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The Obama Pivot to Asia: An Analysis of the Fundamentals

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Abstract

The Obama Administration’s Pivot to Asia policy was a grand shift in focus for U.S. foreign policy and sought to lay the foundation of U.S. policy in the region for the future. This paper derives three fundamental assumptions that the Pivot policy was based upon, from the articulations of the main architects of the Pivot Policy: former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former National Security Advisor Tom Donilon. These assumptions are as follows, pivoting to the Asia-Pacific will be beneficial to the U.S., engagement with China is central to the Pivot policy and the policy is not an effort to contain China, and finally the draw down in the Middle East will happen and the Pivot policy cannot happen without this draw down. Then, this paper assesses whether they were realistic to presume. It is found that the foundation of the Pivot policy was sound, but certain actions by the Obama Administration undermined these assumptions and overall hurt the effectiveness of the Pivot policy.

1. Introduction

On November 17, 2011, former President Barack Obama officially launched what his administration wished to be its most significant contribution to the history of United States foreign affairs: the “Pivot” or “Rebalance” to the Asia-Pacific. As President Obama said in his roll out speech to the Australian Parliament in Canberra, “After a decade in which we fought two wars that cost us dearly, in blood and treasure, the United States is turning our attention to the vast potential of the Asia Pacific region.”1 The President argued the United States was a “Pacific Nation”2 and went on further to highlight the Asia-Pacific region’s growing importance in a

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2 Obama, 2011.
global context, specifically in relation to the United States: “Here, we see the future. As the world’s fastest-growing region and home to more than half the global economy—the Asia Pacific is critical to achieving my highest priority, and that's creating jobs and opportunity for the American people.”

Due to this realization, the President prioritized a greater shift of resources and attention to the region. This elevated this initiative to the core interests of the United States and paramount importance to his administration.

There has been much debate about this massive policy shift to the Asia-Pacific region. First, especially as the policy evolved, observers have considered whether the Pivot a success or a failure? Was this the right time for the Pivot? Could America sustain this great of a resource shift? Was the Obama administration pursuing the correct course of initiatives? Was its purpose to contain China? All these questions are valid and must be answered due to the growing importance of the region and the future of American involvement in it. This reflection is vital to the growth and evolution of U.S. policy, as the Obama Administration correctly identified, towards an increasingly important region in the world. Of equal importance to the debate is to whether and what extent the Obama Administration, and the architects of the Pivot, could correctly account for and predict the consequences, viability, and achievability of the core premises of the Pivot.

This paper will seek to answer questions about these premises. Were the fundamental assumptions that created the foundation of the Pivot policy sound? Did the Obama Administration follow-up with actions and policies that were consistent with their premises? This paper will be broken up into four parts that will determine whether and to what extent the administration had a reason to believe its own premises underlying the Pivot policy. The first

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3 Obama, 2011.
section is an examination of the promotion of the Pivot policy by the two main architects of it, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and National Security Advisor Tom Donilon. From these two central figures, the fundamental premises that the President and his Administration built the pivot policy on will be determined. Following this, the paper will undertake a review of the main debate within the Pivot to Asia literature was the pivot needed and was it a success or failure. These assumptions will then then be analyzed to determine if they were sensible or if they were flawed in some way. The final section will discuss what implications the findings of this paper have on foreign policy as a whole.

**2. The Pivot to Asia: Assumptions and Implementation**

There are two parts to this section. The first will examine the principle advocates of the pivot policy and the fundamental assumptions upon which the pivot policy was built. The second will provide a brief overview of how the Administration operationalized the pivot in order to achieve its goals. This highlights the two parts of policy formulation—justification for the policy and actual implementation of the policy. This section will present a general overview of major parts of the pivot policy as well as provide the subject of analysis for the rest of the piece by way of the fundamental premises.

**2.1 The Advocates: Clinton and Donilon**

To determine the fundamental assumptions that guided the pivot towards its overall goals, an examination of the writings of the main advocates of the pivot is required. The following section will look at these two principal advocates of the Pivot—former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and former National Security Advisor Tom Donilon. These two are the most senior (beside the President) architects of the Pivot. They were charged by the administration with defending the policy and helping America and the world understand its goals
and aspirations. Both of these two released comprehensive articulations of the Pivot that laid out what it was seeking to achieve and how it would achieve its objectives.

Through these two official’s writings and promotion of the Pivot policy, three fundamental assumptions are established in their writings. The first entails that, pivoting to Asia, as opposed to other regions of the world, is the correct choice and will be beneficial for America. The second is also two-fold—engagement with China is central to the success of the Pivot and the Pivot is not a counter to China. Finally, the third one is two-fold, the United States will be able to significantly decrease the resources it allocates to the Middle East (also known as a drawn down), and the pivot cannot happen unless this draw down takes place. These assumptions represent what the administration used to justify the Pivot, as well as some conditions necessary for the pivot to have a reasonable chance of success. Analyzing these will help one determine if these assumptions were realistic or unrealistic, or if there were variables that arose that the administration could not have foreseen.

The pivot had been a priority for the Obama administration even since the campaign. However, the Pivot did not have an official rollout or accompanying policy document until the 2011 speech in Canberra. A month before that speech though, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton released an article in *Foreign Policy* titled “America’s Pacific Century”\(^5\), which can be considered the best articulation of the Pivot to Asia.\(^6\) In it, Secretary Clinton argues America is at a “pivot point” due to the drawn down of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the

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Administration’s desire to move away from the Middle East. She states that America must make a choice of where it should “pivot” to next, which she then claims should be the Asia-Pacific. She outlines six key actions that the United States will pursue in this policy shift: “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.”

The article was meant to officially articulate the Administration’s efforts in the region. She attempts to convince the American people and the rest of the world, that the Pivot is a necessary initiative for the United States to pursue.

The second piece is a speech given in 2013 by then National Security Advisor Tom Donilon to The Asia Society in New York City, two years after Clinton’s article. Donilon’s speech essentially reaffirmed many of the ideas discussed by Secretary Clinton in 2011, but was an overall rebranding that sought to do away with the “pivot” connotation. He instead framed the policy as a “re-balance” to Asia. He explains that America had “over weighted” its resources in some regions and that the United States was going to “re-balance” its foreign policy to cover other regions of the world. The most important of these regions is the Asia-Pacific.

Donilon stressed that the pivot is a foreign policy shift that will be permanent and that the United States will be able to maintain this long-term transferal of resources. He spoke of five key pillars to the American Pivot strategy, “strengthening alliances; deepening partnerships with emerging powers; building a stable, productive, and constructive relationship with China; empowering regional institutions; and helping to build a regional economic architecture that can sustain

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7 Clinton, 2011, 4.
shared prosperity.” These are similar to Clinton’s key actions, but are somewhat revised to address specific concerns that critics were voicing about the Pivot at the time.

These two pieces represent the Administration and are the best articulations of the goals and principles of pivot policy. These comprehensive pieces were given by the highest government officials associated with it that were not the President Secretary Clinton’s article is the first real effort at this and is a comprehensive overview of the Pivot strategy. Donilon’s speech marks a rhetorical shift of the Pivot policy due to the rebranding as a “rebalance”, but maintains the same rudimentary objectives and principles first outlined by Secretary Clinton two years prior.

The first assumption, pivoting to Asia, specifically Asia, is the correct choice and is beneficial for America. Secretary Clinton spends the first section of her article explaining why America should pivot to the Asia-Pacific region and what the region offers that would benefit American interests. Right away in the second paragraph Clinton says, “The Asia-Pacific has become a key driver of global politics…It [the Asia-Pacific] boasts almost half of the world’s populations. 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 if our key allies and important emerging powers like China, India, and Indonesia.” She also details how America and the Asia-Pacific region became deeply linked through workforce and student sharing.

Through this, the Secretary argues that the Asia-Pacific region will become the center for every aspect of the international system, through security, economics, and diplomacy. Thus, it would be rational for the United States to begin investing in the various forms of infrastructure in

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9 ibid, 2013, 4.
10 Clinton, 2011, 1.
11 ibid, 2011, 3.
this increasingly important region, since the international political center of gravity is shifting towards it. As Clinton put it, “A strategic turn to the region fits logically into our overall global effort to secure and sustain America’s overall global leadership.”

Donilon supports and builds upon Clinton’s manifestation of this assumption. He cites the growing economic importance of the Asia-Pacific region and offers the prediction that “over the next five years, nearly half of all the [economic] growth outside of the United States is expected to come from Asia.” Due to this, he states, “…Asia’s future and the future of the United States are deeply and increasingly linked.”

Both Clinton and Donilon see the Asia-Pacific region, becoming one of, if not the, most important region in the world both economically and diplomatically. This growth will benefit America in every way and requires America’s attention, leadership, and resources. Both argue that this leadership will bring stability (through all tools in the American foreign policy toolbox, military, economic, and diplomatic) and growth that will benefit all parties. This is why America needed to make this turn now before the rules continued to be shaped without American involvement. Through this reasoning, Clinton and Donilon argue the first assumption of the pivot, the correct move is pivoting to the Asia-Pacific region and this will benefit America.

The second assumption that the Administration placed under the pivot has two main parts. The first is, China is central to the success of the pivot. The second, the Pivot is not a counter to China. Secretary Clinton, when laying out the six goals of the Pivot, specifically points out China as one of the emerging powers that the United States will work with. She says, “…deepening our working relationships with emerging powers, including with China…”

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12 ibid, 2011 3.
13 Donilon, 2013, 3.
14 ibid, 2013, 3.
15 Clinton, 2011, 4.
While earlier in the piece she does name India and Indonesia as other budding nations that the United States must work with, special attention is paid to China. Clinton spends an entire two pages discussing China specifically and its role in the context of the Pivot. She starts out by saying, “China represents one of the most challenging and consequential bilateral relationships the United States has ever had to manage.”\(^\text{16}\) This, compared to just three-quarters of a page outlining how India and Indonesia fit into the Pivot, combined.

Donilon doubles down on the centrality of China in the Pivot. One of the five pillars of the American strategy of the Pivot involves “…building a stable, productive, and constructive relationship with China.”\(^\text{17}\) He then spends a good chunk of time outlining the importance of the Chinese relationship in the Pivot. He goes on to say, “The President places great importance on this relationship because there are few diplomatic, economic or security challenges in the world that can be addressed without China at the table and without a broad, productive, and constructive relationship between our countries.”\(^\text{18}\) This further reinforces how critical the Administration considers China to the overall success of the Pivot policy.

