

THE US 'PIVOT' TO THE ASIA - PACIFIC: BEGINNING OF A NEW COLD WAR?

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Introduction

The United States (US) Grand Strategy over the years has been to prevent the rise of powerful nations, which could threaten its national security by limiting their strategic power either through direct military confrontation or by maintaining balance of power.¹ US actions during the World Wars against Germany and Japan, which rose to threaten the US, and against the erstwhile Soviet Union during the 'Cold War' illustrate its approach to national security. Post World War II, the US in pursuit of its Grand Strategy maintained a significant military, diplomatic and economic presence in the Asia-Pacific.² The end of the Cold War led to diminished US interest in the Asia-Pacific while the Iraq and Afghanistan wars shifted the US focus away from the region for nearly two

decades as a result of which US influence in the region gradually waned.

During this period, the economic and geostrategic importance of the Asia-Pacific Region increased,³ and as the US engagement in the Middle East diminished, it gradually turned its attention back to the region. The US 'economic crisis' from 2004-2010,⁴ perhaps prevented the US from simultaneously focusing its attention on the Middle East and the Asia Pacific, though it set into motion plans to reestablish its primacy in the region.⁵ The emergence of certain nations as significant economic and military powers in the region led the US to accelerate implementation of these plans and in 2011, it initiated a series of measures (commonly referred to as the 'Pivot' or 'Rebalance') to expand its

¹Paul Miller, 'Five Pillars of American Grand Strategy', IISS website available at <http://www.iiss.org>, accessed 21 Apr 2015

²Robert Sutter et al, 'Balancing Asia: The US rebalance and Asia Pacific Stability'. Elliot School of International Affairs and Sigur Centre for Asian Studies, George Washington University, Aug 2013, p1

³U.S. Strategic and Defense Relationships in the Asia-Pacific Region, CRS Report to Congress 2007, available at <http://www.fas.com>, accessed 21 July 2015

⁴'2008: US Decline in the Asia-Pacific', available at <http://www.emperorsandinterventions.wordpress.com>, accessed 18 August 2015

⁵U.S. Strategic and Defense Relationships in the Asia-Pacific Region, CRS Report to Congress 2007, available at <http://www.fas.com>, accessed 21 July 2015

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presence and intensify its engagement with the Asia- Pacific region.⁶ The US has stated that its actions are not aimed at any particular nation, but instead are progressive and providing stability to the region. However, the 'Pivot' is viewed as a threat to its interests by China causing it to respond and rival the US.⁷ This rivalry is likely to only intensify in the coming years and perhaps develop into a 'Cold War'.

Drivers for the US Pivot to the Asia-Pacific

The drivers for the 'Pivot' are the political, military- strategic and economic concerns of the US in the Asia-Pacific region. Geopolitics and economics are closely related in International Relations.⁸ US political influence in the Asia-Pacific diminished over the years largely due to US and International Monetary Fund

(IMF) actions in the aftermath of the 1990s East Asian economic crisis being widely viewed as inappropriate in the region and more recently due to the US financial crisis.⁹ The foreign policy pursued during the Bush-Cheney years, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and fixation with security related issues post the 2001 terrorist attacks in the US also diminished US influence in the region.¹⁰

The rapid growth in the PLA's capabilities, its ability to challenge US military supremacy in the Western Pacific (indicated by confrontation between US military units and Chinese forces over the last decade,¹¹ are testimony of the gradual shift in the 'Balance of Power' in the region. China's close interaction with Russia, its territorial claims and reclamation activities in the South China Sea,¹² are a cause of serious concern for the US, its

⁶Kurt Campbell and Brian Andrews, 'Explaining the US Pivot to Asia,' *Chatam House Website*, available at <http://www.chathamhouse.org>, accessed 20 Mar 2015

⁷The Oxford dictionary defines 'Cold War' as a state of political hostility between countries characterised by threats, propaganda, and other measures short of open warfare. Such a political situation prevailed predominantly in Europe after the end of the Second World War

⁸Graham, 'Southeast Asia in the US Rebalance: Perceptions from a Divided Region', p 309

