



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Asia-Pacific under Obama's Rebalance Strategy: Regional Responses

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Received:</b> January 11, 2020</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> March 24, 2020</p> <p><b>Online:</b> March 31, 2020</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Asia-Pacific, Balance of Power, New Cold War, Obama Administration, Rebalance Strategy</p> <p><b>*Corresponding Author:</b> zahid.yaseen@gcw us.edu.pk</p>	<p>This paper analyzes the "pivot" or "rebalance" of the Obama administration in US relations with the Asia-Pacific region. Rebalance Strategy is a project which includes three sets of measures i.e. security, economic, and diplomatic elements. It puts a strong emphasis on Southeast Asia and South Asia to rebalance the historically strong US emphasis on Northeast Asia. However, Beijing has responded to the rebalanced approach through its hard power and soft power, arguing that the US is engaged in a plot to establish a "containment" of China in the Cold War-style. The changing game of geopolitics in the Asia-Pacific can be distinguished by the "Power Transition Theory", via qualitative research. Hence the paper concludes with the remarks that "the US's return to Asia-Pacific has become a model of a security that seeks to pronounce China as a belligerent and unstable Power in the region".</p>

## Introduction

In October 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton published an article in Periodic Foreign Policy entitled "America's Pacific Century," an "official" statement of strategic intent for all practical purposes. Clinton points out in this article that Washington claims that the axis of world influence is no longer the Atlantic but the Pacific and that the Asia-Pacific region is more important to the US than ever before. She underlined that much of 21st century history would be written in Asia. In her words, "As the war in Iraq winds and the United States begins to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the United States stands at a critical juncture". She explained: "The growth and dynamism of Asia is fundamental to the economic and strategic interests of America and a core priority for Obama. Open Asian markets provide unprecedented opportunities for the United States to invest, trade and access cutting-edge technology. The domestic economic recovery must rely on exports, and on American firms' ability to tap into Asia's large and increasing customer base. Strategically, maintaining peace and stability in Asia-Pacific is increasingly crucial for global development" (Clinton, 2011).

The rebalancing is a multidimensional, region-wide policy initiative. In terms of strategy, the rebalancing includes three sets of initiatives—defense, economic, and diplomatic. Changes in the composition of the U.S. military force are widely evident and have received significant attention. The United States is transferring major military resources from other operational areas to the Asia-Pacific and changing its global security structures to create more concentrated U.S. forces throughout the region. It included high-profile new military deployments to Australia and the Philippines, which was followed by enhanced security agreements with regional allies underlining greater military integration. The rebalancing also involves economic initiatives aimed at expanding bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation between the USA and the region. Ultimately, a much-intensified degree of U.S. political involvement in the region has seen the rebalancing. U.S. political involvement has included improving U.S. alliances; establishing stronger ties with allies like Singapore and India; enhancing cooperation with multilateral institutions; and maintaining interactions with China (Castro, 2013).

The policies of the Obama administration towards the Asia-Pacific region have evolved over time and have passed through two distinct phases. When the policy was first rolled out in 2011-12, there was much emphasis on the region's military initiatives. China disapproved of these measures and Beijing took precautions to demonstrate its influence with US allies in maritime territorial disputes. In late 2012, the Obama administration changed its strategy, playing down the importance of military actions, stressing economic and political aspects and pressing for stronger U.S. engagement with China. Nevertheless, some critics in China and some observers elsewhere have indicated that the rebalancing was intended to contain China, this is a simplistic interpretation of the new strategy (although, in China's case, partially articulated). While US policymakers are definitely aware of China's rapid growth and its increasing military strength, a much broader range of geopolitical, cultural, and political factors has driven the rebalancing (Schiavenza, 2013).

China has reacted on two levels to the Obama administration's balancing of US-Asia relations. At the official level, Chinese government officials and state media have sharply criticized the new US policy, especially its military aspects. Official reports have also criticized "US diplomatic operation in Beijing backed in maritime and regional conflicts with China by the US and its allies. The tension and criticism of the United States has been boosted in China's rising non-state media. Some observers have accused the United States of conspiring to develop "Cold War-style" containment" of China" (Castro, 2013). In addition, almost every other regional power holds two positions in Northeast, Southeast and South Asia. First, most regional powers were delighted to see the stronger US commitment to the Asia-Pacific region, either publicly or privately. Second, regional powers are also keen to avoid having to make a choice between the US and China. They are very keen to maintain good relations with both sides. Some regional powers, including Indonesia, Thailand (a formal US ally) and Malaysia, have "straddled the fence" – preventing any overt indication of either tilting toward the US or China. Governments in these countries have also been cautious to maintain their strong economic relations with China, and to avoid upsetting the growing power of the region (Castro, 2013).

