

CORBETT CENTRE FOR MARITIME POLICY STUDIES SERIES



# Assessing Maritime Power in the Asia-Pacific

*The Impact of American Strategic Re-Balance*



Edited by  
**Greg Kennedy and Harsh V. Pant**

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The Impact of American Strategic Re-Balance

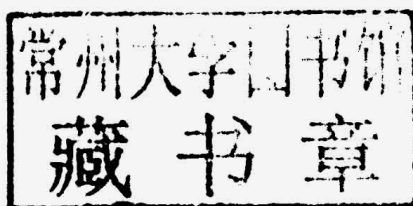
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# ASSESSING MARITIME POWER IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

# Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies Series

Series editors:

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The Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies Series is the publishing platform of the Corbett Centre. Drawing on the expertise and wider networks of the Defence Studies Department of King's College London, and based at the Joint Services Command and Staff College in the UK Defence Academy, the Corbett Centre is already a leading centre for academic expertise and education in maritime and naval studies. It enjoys close links with several other institutions, both academic and governmental, that have an interest in maritime matters, including the Developments, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), the Naval Staff of the Ministry of Defence and the Naval Historical Branch.

The centre and its publishing output aims to promote the understanding and analysis of maritime history and policy and to provide a forum for the interaction of academics, policy-makers and practitioners. Books published under the eegis of the Corbett Centre series reflect these aims and provide an opportunity to stimulate research and debate into a broad range of maritime related themes. The core subject matter for the series is maritime strategy and policy, conceived broadly to include theory, history and practice, military and civil, historical and contemporary, British and international aspects.

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# Introduction

Greg Kennedy and Harsh V. Pant

This collection of chapters by leading academics from around the world engaged in analysing maritime strategic issues will deliberate the impact of the American ‘pivot’ or ‘re-balance’ strategy on the maritime power and posture of a number of selected states. These states have been selected due to either the influence in the Pacific region they are able to generate due to their physical presence or proximity to the region, or, due to their close strategic relationship to the United States, either bilaterally or through such alliance conduits as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Intending to strengthen US economic, diplomatic and security engagement throughout the Asia-Pacific, both bilaterally and multilaterally, the re-balance stands out as one of the Obama administration’s most far-sighted and ambitious foreign policy initiatives.

Much of the re-balancing to the Asia-Pacific is a continuation and expansion of policies already undertaken by previous administrations, as well as earlier in President Obama’s term. Since President Obama’s inauguration in 2009, the United States has given considerable time and emphasis to Southeast Asia and to regional multilateral institutions. Under President George W. Bush, the United States emphasized the strengthening of relations with existing allies in Asia, began moving toward a more flexible and sustainable troop presence in the region, concluded a free trade agreement (FTA) with South Korea, brought the United States into the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) FTA negotiations, and forged new partnerships with India and Vietnam. All of these steps have been furthered by the Obama administration. There are, however, a number of new aspects connected to this shift.

The most dramatic of these new influences lies in the military sphere. As part of a plan to expand the US presence in the south-western Pacific and make it more flexible, the Obama administration has announced new deployments or rotations of troops and equipment to Australia and Singapore. US officials have also pledged that planned and future reductions in defence spending will not come at the expense of the Asia-Pacific (nor of the Middle East). Additionally, underlying the re-balancing is a broader geographic vision of the Asia-Pacific region that includes the Indian Ocean and many of its coastal states. These recalibrations in American focus will undoubtedly have an influence on how existing and potential allies of the United States will create and use their own maritime power.

The ‘pivot’ strategy was articulated by the Obama administration in its first term and it is being operationalized in his second term as Washington disengages

from Afghanistan and tries to focus on the management of the domestic economy. In a major foreign-policy speech to the Australian parliament in November 2011, President Obama declared the strategy of a 'pivot', a shift that entailed a strong military commitment to the Asia-Pacific. Action followed words: it was announced that 2,500 US Marines would be stationed in the Australian port city of Darwin. By January 2012, Pentagon was ready with a major policy directive, 'Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense'. The terminology it used to define the new strategic vision – one geared toward the Pacific – was 'strategic re-balancing'.