⁹Mark Beeson, 'The US and East Asia: The Decline of a Long Distance Relationship', *The Asia Pacific Journal*, website available at <http://www.japanfocus.org>, accessed on 21 Mar 2014

¹⁰Beeson, 'The US and East Asia: The Decline of a Long Distance Relationship'

¹¹Bonnie Glaser, 'Armed Clash in The South China Sea', available at <http://www.cfr.org>, accessed 12 July 15

¹²Charles Clover, 'China Makes Rapid Progress on Reclaimed Islands Facilities', *The Financial Times*, available at <http://www.ft.com>, accessed 30 Jun 2015.

allies and partners in the region. The threat of Chinese nuclear weapons,¹³ North Korea's intense rivalry with the South, its nuclear and ballistic missile programme,¹⁴ are other reasons for the US to refocus its attention on the region.

The United States accounted for nearly 20 percent of ASEAN trade in 1998, but this fell to about nine percent in 2010,¹⁵ as against China, which has become the region's largest trading partner.¹⁶ Markets in the Asia-Pacific region account for nearly 600 million people and are critical to the recovery of the US economy.¹⁷ Further, there is significant US FDI and other investments making the region economically important to the US.¹⁸ The Economic Policy Institute, Washington DC, estimates that China's managed currency and trade have cost the US more than two million jobs. Its

trade policies, control on the value of the Yuan, restricted access to government contracts, scant respect for Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs), requirements of forced sharing of technology for doing business in China all affect US trade and economic interests.¹⁹ In future, China's domination of the South China Sea could also impact freedom of navigation and, in turn, maritime trade, which is detrimental to US economic interests.

The need to reassure its allies of its protective defence umbrella, further its economic interests, offset growing Chinese and Russian assertiveness, and re-establish its primacy in the region are the main drivers of the US pivot to the Asia Pacific.²⁰ The 'Pivot' strategy thus comprises diplomatic, economic and military elements.

¹³ Ian Rienhart, Steven Hildreth, and Susan Lawrence, 'BMD in the Asia – Pacific Region: Cooperation and Opposition, CRS Report, p 3, Available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R43116.pdf>, accessed 30 June 2015

¹⁴ Rienhart, Hildreth, and Lawrence, 'BMD in the Asia – Pacific Region: Cooperation and Opposition, CRS Report, pp 2-4,

¹⁵ Euan Graham, 'Southeast Asia in the US Rebalance: Perceptions from a Divided Region', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol 35, No3, pp 305-32

¹⁶ Philip Saunders, 'The Rebalance to Asia: US China Relations and Regional Security, Strategic Forum Series, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defence University, NDU Press Washington, pp6

¹⁷ Saunders, 'The Rebalance to Asia: US China Relations and Regional Security', p6

¹⁸ Saunders, 'The Rebalance to Asia: US China Relations and Regional Security', p7

¹⁹ Hugh de Santis, 'The China Threat and the Pivot to Asia', *Current History*, Sep 2012, 111, 746, Proquest, p 209

²⁰ Saunders, 'The Rebalance to Asia: US China Relations and Regional Security', p 4

The US Pivot

Diplomatic-Political. The first priority for the US as part of its pivot has been to strengthen its alliances in the region. The US Government is working closely with Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore to expand bilateral and security co-operation. The US-Philippines relationship is improving progressively, while relations with Thailand are also on the upswing after President Obama's visit in 2012.²¹ The United States has also elevated its strategic dialogue on East Asian issues with India and is strengthening its relations with Myanmar, Indonesia, Vietnam as well as with Taiwan. Parallely, the US is now engaging with several multilateral institutions such as the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus mechanism²² and Pacific Island Forum besides deputing an envoy to the ASEAN headquarters.²³

The US moves signal the strategic importance of the region as well as its

intention to play a more active role in the region. At the same time, the US is also attempting to clearly offset growing Chinese and Russian politico military influence in the region by strengthening its ties with its allies and forging new partnerships with nations, which are wary of China's growing power. The announcement of US support for the Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea dispute in 2010, after extensive discussions with all the claimants to the dispute except China is indicative of this approach.²⁴

Economic. The US government has taken steps to create a political and international regulatory environment to facilitate closer commercial ties, promote integration and shared economic growth across the Asia-Pacific. The US-Korea Free Trade Agreement, Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Expanded Economic Engagement (E3) and US-Asia Pacific Comprehensive Partnership for sustainable energy supplies are some of the important US initiatives in this

²¹Barrack Obama arrives in Thailand for South East Asia trip, available at <http://www.dailytelegraph.com>, accessed 12 June 2015.