While Clinton and Donilon both spend large amounts of time asserting the importance of China in the Pivot, they also zealously affirm that the Pivot is not an attempt to counter China’s rise in the region, the second part of the China assumption for the Pivot. In the first official rollout of the Pivot, Secretary Clinton states, “Some in our country see China’s progress as a threat to the United States; some in China worry that America seeks to constrain China’s growth. We reject both those views.”\(^\text{19}\) Here she flat out rejects the notion that the United States feels threatened by the rise of China. She goes on to support this rejection throughout the article by

\(^{16}\) ibid, 2011, 6.
\(^{17}\) Donilon, 2013, 4.
\(^{18}\) ibid, 2013.
\(^{19}\) Clinton, 2011, 6.
accentuating the prosperity of both nations is in the absolute best interest of the United States and China. She continues to speak of engagement with China through bi-lateral and multi-lateral means, rather than confrontation, in order to counter the impression that the United States strives to contain China.

By the time Donilon articulates his advocacy for the Pivot, critics still claim that the Pivot is an attempt to contain China.\(^{20}\) Donilon addresses this issue again by stating that it is of the things that the re-balance is not “… [The Pivot does not] mean containing China or seeking to dictate terms in Asia.”\(^{21}\) Donilon rejects the idea that a rising power and an established power are doomed to conflict and says that there is nothing “preordained about such outcomes.”\(^{22}\) He used much of the same engagement language that Secretary Clinton used to the further reinforce that the U.S. does not seek to contain China. He emphasizes that both the United States and China are working together to form a positive relationship to tackle the world’s problems.\(^{23}\)

The Administration both directly and indirectly goes to great lengths to make China a central part of the pivot policy and to dispel the theory that the United States is attempting to contain such an integral part of the pivot. They devote large sections of their dictions of the Pivot to addressing the benefits and challenges that the United States faces with China. Overall, they see engagement with China as a vital premise that must be fulfilled to achieve success with the Pivot.

The final premise is one that the pivot relies upon for success and one that must be achieved to be able to fully commit to the Pivot. This assumption is that the United States is


\(^{21}\) Donilon, 2013, 4.

\(^{22}\) ibid, 2013, 9.

\(^{23}\) ibid, 2013, 10.
going to draw down its presence in the Middle East, and this will free up resources to be used for the pivot policy. Both Clinton and Donilon seem confident that the United States will be able to pull out of the Middle East and both stress that the pivot can happen because the United States is going to be able to draw its presence down in the Middle East region.

The first part of this assumption, the United States will be able to draw down its resources in the Middle East, neither Clinton nor Donilon even address America’s ability to substantially withdrawn from this region. They both speak of the draw down as an inevitable fact, rather than a hope of possibility. In the first sentence of Clinton’s piece, she speaks absolute terms: “As the war in Iraq winds down and America begins to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the United States at a Pivot point.” The war in Iraq is winding down and the America is withdrawing troops from Afghanistan.

Donilon frames his articulation of this argument in the context of America having an “over-weight” of interests in other regions (he names the Middle East specifically), and that these resources must be “re-balanced” to other regions of the world. He speaks in terms of absolutes as well, just like Secretary Clinton. America will be able to shift resources away from other regions and appropriate them to the Asia-Pacific. Both Clinton and Donilon speak of the drawn down from the Middle East as imminent, straightforward, and permanent. This draw down is what marked the “pivot” point or for a “rebalance”. The Middle East was the primary foreign policy focus of the U.S for a decade. The Obama Administration now wanted to make the Asia-Pacific that focus.

The second part of the Middle East assumption, that the pivot cannot happen without the drawn down is also expressed in this manner by Clinton and Donilon. Both emphasize that a

24 Clinton, 2011, 1.
shift in the focus of American foreign policy is predicated by a decrease of focus and resources from the Middle East. They argue this because resources have been pre-occupied by the wars of the Middle East for the better part of a decade and should be allocated elsewhere in the world. Secretary Clinton says, “Over the last 10 years, we have allocated immense resources to those two theaters,” and that America must be “…smart and systematic about where we invest time and energy.” Donilon, again framing it in terms of the “re-balance”, says that the “over-weighting” of U.S. resources in other regions (citing the Middle East), is an inefficient use of them and they can be better utilized in other parts of the world. Both Clinton and Donilon argue that the United States needs to re-allocate its resources away from regions that hurt America (the Middle East) and towards regions the benefit America (the Asia-Pacific). Without these resources, there really can be no Pivot or re-balance, because there would be nothing to re-balance.

These three assumptions and their subparts were fundamental for the justification and success of the Pivot as articulated by the two primary advocates of the Administration for the pivot policy. They are structural to the integrity of the Pivot overall, because they lay the foundation that the Pivot policy is then operationalized upon. Sections four through six will take these assumptions individually and see if the administration was correct to make that assumption. In addition, it certain policy actions relating to these premises will be evaluated to see how they affected these premises. Were the assumptions realistic or unrealistic, or were variables that arose that the administration could not have foreseen?

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26 Clinton, 2011, 1.
2.2 The Pivot in Action

In order to achieve the goals and aspirations of the pivot policy, the Obama Administration implemented a multidimensional strategy that had three components: diplomatic, economic, and security. The pivot policy was designed to employ all the foreign policy tools at the disposal of the United States to deepen relations, influence, and involvement in the Asia-Pacific region in ways that would ultimately benefit the United States.

The first dimension of the pivot was diplomatic. The Obama Administration sought to expand American involvement in Asia-Pacific’s multilateral institutions, as well as further develop bi-lateral relationships within the region. The Obama Administration broadened its engagement in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) by signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 2009, appointing the first resident U.S. ambassador to ASEAN, and seeking Economic Support Fund (ESF) funding for ASEAN and other regional ASEAN programs.27 President Obama capped this off by hosting an ASEAN Summit in February 2016, the first time the United States has ever hosted one. Additionally, the Obama Administration sought to expand its collaboration in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), hosting a meeting in 2011, to complement its growing work in ASEAN.28 Finally, the Obama Administration joined the East Asia Summit (EAS), which is one of the region’s foremost multinational organizations,29 and promised never to miss a “head of state” meeting of the body. Joining EAS helped underscore the Administration’s commitment to the Asia-Pacific region.

28 Clinton, p 9 2011.
29 Manyin et al., 2012, 1.
To strengthen bi-lateral relationships, the Obama Administration focused on strengthening existing, long standing relationships with Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Australia while building upon a plethora of fledging relationships with Indonesia, India, Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, and Burma. The stalwarts of U.S.-Asian alliances, South Korea and Japan, received assurances of America’s continuing commitment and the U.S. bolstered military cooperation, trade, and diplomatic efforts. Tom Donilon considered the Japanese-U.S. alliance as the “cornerstone” of Asian security.”

He pointed to U.S.-Japanese cooperation after the Fukushima disaster and the excellent relationship between President Obama and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as a sign of strengthened ties between the two countries. South Korea received similar assurances of solidarity as well as a deepening of trade ties in the form of the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. Meanwhile, the United States and Australia agreed to a rotation of U.S. marines in Darwin and promised to work together towards continued prosperity and regional security.

The Obama Administration also focused on building bi-lateral relationships with emerging countries in the region. Most notable is India, which the Obama Administration brought into the Asia-Pacific fold. High-level meetings with both heads of state were held, a 10-year defense framework was signed, a joint climate change action plan was revealed, and both worked in ASEAN to facilitate trade. In addition to India, the United States built up ties with Indonesia by developing the U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership, while working

30 Tom Donilon, 2013, 4.
with Indonesia in other Asian multi-lateral institutions. Indonesia was the country that invited the United States into EAS, further showing the commitment of the two nations to work together. The Obama Administration further reinforced ties with countries like Thailand and the Philippines through counter-terrorism and humanitarian assistance. Rapprochement with Burma and a thawing of relations with Vietnam further demonstrates the Obama Administration’s broad diplomatic approach to the pivot.

The second dimension of the pivot is economic. Although there were many smaller economic efforts and agreements made bi-laterally (trade agreements with South Korea and Singapore), the main component of the economic dimension of the pivot policy was the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The TPP was one of the central operational pillars of the pivot policy and essentially, the entirety of the economic dimension rested upon its success. Kurt Campbell, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs between 2009 and 2013, describes the importance of the TPP as “…the true sine qua non of the Pivot.” The TPP was a free-trade agreement between twelve countries around the Pacific Rim. Lead by the United States, the countries of the TPP made up 40% of the global economic output. The design of the TPP was to promote further integration of the Pacific Rim economies and to ease the flow of goods and services between them. The creation of this common market tackled a range of economic issues from tariffs, quotas, intellectual property rights, labor standards and many more.

36 The negotiating parties of the TPP were Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, The United States, and Vietnam.
37 Campbell, 2016, 266.
The final dimension of the pivot policy was security focused. It involved shifts in the priorities and resources of the American military. Under the pivot policy, the Department of Defense would put greater importance on the Asia-Pacific region. The Obama administration believed that an American military presence is vital to maintaining security in the region. There were three features of this plan. The first is a broader distribution of forces throughout the Asia-Pacific, primarily to the southern part of the region. The focus of the United States security efforts in the Asia-Pacific has been concentrated in the Northern region due to the threat of North Korea. The pivot sought to spread that focus to areas like the India Ocean, Southeast Asia, and the Strait of Malacca.

The second feature is increased flexibility towards deployments that would make American forces more agile and responsive. Former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced in 2012 that the United States Navy was to shift 60 percent of its fleet to the Asia-Pacific region by 2020. This feature in the pivot policy’s security dimension also incorporates Air-Sea Battle doctrine which seeks to help “meet the challenges of new and disruptive technologies and weapons that could deny our forces access to key sea routes and key lines of communication.” Forward deployment of forces to bases like Guam and Diego Garcia, and the incorporation of Expeditionary Sea Base (ESB) ships into the naval fleet represented an effort to increase the flexibility and responsiveness of American security forces.

39 Clinton, 2011, 12.
The final feature of the security dimension of the pivot involved enhancing partner capabilities through training and the strengthening of security alliances.\textsuperscript{43} The rotation of U.S. marines to Australia, the agreement to deploy littoral combat ships to Singapore, the defense partnership with India, and the desire to increase joint-training exercises with many Asian-Pacific nations are a few examples of efforts in this feature. The Obama Administration wanted to “ensure collective capability and capacity for securing common interests.”\textsuperscript{44}

The three dimensions the Obama Administration took to implement the pivot policy only emphasizes the vast scope of it. There were countless number of gears turning at every level of government to put the policy into action. It was a thorough engagement of every foreign policy tool available to the United States government, just as Secretary Clinton had said it would be. The first half of this section laid out the three of the fundamental assumptions of the pivot policy that laid the groundwork for the operationalization of the pivot policy. The second half of the section then described the major policy actions the Obama Administration did to implement the pivot policy that gained tangible results. The next section will now review the literature regarding the Pivot to Asia and will examine the debates about its success, failure, and feasibility.