This re-balancing entailed a comprehensive shift in America's military and diplomatic commitment to the Asia-Pacific. By the summer of 2012 the Department of Defense had declared that 60 per cent of America's naval assets would be stationed under the US Pacific Command. Washington followed up by increasing its defence cooperation with Vietnam, renewing its military engagement with Philippines, promising more conventional arms to Taiwan, and permanently stationing a flotilla of littoral combat ships in the port city of Singapore. New missile defence systems were installed in East Asia, and similar plans were made for Southeast Asia. Naval reallocation to the Pacific was followed up with the dedication of 60 per cent of US Air Force to the Pacific Theatre by mid-2013. In April 2014, to reassure its Asian allies, President Obama visited a number of key countries in the Asia-Pacific. In Tokyo, Obama declared that the Senkaku islands fall under the purview of US–Japan Security Treaty. He also signed a 10-year defence pact in Manila, paving way for more US military presence in the Philippines.

The Obama administration has been at pains to underscore that its Asian re-balance is a function of a number of factors, including the ending of US combat operations in the Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the shifting centre of gravity of global economics to Asia and is not driven by the growth of China as a major economic and military power with the capability of challenging America. But for the larger world the US re-balancing toward the Asia-Pacific region is mainly about China. There is a wide recognition in Washington of the growing importance of Asia in the world, the need to maintain a US military presence in Asia, and the importance of avoiding a military clash with China through a combination of deterrence and defence measures. As a consequence, American strategic posture is leading to major naval powers in Asia and beyond also responding to the developments in the Asia-Pacific.

In this broader context, this study will be the first of its kind in mapping out the responses of key states to the new strategic national security architecture that Washington seems keen to construct in the Asia-Pacific. This book is aimed at influencing and helping inform the defence/international relations discourse and connected policy-makers, as the international system comes to terms with the realignment of American military and foreign policy – one of the most significant developments in global politics in recent years. The utility of the study is not just for American policy-makers and academics, although their attention to what is

said below would be welcome, but will serve also as a useful guide to the policy-makers of the nations studied within the 'pivot-re-balance' paradigm.

The breadth of cases examined in this project makes this a truly global endeavour. Given that the impact of the US strategy is global in nature, the provision of the impact of the re-balance strategy on other nations will force policy-makers in the US, the UK and elsewhere to examine this issue more holistically than from merely a national perspective, engendering a cross-national discussion on the implications of the changing US strategic posture. This pan-national approach will analyse what the real and potential impact of the American re-balance will be on the naval force structures and maritime preparedness of key nation, and, therefore, what the potential chances of that strategy being successful and appropriate are.

The first chapter by Greg Kennedy challenges the re-balancing concept as a strategy, asking if it is really a strategy at all. By measuring the overall American use of power aimed at addressing the China question and America's place in the Far East, Kennedy asks if the concept put forward to date is not really a strategic construct but rather a more operationally oriented creation. Because of the emphasis on the military components and attributes of the re-balance strategy other possible strategic power bases have not as yet been engaged, or, if they have been engaged they have not been utilized in a coordinated fashion to any significant level. Further, without a recognized method of coordination for the constituent strategic power variables available to the United States, there is no conscious governance of any complexity in the American approach. Their own commentary and that of other nations have, therefore, naturally focused on the military aspects of the strategy. That emphasis, whether desired, accurate or not, has oriented the dialogue in the strategic environment now to such an extent that the question has to be asked if other strategic power pillars could be used effectively in any case, given how the military nature of the strategy has biased the strategic relationship between the United States and China. He also challenges the belief that the tools thought to be of use to underpin the military approach to the strategy are not well thought-out, especially in terms of the blockade of China being a preferred method of deterrence or coercion. As well, without more emphasis on other power pillars available to the United States being applied to the problem, Chinese accusations of the United States trying to use military power to gain advantage, as opposed to diplomacy, trade, economics or commerce levers, are hard to refute. That inability to present a less militaristic face, while at the same time asking China to rethink its militarization programmes, casts the American strategic position into a globally difficult posture easily accused of being the 'usual' American foreign policy hypocrisy. He concludes by calling on the United States to use its fleeting window of strategic advantage to try and wrest away that Chinese momentum in terms of strategic messaging and posturing, by challenging China to live up to its rhetoric of peace and cooperation by joining in a naval disarmament programme that will provide the building blocks for greater security in the region.

