

I. Defence and security cooperation in the context of the US rebalance towards the Asia–Pacific

KATHARINA SEIBEL, MATHIEU DUCHÂTEL AND OLIVER BRÄUNER

During its first term (2009–12), the Obama administration focused its attention on Asia as an economically and politically dynamic region. In February 2009 US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made Asia the destination of her first diplomatic trip abroad, visiting China, Indonesia, Japan and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). In 2011 Clinton officially announced the strategic decision to ‘pivot’ US foreign policy towards the Asia–Pacific.¹ The term ‘pivot to Asia’, however, was replaced in early 2012 by the term ‘rebalance to Asia’, mainly in order to ease European concerns about a reduced US-commitment to Europe. The second Obama administration increased its efforts to take into consideration China’s widespread concerns that the USA was resuming a policy of strategic encirclement, deepening military cooperation with many neighbours of China to constrain the rise of China.²

The scope of the pivot encompassed economic-, political- and security-related issues and was evidenced by greater military, security and trade cooperation. The new policy focused on a multitude of bilateral alliances and security cooperation agreements with Asian countries as well as closer cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The increased cooperation was formally expressed in the 2009 ASEAN–US Declaration on Enhanced Partnership for Enduring Peace and Prosperity.³ Subsequently, the USA has conducted joint military exercises with Japan, South Korea and Viet Nam in 2011 and 2012; and in 2014, US military personnel were dispatched to Australia and the Philippines as part of recently signed bilateral agreements.⁴ Furthermore, in the same year that ASEAN and the USA declared their enhanced partnership, the USA joined the discussions on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—a multinational

¹ Clinton, H., ‘America’s Pacific century’, *Foreign Policy*, 11 Oct. 2011, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century?page=0,6&wp_login_redirect=0>.

² Qingcheng, D., ‘应高度警觉美国 “重返” 亚洲’ [We need to remain highly alert to the US rebalance to Asia], *Huanqiu Shibao*, 7 July 2009 <<http://opinion.huanqiu.com/1152/2009-07/527966.html>>; ‘Chinese FM refutes fallacies on the South China Sea issue’, *China Daily*, 25 July 2010; Sheng, Z., ‘The U.S. should not muddle waters over South China Sea’, *People’s Daily*, 20 Mar. 2012; and ‘Contradiction blots Obama’s legacy’, *Global Times*, 5 Aug. 2014, <<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/874273.shtml>>.

³ For an overview of the ASEAN–US Dialogue Relations, see <<http://www.asean.org/asean/external-relations/united-states/item/overview-of-asean-us-dialogue-relations>>.

⁴ ‘U.S., Japan to hold joint military drill amid island row with China’, *Reuters*, 30 Oct. 2012; Barta, P., ‘U.S., Vietnam in exercises amid tensions with China’, *Wall Street Journal*, 16 July 2011; ‘S. Korea, U.S. conduct joint military exercise’, *Xinhua*, 23 Mar. 2011; ‘US–Philippines reach 10-year defense agreement amid rising tensions’, *Washington Post*, 27 Apr. 2014; and Hellmann, M., ‘The U.S. will increase its military presence in Australia’, *Time*, 12 Aug. 2014.

trade agreement centring on Asia that China was initially excluded from joining—thus reinforcing China’s perception of the US pivot as strategic encirclement.⁵ Although the way is clear for China to formally join the TPP negotiations, China appears to have adopted a ‘wait and see’ attitude, continuing to assess the impact of joining or remaining out of the TPP on the basis of its global trade posture and internal economic structure.⁶