### **Rebalance Origins and Evolution**

For more than two centuries the United States has been deeply involved in the Asia-Pacific region and the region has solid, enduring interests in the United States.

President Bill Clinton's and President George W. Bush's post-Cold War administrations were active in Asia, although they also faced crises in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq, as well as the al-Qaeda threat. For example, in 1993, the Clinton administration launched a "New Pacific Community Initiative," which elevates the value of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), a platform to facilitate trade and good economic ties in the region. In 1995 President Clinton announced that relations with Vietnam would be normalized. President Clinton has tried both to engage China and to deter it. He vowed to invite the president of China to Washington and to reinvigorate talks leading to the accession of China to the World Trade Organization. In 1998, the Chinese leader visited Washington and in 2001, China joined the WTO via US auspices. President Clinton also sent two aircraft carrier combat groups to the Taiwan region to deter China when it took offensive military action before a presidential election in Taiwan in 1996 (Robert, 2013).

Likewise, in the Asia-Pacific region, the Bush administration strengthened US relations with allies and friendly countries. In 2001, it signed a promise to foster bilateral cooperation with Indonesia, and in 2003, it named the Philippines and Thailand as major non-NATO allies. In 2008, it concluded free trade agreements with Singapore in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a multilateral free-trade region. In 2005, it signed a 10-year security cooperation agreement with India in a significant move, creating a new "economic alliance" and a diplomatic rapprochement with India. A 2008 report carried out by The Chicago Council on Global Affairs assessed the impact of the "soft power" of the United States in Asia. The survey showed that the soft power scores of the United States in the Asia-Pacific outstripped China and those of the region's other nations. In particular, the soft-power ranking of the United States in the region was higher compared to that of China in all surveyed countries. As a result of two centuries of US cultural, political, military, and economic engagement with the Asia-Pacific region, this soft power was established and nurtured (Wright, 2008)

The Obama administration has specifically defined the wide Asia-Pacific region as a geostrategic priority for the United States, from India to New Zealand and the Pacific Islands to northern Japan and the Korean peninsula. The Obama administration paid an unprecedented degree of high-level attention to the region, including numerous presidential and cabinet visits. Diplomatic engagement by the administration has included bilateral engagement with key countries as well as a much higher degree of engagement with multilateral regional institutions. The agenda of the Administration also included new economic and security measures. In mid-2010 when three ballistic missile submarines reconfigured for cruise missile assault surfaced simultaneously in Diego Garcia (Indian Ocean), Busan (South Korea), and Subic Bay (Philippines), the US Navy foreshadowed the current American military build-up in the Asia-Pacific region.

### **The Rebalance Elements**

Although much attention has been focused on the military aspects of the US rebalance which is the most visible and perhaps the most controversial aspect of policy but it is important to understand that this rebalance act is multifaceted. It includes three main measures: security elements, economic elements, and diplomatic elements.

### **Security Elements**

The rebalance indicates that the Obama administration is pursuing U.S. pullbacks from Iraq and Afghanistan giving priority focus to the Asia-Pacific region. The military aspects of the “new strategy reflect the administration's commitment to retain strength levels and military capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region despite substantial deficiencies and dramatic cutbacks in overall U.S. spending on defence”(Odom, 2013)The administration's military actions will lead to large-scale dispersal of US forces and base / deployment arrangements. This reflects the growing importance of Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Indian Ocean, as well as the long-standing US emphasis on Northeast Asia.The deployment and dispersal of U.S. forces and the development of a new concept of air warfare are aimed at countering China's growing “Anti-Access or Area Denial” efforts in the Asia-Pacific region, primarily in Taiwan and China's maritime routes but also through Iran in and around the Gulf (Odom, 2013).