In Chapter 2 Tim Benbow examines the question of the impact of re-balancing from the position of arguably America's closest ally: the United Kingdom. As the

other half of 'The Special Relationship', the United Kingdom has undoubtedly a unique position with regard to its strategic relationship with the United States, particularly in the realm of maritime power and the shaping of maritime conditions throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Benbow argues that, although the immediate impact of the re-balance itself is sometimes exaggerated, the longer term trends that underpin it give rise to important consequences for the UK and other allies. Responding to these is made all the more complicated by the impact of similar economic, political and technological trends in American strategy making, which seem to be having an even greater impact on the eastern side of the Atlantic. The chapter explores the context of contemporary UK strategy formulation as well as specific issues germane to the UK forming any reassessment of its own defence needs in light of pressures created by the re-balancing strategy. Third, it assesses some of the possible responses for the UK to competing strategic paths presented by changes to the American global strategic position. He proposes one preferred choice in the form of Britain rejecting both a significant diminution of its military role and also any ambitious extension of this role to Asia-Pacific; rather than joining the US re-balance, the UK should lead other European states in 'back-filling' to facilitate it, by taking on a more significant role in the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf regions.

In Chapter 3 Hall Gardner, when looking at the impact of the re-balancing strategy on French strategic considerations, links the geo-strategic activity in Europe to the Asia-Pacific region. The great connector, as it has always been historically, is Russia. Once again European powers are faced with an aggressive and unpredictable Russian actor wishing to challenge the status quo of borders and security relations in Eastern Europe, while a major Asian power seeks to do the same on the other side of the world. In a situation reminiscent of the 1920s and 1930s, when Weimar Germany and Stalinist Russia (still in the process of subjugating Ukraine) forged a Rapallo pact before Hitler rose to power, and before Japan applied naked force in pursuit of its imperial designs on mainland China, European powers must prioritize their defence and security planning around two geographically separate but strategically linked areas. France, however, not only is having to worry about selecting areas of operation in a time of budgetary constraint, but also is caught between wanting independence of action with regard to formulating strategic relations with Russia and China, while needing to stay in step with the United States due to economic and alliance ties. This difficult position of being caught in a strategic cleft-stick creates many demanding pressures on France's maritime power: should it be built with a view to local European usage or global capabilities? Furthermore, in terms of selling on sophisticated naval technology, should France be able to sell to Russia and China as part of its relationship-building efforts or should it be willing to forego such export sales in order to deny advanced naval technology to the two potentially dangerous rival nations? Gardner concludes his analysis with a summary of the geo-strategic options facing France now and possible collaborative methods of achieving stability and security in the Pacific region that would be applicable to the French strategic needs.

In Chapter 4 Elinor Sloan examines the impact of America's re-balancing strategy on Canada's strategic thinking and maritime posture. The analysis highlights the enduring and long-existing strategic realities that were present even before the Obama administration came to power. Those factors were a large part of the driving forces behind Canada's focus on the Asia-Pacific region, particularly the naval aspects. She then turns to the impact of the US re-balancing strategy on Canada, briefly outlining Canada's historic involvement in the region before examining the central aspects of its present and future military and security engagement. The American Air-Sea Battle concept is analysed, with attention being paid to the impact of new technologies on not only the American ability to progress with the concept, but also the implications for future Canadian acquisition programmes. Specific Canadian naval construction programmes, as well as basing considerations are all dealt with. The final picture is a grim one, with Canadian aspirations to be an 'honest broker' in the Asia-Pacific environment being unlikely to come to anything due to it having no effective naval capabilities for use in the region. Other Asia-Pacific actors are not likely to take the Canadian position too seriously given the lack of investment and attention paid to it strategically over the last two decades.

Chapter 5 sees Geoff Till investigate the impact of the re-balance strategy on Asia in general and, more specifically, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). His analysis points to a number of region actors wanting American supported and a strong, legitimate presence in the area, but, on their terms. Given the number of nations involved, and their varying strategic perspective on how and why to deal with China, the likelihood of America being able to have a wide-ranging or secure base of regional support is suspect. Till argues that these divergent perspectives do have one common feature: that they do not want to be tightly bound to any Air-Sea Battle concept that threatens their individual abilities to form a relationship with China. Nor do they wish to be tied to an expensive twenty-first-century operational construct that will cost a vast amount and make them dependent on American military technology. Rather, they would like to see the Air-Sea Battle concept downplayed, allowing diplomatic and economic leverage to develop inroads with China. The overall message of the chapter is that the American re-balance strategy will be forced to turn to other strategic power pillars due to regional actor pressure, if it is to be successful in its aims of developing a regional stability and security framework.

