MANAGING THE GLOBAL IMPACT
of America’s Rebalance
TO ASIA

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SOME THREE YEARS after President Obama announced in a November 2011 speech to the Australian parliament that he had made a “deliberate and strategic decision” for the United States to “play a larger and long-term role in shaping [the Asia-Pacific] region” and to make the U.S. “presence and mission in the Asia-Pacific a top priority,” the Pacific “pivot,” as it was initially dubbed, remains very much a work in progress. It is a work in progress, moreover, that has been much slower to develop than many expected, composed, in the words of one longtime Asia hand, of a “[few] positive steps forward, a lot of standing in place, and some unfortunate steps back.”

A senior American diplomat with extensive experience in the Asia-Pacific region has complained even more bluntly, arguing that the entire pivot concept was “ill-conceived and bungled in its implementation... [setting] up expectations that we would have a hard time fulfilling.”

1 “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament,” the White House, Office of the Press Secretary, November 17, 2011.


3 These comments have been attributed to Ambassador Stephen W. Bosworth, U.S. special representative for North Korean policy in the first Obama administration; he has also served as U.S. ambassador to South Korea and the Philippines and as executive director of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), established in 1995 to implement the 1994 U.S.-North Korea Framework Agreement that was aimed, among other things, at freezing the North’s weapons-relevant nuclear activities. See David E. Sanger and Mark Landler, “Obama’s Strategic Shift to
In recent months, critics of the pivot – now commonly referred to as the rebalance to Asia – have pointed in particular to defense budget cuts (and to the prospect of more to come) as proof that the financial resources needed to underwrite the all-important military component of the rebalance are unlikely to be approved, leading in time to a hollowing-out of military units and capabilities that would be essential for a successful strategic shift toward Asia. Perhaps fearing such a turn of events, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Acquisition Katrina McFarland sparked considerable controversy when she remarked rather pointedly in early March 2014, just prior to the release of the Obama administration’s fiscal year (FY) 2015 defense budget request, that the pivot “is being looked at again because, candidly, it can’t happen” in the current budgetary environment.  

Not surprisingly, McFarland and various Department of Defense (DoD) spokesmen were quick to offer a clarification to the effect that she simply meant to reinforce U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel’s earlier comments that hard choices would soon have to be made about defense modernization and acquisition priorities (including as they relate to the rebalance) “to ensure that our military remains ready and capable,” and that the FY 2015 budget request was a serious effort to do just that in the midst of sequestration-imposed funding cuts. At the same time, it was also noted that while the military component of the rebalance was perhaps the most visible and easiest to set in motion in the short run, it was not really meant to be the most central or far-reaching element of the initiative. Indeed, the architects of the rebalance within the Obama administration, so the argument went,  

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5 Ibid.
6 Simply put, sequestration is the imposition of automatic, mandatory, across-the-board spending cuts in the federal budget in the face of annual budget deficits. Toward that end, the Budget Control Act passed by the U.S. Congress in 2011 called for some $500 million in defense budget cuts over ten years beginning on March 1, 2013, if Congress failed to reach an acceptable deficit reduction plan. It failed to do so, and the cuts began as required.
always viewed it as a multidimensional, whole-of-government effort, in which the diplomatic, economic, and civil society aspects of America’s engagement with individual countries and various multilateral institutions in the Asia-Pacific region would eventually predominate. Viewed from this angle, a more accurate assessment of the overall sustainability of the pivot, it was further suggested, would have to consider progress made toward these non-military goals, most of which were less obvious to the eye and likely to take considerably more time to bear fruit than their more military-focused counterparts. Harping on what was or was not happening — or likely to happen — with regard to U.S. force posture in the region painted, it was said, a very misleading picture of the overall status and fate of the pivot.