### **Economic Elements**

The US rebalance includes a series of economic measures. This reflects the United States' recognition that Asia is and will remain an important economic region for decades to come. US economic ties and alliances with Asia's growing economies and its growing economic multilateral groups will be essential to the health of the US economy. Most of the public debate centered on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a package of multilateral agreements involving the US and 11 other nations, including Japan, Canada and Mexico. But the agreement has never been ratified by the US Congress. The U.S. is also raising its international aid to the Asia-Pacific region by seven per cent. It is another component in the effort by Washington to strengthen its multidimensional economic links to the region(Odom, 2013).

### **Diplomatic Elements**

The rebalancing represents a substantial lift to U.S. diplomatic activism in the region. The Obama administration has been engaged at the presidential and cabinet levels, its commitment has been strong and sustained, and a number of bilateral and multilateral agreements have accompanied its activities. The U.S. priorities include “global security and stability free and open economic trade and human rights and responsible governance international ties and values. Inadequate US engagement will run the risk that Asia-Pacific states and regional groups will fail to adhere to and maintain long-term, transparent, and liberal international discipline that has long been a source of collective security, free markets and open societies”(Castro, 2013) Misaligned U.S. engagement will run the risk of regional states, most of which are closely monitoring American intervention in the region, seeing U.S. policy as overly centered on Chinese competitiveness and deterrent assertiveness and expansion, or focusing overly on cooperation with China at the detriment of other regional states and their interests. There are implications for the United States' ability to strike the right balance in its relations with China, which are far removed from US-China relations(Schiavenza, 2013).

## **The Evolving Economic Relationship**

The economic relationship between the U.S. and Southeast Asia is profoundly strained not only by the US withdrawal from the TPP but also by regional economic convergence within the states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which the U.S. has largely ignored. The United States and Asian partners “may attempt to create an alternative to China's BRI, which is likely to fail because it would not be able to mobilize the capital available in the BRI. Potential partners in such a U.S. scheme, like India or even Australia, other than Japan, have minimal funds to provide an alternative BRI” (Brzezinski, 2016) This is also clear that U.S. companies and other major multinational corporations see opportunities emerging from the BRI, especially in the transportation, logistics, construction and finance industries. They might not be prepared to work with any project framed as a straightforward alternative to BRI (Perwita, 2014).

While China is now the biggest trading partner of ASEAN, “irrespective of the presence of the BRI, and that other than the Philippines, no Southeast Asian state has supported the desire of the Trump administration to pursue bilateral trade deals over multilateral regional trade integration” (Li, 2017) It was noted that any future trade agreement between the U.S. and the Philippines was impossible, as there were significant regulatory and political obstacles on both sides. However, China is increasingly using economic leverage to increase its geopolitical influence in Southeast Asia, for example by fragmenting aid agreements to ensure that countries receive only the full amount of pledged assistance after embracing Chinese regional foreign policy objectives (Li, 2017).

In general, the U.S. political climate has been so hostile to multilateral trade agreements that irrespective of who wins the 2018 mid-term and 2020 presidential elections, the U.S. is unlikely to join the TPP. As a result of the absence of the United States from the TPP, “China does not feel any pressure to force Southeast Asian states to embrace the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which is a Beijing-centered multilateral trade agreement widely promoted in 2015 and 2016” (Fels, 2016) Instead, Chinese officials seem confident that, without the United States in the TPP, China will effectively decide Asia's trade rules and norms through a number of other agreements it negotiates besides the RCEP, as well as through its actual trading practices (Fels, 2016).

## **Regional practices of Beijing since the Rebalance**

Numerous factors influence China's foreign policy decision and it is difficult to determine whether China's actions may have been motivated or influenced by the rebalance. However, the Rebalance is intended to maintain the U.S. global presence in the long term and should not be judged purely on the basis of short-term adjustments in the actions of China, even though such actions may be related to the Strategy. However, since the Rebalance was announced, Beijing's rhetorical response to the strategy and its policy decisions can provide early indicators of how China's regional approach can unfold in the long run.

## **Beijing's Public Response to the Rebalance**

At first, China replied officially to the Rebalance by cautiously accepting it, but later negative statements and continued support of alternative international norms suggest underlying tensions with the regional involvement of the USA. “Then Vice President Xi

Jinping said during his 2012 trip to the United States that China welcomes the constructive role of the United States in fostering peace, stability and development in the Asia Pacific, while hoping that the United States will respect the interests and concerns of China and other countries in this region" (Odom, 2013). Since then Beijing has continued to announce that it supports the establishment of close ties with Asian countries by the United States. Nevertheless, since that time, official rhetoric has included cautious criticism of the policy, particularly of its military aspects and its support for U.S. allies and partners having territorial disputes with China. For example, China's 2013 Defense White Paper refers to "some country" which has made the regional situation tense, while the 2015 version refers to the Rebalance as one of many trends which "have a negative impact on security and stability along the periphery of China" (Hayton, 2015).

