

A PARADOXICAL AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY: PIVOT TO ASIA

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Since Obama assumed office, his foreign policy aim was to reinvigorate Asia under the title of “Pivot to Asia”. Obama and his cabinet members unequivocally articulated that the strategy is designed not to agitate China, but to build more amicable ambience for further economic-relations. However, U.S.-Japan security ties check China’s ambition in the Southeast China Sea and Washington-Beijing diplomatic discord is inevitable. The Obama’s Asia strategy illustrates a paradox that exists between economic and security realms. This paper analyzes Obama’s foreign policy in Asia and its implications for the region.

US foreign policy under the Obama Administration has refocused toward the Asia-Pacific region under the term coined, “Pivot to Asia”, later entitled “Rebalance to Asia”. The new US policy toward Asia, according to former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, is defined as “strengthening bilateral security alliance, deepening working relationships with emerging powers including China, engaging with regional multilateral institutions, expanding trade and investment, forging a broad-based military presence, and advancing democracy and human rights.”¹ Kurt Campbell, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, also articulates that the policy is not for constraining China’s growth but to enhance the Sino-US relationship.²

There is much strategic and practical importance to strengthening Sino-US relations. Given China’s strength in the international community,

1 With regard to containing China, Clinton argues that “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.” Referring to Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century: The Future of Geopolitics Will be Decided in Asia, Not in Afghanistan Or Iraq, and the United States should be Right at the Center of the Action.” *Foreign Policy* October 11, 2011.

2 Kurt Campbell and Brian Andrews, *Explaining the US ‘Pivot’ to Asia* (London: Chatham House, 2013).

US would do well to maintain friendly and stable relations. To illustrate, while US (and much of the world) suffered from the global financial crisis in 2008, China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rapidly grew. The Chinese economy even surpassed Japan's in 2010 to become the world's second-largest economy.³ Although many analysts speculated that the rise of China would pose a threat to US security because of disparate political ideologies and approaches such as a divergent policy on denuclearizing North Korea, US has never treated China as it did the Soviet Union. Yet, US remains ambivalent toward China. Unlike Japan or South Korea, China has never been a traditional ally. Even as US appears to desire cordial relations, it continues to display strategic ambiguity toward China. Given the tensions of the Asian-Pacific region, along with US's multifaceted ambitions in the region, this is probably inevitable. Ambiguity exists in various channels, including official support for Japan's collective self-defense rights, and maintaining the US Missile Defense (MD) system in the Asia-Pacific region. However, Japan's collective self-defense can also be a pathway to re-militarization and is a potentially serious threat to Chinese security. The presence of US MD in Asia-Pacific can be viewed as a China containment strategy. Not surprisingly, China strongly opposed the US's advocacy for Japan's defense ambitions, and also criticized the US MD.

While the Pivot to Asia is implemented to vitalize a relationship with the emerging powers, specifically China, there are actions that may be interpreted as 'encircling China'. This is a paradox that exists in American foreign policy that must be explained. US and China always had a discrepancy in security issues, such as the reinvigoration of the US-Japan alliance and China's Air Defense Identification Zone (CADIZ). However, beyond the Sino-US security confrontation, Washington has exerted great effort to ameliorate its ties with Beijing to substantiate its Pivot to Asia's aim, deepening relations with China. The outline of the paper is as follows. First, a brief look at the Obama-Xi summits will examine the Pivot to Asia policy and China's rise on a level of the heads of state. Second, America's participation in multilateral initiatives will examine the effects and reactions to the policy on the level of international entities. Next, the paper will discuss potential destabilizing weak points in US-China relations: Taiwan, Japanese self-defense, and America's missile defense (MD) in the region. The main argument of the paper is that there exists an ambiguity and paradox of the

3 Kevin Hamlin and Li Yanping, "China Overtakes Japan as World's Second-Biggest Economy," *Bloomberg*, August 16, 2010.

America's foreign policy posture in the region.

Obama-Xi Summits: Friend or Foe?