3. Literature Review

The Pivot or “Rebalance” to Asia was an extensive and broad shift in American foreign policy that mobilized every foreign policy tool in the President’s toolbox. Due to this, it is reasonable there was much debate about what implications a grand shift in policy may bring. Some of these revolve around some central questions: Can the United States maintain such a

\textsuperscript{43} Manyin et al., 2012, 12.
commitment as envisioned by the Obama Presidency? Is the Administration going about the pivot in the right way? Is this to contain a rising China, or is the shift purely benign? Was the Pivot even feasible or necessary at all? Ultimately, all these questions lead to a central debate: Was the pivot a success or a failure? This section will examine the many facets of this debate and the consensus reached by commentators and scholars concerning the pivot policy.

In lieu of the initial rollout of the pivot policy by Secretary Clinton, the debate surrounding the pivot policy started out as an inquiry as to whether the pivot was necessary and analyzed the initial rhetoric of the policy. This debate prompted the rhetorical shift of a “rebalance” rather than a “pivot”, which Tom Donilon articulated. After this rhetorical shift, concrete results started to emerge from the pivot policy. The debate then evolved into one that flowed into three different categories: the pivot was a success, the pivot was a failure, and the pivot was a mixed bag of results. While the debate about the pivot policy does not follow this rhetorical shift neatly, there were those that were criticizing the few early actions of the Pivot prior to Donilon. However, debate on the actual pivot in action generally did not take place until after the rhetorical rebranding.

The first section below will present an overview of the initial debate of the pivot, its rhetoric and necessity. The second section will focus on the evolution of this debate, and offer an overview of arguments made by those who suggested that the pivot is/was (some of these pieces were written during the “pivot years”) a success. Discussions of those who argue that the pivot was a failure and those who argue it was a mixed bag of results will follow the same format as the first section as well. Strands of continuity within each camp will also be examined along with similarities between all three groups.
3.1 The Initial Debate

After the rollout of the pivot policy, one of the immediate concerns of foreign policy scholars was what is going to happen to the Middle East? In his piece written in 2012, Javier Solana, former secretary general of NATO and former minister of foreign affairs of Spain, warns of this foreign policy dilemma that America put itself into by initiating the pivot policy. He describes this dilemma in terms of having to choose between shifting focus to the Asia-Pacific or keeping that focus in the Middle East, which at the time was still experiencing great unrest. Solana points to a number of issues in the Middle East that are still taxing the foreign policy resources of the U.S. The increasing violence in Gaza, instability in Iraq, and the Iran nuclear issue are all examples he uses to illustrate the continued use of American resources in the Middle East, rather than in the Asia-Pacific. Solana raises the question of whether the United States can maintain this balancing act and if it will have to choose between the two. Solana argues that while the Obama Administration wants to make the Asia-Pacific its top foreign policy agenda, issues in the Middle East will continue to prevent that. This fact will then diminish the effectiveness of the pivot policy overall.

Martin Indyk, former U.S. Ambassador to Israel from 1995 to 1997 and executive vice-president of the Brookings Institution, argues in line with Solana in his 2012 Foreign Policy piece “The Re-Pivot.” In it, Indyk argues that Obama is leaving the Middle East too early and doing so will leave issues like the increasing Gaza violence and the Iran nuclear issue in dangerous states. Pivoting to Asia at this time would take away valuable resources, such as

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high-level diplomatic officials, that are needed to resolve these conflicts. Indyk is not against the pivot policy per se; what he is against is the timing of the pivot. Indyk wants the big issues in the Middle East dealt with before Obama commits the resources necessary for the pivot policy.

Robert Ross, a professor of political science at Boston College who has taught in several American and Chinese universities on East Asian Security, argues that the issue is not pivoting to Asia and away from another region, but that the entire policy is counterproductive and unnecessary.\(^{48}\) China is the most important player in the region. China and the United States have not always had the greatest of relationships and during the early years of the pivot, increasing concerns of an aggressively rising China were returning to the forefront of foreign policy analysis. Ross argues that this grand pivot policy only worsens China’s latent anxieties of domination by a foreign power. This is then counterproductive to the stated goals of the pivot because it will only make China more aggressive and will make surrounding countries weary of what will happen between the U.S. and China. This will then make these countries more hesitant about working with the United States. Ross says that the United States needs to maintain a high level of engagement with China to quell these anxieties and achieve success in the Asia-Pacific.\(^{49}\)

There were also those who supported the idea of the pivot policy and the need for increased attention in the Asia-Pacific. Will Inboden, executive director of the Williams P. Clements, Jr. Center at UT-Austin, called the pivot policy “The Obama Administration’s most significant success” for foreign policy in 2011.\(^{50}\) Inboden says that the actual creation of an Asia-


\(^{49}\) Ibid, 2012.

Pacific grand strategy could have the “...potential to pay dividends for a generation.”\textsuperscript{51} Inboden does worry about the U.S. ability to commit to such a grand strategy in the long-term, as well as the domestic political will to do the same. Overall, Inboden says that the United States cannot afford to put so much focus on specific regions like the Middle East while it can take steps to increase influence in other regions of the world, such as the Asia-Pacific.\textsuperscript{52}

Leon Hadar of the CATO Institute also takes the general position of Inboden, that the shift in focus to the Asia-Pacific is good but time will tell if it is successful or not.\textsuperscript{53} Hadar says that the Bush administration’s fixation on the Middle East and the War on Terror hurt relations with the Asia-Pacific and that this was a detriment the U.S. as a whole. Hadar welcomes the shift in focus to the Asia-Pacific but warns that the United States still has commitments in the Middle East and must play a role in them.\textsuperscript{54} To close his piece Hadar offers one final word of caution about the timing of the pivot policy. He questions the potential effectiveness of the pivot policy when the Middle East draw down was just starting to take effect. As Hadar puts it, “America's Pacific Century, alluring as it is, may have to wait.”\textsuperscript{55}

3.2 The Second Pivot Policy Debate

Once more tangible results started to emerge from the pivot policies initiatives, the debate over the pivot policy moved into that regarding its general success or failure. Michael Fuchs, former deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs from 2013-2016 (among various other State Department roles he served in before), in the New Republic, argued

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 2011.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Will Inboden, “The Global Chessboard,” Foreign Policy, November 21, 2011. \url{http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/11/21/the-global-chessboard/}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 2011.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 2011.
\end{itemize}
that the pivot was primarily a success because it laid the necessary foundation for future U.S. policy in the region. In his words, “… the Obama administration has established the groundwork for a fundamental shift in U.S. foreign policy in the coming decades.”  

Fuchs focuses on the success of the diplomatic dimension of the pivot. He praised the United States for joining the East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2010, which Fuchs says may not be as “earth-shattering” as other initiatives but it is extremely significant because it gave the United States a voice and opened avenues of cooperation within the border region.

Fuchs also praises the Obama Administration for consistently showing up to these multilateral meetings, even when other crises were happening around the world, specifically citing Secretary of State Hillary Clinton leaving the 2012 East Asia Summit to broker a peace between Gaza and Israel. All of these events improved the credibility of the United States’ claim that it was serious about committing to the region. To strengthen his assertion that the diplomatic dimension was successful, Fuchs points out the improvement of relations with nations such as Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, and Malaysia, all of which have been historical unfriendly towards the United States. Finally, Fuchs concludes by showing how opinion polls recording favorable views of the United States in Korea, Indonesia, and Malaysia have all gone up significantly between 2007 and 2015.

Fuchs does discuss how the challenges the pivot is facing, tensions with China that have not improved, troubles with the TPP due to domestic concerns, and the fact that the United States did not join the Chinese lead Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) were factors

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59 Ibid., 2016.
hurting the pivot at the time of his writing. However, as an aggregate, the pivot is succeeding in improving American engagement in the region and laying a foundation for future work in areas in which the pivot challenged, specifically in regards to China.

Following the same basic argument, Doyle McManus of *The Los Angeles Times* Washington Bureau, also argues that the pivot is working because it is laying important infrastructure for sustainable American engagement within the region. McManus underscores the fact that other nations are “…clamoring for a closer relationship with the United States.”\(^6^0\) What comes out in his argument is that the Obama Administration is capitalizing on the fear countries in the region have for a rising China, and that this is pushing them in the direction of the United States. He specifically uses the example of Vietnam and its rapprochement with the United States out of concerns about China.

McManus is among the camp that believes one of the goals of the pivot was to balance and counter China’s rise within the region. In this regard the United States is winning due to its “…asymmetric advantage of its own: its ability to forge stronger alliances with China’s worried neighbors.”\(^6^1\) This strengthening of relationships in the region raises “the long-term costs to Beijing”\(^6^2\) in regards to carving out a sphere of influence. This translates to a success in the grand scheme of foreign policy, according to McManus. He does give a nod to the fact that if the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) is failing this will hurt the overall success of the pivot. This failure would be a win for China but he does not spend much time on the subject.

One of the biggest advocates of the Pivot to Asia was President Obama’s former National Security Advisor, Tom Donilon. Donilon was one of the principle architects of the pivot and his


\(^{61}\) Ibid., 2016.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 2016.
advocacy of the pivot while he was in the White House was more closely examined in the previous section. He does continue to defend the pivot even after his tenure in the White House. In an opinion piece he wrote for the Washington Post, he asserts that “the rebalancing of U.S. priorities and resources toward Asia remains the right strategy.”\textsuperscript{63} He contends that the purpose behind the pivot was to “rebalance” America’s priorities to a region that is of increasing importance, thus laying the groundwork for future commitments to the region by the United States.

In keeping with the two previous authors, Donilon focuses on the diplomatic successes, drawing attention away from the military dimension and the struggle of the economic dimension by way of the TPP. He maintains the continued diplomatic successes and steady work to ensure the success of the TPP will bring the United States and Asia security and prosperity. This supports the Administration’s vision that Asia in the twenty-first century “defined not by conflict but by security and prosperity.”\textsuperscript{64}

Supporters of the pivot contend that the main goal of the policy is to lay a foundation for future American engagement within the Asia-Pacific. They tend to focus on the immediate successes of the diplomatic dimension of the pivot and the increasing cooperation between the United States and other nations of the region. Some proponents discuss some of the challenges that the pivot is facing (like the TPP negotiations) and some failures of it (like the inability to stop Chinese aggression and land disputes). However, the argument is the creation of this foundation outweighs those concerns and they can be addressed down the road due to the relationships forged through the pivot policy.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 2014.
Now that there has been an overview of those arguing the success of the Pivot, let us look at those who claim the opposite. John Ford, a U.S. Army Captain who studied at Peking University, calls Obama’s Pivot to Asia his “greatest foreign policy mistake.”[^65] He claims that the focus of the pivot sacrificed attention to other parts of the world and that the assumptions of it are flawed. The assumptions he identifies are: the U.S. policy had ignored the Asia region, that the importance of the region called for a military strategy, and that the United States could pull out other regions of the world.