²²US- East Asia Relations: A Strategy for Multilateral Engagement, Asia Society Task Force Report, available at <http://www.asiasociety.org>, accessed 12 June 2015

²³Euan Graham, *South East Asia in the US Rebalance*, p 312

²⁴Robert Ross, 'The Problem with The Pivot', *Foreign Affairs*, Nov 2012, p 34

regard to balance Chinese economic initiatives in the region. The TPP provides a rules-based, regional economic and trade architecture that will assist US businesses to better tap the growing trade and investment opportunities in the region and attempt to restrict the growth of the Chinese economy. The US has also significantly increased its non-military aid to the Asia Pacific region over the last five years to counter China's economic aid programme in the region.²⁵

Military-Strategic. The US military pivot is aimed at developing the required capabilities to maintain access and undertake operations in the Asia-Pacific and retain its combat edge. These include initiatives to defeat Anti Access/ Area Denial capabilities being

developed by the PLA Navy through the Air Sea Battle Concept (ASBC),²⁶ with focus on the cyber and space domains.²⁷ The US plans to deploy nearly 60 percent of its warships, significant air force assets and troops to the Pacific, besides deploying marines and operating submarines from Australia.²⁸ With an eye on the South China Sea, the Littoral Combat Ships have been based at Singapore.²⁹ Further, newer or modernised ships of the same class are replacing major warships deployed in the region,³⁰ while the P-8 maritime patrol aircraft,³¹ heavy lift aircraft, F-35 (Joint Strike Fighter), F-22 and other newer combat aircraft are being deployed to the Pacific for the first time.³² An additional Anti Missile Defence Surveillance system is also being

²⁵ Saunders, 'The Rebalance to Asia: US China Relations and Regional Security,' p7

²⁶ The Air Sea Battle Concept is a sub-component of the broader Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) unveiled by the US in early 2012. The operational core of this strategy involves a networked, domain-integrated, deep-strike-oriented force structure designed to disrupt, destroy, and defeat all relevant Chinese A2/AD- type capabilities, encompassing both offshore weapons systems and supporting onshore assets.

²⁷ Saunders, 'The Rebalance to Asia: US China Relations and Regional Security,' p7

²⁸ Tom Hayden, Containment Risks Permanent Brinkmanship, New York Times website available at www.nytimes.com, 02 May 2012

²⁹ Euan Graham, 'SE Asia in US Rebalance: Perceptions from a Divided Region', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol 35 No 3(2013), p 311

³⁰ Megan Eksten, 'Modernised Cruiser Chancellorsville leaving for New Homeport in Japan', USNI News, available at <http://www.newsusni.org>, accessed 02 Jun 2015

³¹ Mike Yao, 'US Navy Growing P-8 Posiedon Operations in the Western Pacific', available at <http://news.usni.org> accessed 30 June 2015.

³² Shirley Kan, 'Guam : US Defence Deployments', US CRS Report, available at <http://www.crs.org>, accessed 01 July 2015, pp 1-3

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established in Japan to improve TMD and counter emerging ballistic missile threats in the region,³³ while there is obviously a nuclear dimension to the 'Pivot' (though unstated).

The US has also expanded the scope and robustness of its engagement with militaries in the region by increasing participation in joint military exercises,³⁴ such as the 'Cobra Gold' and 'Talisman Sabre' which this year will include Japan and New Zealand.³⁵ Overall, the US military is repositioning to balance emerging military challenges and retain the balance of power in the region.