As to show for the two goals of America's Pivot to Asia, strengthening bilateral alliances with extant regional allies in Asia Pacific and enhancing relations with China, Obama and Xi held three summits since Xi came to office. If Washington and Beijing maintain antagonistic relation because US policy toward Asia is designed to encircle China, then two head of states would not have convened a summit. For example, after President Park Geun-Hye presumed office, she has not held any official summit with the Japanese Prime Minister. This is unprecedented in South Korean foreign policy. Tokyo used to be a second stopover, followed by Washington, for the head of South Korean administration's state-visit. Due to greater historical animosity that derived from Japanese ultra-nationalistic policies and remarks such as implementation of rights of collective self-defense or not recognizing comfort women, Seoul and Tokyo are not able to host a summit because of domestic opposition. Therefore, if Washington's Asia policy is set to contain the rise of China or Beijing's perception on US policy aim is targeted to undermine its growth then two states will trigger a new Cold War and preserve hostility toward each other.

Xi Jinping visited the White House on February 2012 as Vice President and exchanged thoughts on Pivot to Asia with Obama. Obama said,

“We are a strong and effective partner with the Asia Pacific region... in order to do that it is absolutely vital that we have a strong relationship with China...I have always emphasized that we welcome China's peaceful rise, that we believe that a strong and prosperous China is one that can help to bring stability at prosperity to the region and to the world.”⁴

Then Xi replied, “China welcomes a constructive role by the United States in promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific.”⁵ Based on this

4 Office of the Press Secretary, “Remarks by President Obama and Vice President Xi of the People's Republic of China before Bilateral Meeting,” The White House, February 2, 2012, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/02/14/remarks-president-obama-and-vice-president-xi-peoples-republic-china-bil> (accessed December 9, 2014).

5 “Remarks by Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping at a Luncheon Co-Hosted by the US-China Business

mutual understanding between Xi and Obama, the first summit convened in Sunnylands. Although the Sunnylands summit was an unofficial summit, the two head of states were able to build an intimate relationship and created a more effective platform through eight hours of conversations in two days. Tom Donilon, a national security advisor to Obama, analyzed that a meeting that was “positive and constructive, wide-ranging and quite successful in achieving the goals that we set forth for this meeting.”⁶ According to observers, both Obama and Xi candidly asked and answered each state’s concerns. For example, China raised an issue regarding US arm sales to Taiwan and US conveyed anxiety in regards to Chinese cyber-theft.⁷ Even though the Sunnylands summit did not produce a immediate resolution for ongoing issues in between Sino-US relations, the positive ambience created by the two leaders hints to future possibilities of addressing issues more effectively in the future.

Obama and Xi had a reunion in 2014 at the Nuclear Security Summit in Hague. Xi mentioned that, “China will adopt a more positive attitude and more vigorous actions to strengthen cooperation with the United States.”⁸ Through the meeting, both states have concluded, on the issue of North Korean nuclear program, that neither China nor US would tolerate Pyongyang’s nuclear arms and both states would commit to promote denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.⁹ Although Beijing and US could not finalize a decision on the resumption of the Six Party Talks (SPT) because China urged US to return to the negotiation table whereas US insisted that North Korea must show its willingness to resume the talks by eliminating its Uranium Enrichment Program (UEP), China confirmed that North Korean nuclear weapons can stimulate instability in Northeast Asia region. After Xi became president, China has shifted its North Korean policy to cooperate with other parties to circumscribe North Korea’s financial transactions. The Bank of China closed all dealings with the North Korean bank on May 2013 and Beijing has complied with international sanction

Council and the National Committee on US-China Relations,” *Federal News Service*, February 15, 2012.

6 Office of the Press Secretary, “Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Tom Donilon,” The White House, June 8, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/06/08/press-briefing-national-security-advisor-tom-donilon> (accessed December 10, 2014).

7 Richard C. Bush, “Obama and Xi at Sunnylands: A Good Start,” Brookings, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2013/06/10-obama-xi-sunnylands-bush> (accessed December 10, 2014).