Ford then discusses how each assumption was flawed. The United States has always engaged the Asia region, specifically citing the previous administration’s efforts in China-Taiwan relations, a civilian nuclear agreement with India, trade agreements with various countries in the region, and working relations with Pakistan. He contends that the security dimension was unnecessary and counter-productive it increased Chinese anxieties and caused them to become more aggressive in the region. He even questions the point of having a security aspect at all, “The premise of the pivot was that Asia was more important relative to other parts of the world because it was home to a rising proportion of global GDP and was now at the center of the world economy.”[^66] He finally concludes with the administration’s further withdrawal from the Middle East, which led too much of the ensuing conflict that followed. He also points to the move away from Europe and how, in his opinion, that emboldened Russia to entertain its endeavors in Ukraine and Crimea.

Dan Blumenthal, director of Asian Studies at the American Enterprise Institute and former senior director for China, Taiwan, and Mongolia at the Department of Defense, follows


[^66]: Ibid., 2017.
many of John Ford’s arguments by way that the Obama administration was focusing too much on just Asia, and taking its eyes off the rest of the world. The pivot was a “strategic misconception” because the United States is a global power and Asia is more globally connected. Thus, any Asia policy must not look at Asia as a black box. As Blumenthal put it, “There can be no Asia policy without a global strategy.” He goes on further to argue that Obama may have been a tad too ambitious with the Pivot to Asia and should, “…settle for something more mundane: building on the Asia work of his predecessors.”

Simon Tisdall, assistant director of The Guardian, takes a similar approach to the pivot, but he frames the failure in regards to its attempt to contain China. Tisdall contends that the pivot is an effort by the United States to use all of its foreign policy tools in a bid to contain China and ensure a peaceful rise. The TPP being in trouble (by not including China), growing wariness of allies about U.S. commitment in the region, and the administration’s inability to curb Chinese aggression in the South China Sea have all contributed to the failure of the pivot, according to Tisdall. He also draws on the new Philippine President, Rodrigo Duterte’s, shift towards China to strengthen his argument. This shift by Duterte, he argues, represents a growing wariness of U.S. commitment among Asian states that is working in China’s favor by pushing them towards China. He concludes his piece by taking a classic realist perspective on the area and U.S. efforts in the region. He contends that the failure of the pivot will only hasten the eventual conflict between the U.S. and China. Robert Ross complements Tisdall’s argument. Ross follows the

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68 Ibid., 2016.
69 Ibid., 2016.
same assertion that one of the primary goals of the pivot was meant to check the rising China, but instead “…has sparked its combativeness and damaged its faith in cooperation.”\(^7\)

Those that flat out call the pivot a failure mainly point to the increased tension between the U.S. and China caused by the security dimension and its inability to curb Chinese aggression in various areas of the region, mainly the South China Sea. They also point out the trouble of the TPP (which eventually failed) and the neglect of the rest of the world by the Obama Administration, especially for a policy that was supposed to “re-balance” American commitments globally. With most of the attention paid to the military and economic dimensions of the pivot, these critics failed to adequately consider the diplomatic dimension of the Pivot. This failure implies that the critics did not believe the successes of the diplomatic dimension outweighed the failures of the economic and security dimensions.

Finally, there are those who view the pivot as a mixed bag of results that has its successes and failures. Mike Green, senior vice president for Asia and Japan Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, is one such person. He argues that there are four highlights of the legacy of the pivot. These highlights include a significant achievement: laying the groundwork for engagement in the Southeast Asia region, one sub-par performance: the management of great power relations in North Asia, one lost opportunity: trade and the TPP, and finally one that was left dangerously incomplete: North Korea.\(^7\)

Green takes a more even-handed approach in his analysis of the pivot. He praises the Obama Administration’s efforts in a re-balance between North Asia and Southeast Asia by way of increased involvement in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and joining


the East Asia Summit. He says the administration should be lauded for laying the “overdue framework for engagement with this increasingly important sub-region.” Similarly, he continues to point out the success of the Administration’s diplomatic efforts with great powers, but criticizes the handling of China. He does note that there were “exogenous factors” like the 2006 financial crisis and the leadership change from the mild-mannered Hu Jintao to the tougher Xi Jinping, which contributed the flaring of these tensions, but that the administration did not recover well.

While offering successes, Green presents failures as well. This is mainly in the form of the increasing trouble that the TPP is facing and the deteriorated situation in North Korea. Green thinks more could have been done with trade and that domestic pressures seem to have doomed the agreement. In regards to North Korea, Green is fair to say that no administration has handed off North Korea better than what they found it, and that the Obama Administration is no different. Green sums up his point a view quite nicely, “This is not the worst Asia legacy or the best in recent history. There are elements to build on but also areas that need to be fixed. Understanding that will help the next administration.”

Kenneth Lieberthal, who is senior fellow emeritus in the Foreign Policy program and the Brookings Institution and was former special assistant to the president for national security affairs and senior director for Asia on the National Security Council from 1998 to 2000, takes an approach similar approach to Green’s in identifying points of success, failure, and challenges of the pivot. Lieberthal argues that trade, the handling of China, domestic issues, and the strong push of American values have all hurt the record of the pivot. However, he gives credit for the

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73 Ibid., 2016.
74 Ibid., 2016.
diplomatic initiatives that Obama has pursued and ultimately the pivot “…establishes a more balanced economic, diplomatic, and security approach.”

Fareed Zakaria, a journalist for CNN and a columnist for The Washington Post, questions the commitment of the United States to the pivot in his Washington Post op-ed in 2015. While he does heavily criticize some of the Obama Administration’s decisions throughout the pivot, he also implies that the grand strategy is not a bad idea. Zakaria’s main point is to shine light on the various crises happening around the world that were pulling Obama and his team away from Asia, prompting the title of his piece: “Whatever happened to Obama’s Pivot to Asia?” He questions Obama’s decision on the AIIB, his handling of China, and the fact that the TPP is in quite a bit of trouble. What Zakaria does say, though, that may reassure the legitimacy of the pivot as a whole: “The Obama administration needs to start believing in its own grand strategy…Washington should focus its energies, attention and efforts on Asia.” This shows that Zakaria may ultimately support the idea of the pivot and that it can work if Obama keeps his eyes on the ball and is able to fix the problems it does have.

Those who argued that the pivot is a mixed bag of results incorporate the successes that the pro-pivot advocates and the failures that the critics point out. The diplomatic dimension of the pivot is definitely the strongest part of the strategy, but the success does in this area does not outweigh the mistakes and challenges that are facing the pivot. This group argues that more work needs to be done to ensure greater success of the pivot but that it is making a good effort at establishing a good framework going forward.

Out of all of the literature on this subject, there seems to be consensus that is drawn, even if one disagrees on the overall success or failure of the pivot. The first is that the pivot is succeeding in the establishment of the foundation for future engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. Second, the economic portion of the pivot is proving to be challenging. If you are on the pro-pivot side, this challenge can be overcome and the benefits will be enormous. If one is a critic of the pivot, this will not be overcome and it will hurt America in the end. For the third and final point, China continues to be an issue and the United States is struggling to find a balance between engagement and holding China accountable for its aggression and pressure in the region. Overall, all sides of the debate seem to be furthering the assertion that Obama’s Pivot to Asia is indeed a mixed bag of results that has its successes and failures. It just depends on which part one wishes to focus on.

4. Growth and Opportunity

The first basic premise of the Pivot to Asia is that turning to the Asia-Pacific will benefit the United States. Was this a safe assumption though? Both Clinton and Donilon point to the potential economic and diplomatic benefits of the region.\textsuperscript{77} Was the Asia Pacific region going to provide the economic and diplomatic benefit that the Obama Administration had anticipated? Based on economic data of the Asia-Pacific Region in 2011, such as aggregate Gross Domestic Product (GDP), GDP growth, FDI inflows and outflows, as well as the growing influence of the region in international politics, the first premise of the pivot policy was rational for the Administration to make. The Asia-Pacific region had the potential to benefit the United States in ways that warranted an increase of focus on the region.

\textsuperscript{77} Supra, p. 5-7.
As Secretary Clinton noted in her 2011 piece, the Asia-Pacific region is home to a large portion of the global economy. As seen in Figure 4.1, the East Asia & Pacific region is among the regions with the highest GDP globally. By 2009, East Asia as a region over took the United States in terms of GDP and then the European Union not long after in 2010. The East Asia & Pacific region has maintained its prominence at the top of the GDP chart into 2016. In the same figure, the South Asian region’s GDP increased over the course of the 2000s to come in just under the resource rich nations of the Middle East and North Africa.\textsuperscript{78} By 2016, the South Asia region is poised to overtake the Middle East and North Africa in terms of GDP.\textsuperscript{79} Furthermore, in 2011 both the East Asia & Pacific and the South Asia regions accounted for $21.906 trillion of the $73.242 trillion global GDP.\textsuperscript{80} That is just shy of 30\% of global GDP. In 2016, that share rose to $25.373 trillion of $75.544 trillion, or just over 33\% of the global GDP.

\textsuperscript{78} The countries that are included in the “East Asia & Pacific” and “South Asia” regions are based on the classifications of the World Bank Group and can be found here: https://data.worldbank.org/country
\textsuperscript{79} India accounts for 78\% of the aggregate GDP of the South Asia region.
In terms of aggregate GDP, the Asia-Pacific region holds a large share of the global GDP. Does this dominance hold true for growth in GDP growth as well? Figure 4.2 shows the annual percent growth in GDP for every major region in the world since 2000. For the most part, South Asia has had the highest GDP growth rate of all other regions since 2000 (mostly due to India). The East Asia & Pacific region steadily rose to become the second-fastest growing region by 2011, right behind South Asia. After 2011, the two Asia-Pacific regions continued to maintain their superior growth in relation to other regions, remaining first and second places, respectively, in terms of growth in 2016.
The recovery of these two regions after the 2008 recession also speaks to their economic power. Both regions in the Asia-Pacific recovered from the recession much quicker than other regions and were able to ascend past pre-recession levels of growth faster as well. Growth for the region did dip in 2011 and leveled off at a rate lower than pre-recession levels, both regions maintained higher growth than the rest of the world by 2016.

In terms of total GDP and GDP growth rate, the Asia-Pacific region has performed better than other regions of the world. While the Asia Pacific region is vast and differs from other regions in terms of resources, geography, capital, culture, and other economic factors that may contribute to the differences in economic strength, the previous decade showed a steady increase in the share of global GDP by the Asia Pacific region. When the pivot policy was formulated and rolled out in 2011, this trend had held strong (even through the 2008 recession). Given this decade-long trend and post-recession recovery, it could have been reasonable for the Obama

Administration and the architects of the pivot policy to believe that the Asia-Pacific region would remain strong economically compared to other regions of the world. This strength could then provide more opportunities for American investment than that offered by other regions.

