

# The US Rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific: Really Realist?

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## Abstract

The Obama administration perceives the Asia-Pacific as a vital and dynamic region and thus prioritized it in its foreign policy agenda. Some scholars have suggested that the Obama administration's rebalance towards Asia has taken a realist approach to engagement with the Asia-Pacific while others suggested that it deviated significantly from realism. This article seeks to examine more closely the question of the realist nature of the US rebalance policy towards the Asia-Pacific. It begins with a discussion of views of the Obama administration's rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific before giving an overview of realism. Then, it seeks to establish a realist model of foreign policy and examine the Obama administration's rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific against that model. It finds that the Obama administration has high scores on two of the indicators of realism—the emphasis on military capabilities and the emphasis on alliance-building—but has lower scores on the third and the fourth—a low regard for multilateral institutions, and a low regard for values. The Obama administration has actively engaged with regional institutions and has strongly supported the spread of democracy and human dignity all over the Asia-Pacific. Hence, the Obama administration's rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific is a realist foreign policy with certain modifications.

## Keywords

Asia-Pacific, rebalance, realism, Obama administration, foreign policy

## Introduction

In 2008, the Obama administration implemented a review of the US global strategy and forces (Obama, 2008). The review found out that there was an imbalance in the global focus of the US national power. The United States had invested much

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time and energy in Europe and the Middle East and it was necessary for Washington to shift its focus to the Asia-Pacific. The United States wanted to maintain and advance its position as an important power in Indo-Pacific affairs as highlighted by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in October 2011:

[A]s the war in Iraq winds down and America begins to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the United States stands at a pivot point .... In the next ten years, we need to be smart and systematic about where we invest ... so we put ourselves in the best position to sustain our leadership, secure our interests, and advance our values. (Clinton, 2011)

The US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific has been characterized by some scholars as a realist foreign policy. Other scholars, however, have claimed that it is somewhat of a departure from the international relations (IR) theory of realism. This article examines closely the question of the realist nature of the US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific. It begins with a discussion of views of the Obama administration's rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific before giving an overview of realism. Then, it seeks to establish a realist model of foreign policy, examine the Obama administration's rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific against that model, and, finally, suggest how the Obama administration's rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific may be best characterized.

## **Views of the US Rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific**

Since the fall of 2011, a series of official announcements have been made about the US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific and a series of steps have been taken to increase the US presence in this region (Clinton, 2011; Obama, 2011, 2014). The Obama administration has repeatedly underlined that the United States has vital interests in the Asia-Pacific, and that the rebalance is a continuity of the already intensive engagement by the United States in the Asia-Pacific. Some analysts of the Obama administration's rebalance policy have described it as deeply realist in orientation; for instance, Stephen M. Walt wrote, 'there is a perfectly sound realist justification for this strategic shift' (Walt, 2011, pp. 2–16). Having recognized such developments in the Asia-Pacific as China's rise and Asia's economic dynamism, the United States saw the need to expand its engagement with this key area. The realist nature of the US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific lies in the fact that it is in the US national interest to prevent any single power from becoming a regional hegemon, a position that the United States has held since 1945. Thus, keeping the Asia-Pacific divided and balanced among several powerful states is strategically important to the United States. Sean Kay also saw the realist logic of the US rebalance: 'The pivot to Asia reflects a return to realist thinking in terms of America's international goals' (Kay, 2013, p. 1). He pointed out the calculations behind the Obama administration's rebalance policy:

The basis for the 'pivot' was founded on a realist assessment of the international environment which shows a long-term rise of China but a generally benign international environment that allows the United States to handover responsibility in some parts of

the world and to prioritize Asia. ... [a] second rationale for the pivot to Asia is the realist idea that states should make cost benefit assumptions to guide foreign policy relative to the national interest. (ibid., p. 9)