8 Shannon Tiezzi, “Obama, Xi Meet at Nuclear Security Summit,” *The Diplomat*, March 25, 2014.

9 “Xi-Obama Talks Frank, Constructive: Chinese FM Spokesman,” *Xinhuanet*, March 25, 2014.

by tightening restrictions on goods banned for export to North Korea on September 2013.¹⁰ Since the Bank of China is state-controlled, the bank cannot autonomously decide to sever the transactions with North Korea. China has started to encourage denuclearization of North Korea by utilizing its leverage, which is extraordinary in Sino-North Korean relations. In the aftermath of UN resolutions on sanctioning North Korean economy for condemning Pyongyang's unilateral nuclear and missile tests, China provided economic assistance to sustain the Kim's regime in spite of other state's criticism and concern. Therefore, China's shifting tides on North Korea can possibly induce changes in Pyongyang's military posture. The Hague summit reassured China's position toward the North Korean nuclear issue, which substantiated deepening Sino-US relations.

The most recent US-China summit was held in the midst of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). In Obama's remarks, he signified the importance in building cooperative setting in between Beijing and Washington by saying, "if China and the United States can work together, the world benefits."¹¹ The outcomes of the summit validated prospective Sino-US collaboration. Xi promised China's CO₂ emissions would peak in 2030 and be responsible in terms of climate change by cutting CO₂ emissions for the first time.¹² Since industrial production is one of the main resources in the Chinese economy, increments of CO₂ emissions is seen as inevitable.¹³ However, Xi setting a specific year in order to recognize the climate change issue is salient for the world in the near future. Other than the climate change deal, two states established rules pertaining to military relations. For instance, each state needs to notify its military exercise to the other in advance. Also, the two established norms for maritime and air encounters in the western Pacific.¹⁴ In terms of cultural exchange and economic

10 Chinese Commerce Ministry posted a list of restricted goods that has potential "dual-use" products that can be used either for weapons or non-military nuclear purposes. Retrieved from Keith Bradsher and Nick Cumming-Bruce, "China Cuts Ties with Key North Korean Bank," *The New York Times*, May 7, 2013; "China Tightens Nuclear Sanctions Against North Korea." *Voice of America*, September 24, 2013.

11 Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by President Obama at APEC CEO Summit," The White House, November 10, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/10/remarks-president-obama-apec-ceo-summit> (accessed December 11, 2014).

12 Elizabeth C. Economy, "Obama's Big China Win at APEC: Not what You Think," *The Diplomat*, November 15, 2014.

13 From the data, China's CO₂ emissions rate is the highest in the world. Retrieved from "Data: CO₂ Emissions (Metric Tons Per Capita)," The World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC/countries/CN-4E-XT?display=graph> (accessed December 11, 2014).

14 Elizabeth C. Economy, "Obama's Big China Win at APEC: Not what You Think," *The Diplomat*, November 15, 2014.

relations, the two sides completed negotiations to issue a ten-year tourist and business visa and to decrease tariffs on semiconductors and other information-technology products.¹⁵ In the last summit, more productive and effective results were delivered as proof that both states were inclined to forging intimate relations.

America's Pivot through Multilateralism

Over the past decade, China has tried to exclude US from the Asian multilateralism in order to preserve its own version of the 'Monroe Doctrine.' China has invested its resources in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN+3, and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). She has even provided economic incentives to ASEAN through ratifying a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).¹⁶ Also, China perceives the ARF as a vital Asian security forum. Obama has shown active engagement in Asian multilateral organizations in accordance to the Pivot to Asia. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is one example of this. The TPP was established by an agreement between New Zealand, Chile, Brunei Darussalam, and Singapore in 2005. US, Canada, Australia, Peru, Vietnam, Mexico and Malaysia have joined following this initial agreement. Japan and South Korea have shown a positive signal toward joining the TPP.¹⁷ The countries that have joined TPP negotiate on issues such as "trade in goods and services, investment, labor, financial services, technical barriers and other regulatory issues."¹⁸ In stark contrast to the TPP, Beijing launched a contending economic integration, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The origin of RCEP differs from the TPP. The participant states are ASEAN, subsuming Brunei, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippine, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, which have already ratified FTAs with each six non-ASEAN states such as China, South Korea, Japan, India, Australia and New Zealand. Through RCEP, separate FTAs between ASEAN and non-ASEAN states can integrate into one regional economic agreement. RCEP argued, "it will establish deeper economic cooperation than the existing FTA agreements."¹⁹ If two forms of economic integration compete in the Asia-