Implications of the US Pivot

Diplomatic. Japan, Philippines, which are allies with the US and nations like Vietnam which have disputes with China are increasingly leaning towards/ aligning with the US and so are other nations such as Singapore,

Malaysia,³⁶ and even Myanmar to an extent.³⁷ Groupings of nations with Russia, China, Laos, Cambodia and North Korea on one side and the US and its allies/partners on the other are gradually emerging in the region. The US stance is emboldening its allies and partners to counter Chinese maritime territorial claims in the Western Pacific as well as military actions evoking strong reactions from China. The Chinese have accused the US of stoking tensions in the region through its 'Pivot' strategy and in the absence of a conflict; the situation is reminiscent of the Cold War.³⁸

Economic. Economic aspects of the US Pivot are aimed at achieving long term objectives of containing China's economic growth. US has characterised the TPP as a purely economic vehicle, one that will deepen trade with Asia. However, the US already has Trade Agreements with a majority of nations negotiating the TPP, other nations are

³³ Ian Rienhart, Steven Hildreth, Susan Lawrence, 'BMD in the Asia – Pacific Region: Cooperation and Opposition,' CRS Report, pp 9-10, Available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R43116.pdf>, accessed 30 June 2015

³⁴ Robert Ross, 'The Problem with The Pivot', *Foreign Affairs*, Nov 2012, p 34

³⁵ Ankit Panda, 'A First: Japan to Join US-Australia Military Exercise', available at <http://www.diplomat.com>, accessed 28 May 2015

³⁶ 'Envoy: Malaysia-US Relationship being Upgraded to Comprehensive Partnership', available at <http://www.malaymailonline.com>, accessed 15 Jun 2015

³⁷ Jurgen Haacke, 'Myanmar: Now a Site for Sino-US Political Competition', available at <http://www.lse.ac.uk>, accessed 15 Jun 2015

³⁸ Saunders, 'The Rebalance to Asia: US China Relations and Regional Security', p 13

insignificant and unlikely to achieve the standards to join the TPP. China reaps economic benefits under its current economic policies and is unlikely to agree to TPP obligations. The TPP thus appears to be a long-term plan aimed at regulating Chinese trade in the region and improving the opportunities for US. Chinese leaders view this as a means to sustain a US dominated global order and to lock China into binding commitments such as carbon emission limits and revalued Chinese currency, which will limit its growth in the future. Chinese scholars have also spoken of the ‘responsibility theory’, which they claim is once again aimed at stifling Chinese economic growth.³⁹

Military. The ‘Pivot’, has resulted in a larger US military presence in the region and consequently increased numerical strength of forces at the disposal of US Force Commanders to undertake the complete spectrum of military operations in the Asia-Pacific region.⁴⁰

The repositioning of forces throughout the region will also help the US Government to respond faster to emerging crisis in the region. The military-strategic alliances with various nations in the region being pursued by the US clearly provide for encirclement of China. The increased numerical strength and type of platforms, equipment and systems being inducted in the region by the US would help maintain Balance of Power in the region without allowing the Russia - China partnership to gain an upper hand and upset the ‘Balance of Power’. In short, the United States has sought to remain deeply engaged in the Asia-Pacific region and demonstrate that it has the capacity and resolve to actively shape – and offset – China’s growing military capabilities and retain its primacy in the region.

Chinese Response to the US Pivot

Political-Diplomatic Response. China has responded politically, militarily as well as economically to the US pivot.

³⁹Responsibility theory is a Chinese theory where China claims that the West blames China for global economic problems and is therefore forcing it to take on commitments to alleviate these problems which are far greater than its capacity and is thus aimed at stifling Chinese economic growth

⁴⁰Saunders, ‘The Rebalance to Asia: US China Relations and Regional Security’, pp 9

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In October 2013, almost simultaneous visits were made by President Xi and Premier Li Keqiang to Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Brunei to strengthen relationships with these countries.⁴¹ As part of a broader diplomatic offensive to increase its political influence in Asia, President Xi Jinping visited Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan with which it concluded a strategic partnership in September 2013. In 2014, the President visited Mongolia, South Korea,⁴² and followed it up with visits to nations in Africa, Tajikistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka.⁴³ China has also challenged U.S. interests beyond East Asia, foregoing the cooperation that the two countries had managed to sustain in the years leading up to the 'Pivot'. Whereas between 2006 and 2010, China voted for five UN Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on Iran,

in 2012 it threatened to veto sanctions on Iranian oil exports and reached new agreements with Iran to purchase oil. Later, China blocked Washington's attempts for action against Syria, and instead backed Russia's support for the Syrian leadership.⁴⁴

China continues to support North Korea even enhancing its food aid, investment in mining infrastructure and manufacturing industries overlooking its nuclear weapons development programme.⁴⁵ Growing nationalist sentiment has forced China to resort to tough diplomacy and it has often resorted to rhetoric to make the world sit up and listen.