Unfortunately for this particular line of reasoning, an April 2014 report on “re-balancing the rebalance” prepared by the majority staff of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations made it crystal clear that key civilian components of the rebalance were also significantly under-resourced and likely to remain so without a far more concerted effort by Congress and the administration to provide additional funding.\(^7\) According to the report, the U.S. Department of State, for example, had “not substantially increased the diplomatic resources [available] to its Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs” to help advance the pivot, U.S. development assistance to the region remains below the levels achieved several years ago, and inadequate staffing levels at the U.S. Department of Commerce limited that department’s ability to promote trade and business opportunities in Asia to the degree expected.\(^8\) Ongoing and at times unexpected crises


\(^8\) Ibid., 2.
elsewhere in the world – such as civil war in Syria, sectarian violence in Iraq, renewed Israeli-Hamas conflict in Gaza, a worsening security situation in and around Ukraine, and the spread of Ebola in West Africa – made it extremely difficult as well, the report went on to stress, to shift monies from activities in other regions of the world to the Asia-Pacific. As a result, the rebalance, whatever its merits, was in danger of becoming, the report implied, yet another “sweeping policy pronouncement unsupported by concrete deliverables,” thereby creating “a large gap between expectations and reality.”

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It is for precisely this reason, one might reasonably surmise, that a slew of Obama administration spokesmen have spent so much time lately repeating the message that the pivot, contrary to what may appear to be the case, is “alive and well, if just a bit delayed,” and that it remains a centerpiece of President Obama’s foreign policy.10

All that said, and worries about a lack of funding for the pivot notwithstanding, it remains the case that the Asia-Pacific region exerts, as former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Asian-Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell has put it, “an inexorable gravitational pull”11 on American national security and foreign policy planning. Campbell has also argued that “the lion’s share of the political and economic history of the 21st century will be written in the Asia-Pacific region,”12 which is the primary reason why he and other top officials in President Obama’s first term pressed so hard for a rebalancing of strategic priorities toward Asia in 2011 and 2012. Given the challenges to implementation noted above, therefore, the real question, Campbell has concluded, “is not whether the United States will focus more on

9 Ibid., 4.
Asia, but whether it can do so with the necessary resolve, resources, and wisdom.”13 This conclusion, it is worth noting, echoes that of the aforementioned Senate report on the rebalance, which observed that “the methods of policy execution are just as important as the results... [and] how a policy is pursued and perceived can impact its success as much as the actual mechanics of its implementation.”14 In this context, improving interagency coordination within the U.S. government, the report continued, to target scarce resources – be they financial or personnel-related – on programs and countries where they could have the greatest effect will be especially important to the pivot’s success.

Taking these observations just a step further, one might simply add that the way in which the pivot is implemented (or not) will probably have as profound an effect as its final outcomes will have on how this strategic shift is viewed – and the degree to which it is seen as credible – by those countries and organizations that the United States seeks to engage more fully in the Asia-Pacific. Evidence to that effect already can be found, for example, in recent comments by a senior foreign policy expert in Japan, who has openly worried about an underlying lack of consistency in the approach to global affairs of an increasingly “inward-looking” America, and how the growing image of a hesitant, “non-involved America” – however accurate or not that image may be – could increasingly undermine Asian support for the rebalance.15 Concerns like these are being voiced with some regularity, not only in Japan, but in a number of other key Asian-Pacific countries as well, in reaction to what they believe

14 U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Re-Balancing the Rebalance: Resourcing U.S. Diplomatic Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region, 2.
to be (again, rightly or wrongly) a rather feckless series of responses by the Obama administration to worsening security conditions in Syria and Iraq, and, perhaps most importantly, to Russia’s annexation of Crimea. Indeed, the Crimean example has been particularly worrisome to those in Asia who fear that Washington may not come to their aid should China choose to use military force to settle territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas.\textsuperscript{16} This particular issue will be discussed in some detail in chapter 2, but suffice it to say here that reservations along these lines about American resolve are shared by many in the Asia-Pacific region, and that they can clearly affect the process of implementing the pivot (and its relative success), just as they are influenced in turn by that very same process.