15 Carol E. Lee, Jeremy Page and William Mauldin, "US, China Reach New Climate, Military Deals," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 12, 2014.

16 Kenneth Lieberthal, "The American Pivot to Asia," *Foreign Policy* 21 (2011): 3-4.

17 Beginda Pakpahan, "Will RCEP Compete with the TPP?" *East Asia Forum*, November 28, 2012.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

Pacific arena, then one may argue that a diverse approach of economic engagement can trigger a deeper rivalry between Beijing and Washington. But through TPP and RCEP, quasi-multilateral economic cooperation can be fostered. Some member states such as Australia and New Zealand have joined both economic partnerships.

Quasi-economic integration is derived from Victor Cha's quasi-alliance concept in which he brings two unallied members to form a strategic alliance through common ally.²⁰ Since US has not concluded FTA agreements with ASEAN, this quasi-economic integration can act as a catalyst in bringing the Asian economy into a form of deeper integration. On the other hand, China officially announced that it is open to TPP and considers integrating with the global trade system.²¹ In other words, TPP and RCEP is not a form of economic containment to exclude either party but can be a mechanism to converge economic and trade relationships. Therefore, Obama's approach of economic integration, which originated from Pivot to Asia, can foster cooperative setting for the means of deepening relations in between Beijing and Washington.

Moreover, in the security aspect, US has presented its effort to bring an intimate relation with China through multilateral organizations. In the aftermath of Pivot to Asia, US Secretary of State attended the ARF and addressed security issues in the Southeast China Sea such as territorial disputes. Also, by signing Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) with ASEAN, the US provided an institutional framework for regional cooperation. The US was able to accede to the East Asia Summit (EAS) and Obama has been attending the EAS since 2011 with an exception of the eighth annual summit in 2013. China has advocated for the ARF to be an important security forum and through US participation in ARF, the forum could be a more effective and practical platform in dealing with security issues.

If America's Pivot to Asia was designed to contain China's rise, then US should provide security guarantees for those states that are in territorial disputes with China. However, the US is pursuing to settle security issues in the Southeast China Sea through diplomacy and multilateral dialogues. US engagement in multilateral organizations in the Asia-Pacific demonstrates that US commitment to the region is not to contain but to build constructive relations with China. Even in times when China acts unilaterally and sparks

20 Victor Cha, "The Argument: Quasi Alliances," in *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 36-58.

21 Shannon Tiezzi, "Will China Join the Trans-Pacific Partnership?" *The Diplomat*, October 10, 2014.

tension by acts such as declaring a CADIZ or asserting sovereignty over what is disputed territory, the US has maintained the door to dialogue open. If Obama's Pacific Policy were meant to encircle or restrain China's rise in Asia, then multilateral security cooperation such as Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) should be revisited. Thus, Obama administration's reconciliation policy toward China rather than coercive diplomacy has confirmed that US interests in Asia-Pacific is to have a tighten linkage with China to avoid the escalation of security confrontation that can instigate a security dilemma in Northeast Asia.

