's War on Terror focus, which was very unpopular with the regional leaders and the public in Asia-Pacific<sup>194</sup> Obama's approach to Asia is much more multi-facet and comprehensive.<sup>195</sup>

The Pivot, therefore, some new elements, while a number of its elements was based on previous policies. What sort of a new policy was it then? Is it a an absolute game changer – a paradigm shift – or just another foreign policy? Peter A. Hall speaks of policy paradigms using Kuhn's concept of scientific paradigms<sup>196</sup> saying that “policymakers customarily work within a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing (...) this framework is embedded in the very terminology through which policymakers communicate about their work and it is influential precisely because so much of it is taken for granted and unamendable to scrutiny as a whole.<sup>197</sup> Using Hall's definition, I think it becomes quite clear that the Pivot policy – unlike for instance Nixon's opening to China which redefined Cold War in Asia, or 9/11 and War on Terror which brought a marginal threat of non-state actors at the forefront of the national security – is not a paradigm shift. However, I believe it is not too bold to say that the original concept of the Pivot was introduced as one. As something that will redefine the U.S. foreign policy for the decades to come. This begs the question: why?

### 3. Why Pivot to Asia?

To understand why the Pivot was launched at the end of 2011 and why it was launched as perhaps something bigger than what it is, we need to take into account a number of international and domestic factors. Following the logic of neoclassical realism we first

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<sup>192</sup> Manyin et al., “Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's ‘Rebalancing’ Toward Asia”, p. 4.

<sup>193</sup> Ibidem, p. 5.

<sup>194</sup> Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, location 6924 of 7718.

<sup>195</sup> Ratner, “The False Cry of the Pivot Deniers”.

<sup>196</sup> Although Kuhn himself didn't believe social sciences had paradigms as he defined them.

<sup>197</sup> Peter A. Hall, “Policy paradigms, Social Learning, and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain”, *Comparative Politics* 25, No. 3 (1993): 279. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org> (accessed July 10, 2014)

have to examine the relative power perception (shift) in the region prior to the Pivot, specifically in the case of Asia-Pacific the phenomenon of a more assertive China and the idea of China threat. In this, the balance of power and threat theories will provide useful inside. Secondly, we have to take into account domestic politics factors to better explain especially the timing of the Pivot. Based on the available literature and primary sources neo-isolationist mood and fiscal constrains following the financial crisis seem to be the most relevant factors. Having examined what the Pivot is in great detail, I believe the combination of these factors should provide a plausible explanation of why the pivot was launched when and the way it was. That being said, I do not claim that the official reasoning of that Pivot – that Asia-Pacific is the most dynamic region and the engine of the global economy and is therefore of capital importance – is a lie, I am saying it's not complete.

When it comes to security in Asia-Pacific, the challenges are many – from rising ocean tide to nuclear North Korea None is, however – except perhaps for time of crisis on the Korean peninsula – as prominent as the potential “China threat.” During the last decades, China has experienced unprecedented economic growth paralleled in the later years with an impressive military modernization and buildup. China now has the second largest economy and is projected to become the largest, moreover China now also has the second largest military and military budget, which has been increasing every year.<sup>198</sup> This unprecedented growth – known as the rise of China – would probably be enough to cause worries among its neighbors, however, China also has a revisionist history<sup>199</sup> which is well remembered by countries like India or Vietnam. Nevertheless China has been very aware of the possibility of being seen as a threat. “Beijing had been remarkably successful in reassuring others that its greater power would not pose a threat. Policies aimed at offsetting inevitable anxiety about China’s rise had been a central thread in the grand strategy Beijing’s leaders embraced in the 1990s.”<sup>200</sup> “China’s development will never pose a threat to anyone”<sup>201</sup> said the official “China’s Peaceful Development Road” document. For the better part of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China made good by that proclamation. China has joined a number of regional multilateral organizations and improved their relations with virtually all

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<sup>198</sup> Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, p. 7.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 133.