Clinton and Donilon not only believed that the Asia-Pacific would remain strong economically, but they also believed that this economic potency would provide opportunities for American and Asian businesses to grow as well. Flows of foreign direct investment (FDI) are another indicator of the economic strength of the Asia-Pacific region and its potential benefit to the United States. FDI has its negatives and positives, but overall high inflows of it can be a good indicator of growth and economic strength of a country or region. Countries with high inflows of FDI, meaning foreign entities investing capital and technology to expand business operations and access the market within that country, show that foreign investors see business opportunities, potential growth, and low risk within that country or region. While inflow of FDI is generally considered more beneficial for the recipient country, specifically developing ones, high outflows of FDI from a country can also show strength in the economy of a country. Outflows of FDI are the other side of the coin of FDI inflows. FDI outflow is when domestic businesses are investing abroad to expand operations and their access to markets. High outflows of FDI are a sign that domestic businesses are doing well enough to have excess capital to invest abroad and can be an indicator of an overall stronger economy.

The Asia-Pacific region has seen strong performance in both inflows and outflows of FDI. Figure 1.3 shows the net inflows of FDI for the major regions of the world and the United States since 2000. As one can see, the amount of FDI invested in the East Asia region has been

steadily increasing since 2004, and East Asia has been among the top three recipient regions of FDI. By 2011 and the roll out of the Pivot, the Asia-Pacific region was experiencing its largest increase of inflow of FDI since the recession.\textsuperscript{83} This trend continued after 2011, which shows the retention of investor confidence in the region. East Asia, specifically China, does account for a large portion of the FDI inflows in the Asia-Pacific region. However, considering that China is the largest or second largest trading partner for a majority of Asian-Pacific countries,\textsuperscript{84} it has a profound influence on the economies of surrounding countries and a strong Chinese economy can be beneficial for the region.


FDI inflows into the region did decline sharply in 2016, but this is not a phenomenon specific to the Asia-Pacific. Global FDI fell by 13% in 2016, with some regions faring better than others did.\(^\text{85}\) This decrease does not undermine the Obama Administration’s formulation of the first assumption, since global FDI inflows decreased. Also, at the time of the formulation of the pivot policy, inflows of FDI into the Asia-Pacific were on the rise, which could have given the Administration a reasonable belief that the trend would continue (which it did). This would then contribute to the overall growth of the Asia-Pacific region, growth that the pivot architects wanted America and its businesses to benefit from.

In addition to having a global trend of investment into the Asia-Pacific region, American companies were also increasing their investment into the region at a greater rate when compared to other regions of the world. Figure 1.4 shows the U.S. direct investment positions abroad on a historical cost basis between 2000 and 2016. Since 2000, the Asia-Pacific has been the second or third region that U.S. companies invest in the most. The growth in American FDI to the Asia-Pacific has steadily increased at a constant rate for over a decade and even continued post-recession. In 2016 it was dead even with Latin America, and may over take the US neighbors to the south in 2017 if the trend continues. These data show that American companies continue to invest in emerging Asian markets on a more consistent basis than they do in other regions. Investment in Latin America has dipped and leveled off since 2012, while investment in the Asia-Pacific has continued upward for more than a decade.

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While American companies were investing in the Asia-Pacific, Asian-Pacific companies were investing in the United States more than any other developing region in the world. Figure 1.5 shows the steady growth of Asian-Pacific investment into the U.S. since 2000. This growth then continued onward to 2016 when it reached its highest level. Asian-Pacific countries investing in the U.S. benefits the American economy by creating jobs and demand for capital produced by local suppliers, i.e. American companies. 86 According to the International Trade Administration’s Office of Trade and Economic Analysis, foreign firms, due to FDI, either directly or indirectly employ 12 million (8.5 percent) of the U.S. labor force. 87

Foreign investment into the Asia-Pacific from the U.S. and the rest of the world was strong leading up to the implementation of the pivot policy in 2011 and continued after it. Even investment from the Asia-Pacific into the U.S. followed this trend. These trends gave evidence to the Obama Administration that these investment opportunities in both directions would continue and that the United States should allocate resources to facilitate them. These opportunities would then benefit America economically, which was a part of the original assumption of the region benefiting the United States.

Another reason that makes the Asia-Pacific an increasingly important region that could provide further justification for the first assumption of the pivot policy relates to diplomacy. It revolves around the growing collective power of the Asia-Pacific region in international politics. The Asia-Pacific region has increasingly gained influence in international organizations, most
notably the United Nations (U.N.), which is making it more relevant in international decision-making processes.

The U.N. is the main international organization recognized by countries of the world. It is a place where member states come together to tackle the most challenging issues facing the world. International rules and norms are established within its resolutions and it provides a forum where every nation can have its voice heard. While there is debate on the effectiveness of the U.N. and its functions,\(^88\) it does have considerable power to fund various humanitarian aid and development programs, and establish rules and norms.

The main deliberative body within the U.N. is the General Assembly (GA), which comprises 193 member states with an equal voice and vote. This is then subdivided into several subcommittees on topics such as international security, economic development, social development, and cultural heritage.\(^89\) The GA is the largest body within the U.N., is where many of its resolutions are created, and is the formal platform for a country to express its position on the international stage. The composition of this body has profound impacts on the agenda of the U.N.

The Asia-Pacific region maintains a large voting bloc within the U.N. The countries that are included in the focus regions of the pivot policy make up 19 percent of the countries in the GA.\(^90\) The Asia-Pacific region is the second-largest voting bloc within the GA right behind the continent of Africa, which makes up 24 percent.\(^91\) In addition to voting bloc size, these Asia-


\(^{90}\) “United Nations Regional Groups of Member States,” *Department for the General Assembly and Conference Management*, Last Update May 9, 2014. [http://www.un.org/depts/DGACM/RegionalGroups.shtml](http://www.un.org/depts/DGACM/RegionalGroups.shtml). The United Nations groups the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East into a single voting bloc. They are separated for the purposes of this study. In addition, Australia and New Zealand are separated from the western states bloc and grouped with the Asia-Pacific bloc for both voting share and financial contributions.

\(^{91}\) Ibid, 2014.
Pacific countries also accounted for 21 percent of total asset contribution to the U.N. in 2011. This is a larger contribution than the more numerous members of the African region and the smaller Latin America and Caribbean region, which makes up 1.11 percent and 5.44 percent in 2010, respectively. By 2017, the Asia-Pacific’s contribution had risen to 24 percent. The African and Latin America and Caribbean regions increased their contributions to 1.34 percent and 8 percent in 2017, respectively. The only other regions or countries that contribute more to the U.N. than the Asia-Pacific are Western Europe and the United States.

The large voting share in the GA and the large financial contributions to the U.N. as a whole can lead to greater influence on the international stage for the Asia-Pacific region. If a country or a group of countries working on a resolution wants it to pass within the GA, they will most likely need the support of some of the Asia-Pacific countries. This gives the Asia-Pacific countries advantage with policymaking, which could increase the chances of them furthering their agendas in the international realm. In addition, contributing as a group a large portion of the U.N. budget, the Asia-Pacific countries are sources of potential funding that other member nations may approach for assistance with the financial aspects of a resolution. Just as in the case of U.N. voting, this may give the Asia-Pacific countries more influence within the body.

Increasing diplomatic ties with the Asia-Pacific countries through the pivot policy can help the United States tap into the growing influence of this region in international politics. Having good relations with a large voting bloc within the U.N. can assist the United States in passing resolutions it wants to see succeed, or blocking the passage of resolutions it does not.

Deeper relationships with these nations can help the United States convince them to lobby other nations on behalf of the United States in order to further its agenda, and vice versa.

Strong rapport with such a large financial bloc provides larger potential funding sources for projects the United States pursues. In addition, since the Asia-Pacific region is becoming such a large part of the global economy, being able to have this region back economic sanctions may increase the effectiveness of those sanctions. This is extremely valuable, as economic sanctions are one of the main enforcement mechanisms of the U.N.\textsuperscript{96}

In addition to the U.N., Asia-Pacific nations are gaining strength in international organizations like the G20. Of the members that met in Hamburg in 2017, Asian-Pacific states account for six of them, with Singapore invited to participate by the German Presidency (the host of the 2017 summit) and Vietnam representing APEC.\textsuperscript{97} Eight Asian-Pacific nations attended the G20 summit in 2017, which is an increase from the seven that attended in 2011.

The first fundamental assumption of the Pivot to Asia is that turning to Asia specifically will benefit the United States. As shown throughout this section, at the time of the construction of the pivot policy and following its initial implementation, the Asia-Pacific is a region that continues to grow in economic and diplomatic influence when compared to other developing regions of the world. The Asia-Pacific region maintained a higher aggregate GDP, GDP growth, and attracted greater amounts of FDI through the first decade of the twenty-first century than other developing regions. This history of economic strength gave the Obama Administration reasonable justification to assume that increasing American involvement in the region would provide more economic opportunities for the U.S. than other regions of the world. The


\textsuperscript{97} “Participants of the G20 Summit in Hamburg in 2017,” The Press and Information Office of the Federal Government: Germany. 2017. [https://www.g20.org/Webs/G20/EN/G20/Participants/participants_node.html](https://www.g20.org/Webs/G20/EN/G20/Participants/participants_node.html)
continuing trend of the Asia-Pacific’s economic strength and growth beyond the initial enactment of the pivot policy only provides further evidence that the Administration was correct in their assumption. Add in the growing diplomatic and financial influence of the Asia-Pacific in the U.N. and international politics compared to other regions, and it appears as though deeper relations with the Asia-Pacific region could benefit the United States in the pursuit of its agenda in the international order.

Evidence of the growing economic power and diplomatic influence of the Asia-Pacific region was available to the Obama Administration during the design of the pivot policy and during the start of its official implementation in 2011. Due to this, it was reasonable to assume the Asia-Pacific had great potential benefits and increasing American focus on the region could benefit the United States economically and diplomatically. The continuation of these positive trends after 2011 only supports the original assumption of the Obama Administration.

5. China

As stated earlier, the second assumption is broken up into two parts. The first is that the relationship with China was central to the Pivot and the second is that the Pivot is not a counter to China. Both Secretary Clinton and Tom Donilon dedicated a large amount of time to outlining the U.S.-Chinese relationship,98 showing that they viewed it as the most important relationship in the Asia-Pacific region. The questions this section will answer are whether the Pivot policy needed China in order to work or function and was it the most important nation in the Pivot policy. Then, this section will address the other part of this assumption, namely that the Pivot was not a counter to China. Was it a counter? Was it reasonable for the Obama Administration to assume that it would not be perceived as a counter to China?