Taiwan Relations and China's reaction to Pivot to Asia

Obama reiterating the one-China policy indicated that US would not interfere with China's domestic issues, especially pertaining to Beijing-Taipei relations. In the aftermath of diplomatic normalization between Washington and Beijing in 1979, US severed the diplomatic ties with Taiwan to give recognition to mainland China as the sole legitimate state. Based on Joint Communiqués that were issued in 1972, 1978, and 1982 and the US-Taiwan Relations Act, the US was able to continue to preserve cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with Taiwan.²² US respected the Taiwan issue as an internal affair of China and concurred to not to intervene into Chinese domestic matter unless Beijing wages a war against Taipei in which case would affect the peace and stability in the region. Following the agreements and the subsequent US-Taiwan policy, US has established *de facto* embassy, American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), to manage its unofficial relations in order to comply to China's demands. If US and China had hostile relations, then Washington may employ the Taiwan card and pressure China militarily. For instance, by providing expanded military capabilities such as Bush administration's approval for possible selling of offensive-purpose

22 Regarding to US policy toward Taiwan, refer to "Joint Communiqué of the People's Republic of China and the United States of America," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, February 28, 1972, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zmgx/doc/ctc/t36255.htm> (accessed December 11, 2014); "Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States of America," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, December 16, 1978, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zmgx/doc/ctc/t36256.htm> (accessed December 11, 2014); "Joint Communiqué of the People's Republic of China and the United States of America," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, August 17, 1982, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zmgx/doc/ctc/t946664.htm> (accessed December 11, 2014); Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, "Fact Sheet: US Relations with Taiwan," US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35855.htm> (accessed December 11, 2014).

arms (i.e. diesel-electric submarines, P-3 anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft, and four decommissioned US Kidd-class destroyers), US can use its both diplomatic and military leverage on Taiwan to encircle China.²³ But Obama officially reaffirmed that US does not support Taiwan's independence and favors cross-strait relations with Taiwan.²⁴ The implication of Obama's stance on the Taiwan issue is that US will preserve the past traditions in terms of its relationship with Taiwan and be able to create a cooperative ambience with China.

One residual concern is US arms sales to Taiwan. Since the 1990s, Taiwan has been a major US arms buyers and China conveyed serious concern to US.²⁵ But, in accordance to the US-Taiwan Relations Act, US is committed to assist Taiwan in sustaining its defense capabilities. China's missile launches in 1995-1996 triggered US to expand military ties with Taiwan. However, the US Congress restrained Bush's arms sales by freezing two submitted pending programs, a submarine design program and new F16C/D fighters.²⁶ Obama still has not made a decision regarding this issue in fear that US selling arms to Taiwan may be interpreted by China as US providing offensive capabilities to Taiwan. During the most recent APEC summit, Xi and Obama candidly discussed the arms-sales issue. When Xi raised his concern on US military ties with Taiwan, Obama simply reiterated the one-China policy and elucidated the purpose of selling arms as offering a defensive capability, which originated from the Taiwan Relations Act. Obama's position in arms-sales and his deferral of spending programs should be appreciated in that it is a sign that the US does not want to aggravate China's regarding Taiwan.

In deepening relations, cooperation is a key in between counterparts, as a marriage cannot be realized by only one side's willingness. If this concept is applied to the Sino-US relations based on America's Pivot to Asia, not only US intention but also China's reactions must be assessed to define whether two states are in the process of developing relations. In other words,

23 Shirley A. Kan, *Taiwan: Major US Arms Sales since 1990* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014): 7-8.

24 "Obama: US does Not Support "Independence" of Taiwan,Tibet," *Xinhuanet*, November 12, 2014.

25 During Bush administration, six of the eight pending programs (not a "package") had a combined value of \$6.5 billion. Despite those concerns, President Obama repeated that cycle to wait to submit formal notifications for congressional review all on one day (on January 29, 2010) of five major programs with a total value of \$6.4 billion and again (on September 21, 2011) of three major programs with a total value of \$5.9 billion, including upgrades for Taiwan's existing F-16A/B fighters. Retrieved from Kan, *Taiwan: Major US Arms Sales since 1990*. 44-45.

26 Ibid.

the resulting consequences of Pivot to Asia must be examined to confirm the Beijing-Washington's tightened ties.