This is echoed by Chen Rong when he concluded that ‘The U.S. pivot provides a contemporary example of realist IR theory informing strategy and policy’ (Rong, 2013). However, he noted that an enormous amount of liberal rhetoric could be found in the examination of the US rebalance (ibid., p. 59). For Rong, realism that was particularly applied to the Cold War era, which was characterized by great power competition, sometimes fails to explain the reality today given that the US and Chinese economies have become highly interdependent and any military confrontations between them are unlikely. In other words, trade and commerce will not necessarily prevent conflict. A classic example of this is Great Britain’s trade situation with Germany immediately prior to World War I. Therefore, no single theoretical approach should be employed for analysis of contemporary world politics. Implicitly, a combination of various theories of IR should be used as the best tool for analytical clarity and sound policy recommendations.

## Theory of Realism

The idea of realism was noted as early as in Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*, Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and Carl von Clausewitz’s *On War*, and gradually expanded to become a dominant theory of IR after World War II. If the US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific is to be examined in terms of realism, then the components of a realist model of foreign policy need to be defined. It is difficult to construct a realist model of foreign policy without an understanding of realist theories. Realists tend to ‘emphasize the irresistible strength of existing forces and the inevitable character of existing tendencies, and to insist that the highest wisdom lies in accepting, and adapting oneself to these forces and these tendencies’ (Carr, 1962). Realism is based upon four main assumptions. First, the international system is in an anarchic state. Due to the lack of a common government that can make rules and enforce order, the international system is essentially a ‘self-help’ system (Waltz, 1979) in which states must take responsibility for their own survival. In an anarchic system, states survive only if they are powerful. Thus, the struggle for power is seen as a national interest. With an emphasis on the pursuit of power in a self-help system, realists suppose that international politics is constantly in a competitive and conflictual situation. Second, realists view the principal actors in the international system to be states. States are concerned with their security, define their own interests and pursue power. States are the most relevant actors in the international system, rather than international organizations or non-governmental groups. States can influence international politics and can be influenced by international politics. Realists place emphasis on great powers or major states in the international system, because ‘these states dominate and shape international politics and they also cause the deadliest wars’ (Mearsheimer, 2001). Third, all states within the international system are unitary and rational. They tend to act in pursuit of self-interest and seek

to accumulate as many resources as possible. Put simply, as unitary and rational actors, states ensure their own security by maximizing their power. A state can maximize its power through internal means, enhancing its military or economic capacity, or by external means, fostering or expanding their alliances (Waltz, 1979). Finally, survival is the primary concern of all states. States tend to 'rely on the use of force or on the threat to use force to protect their interests and enhance their security' (Frankel, 1996). This means that military power has an overriding role in a state's security. However, when states increase their military power, it could cause a security dilemma: building up one's security may lead to insecurity because the opposing power will strive to increase its own military capability in response. In a realist view, security is a zero-sum game and stability may be ensured only by balance of power or equilibrium between states.

Realism encompasses three main approaches, which diverge in their explanations of state action: classical realism, structural/neorealism and neoclassical realism. Structural/neorealism is further divided into defensive and offensive approaches. Human nature is a starting point for classical realism, thus it is also branded as human nature realism. One of the most influential representatives of classical realism is Hans J. Morgenthau. In his book, *Politics among Nations*, he argued that human beings are born to be self-interested. Human self-interests overcome ethical and moral principles. States are social institutions that are created and run by human beings. Therefore, states are driven by the nature of human beings. States always want to protect or promote their interests by maximizing their power; this essentially conflicts with the other states' interests (Morgenthau, 1993). Due to the constraints imposed on politics by states' pursuit of power, achieving 'the realization of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good' is the primary goal of politics (ibid., p. 4). From the classical realist perspective, this 'lesser evil' can be realized through the search for the balance of power in which states strive to maintain an existing equality of power or construct a new one (ibid., p. 184).