Of even greater importance to this particular study, however, is the likelihood that the implementation process for the pivot – and perceptions overseas of America’s continued willingness and ability to pursue it – will have an equally defining influence on how the rebalance is viewed by key U.S. friends and allies in other regions of strategic importance to America. This is likely to be especially true with respect to longstanding partners in Europe and the greater Middle East, many of whom still worry that a rebalance by Washington toward Asia could harm their own security and might require them to pick up a larger share of the defense burden normally shouldered by the United States than they can easily handle. Just as they have in Asia, events in Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine, among other flashpoints, have also created anxiety among America’s allies and partners outside of Asia over the basic direction of U.S. foreign policy, prompting more than a few to call for a “re-pivot” by the United States back to a priority focus on their home regions. At the same time, statements by the Obama administration that it nonetheless remains committed to the pivot – however haltingly it may be pursued and whatever

the crises elsewhere – seem to reinforce a fear among these same “re-pivoters” that America, like it or not, is poised to disengage further from their defense. Unless it develops a strategy for promoting and implementing the pivot that takes this fear (and measures to reduce it) more fully into consideration, the United States, suggests one prominent American strategist, could end up convincing “everyone in the Middle East that we are leaving, [and] no one in Asia that we are [really] coming, [while keeping] everyone in Europe...confused as to where we’re going.” As a result, the diplomatic scene – and Washington’s efforts to shape it – could very well begin to resemble the cartoon imagery above, with America pivoting from one region

17 Bruce Jones, “The President’s Trip to Asia: Ukraine and the Global Context,” Up-Front blog, the Brookings Institution, April 23, 2014.
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to another (and back again), but reassuring none adequately, as multiple crises ebb and flow.

The trick for Washington going forward, therefore, is to find a way to implement the pivot that avoids creating a reduction in security (or a perception of one) in other key regions as it nonetheless seeks to boost U.S. engagement with (and military commitments to) the Asia-Pacific region. In a nutshell, this is what is meant by the title of this study – namely, “managing the global impact of America’s rebalance to Asia.” At the most basic level, moreover, this is a task that must be achieved in such a way that Asia’s “gain,” so to speak, is not seen as a net loss for Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, or, for that matter, any other area of rising strategic importance. Oddly enough, given all the hoopla surrounding the unveiling of the pivot concept and the administration’s continued efforts to champion its necessity, very little has been done to date to sketch out an implementation strategy that would do just that. The chapters that follow, therefore, are intended to help correct this oversight. As a necessary prelude to exploring in greater depth various regional reactions to the pivot outside of Asia (and what they suggest about its future implementation), chapter 2 provides an overview of why the rebalance was announced as it was, what has been done so far to set it in place, and what the prospects are for its continuing apace. Against this backdrop, chapter 3 surveys a broad range of European perspectives on the pivot and its broader ramifications, grouping these perspectives into alternative schools of strategic thought. Chapter 4 conducts a similar, though somewhat less sweeping, review of regional views on America’s rebalance to Asia in the Middle East, Africa, and, to a limited extent, Latin America. Finally, chapter 5 offers recommendations for a pivot implementation strategy that
takes a more balanced, global approach, sensitive to the legitimate security needs of America’s key regional allies and partner countries outside of Asia, as well as to those within the Asia-Pacific region.
IF WE ARE to understand more fully why countries outside of Asia react as they do to the pivot (and how these reactions may influence its implementation), we must first examine why the pivot was announced in the first place, what it was meant to achieve, how successful it has been so far in reaching those goals, and what roadblocks could arise to hamper its further implementation. Toward that end, this chapter begins by taking a closer look at the underlying rationale for an American rebalance toward Asia, weighing in the process what was really new about it (or was soon expected to be), particularly with respect to U.S. military forces deployed to the region. Against that backdrop, the chapter then explores in some detail what the individual military services – including the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force – have actually done since the pivot was announced to adjust to and help implement it, and what DoD and the administration as a whole have done at the broader policy level to build on that progress at the operational level, however slow and less far-reaching it may be than initially anticipated. With that last theme in mind, the chapter goes on to assess the degree to which a number of complicating factors – such as additional defense budget cuts, potential force posture adjustments called for in the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), the impact of global crises outside of Asia, and changing attitudes toward the pivot even within Asia – may in fact hinder forward progress on the rebalance and the way in which it is pursued.
An analysis along these lines should help us to understand more clearly why America’s allies and partner countries in Europe and the Middle East, for example, worry about the pivot, whether or not their concerns are well founded, and what they may need to do to guard against any negative effects of the pivot on security dynamics within their own regions. This, in turn, should help us to gauge more accurately the extent to which they may actually be able (and willing) to assist in the pivot’s implementation, either by contributing directly to it or by back-filling closer to home on military roles and missions traditionally performed by U.S. forces.