For the Iranian nuclear task, P5+1 (the United States, China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and Germany) agreed to a Joint Plan of Action (JPOA). JPOA is an interim agreement, issued in November 2013, to provide initial steps for multiple states that are involved in Iranian nuclear issue to ensure a peaceful Iran nuclear program.²⁷ Prior to promulgation of JPOA, US had consistently imposed a tightened economic sanction on Iran to prevent illicit nuclear developments. But China was exempted from the financial penalties that a state that maintains trade with Iran must pay.²⁸ China's exemption implies that US respects Chinese national interests, which derive from trading with Iran. However, despite Sino-Iranian relations, China cooperatively operated with other parties to promote the peaceful development of the Iranian nuclear program. China has been a sponsor state of Iran in building nuclear reactors and programs since 1980s. Xi's association with other P4 member states and Germany suggests that if nuclear development is prone to produce Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) then China will not support such a program. There has been a shift in the position taken by China on the Iranian nuclear program. This shift in China's Iranian policy indicates that Beijing also shares the view with US and its allies that Iranian nuclear programs can pose a threat to the world. Furthermore, China also allocates its interests on transnational issues with US. China shared a consensus on counterterrorism against ISIS, maritime piracy on the Gulf of Aden, epidemic such as Ebola, and pledged that China will commit to be responsible on those tasks. Thus, China immerses itself with the international community to foster peace and stability. China has shown its commitment to international security, which US has always demanded. Therefore, it can be concluded that China's positive reaction to US' request on Iran and transnational issues can be measured as positive forces in deepening its bilateral relations. Particularly, if US Pivot to Asia is a signal from Washington to Beijing for the purpose of intimate kinship, China welcomes and accepts the US initiative to expand the ties through commitment on international security and shares her aim on resolving Iranian nuclear issue. China is a sovereign state that can autonomously

27 European Union External Action, *Joint Plan of Action* (Geneva: European Union External Action, 2013).

28 Singapore and India were also exempted along with China. Referring to Keith Johnson, "Beijing Gets a Pass on Iran Sanctions," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 5, 2013; Rick Gladstone, "US Exempts Singapore and China on Iran Oil," *The New York Times*, June 28, 2012.

set its foreign policy and does not necessarily need to cooperate with other countries by default. Chinese cooperation and participation in US initiatives is a sign that America's relations with China are improving. This means that American foreign policy towards the Asia Pacific has been successful. Pivot to Asia's aim lies in strengthening ties with the emerging powers not containing them.

US-Japan Relations: Japanese Collective-Self Defense

Despite Japan's expressed will to exercise the rights of collective self-defense, the Chinese state-run Xinhua published an editorial dismissing Japan's allegedly peaceful ambitions, stating that Japan has no interest in preserving the peace by implementing the rights.

"To conceal Japan's wild ambition of becoming a military power, Abe tailored for his security scheme a phony coat in describing his plan as becoming a 'proactive contributor to peace.'"²⁹

The editorial also implied that Japan would use false premises to push its military development past strict Constitutional limitations: "Japan may use 'assisting the US army' as an excuse to break the limitations on its activities under its collective self-defense right."³⁰ Due to lingering historical animosity and Japanese imperialism in the early twentieth century, there remains significant mistrust between the East Asian nations. It is thus not surprising that China perceives collective self-defense as a pretext for a re-militarizing Japan. Abe Shinzo's ultra-nationalistic policies such as a firm stance on the Senkaku/Diaoyu island dispute, and failure to acknowledge the Japanese Imperial Army's misconduct during the Occupation years have remained issues for dispute. Thus, China's suspicions over Japan's collective self-defense as a pathway to re-militarization will likely never dissipate.