<sup>200</sup> Goldstein, “U.S.-China Interactions in Asia”, location 5308 of 8334.

neighbors, in 2002 China – along with the other interested parties – even signed the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea that was supposed to provide guidelines for resolving maritime disputes in the South China Sea.<sup>202</sup> China’s regional influence has risen considerably, especially in Southeast Asia, overall the U.S. influence was still greater, but the Chinese influence was growing at a faster pace.<sup>203</sup>

Starting in mid-2009, however, China returned to a more aggressive stance it has not assumed since the aftermath of Tiananmen.<sup>204</sup> In 2009-10 “China picked fights and irritated ties with Australia, ASEAN, India, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Vietnam. Even China’s ties with Myanmar and Mongolia began to exhibit frictions.”<sup>205</sup> Especially the Chinese relations with Vietnam and the Philippines deteriorated sharply over the maritime disputes.<sup>206</sup> Analysts debated, whether, the escalation of the maritime disputes was a conscious decision by Beijing, or not. Some<sup>207</sup> saw it as a conscious decision when Beijing took advantage of the perceived weakness of the United States amid the financial crisis. Others like Swaine and Fravel<sup>208</sup> didn’t see enough evidence to convince them it was a strategic decision by Beijing, instead Swaine and Fravel saw provocative behavior by all parties and also pointed out the necessity of submitting the claims to the UN. The way the process of working out the disputes works, in the absence of some sort of a compromise before submitting their respective claims, less than maximal claims would have hurt the interest in China, Vietnam and the Philippines respectively.<sup>209</sup> David Shambaugh – offering a view from inside China where he lived during that period – attributes the increased Chinese assertiveness to the “combination of acerbic Chinese nationalism, hubris over the Western financial crisis and its own

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<sup>201</sup> Quoted from Sutter, *U.S.-Chinese Relations*, location 3432 of 7718.

<sup>202</sup> David Shambaugh, “China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order”, *International Security* 29, No. 3 (2004/05): 64-99. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/> (Accessed: April 12, 2013)

<sup>203</sup> Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China*, p. 74-75.

<sup>204</sup> Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, p. 51.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 76.

<sup>206</sup> Goldstein, “U.S.-China Interactions in Asia”, location 5419 of 8334.

<sup>207</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser, Lyle Morris, “Chinese Perceptions of U.S. Decline and Power”, *China Brief* 9, No. 14 (2009). Available at:

[http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=35241&cHash=d b9748f805#.U9k8vvl\\_sgg](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35241&cHash=d b9748f805#.U9k8vvl_sgg) (Accessed: April 12, 2013).

<sup>208</sup> Michael D. Swaine and M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Assertive Behavior – Part Two: The Maritime Periphery”, *China Leadership Monitor* 35 (2011): 1-29. Available at:

<http://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/71259> (Accessed: April 12, 2013).

<sup>209</sup> *Ibidem*.

economic success, the domestic politics of an insecure regime facing rising domestic social unrest, and territorial disputes with its neighbors”<sup>210</sup>

However, in the end it does not really even matter, if becoming more assertive in its maritime disputes was a conscious decision by Beijing or a result of moves from both sides, what matters is that by the end of 2010 China was perceived as substantially more assertive,<sup>211</sup> China was perceived as a threat. In accord with the balance of threat theoretical concept, China’s neighbors tried to balance against the perceived threat. Given the large power disparity between most of them and China, they logically turned to the external balancing, specifically to improving relations with the U.S. – who is seen by many as the status quo power in the region in contrast to the revisionist China<sup>212</sup> – calling for a greater U.S. engagement in the region.<sup>213</sup> This was a welcome opening for the U.S. to launch the Pivot to ramp up their strategic and economic buildup in Asia-Pacific killing two birds with one stone by reassuring allies and prospective allies; and increasing its own presence in the region – which they have slowly been doing anyway – addressing the power shift in caused by the former U.S. preoccupation with the War on Terror and the Middle East.<sup>214</sup>

While the reaction to rise of China – more specifically the new Chinese assertiveness – and the official reasoning of the crucial strategic and economic importance of the region amount to a plausible explanation why the Pivot policy was launched, it is also important to consider domestic politics influences that could have factored into the reasoning behind the Pivot. I argue that there were two interconnected domestic politics factors, the weariness of big foreign policy commitments and fiscal constraints caused by the financial crisis that influenced the policy launch. Kurt Campbell pointed out in his conversation with Robert Kagan at the “Maintaining America’s Global Responsibilities in Age of Austerity” forum<sup>215</sup> that there is a tendency

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<sup>210</sup> Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, p. 51.