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98 Supra,7-9.
As will be shown, the answers to the questions relevant to these two parts demonstrate that, yes, China was crucial to the pivot policy and that it was correct of the Administration to assume that. Second, it was reasonable for the Administration to assert that the Pivot policy was not a counter to China. However, that debate will always be there simply due to the high-profile nature of the Pivot policy and the rise of China. Subsequent actions and policies undertaken by the administration only served to fuel this debate among analysts and contradicted the assertion that the Pivot policy was not intended to counter China.

Historically, China has been the power center in the Asia-Pacific region. Even during the century of humiliation99 and colonial domination by Western powers, China maintained economic dominance in the region until the rise of imperial Japan. After the fall of communism, China started to regain its central position in the Asia-Pacific region. Now it is the largest and most powerful country in the region by almost every measure. Not counting Russia,100 it is the largest country in the Asia-Pacific in land area at just over 3.7 million square miles (India is second at just over 1.2 million square miles) and has the largest population at 1.37 billion people (a third of the region’s total population).101 It is the largest economic power in the Asia-Pacific, making up 34.5 percent of total GDP output from region in 2011 and 44.1 percent in 2016.102 China accounted for 46.6 percent of total FDI inflows into the region in 2011 and 31.5 percent in 2016. In terms of trade, China is either the largest or the second largest trading partner for a

99 This period in Chinese history is extremely important. For more on it, this source is recommended: Matt Schiavenza, “How Humiliation Drove Modern Chinese history,” Atlantic, October 25, 2013. https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/10/how-humiliation-drove-modern-chinese-history/280878/
100 Russia is not included in this because it is not included in the group of countries the pivot policy focused on.
majority of the countries in the Asia-Pacific.\textsuperscript{103} In 2011, Asian economies sent about 14 percent of their exports to China alone and about 13 percent in 2014.\textsuperscript{104}

China has the largest military in the Asia-Pacific. It has the world’s largest ground army with an active-duty force of 2.3 million, 6,457 combat tanks, 4,788 armored fighting vehicles, and 1,271 fighter aircraft.\textsuperscript{105} Along with sheer numbers, it also has superior quality in terms of military technology, weapons, and training.\textsuperscript{106} In addition, China is the only nation, besides North Korea and Russia, with nuclear weapons. Due to its vast size, economic and military power compared to other Asia-Pacific nations, China has considerable influence in the region.

This influence is most evident in the reaction of other Asian-Pacific nations to the Pivot policy. With the announcement of the Pivot policy, many Asian nations expressed cautious optimism, especially in regards to the security dimension of the Pivot policy.\textsuperscript{107} Most Asian countries welcome more U.S. involvement in the region but they also worry about being caught in major power competition between the U.S. and China. Cozying up to the U.S. or pursuing policies that can be perceived as not in the best interest of China could lead to negative repercussions from China. For example, in 2016, relations between China and Singapore started to grow colder. China started to become critical of Singapore and even seized a ship carrying Singaporean military vehicles and equipment in Hong Kong in November of the same year.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{103} World Factbook, 2016.
\textsuperscript{105} “What is China’s Military Strength?,” \textit{Indian Express}, July 16, 2017. \url{http://indianexpress.com/article/what-is-chinas-military-strength-4748691/}
\textsuperscript{108} Ben Bland and Jeevan Vasagar, “Mystery over seized Singapore army vehicles in Hong Kong,” \textit{Financial Times}, November 25, 2016. \url{https://www.ft.com/content/1a0fbc0d-b2e5-11e6-9c37-5787335499a0}
Some analysts see this as retaliation by China for Singapore’s continued involvement in the Pivot policy.109

Another example of China using its economic and diplomatic influence in the region can be seen in its response to the deployment of the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in South Korea. China opposes the deployment of THAAD in South Korea because it fears its radar could penetrate its air space and track its military assets, posing a threat to its national security.110 In response to its deployment, China used its position as South Korea’s largest trading partner to punish South Korea. China placed restrictions on South Korean businesses in China, restricted Chinese tourism to South Korea, and even canceled several concerts and tours by K-Pop groups.111

These are examples of how China can use its power within the region to influence the actions of other Asian nations. Even strong U.S. allies such as South Korea are still vulnerable due to China’s strength and influence in the region, not to mention less powerful Southeast Asian nations like Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, etc. The fact of the matter is that Asian nations have to consider China’s reaction to their relations with major powers, especially the United States. For Asian nations, the United States is a whole ocean away, while China is right next door.112

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Due to this geopolitical reality understood by many Asian-Pacific nations, any U.S. policy formulated for the region must consider China, not out of fear of China, but simply because China is deeply woven into the economic and diplomatic fabric of the region. Other nations will consider the China question regardless, so the United States must ask that question, too. This is why it was correct for Secretary Clinton and Tom Donilon to make the relationship with China central to the Pivot. China has to be involved, or at least its response considered, because it will always be the looming dragon in the room.

The question now is where to lead the U.S.-China relationship.\textsuperscript{113} This leads into the second part of this premise of the Pivot policy: the Pivot to Asia is not a counter to China. As soon as the details of the pivot policy were revealed to the public, foreign policy analysts jumped on the question regarding whether the Pivot policy was intended to counter a rising China and was meant to contain it.\textsuperscript{114} The Chinese reaction to the Pivot policy was certainly one of concern over this issue of countering.\textsuperscript{115}

As discussed before, Secretary Clinton, Tom Donilon, and the Obama Administration as a whole, went to great lengths to dispel this counter-balance notion.\textsuperscript{116} To assert this is not unreasonable, because the Pivot does not have to be a policy that is meant to counter-balance China. It is then up to the Administration to follow through on that. Policies within the Pivot

\textsuperscript{113} Kevin Rudd, “Beyond the Pivot,” \textit{Foreign Affairs}, March 2013. \url{https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2013-02-11/beyond-pivot}

\textsuperscript{114} Matt Schiavenza, “What Exactly Does It Mean that the U.S. is Pivoting to Asia?” \textit{Atlantic}, April 15, 2013. \url{https://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/04/what-exactly-does-it-mean-that-the-us-is-pivoting-to-asia/274936/}


\textsuperscript{116} Supra, 9-11.
have to reflect this premise. Unfortunately, there were some big choices that the Obama Administration made that directly contradicted this premise they so zealously defended.

For the better part of the past 20 years, there has been a debate about the rise of China. This debate examines how China will interact with other major powers and how those major powers will react to China. The debate mainly revolves around the question of whether China will rise peacefully or if it is inevitable that it will come into conflict with established powers like the United States. Realists like John Mearsheimer contend that China is seeking to maximize its security within its region, and thus competition between it and the established power (the United States) is indeed unavoidable.\(^{117}\) Many foreign policy analysts subscribe to this argument based on recent behavior viewed as China trying to carve out hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region.

The main behavior analysts point to suggest this. The first is increasing Chinese aggressiveness in the South China Sea where they are attempting to enforce their territorial claim on the entirety of it by building artificial islands with both commercial and military capabilities.\(^{118}\) China’s “One Belt, One Road” (OBOR) policy is an initiative that seeks to establish a modern equivalent of the old Silk Road.\(^{119}\) The OBOR policy wants to revitalize the old Silk Road Economic Belt through Central Asia and seeks to create a Twenty-first Century Maritime Silk Road connecting the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and then into the Mediterranean (Figure 5.1). Analysts suggest that China’s initiatives in the SCS and

OBOR show their increasing efforts to shape the international and economic rules and norms in the Asia-Pacific region.\textsuperscript{120} Asia-Pacific nations worry about this potential conflict and China’s rise, which has led some to use the pivot policy as a way for them to hedge against it.\textsuperscript{121}

![Figure 5.1 Source: Xinhua News Agency](image)

With a climate such as this about the rise of China as a dominant hegemon and the potential for conflict between it and the United States, the U.S. has to realize that anything it does in the Asia-Pacific will be analyzed through this debate in some way, whether by analysts or potential allies. Therefore, it is imperative that the U.S. carefully considers the impact of its decisions because there is a high chance that a move may be perceived as a counter to China.


which then would exacerbate the anxieties of China (fearing domination by a foreign power) and other Asian nations (about being caught between the U.S. and China). This exacerbation could thus undermine U.S. efforts in the region.

There were decisions that the Obama Administration made in the Pivot policy that aggravated these precise anxieties and undermined the premise that the Pivot policy was not designed to counter China. The first of these was the choice not to initially invite China to join the TPP negotiations. This decision was viewed as an indication that the U.S. sought to push China out of economic development in the Asia-Pacific. This particular view was held by China especially.\(^\text{122}\) Although the U.S. officially invited China to the TPP in 2012, Secretary Clinton indicated it would have to meet the extremely high standards of the agreement, which some analysts saw as being put into place to block China from entering into the negotiations anyways.\(^\text{123}\) The inclusion of this condition could possibly signal that the U.S. was not even willing to negotiate with China on the issue.

In 2016, former President Barack Obama wrote an Op-Ed in the *Washington Post*, in which he further undermines the premise that the Pivot policy was not meant to counter China. In this piece, he argues China’s economic initiatives in the region undermine America’s interests and its economy.\(^\text{124}\) He goes on to assert that the TPP will serve to help the U.S. maintain its economic position in the Asia-Pacific and will allow the U.S., not China, to “write the rules” of global trade.\(^\text{125}\) This rhetoric completely contradicts the notion that the U.S. does not seek to curb


\(^{124}\) Barack Obama, “President Obama: The TPP would let America, not China, lead the way on Global Trade,” *Washington Post*, May 2, 2016. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-obama-the-tpp-would-let-america-not-china-lead-the-way-on-global-trade/2016/05/02/680540e4-0fd0-11e6-93ae-50921721165d_story.html?utm_term=.aeba40912a6a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-obama-the-tpp-would-let-america-not-china-lead-the-way-on-global-trade/2016/05/02/680540e4-0fd0-11e6-93ae-50921721165d_story.html?utm_term=.aeba40912a6a)

\(^{125}\) Ibid, 2013.
or counter Chinese influence in the region, or globally for that matter. This rhetoric, the decision not to initially include China in the TPP negotiations, and the once invited, increasing then barriers of entry into negotiations for China only served to perpetuate the notion that the U.S. was seeking to counter China in the region.

The second decision the Obama Administration made that undermined this premise of was the choice not to invest in the Chinese-led Asian Investment and Infrastructure Bank (AIIB). This was followed by the subsequent decision to lobby other nations to withdraw or not invest in the AIIB. The AIIB is a development bank that began with twenty-one Asian nations in October 2014 and lends money to build roads and communications infrastructure in developing regions of Asia.126 The AIIB now consists of thirty-eight “regional members,” which includes nations from across South, Southeast, and East Asia. It also has twenty “Non-regional members,” which mainly consist of countries from Europe and Africa.