In the Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee issued after the 2013 '2+2 meeting, "The United States welcomed Japan's efforts in re-examining the legal basis for its security including the matter of exercising its right of collective self-defense... and US will commit to

29 Shannon Tiezzi, "China Responds to Japan's Defense Package," *The Diplomat*, December 18, 2013.

30 Ibid.

collaborate closely with Japan.”³¹ When President Obama made a state visit to Japan in April 2014, he expressed a firm stance on the US-Japan alliance: “Our commitment to Japan’s security is absolute and article five of the security treaty covers all territories under Japan’s administration, including the Senkaku islands.”³²

In the context of Pivot to Asia, what motivates US to officially support Japan’s collective self-defense rights, and sovereignty over Senkaku? Since the 2008 financial crisis, US has maintained heavy defense cuts to reduce the financial burden created by US bases abroad. US support for Japan’s collective self-defense is due to these restrictions on forward deployed capabilities in terms of military expenditure. If Japan employs collective self-defense, the national defense budget for Japan will inevitably increase, lessening the burden shared by the US. However, this move may be destabilizing for the region. Re-militarizing Japan as opposed to maintaining the status quo runs the risk of provoking contiguous states and sparking a regional security dilemma.

The former Secretary of State has rejected claims that its policy is designed to restrict the rise of China, and Kerry has not shifted or amended to balance against China. The ambiguity of the Pivot to Asia policy is in that on one hand, US articulates the significance of building a mutually beneficial relationship with China, yet US maintains a security policy that in effect contains China’s influence in the Asia-Pacific region by strengthening its own alliance with Japan. This signals that America’s priority is to deepen bilateral relations with an existing ally – or more insidiously, to indeed check Chinese influence in the region, and not to cooperate with China. If the priority of Pivot to Asia were indeed “deepening working relationship with emerging powers,” US should not have taken a stance on Japan’s collective self-defense and the territorial disputes over Senkaku.

America’s Missile Defense

China’s response to the US MD is twofold: 1) neglect US’s deployment of MD and focus on its economic development as long as the MD does not involve Taiwan; 2) China should be prepared and must employ a campaign

31 “Joint Statement of Consultative Committee: Toward a Robust Alliance and Greater Shared Responsibilities.” US Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/10/215070.htm> (accessed October 8, 2014).

32 Justin McCurry, “Obama Says US Will Defend Japan in Island Dispute with China,” *The Guardian*, April 24, 2014.

against the MD.³³ Through the assessment of China's security policy on the US MD, China strongly opposes the deployment of US MD in Northeast Asia. According to Ambassador Sha Zukang, Director-General of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's Department of Arms Control and Disarmament from 1997 to 2001, "what the US wants is absolute security, because it is only from a position of absolute security that it can enjoy complete freedom of action in dealing with other countries. The US government and Congress have found MD the best means to deliver this."³⁴ Chinese analysts suggest that US MD developments could seriously affect China's security interests, and that one of the conditions for Beijing to participate in nuclear disarmament should be a US commitment to suspend ballistic missile defense efforts. China recognizes the broader implications since the US MD posture both reflects the threat perceptions and strategic intentions of the state adopting it, and inevitably will affect the existing international strategic environment and the perceptions and interests of other major powers.³⁵ China argues that the US MD would have long-term negative effects on the international security environment and progress in arms control and nonproliferation. First, MD disrupts global strategic balance and stability, harming mutual trust and cooperation between major powers. Second, the US MD will induce an arms race, especially in outer space.³⁶ Despite the China's apprehension and uncertainties toward the US MD, the Obama administration has never intended to remove the MD as it did in Europe. After Obama assumed office, North Korea has conducted two nuclear tests, two ICBM tests, and various missile tests, evoking instability in the region. North Korea became a pretext for Washington's continuing deployment of MD in Northeast Asia. However, China claims that the North Korean threat is greatly exaggerated, and that America's real intentions are to undermine Chinese security by neutralizing its nuclear deterrence.³⁷ Nonetheless, US ignores China's criticism, even requesting South Korea to join the MD. Under the US security policy in the Northeast Asia, MD clearly depicts Washington's containment policy on China. Therefore the US sends unequivocal message to China in terms of security.