Evidence of the pivot can primarily be seen in the development of US military strategy. In 2010, the US Navy and Air Force introduced the ‘air and sea battle’ (ASB) concept as a response to the Chinese build-up of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, which are aimed at preventing free passage in Chinese-controlled waters.⁷ ASB is described as ‘an operational concept . . . to allow US forces to operate in a non-permissive environment’.⁸ When operationalized, ASB is a US military strategy designed to respond to a Chinese offensive with a ‘blinding campaign’ against the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) networks through attacks on China’s command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems, as well as long-range anti-ship missile launches.⁹ China views its acquisition of anti-access capabilities as a counterbalance to US military superiority in its backyard, and considers the ASB an offensive strategy—rather than a defensive deterrent strategy—and is therefore perceived by some PLA analysts as highly escalatory.¹⁰ Since ASB was initiated, the USA has deployed considerably more air and naval military power to the region. China rejects the concept of A2/AD as an inaccurate description by the Pentagon of the PLA’s military strategy in Asia. Although China is actively building capacities that would complicate any US intervention in an Asian military conflict, China’s naval build-up is not purely about counter-intervention.¹¹

However, the US rebalance to Asia takes place in a period of construction of what China terms a ‘new type of great power relations’ between China and the USA. First introduced by Xi in February 2012 during his visit to the

⁵ The TPP was initiated in 2002–2003. As of 2014, 12 countries have participated in negotiations: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the USA, and Viet Nam.

⁶ Bradsher, K., ‘Once concerned, China is now quiet about Trans-Pacific trade deal’, *New York Times*, 28 Apr. 2015.

⁷ In Jan. 2015 the name ASB was adjusted to ‘Joint concept for access and maneuver in the global commons (JAM-GC)’. ‘Document: air-sea battle name change memo’, US Navy Intelligence News, 20 Jan. 2015, <<http://news.usni.org/2015/01/20/document-air-sea-battle-name-change-memo>>.

⁸ Cavas, C.P., ‘Defining air-sea battle: from interservice cooperation to nuclear confrontation, or somewhere in between’, *Defence News*, 27 July 2013.

⁹ Cavas (note 8).

¹⁰ Xu, Q., ‘Air sea battle and the “offensive-defensive balance” in East Asia’, 2014; and ‘空海一体战无助亚太稳定’, [Air–sea battles do not help stability in the Asia–Pacific], *People’s Daily*, 27 Oct. 2014, <<http://military.people.com.cn/n/2014/1027/c172467-25910524.html>>.

¹¹ Fravel, T.M. and Twomey, C. P., ‘Projecting strategy: the myth of Chinese counter-intervention’, *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 4, p. 182.

USA as China's vice-president, the concept promotes mutual respect for each other's core interests and advances areas of mutual interest to avoid the 'Thucydides trap', a narrative employed by officials in both countries that warns of inevitable military confrontation between a dominant power and its rising challenger.¹² The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership thereby intends to elevate China to a politically equal level to the USA, while at the same time clearly demarking its own core territorial interests. The USA officially supports the concept, but it remains reluctant to fully embrace it without further operationalization, fearing it would be 'trapped' into recognizing China's territorial claims.¹³

In this context, China-US security relations appear to be progressing on two parallel tracks. Along with the rhetoric of 'new great power relations', China-US military-to-military ties have intensified to an unprecedented level under Xi and Obama. Since 2012 these ties have deepened through dialogue platforms such as the Defence Consultative Talks, the Defence Policy Coordination Talks, the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement and the Strategic Security Dialogue.¹⁴ Talks on exchanges between land forces are also underway.¹⁵ Furthermore, China participated in the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2014 exercise, one of the biggest naval exercises worldwide, sending 1100 Chinese personnel, the missile destroyer *Haikou*, missile frigate *Yueyang*, the supply ship *Qiandaohu* and the hospital ship *Peace Ark*.¹⁶ However, there is also strategic distrust in China-US relations, as became apparent during the 2014 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. During the Dialogue, US Defence Secretary Hagel accused China of pursuing 'destabilizing unilateral actions' and 'use of intimidation, coercion or the threat of force'. Furthermore, Hagel strongly criticized China's establishment of an air defence identification zone (ADIZ) in November 2013 and expressed support for Japan's aim to play a stronger role in regional security. In response, China's Deputy Chief of General Staff Lieutenant-General Wang Guanzhong qualified Abe's and Hagel's remarks

¹² Erickson, A. S. and Liff, A. P., 'Not-so-empty talk', *Foreign Affairs*, 9 Oct. 2014, <<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142178/andrew-s-erickson-and-adam-p-liff/not-so-empty-talk>>.