Military. The US pivot has set into motion a competition between the US and China to match military capability. China's military growth appears to be increasingly focused on countering the threat posed to it by the US and its

⁴¹Joao Arthur Reis, 'China's Dual response to the US Pivot', *Asia Times Online website*, available at <http://www.atitimes.com>, accessed on 14 Apr 2015

⁴²Michael Swaine, 'Chinese Leadership and Elite responses to the US Pacific Pivot' *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace website*, available at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org>, accessed on 14 Apr 2014

⁴³Xi Ji Pings State Visit to ROK, *China Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa> accessed 21 Jun 2015

⁴⁴'Xi Ji Ping arrives in Male: Starting his State Visit to Maldives', available at *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Peoples Republic of China website* <http://www.fmrc.gov.cn/mfa>, accessed 21 Jun 2015

⁴⁵Robert Ross, 'The Problem with The Pivot', *Foreign Affairs*, Nov 2012, pp 34

⁴⁶Beina Xu, and Jayshree Bajona, *The China- North Korea Relationship*, available at <http://www.cfr.org>, accessed 15 June 2015

allies.⁴⁶ The aim to match US capabilities is indicated by rapidly increasing military budget, induction of increasingly advanced and adaptive naval capabilities – many of which appear to be designed to restrict U.S. freedom of action throughout the Western Pacific. China continues to focus on expanding its power projection capabilities westwards into the Indian Ocean, which is yet another indicator of its challenge to US primacy.⁴⁷ The PLA has challenged the US Navy in the South China Sea on several occasions in the past, the audacity of such incidents has only increased over the years such as the recent incident involving a US P-8 aircraft and a Chinese J 11 B Shenyang interceptor aircraft over the ‘Fiery Cross Reef’.⁴⁸ The declaration of the ADIZ over the East China Sea,⁴⁹ possibly over the South China Sea in

the future, Fishing Exclusion Zone near Hainan,⁵⁰ recent development of hypersonic delivery vehicles for conventional/nuclear weapons,⁵¹ are all illustrative of the Chinese face up to the US in the region.

Economic. In response to the TPP, China is pushing its own Free Trade Agreements such as the 10 plus 1, the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement with Taiwan and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership,⁵² between ASEAN and the six countries with which the regional organisation at present maintains free-trade agreements including China, Japan, India, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand. Other initiatives include the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank and Free Trade Area Asia and Pacific.⁵³ China has begun to strengthen its economic cooperation

⁴⁶ Harry Kazianis, ‘Can China Crush the US Pivot?’, *The Diplomat*, 24 Feb 2012 pp 1, available at <http://www.diplomat.com>, accessed on 31 Mar 15

⁴⁷ Emery’s chew, ‘Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean: Maritime Connections Across Time and Space’, Rajratnam School of International Studies Policy Paper, Nov 2011, pp 16

⁴⁸ Mike Yao, ‘US Navy Growing P-8 Posedon Operations in the Western Pacific’, available at <http://news.usni.org>, accessed 30 June 2015.

⁴⁹ Jun Osawa, ‘China’s ADIZ Over ECS: A Great Wall in the Sky’, available at <http://www.brookings.edu>, accessed 04 June 2015

⁵⁰ ‘Philippines Denounces New Chinese Fishing Regulations’, available at <http://www.voac.com>, accessed 30 June 2015

⁵¹ Franz Stefan Gady, ‘Will This Chinese Weapon be able to Sink an Aircraft Carrier?’, available at <http://www.diplomat.com>, accessed 15 June 2015

⁵² Bai Gao, ‘From Maritime Asia to Continental Asia: China’s Responses to the Challenge of the TPP’, Duke University, available at <http://iis-db.stanford.edu>, accessed on 04 May 2015

⁵³ Kai Yee Chan, ‘Economic Cooperation between China and the US Makes a Better World’ available at <http://www.linkedin.com>, accessed 12 June 2015.