<sup>211</sup> Goldstein, “U.S.-China Interactions in Asia”, location 5666 of 8334; and Bush, “The Response of China’s neighbors to U.S. “Pivot” to Asia””.

<sup>212</sup> Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, p. 312.

<sup>213</sup> Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*, p. 76-77; Goldstein, “U.S.-China Interactions in Asia”, location 5465 of 8334; and Bush, “The Response of China’s neighbors to U.S. “Pivot” to Asia””.

<sup>214</sup> De Santis, “The China Threat and the “Pivot” to Asia”, p. 210.

<sup>215</sup> Kurt Campbell, “The Obama Administration’s Pivot to Asia” (A conversation with Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell moderated by Robert Kagan at the *Foreign Policy Initiative* Forum “Maintaining America’s Global Responsibilities in Age of Austerity”, Washington, D.C., December 2011

in the U.S. after a great engagement like for instance the Wars in Korea or Vietnam to “come home” and focus more on domestic politics. Campbell also said that there is such mood, such tendencies in the U.S. society after the exhausting engagements in the Middle East and Afghanistan.<sup>216</sup> Moreover, by 2011 the U.S. had not yet recovered from the financial crisis, which was also making large new foreign policy commitments difficult.<sup>217</sup> I argue that to overcome this pressure against new foreign policy engagements – and to really convince the Americans that the administration is doing the right thing committing to Asia-Pacific – it had to come up with something big. Therefore, the reason why the Pivot policy was initially presented as something that will redefine U.S. foreign policy was not only to convince the observers abroad – the Asian countries – but also to convince the observers at home – the American people. As far as the timing of the Pivot goes, I have found no plausible links to the domestic policy. I believe it is most likely that the Pivot launch was simply timed so that the President could immediately cash in at the East Asia Summit

#### 4. Whither Pivot?

Having explained what the Pivot is and why it was launched leaves us with but one question. What will become of the Pivot? The Pivot was envisioned as a policy for the rest of the decade. We are now well within its third year. Although not all political pundits and scholars admit it,<sup>218</sup> the policy is still “alive.” During the first three years, the policy has undergone an evolution from its initial “grand design” to a more pragmatic form aptly exemplified by the policy name change from Pivot to Rebalance. Moreover, in spite of some doubts,<sup>219</sup> the policy has survived the departure of a number of its original architects from the key positions in the executive branch of the government. The redeployment of the military assets towards Asia-Pacific continues,<sup>220</sup> despite the defense budget cuts. The TPP negotiations also continue, although the

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<sup>216</sup> Campbell, “The Obama Administration’s Pivot to Asia”.

<sup>217</sup> Kenneth Liebertahl, “The American Pivot to Asia: Why President Obama’s turn to the East is easier said than done”, *Foreign Policy* 189 (2011). Available at: [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/21/the\\_american\\_pivot\\_to\\_asia](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/12/21/the_american_pivot_to_asia) (Accessed September 17, 2013)

<sup>218</sup> Ratner, “The False Cry of the Pivot Deniers”.