The Rationale for the Pivot and Its Policy Roots

The reasons why senior U.S. policy makers believe that a rebalance toward Asia is necessary are as diverse as they are compelling. Overall, they have their roots in the concept of an historic turning point, where the long-anticipated economic and strategic importance of Asia is finally becoming more of a reality than a forecast. After all, predictions of Asia’s rise to prominence in the twenty-first century go back decades. The rebalance is simply the latest confirmation that the predicted rise is upon us or very soon will be. This is a sentiment, moreover, that was perhaps best articulated by former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in her now famous November 2011 article in *Foreign Policy* magazine – an article viewed by many as the first explicit call for a Pacific pivot – when she wrote that “one of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will...be to lock in substantially increased investment – diplomatic,

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economic, strategic, and otherwise – in the Asia-Pacific region,” calling it “among the most important diplomatic efforts of our time.”

To a large extent, the evidence for this turn of events is economic and financial:

- Asia today is home to some of the world’s largest and fastest-growing economies, including the three largest national economies after the United States – namely, China, Japan, and India, in that order. (Russia is in the number six position after Germany). Moreover, roughly 60 percent of America’s exported goods (or about twice the amount headed to Europe) are bound for Asia, and that percentage is growing.

Roughly 60 percent of America’s exports go to Asia

- Over 56 percent of the U.S. debt is held by countries in the Asia-Pacific (not including Russia), and China and Japan between them hold almost 46 percent. At the same time, both U.S. direct investment in Asia and Asian direct investment in the United States have almost doubled during the past decade, “with China, India, Singapore, and South Korea accounting for four of the ten fastest-growing sources of foreign direct investment in the United States.”

All told, investments by Asian-Pacific companies in the United States have reached the $400 billion range, and directly underwrite the employment of some nine hundred thousand Americans.

- New patent filings in Asia, a sure sign of innovation, are growing by double digits (56 percent in China and 20 percent in South Korea in 2010), while U.S. filings (though still the largest in number) fell nearly 2 percent in 2010 to 20 percent below 2007 levels.

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19 Hillary Clinton, “America’s Pacific Century,” Foreign Policy, November 2011.
21 U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Re-Balancing the Rebalance, 15.
• Moreover, according to the Asia Development Bank, by the 2050 timeframe Asia will account for a full half of the world’s economic output, adding Indonesia to the ranks of the world’s ten largest economies.23

But the evidence of Asia’s rise in importance is also demographic and environmental:

• Half the world’s population resides in Asia, with China and India predicted to add nearly 600 million people by 2030, though rising income inequality sparks questions about the ability of their governments to successfully manage such a large and aging population (particularly in China).

• India remains the world’s single largest democracy, and Japan, South Korea, and Australia, together with the United States and India, form a loose but potentially powerful partnership of democracies within the Asia-Pacific region.

• Not to be forgotten, Indonesia is the world’s largest Muslim country.

• On the environmental front, the United Nations has confirmed that the Asia-Pacific region is the fastest-growing source of greenhouse gas emissions globally, and that the region will contribute about 40 percent of the world’s carbon emissions by 2015.24

And, perhaps most importantly, the evidence is strategic:

• Asia hosts six of the world’s largest militaries.

• Annual growth in defense spending in 2013 was 10.7 percent in China, while defense spending in Asia as a whole increased by 23

percent from 2010 to 2013, according the International Institute of Strategic Studies (or IISS).  