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with Russia and Central Asian nations via the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and is also promoting the concept of 'New Silk Roads' to promote economic integration with Eurasia and South East Asia.⁵⁴ Further, China is increasingly using a combination of economic inducements and coercion to keep nations within its sphere of influence.⁵⁵

Emergence of a Cold War

The US attempt to bring stability to the Asia- Pacific through its pivot has not met with much success. Quite the opposite: it has made the region more tense and conflict-prone. Military aircraft and naval ships now crowd the region's skies and waters increasing risks of incidents and mistakes which have the potential to escalate to a conflict and the United States risks getting involved in hostilities. US foreign policy has been based on primacy and unilateralism since the end of the First World War.⁵⁶ US

strategic focus to the Asia-Pacific region represents a return to the Cold War-style "threat-based" national security planning model—directed primarily at China and to an extent North Korea (China's close ally). This is clearly a departure from the capabilities based planning approach of the US military. The ASBC is strikingly similar to the Cold War era concept of Air-Land Battle aimed at the Soviet Union, while the Area Denial/Anti Access Strategy (A2/AD) is largely aimed at the US.⁵⁷

The new US policy towards strengthening Cold War-era alliance relationships is an attempt to use 'small group' military alliances to create a structural barrier to a larger pattern of security cooperation of Asian countries. This approach of US policy is like the relic of the Cold War era.⁵⁸ The strengthening of its military alliance with Australia through positioning of marines, sophisticated weapon systems on Australian soil,

⁵⁴Gao, 'From Maritime Asia to Continental Asia: China's Responses to the Challenge of the TPP', p 12

⁵⁵Michael Swaine, 'Chinese Leadership and Elite responses to the US Pacific Pivot' Carnegie Endowment for International Peace website, available at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org>, accessed on 14 Apr 2015

⁵⁶Mel Gurtov, Peter Van Ness, ed, 'Confronting the Bush Doctrine' Routledge, New York, 2005, pp 1-2

⁵⁷Michael Swaine, 'Chinese Leadership and Elite responses to the US Pacific Pivot' Carnegie Endowment for International Peace website, available at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org>, accessed on 14 Apr 2015 p 8

⁵⁸Swaine, 'Chinese Leadership and Elite responses to the US Pacific Pivot', p 6

increased military interaction with the Philippines, Vietnam is aimed at China and is reminiscent of Cold War era politicking.⁵⁹ Since 2009, China has been far more assertive in laying claim to territories in the South and East China Seas.⁶⁰ Chinese actions to reclaim land in the seven Spratly Island features it occupies,⁶¹ and the move to deploy weapons on the reclaimed islands in the Fiery Cross Group, warnings to the US to avoid interference in the South and East China Seas have further aggravated the climate of mistrust and confrontation in the region.⁶² The recent incident of PLA Navy's warnings to US P-8A aircraft flying over disputed islands in the South China Sea,⁶³ and the description of this incidence by a former CIA Deputy Director Michael Morell as an indicator of the high risk of the United States and China going to war in the

future,⁶⁴ is reminiscent of Cold War rhetoric.

US policy makers mindful of the military, industrial might of China are attempting to throw a ring of containment or encirclement around China.⁶⁵ The Chinese on the other hand fearing a region dominated by the US because of its overwhelming economic and military power have sought to throw a protective security ring around its borders. While there is no NATO like military alliance, the US is increasing its military engagement with South Korea, Japan, Australia and partners in the region such as the Philippines to contain the China.

The extent of economic interdependence between the US and China is such that neither side can risk a military confrontation. The wider impact of such a confrontation on other

⁵⁹Swaine, 'Chinese Leadership and Elite responses to the US Pacific Pivot' p 8

⁶⁰Yashiro Matsuda, 'How to Understand China's Assertiveness since 2009: Hypotheses and Policy Implications' CSIS Paper Japan Chair April 2014, available at <http://www.csis.org>, accessed 01 July 2015.