The modern variety of realism, neorealism or structural realism emphasizes the anarchic structure of the international system, rather than the nature of human beings. Kenneth Waltz first developed this concept in his 1954 book *Man, the State, and War*, and then expanded it in his influential work *Theory of International Politics*. In structural analysis, it is the anarchic structure of the international system that matters in world politics. Structural constraints, rather than states' motivations and strategies, are the major influence on IR. This means that the structure of the international system itself influences and shapes how states strive for power. However, structural realists disagree on the amount of power that states want to have. Offensive realists believe that the anarchic structure of the international system makes states greatly concerned about their security and they can never feel secure. Therefore, states seek to maximize their power to assure their security. Mearsheimer, an influential offensive realist, writes: '... the greater the military advantage one state has over other states, the more secure it is' (Mearsheimer, 1994–1995). The international system has an overriding role in a state's foreign policy; domestic politics are significant merely to the extent that they restrain the state in its efforts to maximize its security (Brooks, 1997).

Mearsheimer highlights that 'A state's ultimate goal is to be the hegemon in the system' (Mearsheimer, 2001). In the offensive realist view, maintaining an equality of power does not assure security for states because states are likely to attack each other. States do not know other states' intentions, thus they are constantly anxious about their own security. The only way for states to survive in an anarchic structure is to accumulate as much power as possible. It is more likely for a powerful state to win a war and less likely to be attacked by other states. Offensive realists view states as power-maximizing revisionists that never have benign intentions (*ibid.*, p. 21). Obviously, from the offensive realist approach, great powers tend to resort to offensive action to enhance their security and to achieve their ultimate goal: survival (Rynning & Ringsmose, 2008). The international system, characterized by anarchy, leads states to constantly cast a wary eye on each other and resort to self-help mechanisms to increase their security and ensure their survival (Mearsheimer, 2006).

Defensive realism also starts with the structure of the international system to explain state behaviour; however, it emphasizes that states will seek to maintain the balance of power and not increase their power through offensive actions (Van Evera, 1999; Walt, 1987, 1996, 2005; Waltz, 1954, 2008). Kenneth Waltz, a leading defensive realist, believes that great powers should not gain too much power because 'excessive strength' may push other states to form alliances against them, leaving them in a situation worse than before (Waltz, 1989). As states in anarchy tend to maintain the existing balance of power by forming alliances against the power-seeking states, pursuing the maximization of power will 'jeopardize the very survival of the maximizing state' (Toft, 2005). In the defensive realist understanding, security is a state's primary goal and this goal can only be achieved when states seek sufficient power to defend themselves. The amount of security that is sufficient for a state's self-defence can be determined by such factors as geography, the neighbouring states' capabilities and states' view of their neighbours' intentions. To defensive realists, waging a war results in more costs than benefits. Snyder says as much in his 2002 article, noting that 'security increments by power accumulation end up experiencing diminishing marginal returns where costs eventually outweigh benefits' (Snyder, 2002). Yet, states sometimes wage a war because of domestic politics, rather than imperatives from the international system. It should be noted that in the defensive realist perspective, security is not the sole goal that states seek to accomplish. When states are assured that they have sufficient security, it may cease to be the most significant goal (Frankel, 1996, p. xvi).

A fourth variety of realism is neoclassical realism. According to neoclassical realists, states seek to control and shape the international system; thus states are more interested in gaining power than security, even though security may be assured by military power. In the neoclassical realist world, economic power is especially important and sought by states. Neoclassical realism concentrates on explaining in detail a state's foreign policy. Neoclassical realists, viewing a state's relative power as a key factor that influences its intentions and foreign policy behaviour, argue that the state's national power and its position in the international system determine its foreign policy, but how the international system affects

each individual states will depend on its domestic variables, namely, decision makers' perception (Rose, 1998). In neoclassical realist literature, the actual foreign policy choices of a specific state are determined by a combination of systematic and domestic variables.