¹³ Li, C. and Xu, L., 'Chinese enthusiasm and American cynicism over the "new type of great power relations"', *China US Focus*, 4 Dec. 2014, <<http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/chinese-enthusiasm-and-american-cynicism-over-the-new-type-of-great-power-relations/>>; and Haenle, P., 'What does a new type of great-power relations mean for the United States and China?', *Phoenix Weekly*, 15 Jan. 2014, <<http://carnegietsinghua.org/2014/01/15/us-china-relations-2013-new-model-of-major-power-relations-in-theory-and-in-practice/gyjm>>.

¹⁴ Wacker, G., 'Sicherheitskooperation in Ostasien: Strukturen, Trends und Leistungsgrenzen' [Security cooperation in East Asia structures, trends and performance limits], *SWP-Studie*, Jan. 2015; and 'U.S., China to hold defense policy talks next week: Pentagon', *Xinhua*, 30 Jan. 2015.

¹⁵ 'China and US slowly building trust between militaries', *South China Morning Post*, 3 Mar. 2014.

¹⁶ Erickson, A. S. and Strage, A. M., 'China's RIMPAC debut: what's in it for America?', *The National Interest*, 3 July 2014, <<http://nationalinterest.org/feature/china%E2%80%99s-rimpac-debut-what%E2%80%99s-it-america-10801>>.

as a 'form of provocation . . . full of hegemony, full of incitements, threats and intimidation'.¹⁷

US defence cooperation in Asia

Despite its renewed focus on the Middle East, the USA has deepened its military ties with its allies in Asia. In August 2014 US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel even proposed to elevate the current defence cooperation with India and Japan to a trilateral military alliance, saying that 'as US and Indian security interests converge, so should our partnerships with other nations'.¹⁸ While Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been in favour of stronger trilateral ties between the countries (if not a formal treaty), India remains reluctant, refraining from participating in Abe's suggested high-level security '2+2' format, which anticipates annual joint security agenda-setting meetings that include the top foreign affairs and defence representatives from all sides.¹⁹ India has traditionally pursued an independent foreign policy, derived from its cold war non-alignment policy, and it is cautious not to openly balance China by seeking stronger security ties with Japan and the USA.

As a part of the rebalance strategy, the USA has also adjusted and deepened its military alliance with South Korea under their 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty. Both countries describe their alliances as 'an anchor for stability, security, and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula, in the Asia-Pacific region, and increasingly around the world'.²⁰ The discreet negotiation over South Korea's inclusion into the USA's anti-ballistic missile system, Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD), shows the deepening of South Korean-US military cooperation. A THAAD system based in South Korea would have part of China's east coast within range, and Chinese Defence Minister General Chang Wanquan has formally expressed concern over the ongoing negotiations that South Korea and the USA have never officially acknowledged are taking place.²¹ Despite its ambitious military modernization programme designed to gain greater strategic independence, South Korea continues to strategically rely on a US

¹⁷ DeYoung, K., 'China reacts sharply to Hagel's criticisms of its "destabilizing" actions against neighbours', *Washington Post*, 31 May 2014.

¹⁸ Banerjee, A., 'Hagel calls for US, Japan, India alliance', *The Tribune*, 10 Aug. 2014, <<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2014/20140810/main5.htm>>.

¹⁹ 'Japan and India to Sign "Two-Plus-Two" Dialogue Mechanism', *The Diplomat*, 22 Aug. 2014, <<http://thediplomat.com/2014/08/japan-and-india-to-sign-two-plus-two-dialogue-mechanism/>>.

²⁰ The White House, 'Joint Declaration in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the alliance between the Republic of Korea and the United States of America', 7 May 2013, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/07/joint-declaration-commemoration-60th-anniversary-alliance-between-republ>>.