⁶¹Jermy Page, 'China Building Air Strip in Spratly Islands, Satellite Images Show', *The Wall Street Journal*, 16 April 2015, available at <http://www.wsj.com>, accessed 30 May 2015

⁶²Mark Hariharan, 'China Moves Weapons to Spratlys, As South China Sea Dispute Intensifies: Report', *International Business Times*, 27 May 2015, available at <http://www.ibtimes.com>, accessed 02 Jun 2015.

⁶³Ankit Panda, 'China Issues 8 Warnings to US Surveillance Plane in South China Sea', *The Diplomat* available at <http://www.diplomat.com>, accessed 26 May 2015

⁶⁴Panda, 'China Issues 8 Warnings to US Surveillance Plane in South China Sea', *The Diplomat* available at <http://www.diplomat.com>, accessed 26 May 2015

⁶⁵Walter La Feber, 'The Origins of the Cold War 1941-1947', John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1971, pp 1-3

nations would also have serious consequences for the world economy due to breakdown of manufacturing networks, loss of markets and such other related issues. Both nations are therefore likely to engage only in shrill rhetoric, brinkmanship and harsh posturing to counter each other in the Asia-Pacific region. Last but not the least, to counter the US military might China is significantly increasing its defence spending, getting embroiled into an arms race with the US just like the former USSR. Overall, the US and Chinese actions replicate those of the Soviet Union and US during the Cold War days only the battleground is now the Asia-Pacific region and perhaps the difference is of economic inter-dependence.

Conclusion

Increased US activity on China's periphery has led China to conclude that the United States has not only abandoned strategic engagement, but has also ignored China's legitimate security interests in its border regions, including even those that are not vital to US security. By challenging China and its sovereignty claims over symbolic territories, the US has led

China to adopt a belligerent approach towards itself and its allies. The pivot has led to Chinese resistance to US policies and hostility towards US economic overtures and security initiatives. The US and its allies have systematically ignored Russia in conduct of strategic affairs in the Asia-Pacific region. An assertive Russia is now posturing assertively in the region and along with China challenging the US primacy in the region.

Strategically, maintaining peace and security across the Asia-Pacific is crucial to US interests, be it ensuring freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, countering North Korea's nuclear weapons, or retaining the balance of power. The US is thus engaging itself increasingly in the Asia Pacific and along with its allies is attempting to contain a rising China and Russia. This has initiated a rivalry which has glimpses of the 'Cold War' and which will only intensify in the coming years.

An economically and strategically powerful China is therefore being perceived as a threat to its national security and primacy in the Asia-Pacific region. The US has always

attempted to prevent the rise of any major power in the world which can challenge its national interests and in pursuit of its 'Grand Strategy' is attempting to contain the rise of China through its 'Pivot' (which comprises of diplomatic-political, military and economic elements) to the Asia-Pacific. This is viewed by China as an attempt by the US to isolate it strategically and contain its growth as a world power. The Chinese response has been to confront the US, intimidate its allies and balance the 'Pivot'. The Military-Strategic competition between the two nations and their allies is bound to escalate as assertive behaviour on both sides continues. The nuclear dimension of this rivalry

(though presently out of public discourse) is of particular significance and a reminder of US- Soviet enmity. The US 'Pivot' has also led to nations aligning with either China or the US, which will gradually lead to formation of power blocks in the region as was the case in Europe during the 'Cold War'. Great power rivalry has been an enduring aspect of world politics for years and US - China rivalry is certain in the coming years. Actions as part of the US 'Pivot' and Chinese responses to these actions are gradually turning into an intense rivalry or a 'Cold War' which will only intensify in the coming years and turn the Asia- Pacific into a perilous region.



About the Author

Commodore VR Peshwae was commissioned into the Indian Navy in January 1989. After completing his ab-initio training, the officer joined the Submarine Arm and later attended the specialist course in ASW. He is a graduate of the Defence Services Staff College Wellington (India), the College of Naval Warfare (Mumbai), and the Australian Defence College, Canberra. He has held various appointments both afloat and ashore including Command, Training and Staff appointments.