In Chapter 6 David Scott examines the impact of the US pivot on China's maritime power. As discussed earlier, China is central to the new US strategy and so in many ways this is the key case to analyse. Scott suggests that while the Chinese government responses to the pivot have been muted, counselling patience and exhorting the US to hold to its public pledges that it is not aiming to contain China, a closer look at such official comments shows ambiguity and greater bluntness in contesting American claims. He argues that even as China's overall maritime power continues to increase vis-à-vis US naval power, US shifting around of a greater amount of its military power into the Asia-Pacific



unilaterally and in conjunction with other allies and partners worried about China means that in the regional-comparative sense China's maritime power has become faced with increasing countervailing maritime forces generated from the pivot. China's maritime power, according to Scott, is also being circumvented by the greater military cooperation emerging between US and China-concerned countries as the US pivot to Asia has been matched by an Asia pivot to the US, as a swathe of China-concerned countries across the Indo-Pacific welcomed the re-balance and strengthened security cooperation with the US; notably India, Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, Vietnam, Philippines, Japan and South Korea.

This is followed by Chapter 7 on Japan in which Emi Mifune presents an analysis of the impact of America's strategy of 're-balance toward Asia' on Japanese naval power. She argues that Chinese assertive and antagonistic actions against Japan and American strategic re-balance towards Asia have compelled the Japanese government to ease limits on the military. Though a change in American strategic posture is important, Mifune suggests that domestic political developments in Japan, in particular the change of guard from the Democratic Party to the Liberal Democratic Party under a powerful Shinzo Abe, have been the fundamental impetus behind the changing Japanese naval posture. This has been exacerbated by China shifting to the anti-Japanese hard-line policy as countermeasures against the strengthening of Japan-US alliance through the US military transformation. She makes it clear that despite the US government stating that 'the US-Japan alliance is the cornerstone of regional security and prosperity', contemporary Japanese concern persists about whether Washington can maintain the will and wherewithal to defend Japan.

In Chapter 8 Balbina Hwang examines the impact of the US pivot on South Korea's naval power. She argues that though the US re-balance towards Asia has profoundly shaped debates and dialogue about security in the region, the policy itself has not had a direct causal impact on South Korea's security outlook. Indeed, Seoul's naval transformation, one of the most noteworthy developments in South Korea's security strategy, is more clearly a manifestation of the country's changing perception of its status in the region and globally, rather than any changes wrought by US pivot itself. More significantly, contends Hwang, it is the failure of the pivot to meet lofty expectations that has weakened confidence among some US allies about continued American commitment in the region at a time of escalating tensions. This is indeed ironical as one of the main drivers of the Obama administration's pivot strategy was to increase American focus on Asia in order to alleviate the perception that US commitment to the region would wane given pressures to reduce American defence spending.

The last chapter by Harsh V. Pant and Yogesh Joshi investigates the Indian Navy's response to the strategy of pivot and argues that it has had no major influence on its approach to the region. This is evident in the unchanging nature of its exercises with the US and other regional navies, stagnation in defence agreements with the United States important for interoperability, and Indian Navy reservations on increasing its constabulary role in the Indian Ocean. This

lack of response can be located in the larger strategic discourse that is guiding Indian foreign policy vis-à-vis the changing balance of power in the region. Indian strategy so far has been primarily to hedge – which translates into reluctance and caution when it comes to actively participating in the pivot. Notwithstanding expectations in Washington, Delhi has been a reluctant supporter of the American pivot. Indian official response indicates a preference for hedging – India would not like to choose sides in this great game, at least before the dust settles, allowing it to make informed choices.

\* \* \*

The contributions to this volume clearly underscore the important ways in which major naval powers in and outside Asia have begun to respond to the American strategic re-balancing even though the strategy is still, in many ways, a work in progress. As several contributors in this volume have underlined, there are serious concerns about the viability and sustainability of the American pivot. And this uncertainty is also shaping the response of various nations. The Obama administration has found itself preoccupied with multiple crises in Europe and the Middle East. It is not readily evident if it has the willingness and the ability to invest diplomatic and financial resources that are needed to fully operationalize its pivot to the Asia-Pacific. This will pose its own set of challenges in the coming years with the American allies and adversaries recognizing the uneven implementation of the re-balance, thereby creating risks that the re-balance may well end up as less than the sum of its parts.