The official reason why the United States opposed the AIIB is that it would not follow international best practices such as standards on human rights and environmental protections.127 However, analysts say the U.S. opposition was purely because the AIIB was a Chinese initiative and that it would help China direct the economic agenda of the Asia-Pacific.128 This follows President Obama’s rhetoric of wanting the United States, not China, to play that agenda setting role. There were also concerns of the U.S. Congress’ willingness to allocate funds for the AIIB if the U.S. joined, but this still could not have stopped the U.S. from supporting the idea of the

AIIB.\textsuperscript{129} To further compound the initial mistake of not joining the AIIB, the U.S. then proceeded fervently to lobby its allies not to invest, citing the same reasons it used to justify its opposition to joining in the first place.\textsuperscript{130}

The reasons why the U.S. would not join the AIIB could not be supported due to the following. The terms of the AIIB were always open for negotiation and China worked with other nations to improve on the initiative. In addition, a plethora of U.S. allies like Western European nations signed onto the AIIB. Traditionally, these allies would be just as concerned about many of the reasons the U.S. cited for not joining the AIIB, yet they still signed onto the agreement. Some analysts agreed that there were areas to improve upon with the AIIB, but overall the United States was better off working with it to improve it rather than sitting on the sidelines.\textsuperscript{131}

These facts paint the U.S. decision not to join the investment bank as one that is unjustified. Thus, the decision not to join the AIIB and the subsequent lobbying of allies no to join it as well only served to hurt America’s position in the Asia-Pacific, and only propagated the notion that the United States was seeking to counter China with the Pivot policy.

The final decision the Obama Administration made that undermined its premise that the pivot policy was not to counter China was its unfounded use of international maritime rules and norms to justify inserting itself in the South China Sea (SCS) disputes. The SCS is a vital waterway that facilitates global trade, commerce, and maritime traffic. It also may contain extremely large natural resource and energy reserves. Due to the importance of this seaway,

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid, 2015.
many nations have claims over areas of it. China has the most contentious claim in the form of its Nine-Dash Line, in which China claims essentially the entirety of the SCS (Figure 5.2).\textsuperscript{132} Other nations that have claims in the SCS assert their 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) enforced in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The United States policy on the SCS disputes is based on the recognition of international maritime rules and norms established in UNCLOS and that territorial disputes should be settled upon what lies within the EEZ of a country.\textsuperscript{133}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{south_china_sea.png}
\caption{Sea of disputes}
\end{figure}

\textit{Figure 5.2 Source: Geopolitical Intelligence Services}

The official position of the U.S. in regards to the SCS is the correct one. The policy itself is not the problem. The U.S. should argue for a resolution of the disputes based on international


norms and rules. The issue is the ideological foundation the U.S. is using to justify its position, the foundation of international maritime rules and norms included in UNCLOS. UNCLOS would be a perfectly good document to base the U.S. position off of, if only the U.S. was a ratifying signatory to it. The U.S. has not ratified UNCLOS, nor has it even signed the document. The U.S. and its Navy have a tradition of adhering to UNCLOS, but adherence in spirit does not hold the same weight as adherence as a ratifying party.

That is exactly the argument that China used against the United States when it revealed its policy for the SCS disputes. How can the United States tell other nations to follow an international law that it has not ratified itself? It does not matter if the U.S. is correct; it cannot base its entire argument upon rules and norms established in a document that it has not ratified. If the United States was a ratifying partner of UNCLOS then it could claim that it can act as an arbitrating party in these disputes and has a duty to maintain freedom of navigation in international waters. However, since it is not, it seems like the U.S. is becoming involved in something that it cannot justify being a part of, other than by claiming they have economic and security interests in a resolution of the conflict. This only complicated the situation and increased the perception that the U.S. is trying to counter China in the Asia-Pacific.

It goes without saying though, China is hardly an innocent in this regard as well. Although China is a ratifying member of UNCLOS, is regularly does not adhere to the rules and norms it sets. This is especially true when China’s national interests are at stake, like its interest in having control in the SCS. Upon ratification of UNCLOS, China submitted a declaration that allowed it to exercise its sovereignty over territorial land and offshore islands that include many

This allows China, from their perspective, to ignore EEZs when it deals with areas that China believes is in its direct national interest. This exemption contradicts the essence of UNCLOS and undermines China’s authority in regards to the SCS. The United States could use that as a counter argument when China accuses them of not being a party to UNCLOS, but overall the best course of action would be for the U.S. to ratify UNCLOS so that it can claim to have authority as an arbitrating party.

In China, the initial official government reaction to the Pivot policy was described as muted and restrained. Chinese government officials approached the Pivot policy with calls for engagement and cooperation as equals in the region. Outside of government, in Chinese news and academic communities, the reaction to the Pivot policy came in two forms. First, the pivot policy was meant to contain China and was offensive in nature. Second, the Pivot was a strategic response to China’s rise and wasn’t necessarily designed to contain her. The majority of Chinese news outlets and scholars subscribed to the former argument rather than the latter, and perpetuated the perception that the Pivot was meant to counter China.

When formulating foreign policy for the Asia-Pacific, no matter the dimension, China will have to be considered. China has an economic or diplomatic stake in almost every corner of the region. Countries in the region understand this reality and will adjust their foreign policy to reflect it accordingly. Due to this, it is imperative for the United States to realize this geopolitical actuality. Fortunately, with the Pivot to Asia, the Obama Administration did recognize this and correctly articulated China’s importance and role in the pivot policy.

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Where the Obama Administration faltered was in the contradictory nature of its rhetoric and its actual policy towards China. The administration desperately did not want the Pivot policy to be perceived as a counter to China and for good reason. This perspective would certainly increase tensions between the U.S. and China, which would make achieving the goals of the pivot policy more difficult. Nevertheless, policy choices such as leaving China out of the initial negotiations of the TPP, not investing the Chinese-led AIIB and then lobbying other countries not to invest in it, and involvement in the SCS disputes that were not fully supported by international law all contributed to perpetuating the notion that the United States was seeking to counter China. It may actually be true that the United States was not seeking to counter China with the Pivot policy, but certain actions it took contradicted that premise and undermined the Administration’s rhetoric, furthering the debate about the rise of China.

6. The Middle East Card

As with the second, the third assumption of the Pivot policy contains two parts—the United States will be able to significantly drawn down its presence in the Middle East, and the Pivot cannot happen unless this draw down takes place. To President Obama this goal served two purposes. Withdrawing from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan functioned as a major campaign promise, but it also became something that was necessary to the preservation of his foreign policy legacy. After the revision to the Pivot policy by Tom Donilon, it became more apparent that the Administration depended upon the draw down to then be able to reallocate those resources necessary for the Pivot policy.

The third assumption turned out to be one of the most important calculations that the Administration was counting on to be correct, even more so that the other two. For the grand ambitions of the Pivot policy to come to fruition, the Obama Administration needed the
diplomatic, economic, and military resources used in the Middle East, for the Asia-Pacific. However, as we saw in the second assumption, actions taken by the Obama Administration undermined their own premise. It was not necessarily the flare-ups of crisis in the Middle East that harmed the validity and credibility of the Pivot policy. Any administration must be able to plan for those contingencies, especially in a region as volatile as the Middle East. As one foreign policy analyst put it, a government must be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. Instead, the Obama Administration, with the Middle East draw down and the Pivot to Asia, tried to walk, chew gum, juggle, and navigate an obstacle course all at the same time.

If by now it is not clear, the Pivot to Asia was an extremely massive foreign policy endeavor. In the five years since its official roll out and the end of Obama’s second term, a number of significant events transpired from the TPP, military exercises, redeployment of military assets, our involvement in several Asian multilateral institutions, bilateral negotiations, rapprochement with Burma, thawing of relations with Vietnam, and building a new relationship with the traditionally non-aligned nation of India. It cannot be overstated how ambitious the Pivot policy was. Secretary Clinton meant it when she said the U.S. was going to utilize “forward-deployed diplomacy” that would use every level of government, reach every corner of the Asia-Pacific, and touch every changing issue in the region.

That was back in 2011, a time when the Obama Administration was kicking the Pivot to Asia into high gear. It was also a time when the Administration was trying to reduce its military and diplomatic presence in the Middle East. At the same time, several issues were going on in the Middle East. Violence from the Arab Spring in Libya and Syria (Syria quickly devolving into

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140 Clinton, 2011, 4.
a civil war), the Israeli-Hamas conflict due to cross-border attacks, the Iran nuclear issue heating up, and Abu Bakr al Baghdadi becoming the leader of ISIS (which then becomes a real issue two years later) all occur within a relatively short span of time. This not even to mention that 2011 saw the peaking of troop levels in Afghanistan as well as the exit from Iraq.\textsuperscript{141} The Obama Administration was trying juggle many foreign policy issues during this time.

Even with the arms-length strategy of coalition building and encouraging states in the region to tackle the problems in the Middle East,\textsuperscript{142} these issues required U.S. attention and involvement. The United States needed to stabilize these types of problems before they took on a major endeavor such as the Pivot to Asia. Relying on this coalition strategy in a region that is notoriously fragile, divisive, and unstable politically,\textsuperscript{143} especially after the Arab Spring rocked it to the core and the breakdown of Syria and Iraq after ISIS swept the Middle East, may have been hoping for too much. If the United States was going to draw down its presence in the Middle East like the Obama Administration wanted, it needed to complete most of the planned draw down before committing to a policy like the Pivot to Asia. The problem is not so much whether the United States could draw down its presence in the Middle East; it did in Iraq and the surrounding region. The problem is that the plan it had for maintaining a presence in the Middle East was not feasible due to the various, extremely complicated problems that the United States should not have left to the devices of a fractured Middle East to solve. After the break down of Syria and Iraq, the Administration was stuck between the Middle East and Asia. The U.S. needed


\textsuperscript{142} Marc Lynch, “Obama and the Middle East: Rightsizing the U.S. Role,” \textit{Foreign Affairs}, September 2015. \url{https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/obama-and-middle-east}

to address the issues in the Middle East but was already committed to the Pivot policy. As critics explained, the limbo the Administration found itself in made many Asian nations question the American commitment to the Pivot policy.\footnote{Zakaria, 2015.}

As said before, crises are going to happen, especially in a region with a tumultuous history like the Middle East. One cannot fault the Obama Administration for its inability to prevent a crisis from happening. The miscalculation that happened here was that the plan Obama left for the Middle East was not realistic. When that strategy broken down and was unable to cope with the problems that arose, it left the Administration in a bit of a scramble to reorient itself. Trying to rush back to the issues of the Middle East while undertaking the Pivot policy in the Asia-Pacific is like trying to perform a full court press with one team on two basketball courts that are not even in the same building.

This miscalculation regarding the effectiveness of its Middle East policy then affected the second part of this assumption—the Pivot to Asia cannot happen without the drawdown in the Middle East. As articulated best by Tom Donilon,\footnote{Donilon, 2013, 3-4.} the plan was to reallocate resources used in the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific and other regions. This did not happen. Various forms of U.S. aid to the region did not decrease in the Middle East and aid did not increase in the Asia-Pacific. Money spent on war efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan did not decrease significantly either, as the Obama Administration had hoped.