Based on the various realist approaches as to how international politics can be explained and understood, this article will now build model of a realist foreign policy against which to examine the US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific. It is necessary to construct such a model because a realist foreign policy is not the same as a realist theory of IR. The Obama administration's rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific cannot be assessed against a theory of IR but only against a realist model of foreign policy, which must be deduced from the main variants of realism.

## **A Realist Model of Foreign Policy**

### *An Emphasis on Military Capabilities*

Realists see the world as an anarchic system in which states have to protect and promote their national interests through self-help mechanisms. National power, therefore, has an important implication for a state's foreign policy. Because national security and power are vital in the realist world, states seek to strengthen their armed forces. They strive to build a military that is powerful enough to deal with potential foes and competitors in the region.

### *An Emphasis on Alliances*

In case a state cannot rely upon internal means to grow strong enough to match potential foes and competitors in the region, it will seek to engage with important allies to balance against these potential foes and competitors. Building alliances or entering into alliances is a strategy that states use to strengthen their capabilities and balance against more powerful states.

### *A Low Regard for Multilateral Institutions*

Realists emphasize that competition and conflict between states are a normal part of international life (Glaser, 1994-95). States are, therefore, ambivalent about the role of multilateral institutions in preventing conflict and assuring stability. While liberalism argues for the usefulness of multilateral institutions in moderating state behaviour, realism expresses a low regard for multilateral institutions because realist scholars believe that such institutions do not have a meaningful impact on state behaviour (Mearsheimer, 1994-1995). From the realist perspective, states see national interest as the first and foremost priority. Guided by national interests, states will only take cooperation into account when it is in their interest to cooperate. This implied that realists only use multilateral institutions if they help to protect and promote national interests. Contrary to liberal internationalism that

believes in the significance of multilateral institutions in foreign relations, realism has never placed multilateral institutions at the centre of foreign policy.

### *A Low Regard for Values*

In the realist world, only national interest is permanent. National power is of great importance to the advancement of national interest. This means that security and military will be especially sought by states while spreading democracy and promoting human dignity are considered to be irrelevant (Morgenthau & Thompson, 1985). Realists even warn that aggressive promotion of values, particularly democracy and human rights, may adversely affect the world peace and stability (Brown, 2002). Henceforth, a realist foreign policy tends to have four features: (a) an emphasis on military capabilities; (b) an emphasis on alliances; (c) a low regard for multilateral institutions and (d) a sceptical attitude towards values. If there is an absence of any of these four features in a specific state's foreign policy, it will be concluded that its foreign policy is not purely realist. A foreign policy that emphasizes military power but also has a high regard for promoting values is not really realist, but rather neoconservative. A foreign policy that has no emphasis on security or military power but gives a high priority to international institutions and promotion of values is classified as non-realist.

However, in the real world, governments tend not to follow a purely realist foreign policy. They usually combine both realist and non-realist perspectives in their foreign policies. This is because foreign policy is not only influenced by governments' worldview. Many other sources also have effect on governments' foreign policy decisions and these sources are sometimes more influential than governments' worldview. This means that in reality, a realist foreign policy is still a reflection of a realist worldview; while certain non-realist features may be embedded in a realist foreign policy, they are not prioritized. For example, the promotion of values may be incorporated in a realist foreign policy, but it is given a low priority. The deviations from realism in a realist foreign policy are an important indication that foreign policy may be ideologically modified to match with the real world. Indeed, accepting that a realist foreign policy must have the aforementioned four features does not mean that all governments' foreign policies will be consistent with the realist model. Occasionally, there are deviations in a government's realist foreign policy because its leaders have to consider both systemic- and domestic-level factors in any of its policies.

## **The US Rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific and Realism**

In order to evaluate whether the Obama administration's rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific is a realist foreign policy, this section will examine the rebalance against the four criteria that have been established as indicators of a realist foreign policy: an emphasis on military capabilities, an emphasis on alliances, a low regard for multilateral institutions and a low regard for values.