In 2014, China's US ambassador criticized the military dimension, saying: "The problem with this rebalancing is that it isn't balanced. Too much emphasis has been put on the military and security dimension, emphasizing conventional alliances without adequately addressing the regional countries' specific needs and concerns for economic growth and sustainable development" (Perwita, 2014). Other critiques centered in particular on the issue of the South China Sea: in May 2016, China's ASEAN envoy claimed that the implementation of the Rebalance Strategy was "the culmination of the issue of the South China Sea and that the United States was the key driving force" behind tensions there; in 2016, a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed multiple times that the region was calm and stable before the Americans came along with the rebalancing stuff" (Feng, 2018). In 2015, a spokesperson said the U.S. used territorial disputes as a reason to follow the policy of rebalancing. Apart from official statements, many in China seem to have deeply cynical and pessimistic perceptions of the Rebalance. David Lampton, Chinese Studies Director at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, testified to the Commission that "China instantly and indelibly saw the rebalancing as part of a neo-containment policy and that it has proved difficult to dissuade Beijing from this view, despite deepened US engagement efforts". Reflecting this perspective, media and academic statements in China appeared to be strongly critical of the rebalance, describing the policy as seeking "containment", portraying China as a threat and an enemy, attempting to check the rise of China, and generating instability in the South China Sea (Fels, 2016).

In addition, "Beijing's economic-strategic strategy is another aspect that raises Beijing's worries about its demand for hegemony, as the contested South China Sea hosts billions of dollars' worth of natural reserves. These reserves can help to reduce Beijing's dependence on imported energy, which is transported mostly through Strait of Hormuz and Malacca" (Hayton, 2015). So it can be said that China's economic-strategic interest was a driving force behind Beijing's imposition of a ban on fishing and an increase in the patrolling of its naval vessels in the disputed waters. Nevertheless, the decisions of the Chinese leadership increased apprehension among other claimant states, leading to their joint military exercises with foreign states, including the United States, in the disputed waters. For Beijing, "taking control of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea means protecting its Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC), as they are at the center of the sea-route trade. Assessment of China's whitepapers reveals that Beijing's foreign policy is defensive in nature as most of these papers endorse the need for peaceful economic growth and cooperation at regional and international level but not at the cost of national security" (Jain, 2017).

### **Alternative Regional Security and Economic Frameworks Proposed by China**

Beijing's policy includes frameworks that are broader in scope, available to all Asia-Pacific countries including the United States, and laxer in seeking free trade in services as well as goods, free investment, market access, and security of intellectual property. For years, however, China has favored regional economic and other groups that concentrate on Asian participants while at the same time excluding the USA. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which is backed by Beijing includes, China Russia India Pakistan and four Central Asian governments as members and several regional observer states. "The SCO issues comments regularly, and adopts policies that contradict the region's U.S. goals. In eastern Asia, China has preferred groups that are based on the ten ASEAN countries plus China, Japan, and South Korea – known as ASEAN plus 3" (Ansaree, 2014) With China endorsing a new regional body known as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a new level of Sino-American competition over Asian global economic groups emerged in the last year. The RCEP excludes the United States and includes all the members of ASEAN plus 3 as well as India, Australia and New Zealand. China is already the biggest source of imports and destination of exports for nearly all the RCEP countries (Ansaree, 2014).

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a free trade agreement (FTA) that will establish the world's largest trading bloc and mark a significant accomplishment for China as it challenges the US for influence and economic dominance in the Asia-Pacific region. RCEP is seen as "an alternative to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and became the second major Asia-led trade agreement following President Trump 's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017, while the remaining 11 TPP members renamed the TPP as the Comprehensive Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), kept its content largely intact, and signed it in March 2018" (Zuojun, 2018) The purpose behind the negotiations between RCEP is to establish a new, inclusive, high-value and mutually valued economic partnership agreement between ASEAN and its free-trade partners. When completed, RCEP will give the rules-based global trading mechanism a valuable enhancement. It will be a free trade area for the record books immense in population and output (covering 3.6 billion people and a GDP of \$25 trillion, exceeding that of the United States) and the record that the developing countries have ever set. This would implement "first-ever agreements between China , India , Japan and South Korea, building on World Trade Organization commitments and presenting new signs of Asian leadership in world trade. Trump's tariff-raising trade war with China gave additional motivation to move ahead with RCEP, which had only slowly progressed since 2012" (Das, 2013).