<sup>219</sup> Tsai, “Obama’s Second Term in the Asia-Pacific Region”

<sup>220</sup> Dona Miles, “Cavalry Rotational Deployment Supports Asia-Pacific Rebalance”, *American Forces Press Service*, January 7, 2014, Washington, D.C. Available at: <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=121439> (Accessed July 17, 2014).

progress is slow<sup>221</sup> and the Obama administration has still not secured the fast-track option for the TPP. On the diplomatic front, the President has during his spring 2014 Asia trip reassured allies that the U.S. has their back in the maritime disputes with China, however, just a few days after the President left Asia, China has initiated one of its boldest moves to asserts its maritime claims up to date.<sup>222</sup>

Nevertheless, the future of the Pivot/Rebalance policy remains uncertain. 2013 has shown that the diplomatic part of the policy is still quite fragile. How can we be certain that there will not be another domestic or foreign political crisis that will prevent the President from attending the annual APEC and EAS meetings diminishing the U.S. potential in the regional multilateral institutions and the credibility of the U.S. commitment? The escalating maritime disputes will require strongest U.S. diplomatic position possible. Meanwhile, the future of the economic dimension of the Pivot/Rebalance – as the U.S. is not pursuing other trade agreement opportunities for instance with the ASEAN<sup>223</sup> – is tied to the success or failure of the TPP, which will depend heavily on whether the Obama administration will be able to secure the Trade Promotion Authority for the negotiated agreement,<sup>224</sup> which is far from certain given the polarization in the U.S. Congress. Finally, even though the strategic rebalance towards Asia-Pacific continues, given the budgetary constraints, the doubts persist about the long term sustainability of the costly military presence in the region. “For example, there is a considerable concern that long-term Navy budgets will not sustain a Navy of 313 ships, as called for in recent plans.”<sup>225</sup>

The Pivot is not a static policy, it has evolved and it will continue to evolve, so it is not make or break just yet. However, with all the challenges ahead, it is becoming obvious that the Pivot/Rebalance policy will require a sustained commitment and priority are its initiatives to be successful. But that kind of commitment and priority might soon become difficult to give.<sup>226</sup> Two regional crises the United States has to deal with one way or the other – in Ukraine and in Iraq – have already broken out in 2014,

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<sup>221</sup> Liptak, “5 takeaways from Obama’s trip to Asia”.

<sup>222</sup> Matt Spetalnick and Manuel Mogato, “Obama’s Asia pivot tested by China’s bold maritime claims”, *Reuters*, May 16, 2014. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/17/us-vietnam-china-obama-analysis-idUSBREA4G00420140517> (accessed July 10, 2014).

<sup>223</sup> De Santis, “The China Threat and the “Pivot” to Asia”, p. 213-14.

<sup>224</sup> Fergusson et al, “The Trans-Pacific Partnership Negotiations and Issues for Congress”.

<sup>225</sup> Sutter, et al, “Balancing Acts”, p. 26.

three if we count the latest escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Meanwhile, the civil war in Syria continues. All of these issues require U.S. attention and resources. Amid all that can the Obama administration really pay enough attention to the Pivot/Rebalance initiatives? Should they? Will the next President?

## Conclusion

At the end of 2011, the Obama administration introduced a new Asia policy called Pivot or Rebalance to Asia envisioned to set the tone of U.S. Asia policy for the rest of the decade. The policy was launched by a series of announcements by the highest officials of the administration including Obama himself. The policy consisted of a number of initiatives majority of which was in the security and economic dimensions. Immediately after its spectacular – perhaps too spectacular – launch the policy accrued controversy as it was said not to be aimed against China, nevertheless, a number of analysts saw it differently<sup>227</sup> and China's reaction to it ranged “from measured skepticism to harsh criticism.”<sup>228</sup> China thought it was being contained by the policy, for the U.S. the policy symbolized a return to Asia when it in fact never left, while some political pundits didn't even believe the Pivot was a real policy.<sup>229</sup> All in all, the policy has generated a number of questions.

In this thesis, I have sought to answer some of them. Specifically, I sought to explain what the Pivot is, why it was launched and to discuss what might become of it. I have found that the Pivot was a combination of considerable expansion of old initiatives dating back to the Clinton and Bush presidencies; and several new ones. Most notably, the Pivot has brought an adjustment of the U.S. defense strategy, a broad and multi-facet approach towards Asia-Pacific and a new perception of the region (including south Asia). I have also found that the Pivot was not – despite the way it was originally presented – a complete reorientation of the U.S. foreign/Asia policy. Concerning the reason why it was launched, I have found that besides the official reasoning of how

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<sup>226</sup> Manyin et al., “Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's ‘Rebalancing’ Toward Asia”, p. 9.