33 Jing-Dong Yuan, "Chinese Responses to US Missile Defenses: Implications for Arms Control and Regional Security," *The Nonproliferation Review* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2003).

34 Sha Zukang, "US Missile Defense Plans: China's View," *Disarmament Diplomacy*, no. 43 (January-February, 2000). <http://www.acronym.org.uk/43usnmd.htm> (accessed October 13, 2014).

35 Yuan, *Chinese Responses to US Missile Defenses: Implications for Arms Control and Regional Security*.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

China does not share similar democratic ideologies with the US and instead elects to pursue somewhat clandestine security policies, such as the nine-dotted line/island chain to expand its territory at sea. Chinese policies have not only increased the tensions with the countries who have claim to the disputed territory but has alarmed the Japanese self-defense forces. Literature tells us of the difficulty in cooperative relationships between countries with different political systems and between countries that are not allies. Pivot to Asia cannot enhance the US' relationship with China if it does not ensure trust between the two countries. The possibility of the removal of US MD is relatively low, as long as North Korea pursues its nuclear program. Thus, 'how' is a big question in Pivot to Asia in terms of revitalizing the US relationship with China. In a hypothetical world, denuclearizing North Korea is the best solution to settle disputes over the US MD. If China uses full leverage to compel North Korea give up its only bargaining chip, US will lose the only pretext of deploying MD. However, this scenario is less likely due to China's buffer zone mentality and the pursuit of stability in the region.

Conclusion

While the Obama Administration argues that the Pivot to Asia policy will be a cornerstone for a 'deepening working relationship' with China, the ambiguity of this foreign policy will create uncertainty towards emerging powers. such ambiguity can lead to miscalculations and mistrust. According to Hillary Clinton's *America's Pacific Century* in Foreign Policy, Beijing and Washington has been involved in the Strategic and Economic Dialogue and Strategic Security Dialogue to bring both states towards cohesion on economic and security issues.³⁸ Notwithstanding high-ranking officials' dialogues and summit meetings, Pivot to Asia has duplicity in terms of security objectives of the US. US has become a patron state for Japan in exercising collective self-defense that can lead to a normal, re-militarized Japan. Moreover, the presence of the US MD in the region and ongoing MD research depicts a containment strategy against China. Even as China tries to assimilate into the international community and abide by international norms, it will not be able to share the consensus on security objectives that can be interpreted as containing China. The Chinese state, retaining its Communist ideology, implements policies and actions that are contrary to existing international

38 Clinton, *America's Pacific Century: The Future of Geopolitics Will be Decided in Asia, Not in Afghanistan Or Iraq, and the United States should be Right at the Center of the Action.*

norms such as declaring the CADIZ.

This paper criticizes the US commitment to the region which does neither of the two: fully cooperate with China or contain the rise of China. The means with which America is implementing Pivot to Asia, and the purpose of stronger military commitments are both problematic. It is unlikely that Obama will declare or issue a bill to contain China as Harry Truman did after the World War II. By analyzing Obama's behavior since inauguration, such as strengthening the hub-and-spokes alliance system especially with Japan, Obama shows that the US is containing China at least in regards to security matters. One of the major concerns with Pivot to Asia is a priority in US foreign policy: whether to strengthen existing bilateral relations with the 'spokes' or to build a working relationship with China. Since the Northeast Asian states have unsettled disputes over territorial claims and historical issues with China's influence, US allies have been threatened by the rise of China. The US has two options to resolve this issue: 1) build mutual consensus with China as a mechanism; and 2) strengthen the hub-and-spokes system to restrain China's arbitrary actions that induce instability in the region. US cannot implement two options simultaneously. However, Pivot to Asia attempts to subsume two contradictory options, thus nullifying its effect. For example, in order to build mutual consensus or to produce an effective agreement, US must abandon its advocacy on Japan's collective self-defense as a trade-off, which will instigate the less cohesive US-Japan alliance. Therefore, strategic ambiguity or a paradox lies in Obama's foreign policy towards Asia. **Y**