U.S. security assistance to the Middle East increased between 2010 and 2015, from $6.7 billion to $8 billion. Comparatively, assistance to Southeast Asia decreased during that time, from $182.1 million in 2010 to $147.6 million in 2015.\footnote{“Rebalance to Asia Led to Drop in Security Assistance for Southeast Asia,” \textit{Council on Foreign Relations}, February 5, 2016. \url{https://www.cfr.org/interactives/rebalance-asia#!/rebalance-asia}} This disparity is also evident in total

\footnote{Zakaria, 2015.}
\footnote{Donilon, 2013, 3-4.}
planned U.S. aid to the respective regions. In 2010, the U.S planned for $8.49 billion in aid for the Middle East and Afghanistan. For the Asia-Pacific it was just $2.85 billion. In 2015 aid jumped to $14.33 billion for the Middle East and Afghanistan, while the Asia-Pacific was only allocated $1.75 billion.147

The disparity of U.S. aid between the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific is stark and hurt the potential success of the Pivot policy. Due to being drawn back into the Middle East, the Obama Administration was unable to take some of that security and economic assistance out of the Middle East and put it into the Asia-Pacific. Furthermore, a report from Brown University estimates the cost of the wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan around $4.79 trillion since the start of the Afghanistan War in 2001.148 This study not only accounts for the costs of the actual operations in the two wars, but also for spending by other departments in the name of national security in relation to these two wars. Additionally, it also accounts for future projections of medical spending for veterans of the wars.149

The amount the United States has spent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the other Middle East conflicts is staggering. These costs, along with the disparity in assistance spending between the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific, could have certainly led the Obama Administration to believe that this money could be spent more wisely, especially in a region that has as much positive potential as the Asia-Pacific (as discussed in chapter 4). This part of the premise, that the Pivot cannot happen without the drawdown, was partly correct for the

149 ibid, 2016, 2.
Administration to assume. In an absolute sense, the Pivot policy did happen without the addition of part of these funds from the Middle East. But the absence of these resources probably hurt the overall success and depth of the Pivot policy. It is difficult to say how much this re-allocation would have affected the pivot policy, but it is reasonable to say that it would have benefited from it based on the amount spent.

This impatience with the timing of the Pivot policy might be attributable to the pressure the Obama Administration felt with these two issues. Obama spent most of his first term focusing on various domestic issues, such as recovering from the 2008 recession and passing the 2010 Affordable Care Act. It is only with the start of his second term do we see the roll out and implementation of major foreign policy goals such as the Middle East draw down and the Pivot to Asia. The pressure of completing, or at least solidifying, his legacy in these two areas is a great deal to pack into one term, even if one has zero domestic issues to confront. It goes without saying that this sense of urgency may have expedited the Administration’s efforts in a fashion that it was unable to keep up with or fulfill using existing resources.

The final premise of the pivot policy was good on paper. The Obama Administration wanted to focus more on a region that had great potential to benefit the United States (the Asia-Pacific), while moving away from a region that had been seen as a drain on the U.S. and its resources (the Middle East). The U.S. would draw down its resources in the Middle East and stabilize it through coalition building. This would free up the billions spent in the region to help bolster the Pivot policy efforts. This would bring more economic opportunity and a great position for the United States in the growing power center of the world.

Unfortunately, the premise of the Pivot Policy was not the main issue. Based on information that the Administration would have had internally about resources spent in the
Middle East at the time it was reasonable to believe this was the right course of action. The problem was the Administration’s execution of their Middle East strategy and the Pivot to Asia. The Middle East strategy was flawed from the beginning given the fractured history of the region, and timing the Pivot policy at the exact time the Administration as trying to stabilize the Middle East stretched resources too thin. The Obama Administration may have jumped the gun too quickly on the Pivot policy and tried to do too much at one time. These policy choices were the downfall of this assumption, not so much the assumption itself.

7. Looking Forward

The underlying premises of the Pivot to Asia were important because they justified different aspects of the Pivot policy. It is just as important to understand these sorts of assumptions of a policy because they represent the “why” of a policy. If one can understand the why, he or she can have a glimpse into the thought process the architects of a policy have when constructing it. The premises are the foundation of a policy and if these are not met, then the policy fractures and parts of it can crumble.

This is evident in the Pivot to Asia Policy and the three assumptions outlined in this thesis. The first premise, that focusing on the Asia-Pacific will benefit the United States, is the most basic and fundamental of the lot. The Administration argued that the Asia-Pacific presents more opportunity and potential to benefit the United States economically, diplomatically, and for its national security. The Asia-Pacific region has accounted for a third of global GDP for the better part of a decade, has been growing at a faster rate than other regions of the world, and has been subject to greater inflows and outflows of investment than other developing regions of the world. It also has seen a growth in influence and power in international organizations and institutions. Due to these facts, the United States could grow economically and gain increasingly
more powerful allies by investing more in the Asia-Pacific. It was reasonable for the Obama Administration to make this assumption.

The second premise, the China issue, was just as important as the first premise because of the central position of China in the region. China is dominant in every dimension—economic, diplomatic, and military, which gives it considerable influence in the region. This is evident in how other Asia nations express the need to consider the China question in their foreign policy, as well as China using its influence in the region to express displeasure with certain policies and actions of other nations (Singapore and South Korea). The Obama Administration correctly identified the centrality of China in the region and to the Pivot policy. However, this premise was contradicted by actions the Administration took that furthered the allegation that the U.S. was attempting to counter China through the Pivot policy. Actions like leaving China out of the TPP, not investing the Chinese-led AIIB, and inserting itself into territorial disputes in the South China Sea based on the tenets of UNCLOS that the U.S. has not ratified all contributed to incubating anxieties about great power conflict between the U.S. and China. This ultimately hurt the Pivot policy and undermined the Administration’s own premise.

The final premise of the Pivot policy, the Middle East draw down, went the way of the China premise. Just as it was correct for the Administration to assume that China was central to the Asia-Pacific, so, too, was it correct for it to assume the resources spent in the Middle East could be more efficiently spent in the Asia-Pacific due to the opportunity there. Billions more in aid was being spent in the Middle East when compared to the Asia-Pacific, not to mention the potential trillions spent on the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Middle Eastern countries. With the sheer amount of money spent in the Middle East, a reduction of this spending could have freed up money that could have positively contributed to the Pivot policy.
Nevertheless, as with the China premise, actions taken by the Administration undermined the basis of the assumption. The arms-length and coalition approach undertaken by the Obama Administration that aimed to have Middle East countries solve their problems together was flawed. The volatile and fractured political nature of the Middle East made this coalition building difficult, and ultimately caused the U.S. to divert attention back to the Middle East and keep spending resources in the region, thus hurting the potential of the Pivot policy and undermining one of its basic premises.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Premise</th>
<th>Importance and Potential Benefit of Asia-Pacific</th>
<th>China is Central to Pivot and the Pivot is not a China Counter</th>
<th>Middle East Draw-Down Will Benefit the Pivot policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable to Assume?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, but executed poorly</td>
<td>Yes, but executed poorly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>The Asia-Pacific had the potential to benefit the U.S. economically and diplomatically.</td>
<td>The Obama Administration pursued policies that contradicted and undermined its ability to engage China while perpetuating the argument that the Pivot policy was to counter China.</td>
<td>The Obama Administration’s miscalculation with its Middle East policy prevented a drawdown of resources from the Middle East. The simultaneous timing of the Pivot and the drawdown stretched the administration thin.</td>
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Table 7.1 Summary of the Basic Premises of the Pivot to Asia

Based on an analysis of the three basic premises of the Pivot to Asia, the idea of the pivot policy was correct. Its basic premises were indeed viable. The United States needed to focus away from the resource-draining Middle East and refocus on the growing region of the Asia-Pacific. The Asia-Pacific had more potential to benefit the U.S. than other regions, China was central to the Pivot and the Pivot did not have to be about countering China, and a draw down in
the Middle East would have benefited the initiative. Even many critics of the Pivot had that were discussed in section 3.2 did not have issues with this. The idea of the Pivot was not the issue. What happened to the pivot policy was that the Obama Administration made specific policy choices that undermined its own premises and the foundation that formed them.

These choices point to a larger lesson of foreign policy. It is difficult to predict other countries policy ambitions, let alone control them. It is also too difficult to predict crises like the expansion of ISIS or the complete and utter breakdown of the state of Syria that would throw a wrench in the machine. What can be controlled are the actions and policy choices of one’s own country. The actions and choices made by one’s government can be crafted in a way that will minimize the negative affects they have on the overall strategy. In the case of the Pivot policy, specific choices made by the Obama Administration caused unnecessary negative effects on the otherwise sound, from the standpoint of its major premises, Pivot policy. It is easier to explain the ineffectiveness of a policy based on hard to manage or predict variables. It is much more difficult to explain this when it was caused by a variable that was completely within a state’s control.

There are a couple recommendations regarding the future of U.S. Asian-Pacific policy that follow from the foregoing analysis. First, the U.S. should continue to build upon the precedent that the Pivot policy provided. The Obama Administration succeeded in making a case for the importance of the Asia-Pacific region to U.S. foreign policy. This set a precedent that brought Asia-Pacific policy to the forefront of American politics. What analysts argue was the most successful dimension of the Pivot policy, the diplomatic portion, should continue to be developed by future administrations. This would allow for the building of relationships that could then facilitate negotiations regarding more complicated issues in the economic and security
realms. The Obama Administration set the diplomatic standard for the Asia-Pacific and it should be sustained.

Second, the U.S. needs to redefine what engagement with China should look like. The Obama Administration’s approach towards China was one of critical optimism. The Administration called for cooperation in traditional areas such as green energy and climate change, while not being shy in offering sharp criticism in other areas such as trade and cyber security. While China is in no way a victim here, there are grave concerns that should be addressed regarding human rights, trade, and cyber security issues. However, there are other areas for which the United States could praise China where it seldom does.

The United States could recognize China as an equal leader and power on the world stage, rather than as a country that must follow its lead. Seriously approaching China as a partner, and declaring them as an equal partner, may help defeat the notion that the United States is attempting to counter China. Domestically, this may be perceived as the United States bending to China’s will, an interpretation that might have contributed to the previous administration’s hesitation for implementing this sort of policy. But in the long run, this sort of recognition by the most power country may help mend some of the distrust that has built up with the rise of China.

The Obama Administration wanted to create a lasting framework for future U.S. policy in the Asia-Pacific. The U.S. succeeded in laying a diplomatic foundation that could be built upon by future administrations. By keeping with the precedent set by President Obama and engaging China as an equal power, the twenty-first century could be more than America’s pacific century; it could be the world’s.
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