<sup>227</sup> I.e. De Santis, “The China Threat and the ‘Pivot’ to Asia”, p. 210.

<sup>228</sup> Avery Goldstein, “U.S.-China Interactions in Asia”, in *Tangled Titans: the United States and China*, ed. David Shambaugh (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), Kindle edition, location 5516 of 8334.

<sup>229</sup> Ratner, “The False Cry of the Pivot Deniers”.

Asia-Pacific is going to be the most important region of this century, it was the rise of China, or perhaps better said the perception of the rising China threat that constituted the largest part of the strategic rationale behind that Pivot. The perception of the China threat – which prompted U.S. allies on China's maritime periphery to turn to Washington for assistance – was complemented by the U.S.' own need to address the shifted balance of power in the region vis-à-vis China. I also believe that the domestic resistance to new large foreign policy engagements after Iraq and Afghanistan and the budgetary constraints played a role in why the policy was originally presented as more radical than it in fact was. Finally, based on the successes and failures of the Pivot so far and the challenges ahead, I believe it is going to be difficult but possible to sustain the Pivot policy and its credibility.

## **Souhrn**

V této diplomové práci jsem zkoumal Pivot do Asie. Pivot neboli rebalancování do Asie je zahraničně politická iniciativa vyhlášená administrativou prezidenta Obamy na konci roku 2011 s vizí, že bude formovat asijskou a do značné míry i obecně zahraniční politiku Spojených států alespoň do konce dekády. Pivot byl spuštěn za pomoci série prohlášení nejvyšších činitelů Obamovo administrativy včetně prezidenta samotného. Politika obsahovala řadu jednotlivých iniciativ, nejdůležitější z nich byly v oblasti bezpečnosti a ekonomiky. Okamžitě po spuštění Pivotu, na které byl kladen možná až příliš velký důraz, se objevily první kontroverze. Obamova administrativa Pivot představila jakožto naprosto zásadní politiku s dalekosáhlými dopady, ale mnozí analytici to viděli jinak, poukazujíc na vysokou dávku kontinuity s politikami předchozích administrativ. Čína chápala Pivot jako zaměřený proti ní ve smyslu politiky zadržování, což Spojené státy popíraly. Není tedy žádný div, že celá politika vzbuzovala a dodnes vzbuzuje řadu otázek. Na tři z nich jsem hledal odpověď ve své diplomové práci. Konkrétně na otázky: co je Pivot, proč byla politika Pivotu do Asie spuštěna a jaká bude budoucnost Pivotu. Zjistil jsem, že Pivot je kombinací rozšířených iniciativ, které byly spuštěny již za minulých administrativ a několika nových. Mezi nejvýraznější novinky patří úprava americké obrané strategie směrem od boje s terorismem a válkou na zemi, k většímu důrazu na válku na vodě a ve vzduchu. Kromě toho ještě stojí za zmínku nový širokozáběrový pohled na region jako celek a nové chápání



jižní Asie jako součásti Asie-Pacifiku. Co se týká toho, proč byla politika Pivotu spuštěna, z mojí analýzy vyplývá, že kromě oficiálního odůvodnění, že Asie-Pacifik bude představovat nejdůležitější region 21. století, stojí za Pivotem do Asie především nárůst vnímání Číny jakožto bezpečnostní hrozby po vystupňování jejích nároků v Jihočínském moři v roce 2010 a následný tlak jihoasijských států na Washington, aby se v regionu více angažoval spolu s vlastním americkým zájmem si v regionu upevnit pozici. Co se týká toho, jaký bude mít pivot budoucnost, současný vývoj nasvědčuje, že by se mohl jakožto americká asijská politika udržet, nicméně bude záležet na tom, jak moc se o to bude úřadující prezident zasazovat, zda nedá přednost jiným regionům či konfliktům.

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