### *The Rebalance and Military Power*

Since the announcement of the rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific in 2011, the Obama administration has expanded its military presence in the Asia-Pacific. This can be seen in the US efforts to redeploy troops and bring new capabilities to the region. There has been a visible shift of the US marines, army, navy and air force to the Asia-Pacific. The United States planned to relocate 9,000 marines from Okinawa (Japan), with 4,000 moving to Hawaii and Australia and 5,000 moving to Guam (Parrish, 2012). About 10,000 marines will stay on Okinawa (ibid.). By the late 2012s, the United States announced that 70,000 troops would be sent to the Asia-Pacific (Carter, 2012). Also, the United States sent more of its naval forces to the Pacific Ocean than to the Atlantic Ocean. The proportion would be 60 per cent for the Pacific and 40 per cent for the Atlantic (ibid.). It is a fact, however, that the Bush Jr. administration had already placed an estimated 58 per cent of the US naval assets in the Pacific; the Obama administration raised that figure to 60 per cent. The additional 2 per cent still makes a difference in terms of perception, signal of intent and actual capability. Also, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said: 'The Air Force has allocated 60 percent of its overseas-based forces, including tactical aircraft and bomber forces from the continental United States, to the Asia-Pacific ... The Air Force is focusing a similar percentage of its space and cyber capabilities on the region' (Hagel, 2013).

Strengthening the US military capabilities in the Asia-Pacific allows the United States to conduct military exercises and operations that can ensure the US strategic interests in the region. This demonstrates that the US security ties to the Asia-Pacific are unbreakable. The United States determination to build up the US military capacity in the Asia-Pacific region was confirmed by the US Navy Admiral Jonathan Greenert in 2013: 'Plans to expand the American naval presence in the Pacific with new ships and hi-tech weaponry will go ahead despite steep budget cuts' (Greenert, 2013). He assured that '... Of the navy's current fleet of 283 ships, 101 are deployed and 52 are in Pacific waters, with plans to increase the US presence in the region to 62 ships by 2020' (ibid.). He added that 'The military also plans to send the latest cutting-edge hardware to Asia, with the first squadron of the new P-8 Poseidon aircraft to arrive in Japan later this year' (ibid.). The US military presence in the Asia-Pacific is made possible with a good posture and presence in the region as well as good investments in human capital (Department of Defense, 2015). Thus, the United States decided to prioritize the Pacific command for the US' most advanced capabilities comprising submarines, Fifth-Generation Fighters such as F-22s and F-35s, and reconnaissance platforms (Donilon, 2013). Obviously, the Obama administration has seen expanding the US military power in the Asia-Pacific region, which is needed to ensure the success of the rebalance. The pivotal role of the US military power and presence in the Asia-Pacific is expected to enhance the regional stability and security vital to the US interests. The Obama administration has shown its strong commitment to rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific when it decided not to let reductions in the US defence budget



affect the United States' forward deployments in the Asia-Pacific. The US air force has also been shifted to the Asia-Pacific.

### *The Rebalance and Alliances*

The Asia-Pacific region is home to five of the US treaty allies including Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Thailand and the Philippines. Since the US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific in 2011, the Obama administration has worked to strengthen these alliance relationships (Yun, 2013a). The United States has viewed strengthening alliances as 'cornerstones' or 'lynchpins' for its foreign and security policies in the Asia-Pacific region (Schoff, 2015). This was reaffirmed in Donilon's remarks in 2013: '... we will continue to strengthen our alliances. For all of the changes in Asia, this much is settled: our alliances in the region have been and will remain the foundation of our strategy' (Donilon, 2013). The United States and Japan have developed joint strategies and enhanced coordination to realize the US concept of Air Sea Battle and the Japanese concept of a 'dynamic defense' (Green, 2012). As the United States is implementing its rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific, the United States and Japan have placed emphasis on the realignment of the US forces in Japan and the US security commitment to Japan. The two nations have committed to strengthening the ballistic missile defence capabilities of both countries, namely, the SM-3 Block IIA cooperative development program and enhancing cyber defence cooperation (Japan Ministry of Defence, 2013, p. 3). Cooperation in space is also taken into account when both nations are committed to realizing the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's (JAXA) provision of the US Social Security Administration (SSA) information to the United States in the near future (*ibid.*, p. 4). Furthermore, the US–Japan alliance has been fostered with the revision of the US–Japan Defence Cooperation Guidelines, enhancement of interoperability and technology sharing, and the moving of more US capabilities to Japan, such as the Global Hawk drones and CV-22 Osprey aircraft. The two nations' efforts to continuously enhance their alliance relationship are clearly stated:

Each government will maintain its individual defense posture based on its national security policy. Japan will possess defense capability on the basis of the 'National Security Strategy' and the 'National Defense Program Guidelines'. The United States will continue to extend its deterrence umbrella to Japan through the full range of capabilities, including US nuclear forces (Fitzpatrick, 2015; Kuhn, 2010). The United States also will continue to forward deploy combat-ready forces in the Asia-Pacific region and maintain the ability to reinforce those forces rapidly. (*ibid.*)

The US has a longstanding alliance with South Korea and the Obama administration's rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific has been a good opportunity for them to deepen their alliance relationship. In June 2015, the two nations had their first-ever combined division that is comprised of subordinate units of the US 2nd Infantry Division and the ROK Army 8th Mechanized Infantry Division. This is

seen as a milestone for the two allies. The 2nd Infantry Division commander Major General Theodore Martin said during the activation ceremony of the combined division at Uijeongbu's Camp Red Cloud,

It serves as a signal to the world, and to our potential adversaries in particular, that we have made the transformation that is necessary to succeed on the battlefield. We now have the best that both armies in the alliance have to offer—all in one division, under one flag, fighting united in effort and purpose. (Rowland, 2015)

In addition, in July 2016, South Korea and the United States decided to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence system in Seongju to dramatically strengthen the military forces of the South Korea–US alliance (Kim & Park, 2016).

The US–Philippines alliance is also strengthened. The United States sees that ‘It is critical the U.S. support the Philippines as it works to establish peace and stability in the region and maintain vital trade routes. [...] Continuing joint training drills and upgrading the Philippines infrastructure will strengthen the U.S.–Philippines partnership’ (House Committee on Foreign Policy, 2016). In 2012, the United States sent to the Philippines 114 personnel carriers as part of a program for distribution of excess defense equipment to friendly countries (Moss, 2015). In December 2015, the United States provided the Philippines with 77 armoured personnel carriers as Washington’s efforts to continuously strengthen security with this Asian ally (*ibid.*). The United States and the Philippines have worked to increase military cooperation and coordination. Especially, the United States has been carrying out surveillance flights from Clark Air Base in the North of Manila to help the Philippines monitor its maritime territory given Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea (*ibid.*). On 12 July 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruled in favour of the Philippines over territorial disputes in the South China Sea. This was a clear indication of the strong US support for the Philippines as Washington had ‘an instrumental role in instigating and authoring’ the Philippines’ arbitration case against China (Santolan, 2016.). The Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte implicitly underlined the shared interest between the Philippines and the United States, ‘We have allied ourselves with the western powers. So there’s an interest which we should not forget—our interest and the interest of our allies’ (*ibid.*). The Duterte administration also decided to continue the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), which allows the basing of the US military forces in the Philippines (Dioquino, 2016). Now, it is important that Washington further supports Manila by enforcing the PCA ruling and ratifying the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (Corr, 2016).