- Half of the world’s seaborne commercial tonnage and one-third of its trade traverse the South China Sea, including a sizeable percentage of the world’s traded oil that passes through the region’s three key straits (Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok). At critical points along the sea lanes, this traffic remains quite vulnerable to disruption by pirates, terrorists, and other bad actors.

- Rapidly rising energy use, food demand, and contested maritime territories that contain important fish and fossil fuel resources have given rise to increased regional tensions, especially in the East and South China Seas. In particular, disputes between Japan and China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands hold the real possibility of drawing the United States into a regional crisis that could spiral out of control.

- Last but far from least, Asia is already home to one nuclear proliferator (North Korea), and it could play host to others (such as Japan and Taiwan) should future strategic trends trigger a cascade of proliferation.

“[T]he central geopolitical uncertainty... is how China’s growing power and influence will impact order and stability...”

that “the central geostrategic uncertainty the United States and its allies and partners face...is how China’s growing power and influence will impact order and stability in the years ahead,” suggesting that this should be the focal point for the U.S. rebalance (even if the U.S. strategy is not to prepare for a fight with China).²⁶ Others are less ambiguous and “conclude that a struggle between the United States and China is underway for mastery of the Asia-Pacific region,” requiring “long-term [U.S.] competition with China in peacetime” including “approaches to levy costs on China.”²⁷ Still others warn that a policy based on military competition with China will become self-fulfilling, and stress “the danger is that both sides will begin to orient their grand strategy around this assumption of long-term rivalry.”²⁸ The Obama administration, for its part, has been careful to emphasize that the rebalance is about more than “any single country or group of countries,” and that it seeks through this strategic shift to solidify a stable and prosperous Asia-Pacific region.²⁹ Still, American policy makers acknowledge that China “views the first two decades of the 21st century as a period of ‘strategic opportunity,’” and that they are determined, as a result, to ensure that the United States remains deeply engaged in the region as a counterweight to a potentially more belligerent China during these formative years.³⁰

As outlined above, the Asia-Pacific region is also home to a number of other influential countries, including Japan, India, South Korea, and a good part of Russia, along with many up and coming Southeast Asian nations. In fact, this pan-regional dynamism and multi-polarity serve as additional factors fueling the Obama

administration’s argument for strategic rebalancing. Asia also largely lacks a coherent and functioning governing structure that can help adjudicate territorial or other disputes, and a spirit of competition always threatens cooperation as a defining characteristic of the region. Chinese bullying tactics in recent years over fishing rights and territorial claims in the East and South China Seas have underscored this deficiency. This is why countries such as Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, and even Myanmar (Burma) actively solicit U.S. involvement and engagement in various ways, to play a balancing role vis-à-vis China’s growth and a stabilizing role in the region as a whole. Some scholars have noted how this development provides the United States with opportunities for engagement that in many cases did not exist before.31 Combine all these factors with a freeing up of U.S. diplomatic, political, and other strategic resources from the drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan, and you have a combination of need and opportunity that drove administration incentives to pursue a rebalance toward Asia in the first place. And to a large extent, these same factors continue to fuel pivot-related plans and activities.

Beyond this, however, another important catalyst influencing early decision making in support of a pivot, though not necessarily an argument in favor of rebalancing to Asia per se, was the challenging economic environment within the United States as the Obama administration took office, and the related need, as noted in chapter 1, to make difficult budget choices. Of course, budget challenges existed at the start of the century, but they grew more acute following the financial crisis of 2008, forcing the government to make plans to trim over $350 billion from the defense budget over ten years. More specifically, tight limits on defense spending and future investments have forced policy makers to prioritize in ways they have not had to do in the past, which led in part to President Obama’s decision to make clear in his November 2011 Canberra speech, noted earlier, that “reductions in defense spending will not come at the expense of the

Asia Pacific,”\textsuperscript{32} despite an increasingly austere budgetary environment. In this sense, announcing a high-profile policy of rebalancing toward Asia was viewed by the president as an effective way to signal priorities – financial and otherwise – across the interagency, while also dispelling fears among allies and partners that a budget-driven American military withdrawal from the region was pending. Of course, and as explained further below, steps toward U.S. military

\textsuperscript{32} “Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament.”
rebalancing – including in Asia – to adjust to post-9/11 strategic considerations had already begun with the George W. Bush administration’s Global Posture Review (GPR), but by 2011 a worsening budget environment had cast the debate over future defense posture in starker (and more urgent) terms.