### **China's incentive to establish an AIIB**

The declared goal of the officially launched China-backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in June 2015 is to meet a need for significant investment across Asia. Yet its existence has created political controversy, with supporters claiming that it is covering up past iniquities while opponents claim that it would be a mere instrument for Chinese power projection. "Since established in December 2015, US diplomatic staff were working to prevent their partners from joining the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which they saw as China's global ambition. Despite US efforts to persuade other major donor countries to withdraw from AIIB, no one but Japan has done so" (Wang, 2015) Today the AIIB has "the world's second highest membership behind the World Bank, with confirmed membership now at eight-six. This is compared to 189 at the International Bank

for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) of the World Bank, and 67 at the ADB” (Jain, 2017) The U.S. fear has been overblown that the AIIB would purposely weaken other multilateral development banks (MDBs). AIIB President Jin Liqun, who had the task of establishing the bank, wanted an institution which would focus on multilateralism and international cooperation.

It is a regional development bank with a disbursement of about 4.4 billion so far and is also privileged as an alternative to the IMF for Asian countries and a major contributor to China in the field of global development finance. One way to gain more influence is to have the largest share of voting as China at 26.6%, which gives it veto power over key decisions such as the election of the president or a major increase in the bank's capital. It has been suggested that AIIB could serve as a way for China to utilize its surplus industrial potential. In assessing the bank's leading objective, it looks fine-tuned to work hand-in-hand with China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project, a port chain and transport structure that links China with continent of Europe and Africa through South Asia, Middle East and Central Asia (Zuojun, 2018).

### **Critical Assessment on US Rebalance**

Within U.S. academic and analytic circles there has been some controversy about the rebalancing efforts by the Obama administration. Some US foreign policy specialists worry that the rebalancing will prompt China to react negatively, leading to a downward spiral in relationships and greater confrontation with a danger of conflict, including possibly military conflict. A few analysts suggest that “Washington has exaggerated China's recent assertiveness and responded in certain ways that are likely to provoke even stronger Chinese action. We are warning of a complex "action-reaction" between the U.S. and China that could destabilize the Asia-Pacific region” (Fels, 2016) some critics argue that the rebalancing is impractical, as efforts to restructure U.S. military operations in Asia would face imminent budget constraints. As many governments in Asia monitor Washington's ability to sustain its expensive military structure in the region, a key question in the Obama re-balancing debate is whether long-term acquisition patterns will sustain investment expenditure on new weapons systems and other demands that are adequate to back up projected levels of naval power and other powers in the Pacific and elsewhere. (Fels, 2016)

There is significant concern, for example, “the long-term Navy budgets will not support a Navy of 313 ships, as proposed in recent plans; the U.S. Navy currently has about 280 ships. The current phase of sequestration entails substantial and precipitous cuts in military end manpower, operational and training funds, as well as delays in expenditure” (Douglas, 2016) the budget cuts are especially detrimental to preparing for the defence. However if potential cuts are made more rationally, further reductions may well lead to a further decrease in the size of US military forces. For example, “even without further reductions in the size of the Navy, a critical issue posed by analysts is whether planned force levels are adequate to maintain projected commitments to the Asia-Pacific Theater and the Middle East / Persian Gulf, especially where regional crises require a surge of force in either location” (Douglas, 2016)

Moreover, the lack of experience of the administration on Asian concerns in its upper ranks is strong in American skeptics' judgments. No senior officials with a clear



perspective on Asia or deep commitment to the region are still in the administration. Secretary of State Kerry has dedicated most of his first months in office to pressing Middle East problems and convincing European partners. Secretary Kerry may have unwisely stated in an April 2013 trip to Seoul that this was his first visit to Korea (even though he had been a member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs for over two decades). Until quite recently, senior staff positions dealing with Asia remained empty in both the departments of State and Defence. Expertise on Asia in the U.S. Congress suffered serious setbacks with the departure of Richard Lugar and James Webb from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Brzezinski, 2016).