Apart from that, the United States has sought to consolidate its alliances with Australia and Thailand. The United States–Australia ANZUS alliance saw both nations reach an agreement on the regular deployment of about 2,500 marine in Darwin, Australia (Schubert & Purtill, 2015). Indeed, the consolidation of its Asian alliance network is an integral part of the US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific. The traditional hub-and-spoke relationships with the five treaty allies are being modernized. The United States has placed an emphasis on enhancing cooperation in navy, cyber and space with its Asian allies. Since the announcement of the

Obama administration's the rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific region, the United States has sought to reinvigorate its long-standing Asian alliances. Maintaining strong and effective relations with its Asian allies is a must for the United States to protect and promote its interests in this region. The United States will need to develop a strategy that builds on Asian alliance network as it rebalances towards the Asia-Pacific.

### *The Rebalance and Multilateral Institutions*

Realists have a low regard for multilateral institutions. However, helping to build up security and economic institutions in the Asia-Pacific has been an important part of the US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific (Baker III, 1991–1992). The United States has been an active member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), contributing to the expansion of trade and investment, promotion of sustainable growth and strengthening of regional relations. The United States views the APEC as 'an integral component' of the US engagement with the Asia-Pacific (American Institute in Taiwan, 2016). At the G-7 summit in Tokyo in July 1993, President Bill Clinton highlighted that the APEC is 'the most promising forum' for promoting trade liberalization and economic growth in the region (ibid.). The United States has contributed considerably to the APEC. For example, in 1992, a permanent APEC secretariat was established in Singapore. The secretariat's 1996 budget was US\$2.9 million and US\$510,000 came from the United States. This budget was used to support the work programmes of the APEC's three committees (trade and investment, budget and administrative, and economic trends and issues) and 10 sector-based working groups (the 10 groups are: trade and investment data review; trade promotion; industrial science and technology; human resources development; regional energy cooperation; marine resources conservation; telecommunications; transportation; tourism and fisheries; ibid.). The US financial aid for the APEC for fiscal year 2010 was US\$900,000 (Martin, 2009, p. 18).

The United States has placed an emphasis on building the partnership between business and the APEC officials because it wants to increase the engagement of business in all of the APEC's activities. Given the US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific region, Washington has expanded its engagement with the APEC. For example, the United States has called for the APEC member countries to limit tariffs on environmental goods and services. Also, the United States identified the APEC as a good forum to put forth its concern about issues related to human dignity and human security (ibid.). In 2013, the US–APEC Technical Assistance to Advance Regional Integration (ATAARI) project was launched by the United States. The project offers technical assistance on economic integration and institutional management and supports the US–APEC policy objectives between 2013 and 2018. It indicates that the APEC is the primary forum for the expansion of the US trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific as President Obama once stressed: 'There's no region of the world that we consider more vital than the Asia-Pacific region.'

With the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the United States believes that the ARF is 'an effective forum for dialogue on a wide range of issues' and especially

can make a considerable contribution to dealing with security challenges in the Asia-Pacific (Bureau of Public Affairs, 2006). For example, the United States planned to organize a regional preventive diplomacy training course in Vietnam in 2016 to develop an effective and comprehensive approach to preventive diplomacy (US Department of State, 2015b). Also, the United States co-sponsored Statement on Strengthened Cooperation on Marine Environmental Protection and Conservation was adopted by the ARF ministers at the ARF meeting in 2015. A new USAID Oceans and Fisheries Partnership was announced by Secretary of State John Kerry (*ibid.*). Initially, the United States made a commitment of US\$4.3 million for dealing with the threat of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in Southeast Asia (*ibid.*). Besides its active engagement in such security areas as preventive diplomacy; maritime security; disaster response; counterterrorism and transnational crime and non-proliferation and disarmament, the United States has called for the ARF members to work together to build a rules-based order that can help to maintain stability, security, development and freedom in the Asia-Pacific (*ibid.*). In October 2015, negotiation on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) was concluded. This agreement aims to increase trade and investment, promote economic development and create jobs among the TPP partner countries. It underscored that the Obama administration's continued focus on the Asia-Pacific. National Security Advisor, Susan Rice once stated that the TPP is 'a focal point' of the US efforts to create high-standard regional trading environment (Rice, 2014). Apart from active support for regional security and economic institutions, the United States has launched initiatives that enable regional countries to work together to overcome common challenges such as the Lower Mekong initiative. This initiative was designed to help five Southeast Asian countries (Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam) to deal with educational, agricultural, environmental and infrastructural challenges (US Department of State, 2015a).