²¹ Agence France-Presse, 'China voices concerns about US missile defense in South Korea', *Defense News*, 4 Feb. 2015.

military presence.²² This is illustrated by South Korea's request to delay the agreement to transfer wartime operational control of the South Korean military from the USA to South Korea until the South Korean forces are entirely capable of leading joint operations in a conflict with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea).²³

In 2014, the USA also established closer ties with the Philippines and Viet Nam, two countries whose territorial disputes with China have been escalating.²⁴ On 28 April, the USA signed a 10-year 'enhanced defence cooperation agreement' with the Philippines, the first formal military agreement between the two countries since the forced withdrawal of the USA from the Philippines in 1992.²⁵ The agreement—which enables the USA to increase and better disperse its forces in the region—is welcomed by the Philippines, as the territorial conflicts with China over islands and shoals in the South China Sea are worsening.²⁶

During a state visit by Viet Nam's Deputy Prime Minister Pham Binh Minh in October 2014, the USA declared the partial lifting of its arms embargo on Viet Nam, enabling the country to build up its naval forces in the face of Chinese assertiveness regarding maritime territorial matters.²⁷ The USA is reportedly planning to start selling unarmed P-3 maritime patrol aircraft to Viet Nam, which would allow the country to monitor China's activities in the South China Sea.²⁸

The US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific has led to the conclusion in June 2014 of an Australian-US force posture agreement. It allows Australian and US armed forces to cooperate more closely, especially with regard to maritime capacity building and disaster relief.²⁹ The agreement includes the rotational deployment of US Marines to northern Australia, with approximately 2500 marines continuously rotating as part of a Marine Air Ground Task Force.³⁰ Similarly, Singapore agreed to host the perman-

²² Arthur, G., 'South Korean Defence modernisation', *Asian Military Review*, 1 Oct. 2013, <<http://www.asianmilitaryreview.com/cold-south-korean-defence-modernisation-moves-forward/>>.

²³ Sang-Hun, C., 'US and South Korea agree to delay shift in wartime command', *New York Times*, 24 Oct. 2014.

²⁴ On maritime disputes in Asia see section II in this chapter.

²⁵ Guinto, J., Talev, M. and Mattingly, P., 'U.S., Philippines sign defence pact amid China tensions', *Bloomberg*, 28 Apr. 2014, <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-04-27/philippines-to-sign-defence-deal-with-u-s-amid-china-tensions.html>>.

²⁶ Eilperin, J., 'U.S., Philippines reach 10-year defence agreement amid rising tensions', *Washington Post*, 27 Apr. 2014.

²⁷ U.S. Department of State, 2 Oct. 2014, Press briefing <<http://translations.state.gov/st/english/texttrans/2014/10/20141002309324.html>>.

²⁸ Wroughton, L. and Shalal, A., 'Exclusive: courting Vietnam, U.S. prepares to ease arms embargo', *Reuters*, 23 Sep. 2014.

²⁹ White House, *The United States and Australia: An Alliance for the Future*, Office of the Press Secretary, 12 June 2014, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/12/fact-sheet-united-states-and-australia-alliance-future>>.

³⁰ Wasserbly, D. and Kerr, J., 'Update: US, Australia codify deal to rotate marines through Darwin', *IHS Jane's*, 12 Aug. 2014.

ent deployment of four littoral combat ships (LCS) of the US Navy, some of which will be tasked with addressing piracy in the region. Despite several technical issues, in November 2014, the US Navy sent the first LCS frigate to Singapore, where it arrived on 29 December 2014 for a rotational deployment of 16 months.³¹ The deployment of LCS frigates to Singapore is part of US efforts to maintain a robust presence across the Asia–Pacific.

³¹ Burke, M. M., ‘Troubled littoral combat ship program takes another hit during Singapore exercise’, *Stars and Stripes*, 22 July 2013, <<http://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/troubled-littoral-combat-ship-program-takes-another-hit-during-singapore-exercise-1.231592>>; ‘US Navy sends littoral combat ship to Singapore’, Xinhua Net, 20 Nov. 2014, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/photo/2014-11/20/c_133801913.htm>; and ‘USS Fort Worth arrives in Singapore, to support US rebalance to Asia–Pacific’, *Straits Times*, 29 Dec. 2014.