### **Findings**

The rivalry between the United States and China is influenced by the policy priorities of the governments of the Asia-Pacific. Such goals are directed towards economic growth and retaining national sovereignty and independence. The former draws governments to both China and the United States; the latter, though seeking stronger U.S. relations, inclines governments to be wary of China.

In pursuit of development, the majority of the governments and policymakers prioritize export-oriented growth and work effectively with the region's burgeoning trade. This trade is highly interdependent and mutually compatible and places an emphasis on maintaining regional stability and cooperative partnerships with major international investors and trading partners.

Most Asia-Pacific governments remain wary of their neighbors and other forces that may question their sovereignty and independence, leading to concerns about sovereignty and national independence. There are few ally partnerships in the region apart from the U.S. alliance mechanism in the Asia-Pacific. Despite attempts to create regional cooperative organizations, strategic mistrust between China and the United States and between China and Japan secretly pervades regional relationships.

Regional governments are prepared to operate relatively well together in the quest for cooperative economic relations, but they use regional groups such as those in ASEAN and associated bodies to monitor their neighbors and preserve and enhance their sovereignty and independence, a marked contrast with the European Union and other international organizations in which nations are losing autonomy and independence for the greater regional benefit.

Against this backdrop, regional governments continue to scramble and participate in contingency planning to safeguard their interests in the face of the new challenges raised by China's rise most recently. On the one hand, they are looking for cooperative ties and mutually beneficial growth with China. On the other hand, they are worried about the aspirations and potential conquest of China. Generally, governments no longer see a danger of U.S. domination, while many see close ties with the United States and the United States as a useful hedge against China's possible overbearing behaviour.

### **Conclusion**

Asia-Pacific is a multifaceted theatre where the American view of preventive diplomacy and strategic pivot is in stark contrast to China's peaceful rise and peripheral security strategy. In fact, the return of the United States to Asia-Pacific has become a model

of security that seeks to make China a great, aggressive and unstable presence in the region. Statements by the US government have linked the balance of power to the supremacy of the “liberal, rule-based international order” in the Asia-Pacific, and to the broader harmonization of this ideology with US interests as protection. It reflects a strategic change in U.S. strategy in an age of new threats to these interests, seeking to sustain U.S. commitments to the region. Though China has expressed balanced criticism of the Rebalance in official statements, opposition on other levels suggests an overall profoundly negative view. China has also expressed support for alternative regional security and economic structures, taken unilateral action against neighboring countries in breach of its international obligations and tried to establish its own free trade deals since the Rebalance began. Alternatively, China supports or opposes the international order based on differing interests, a point of contention in the Asia Pacific, where closeness and core territorial interests are factoring in the views of Beijing. China's current leadership is unlikely to have foreign-policy priorities that vary radically from those of the past but are more assertive in tactical decision making. Such findings highlight why Beijing has taken on its current regional strategy.

### **Recommendations for U.S. Policy**

Through a meaningful relationship with their Chinese counterparts, an American think tank can demonstrate the long-term benefits that Beijing will reap from a Chinese regional approach that avoids undue pressure, coercion, and zero-sum rivalry and embraces current world standards that hold promise for uninterrupted growth in China. President Obama’s June 2013 summit with President Xi was a notable step forward in this direction.

At the same time, U.S. policymakers will need to develop ways of demonstrating to Chinese leaders the considerable costs that China would inevitably bear if it persists on using its greater coercive capacities in broadly nationalistic pathways to get its way on the regional territorial dispute. Such costs may not be readily evident to Chinese leaders, and prickly Chinese officials may perceive American attempts to highlight them as dangerous. Maintaining the right balance avoiding instability and conflict while maintaining sustainability can be difficult to achieve with careful and constructive engagement.

The success of the US approach from China depends on close US cooperation with other Asia-Pacific countries and regional organizations. Such cooperation will increase trade and investment, diplomatic ties, military exchanges, and other interactions that will benefit the security interests of economic and regional governments and regional groups on the one hand, and the interests of the United States on the other.

US engagement and cooperation, which focuses on Asian countries and regional groups and avoids regional instability caused by direct US challenges to China, is in line with the policy priorities of most regional governments as latter focus on enhancing the economic development of their countries while protecting sovereignty and freedom of policy. Strengthening these regional actors might add to the advantage of growing the opportunities for those regional governments and organizations to negotiate with China without excessive fear through trade and constructive means, without discrimination.

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