### *The Rebalance and Values Promotion*

The US government asserted that 'Democracy and respect for human rights are increasingly part of the fabric of the Asia-Pacific' (Yun, 2013b). In most of the speeches by the US government officials, 'fostering democratic values, and advancing human dignity' is summarized as one of the objectives of the US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific (Rice, 2013). Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Baer stressed the significance of democracy and human rights to the US rebalance:

The role of political progress—in particular, of the advance of human rights and democracy—is less frequently a strand in the public discourse about the pivot. So the topic of this hearing helps fill a gap, and gives us an opportunity to consider important questions: Does the 'rebalance', as a purposeful addition to U.S. foreign policy, include progress on human rights and democracy as part of its objectives? And does progress—or lack thereof—on human rights and democratic governance affect the prospects of achieving the full range of objectives that motivate the broader 'rebalance'? The questions are related, of course, and the answer to both is a firm yes. (Baer, 2013)

In his explanation of how democracy and human rights should be understood in connection with the US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific, Acting Assistant Secretary, Joseph Yun underlined that: ‘the dimension that binds the entire strategy together is our strong support for advancing democracy and human rights’ (Yun, 2013b). He showed that democracy and human rights enable Asian people to have a better life and future. Strong democratic institutions help to enhance transparency and ethics and fight corruption. Democracies enable people to participate in political and civic activities and prevent extremism. He emphasized that people in open societies are provided with more chances for economic, educational, cultural and religious exchanges that are part of the foundation for peace and prosperity. The United States believes that values promotion is ‘the right thing to do; it is also the strategically smart thing to do’ (ibid.). This was reaffirmed in President Obama’s address at the ASEAN summit, ‘together, we can continue to support the aspirations and dignity of our citizens’ (Obama, 2016). The United States has taken every opportunity to talk on human rights and democracy. The US rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific is a good chance for Washington to reemphasize its continued commitment to promoting these values in the region.

## Conclusion

In the context of an increasingly important role of the Asia-Pacific in the world affairs, the Obama administration has smartly crafted the rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific. The rebalance has placed an emphasis on increasing the US military power and fostering the US alliances in the region while supporting multinational forums that aim to promote shared interests and the universal rights of citizens. The expansion of the US military power and the strengthening of the US alliances in the Asia-Pacific are important to defend and advance the US interests. Put simply, the rebalance has used military power and consolidated alliances to maintain the US position and influence in the Asia-Pacific. This is very much a realist approach to foreign policy. However, the Obama administration has been interested in the regional multilateral institutions and values promotion and viewed them as important dimensions of the US increased engagement with the Asia-Pacific. Realists do not prioritize cooperation and values in IR. A purely realist foreign policy is not supposed to be concerned with cooperation and values promotion. When multilateral cooperation and values promotion are subordinated in the rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific, the rebalance is not a truly realist foreign policy. Henceforth, the Obama administration’s rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific is better characterized as a pragmatic foreign policy. It is a deviation from a realist foreign policy. It is a kind of modified realism that Charles Krauthammer put forth for the United States (Krauthammer, 2004). Krauthammer’s realist variant is branded as ‘democratic realism’ and lies somewhere between a truly realist foreign policy (no multilateral cooperation and values promotion) and Bush’s ‘democratic globalism’ that seeks to spread democracy globally. Indeed, the Obama administration’s rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific is a realist foreign policy that has been modified to advance the United States’ security and prosperity in the twenty-first century.

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