However, whatever the precise mix of reasons for advocating a rebalance, the Obama administration has consistently portrayed the pivot as a truly significant strategic shift, one aimed at focusing defense, diplomatic, and economic resources toward the Asia-Pacific region to a much greater degree than had been the case in the recent past. Indeed, former Secretary of State Clinton has claimed that the administration began paving the way for the pivot as soon as it came into office, as evidenced by its decision to accede in 2009 to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia, its promotion of the U.S.-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS) in 2011, Obama’s decision to be the first U.S. president to attend the East Asia Summit (EAS) in 2011, and his pursuit of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement, which continues today. Some of these policies (KORUS and the TPP, for example) were really products of the George W. Bush administration, although Obama can claim credit for the TAC and the entrée it provided to the EAS. Still, it was the combination of the Middle East/Southwest Asia drawdown and the need to make tough budget decisions going forward that really crystallized the idea of (and need for) a pivot, and these same considerations – no doubt rendered more pressing still by funding cuts outlined in the 2011 Budget Control Act and the 2013 Bipartisan Budget Act (about which more is said later in this chapter) – are now driving a host of force posture and budgetary decisions for DoD, including those specifically tied to the pivot.33

33 Robert M. Scher and David F. Helvey, “U.S. Force Posture in the U.S. Pacific Command Area of Responsibility,” joint statement before the U.S. House Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness, August 1, 2012. Scher and Helvey note that “the Secretary of Defense directed the Military Departments and other Components to build on FY 2013 investments in the FY 2014 budget proposal” to “fulfill the Strategic Guidance’s vision of a Joint Force 2020, including enhanced defense capabilities and activities in the Asia-Pacific region.”
Programmatically, the security component of the rebalancing effort was set forth in general terms by President Obama and then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta in January 2012 through the release of a “new strategic guidance” for DoD priorities in the twenty-first century, now generally referred to as the Defense Strategic Guidance (or DSG). Using italics for emphasis, the guidance stated clearly that “we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region,” given the challenges now emerging in the global security environment. DoD later elaborated on what this might mean in operational terms for Asia by highlighting, among other initiatives:

- A strengthening of alliance relationships with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand, including near-term investments to establish fully capable Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs) in Japan, Guam, Australia, and Hawaii, as well as increased rotational deployment of U.S. Air Force units to northern Australia
- The development of new and expanding partnerships with India, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, and other nations in South and Southeast Asia, including plans to deploy up to four littoral combat ships (LCSes) to Singapore
- Promoting a more integrated strategic approach to military activities and operations in the Indian and Pacific Oceans
- Exploring more fully the opportunities for multilateral security cooperation and capacity building in non-controversial but important mission areas, such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR)
- A renewed effort to build enduring military-to-military ties with the Chinese, in part to ease concerns in Beijing

35 Ibid., 2.
that the pivot is largely an attempt to contain a rising China.\footnote{See Scher and Helvey, “U.S. Force Posture in the U.S. Pacific Command Area of Responsibility;” and Leon Panetta, “The U.S. Rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific;” speech delivered at the 11th IISS Asian Security Summit, the Shangri-La Dialogue, June 2, 2012.}

Force-structure-wise, the pivot will rely more heavily on leaner, more agile, and quickly deployable forces, while leveraging new cutting-edge technologies (in, for example, the missile defense, cyber, unmanned systems, and intelligence-sharing realms) and perfecting innovative concepts of operation (or CONOPs) – such as the Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) and the Air-Sea Battle Concept (ASBC) – designed to cope more effectively with twenty-first-century security challenges (such as Chinese anti-access and area denial capabilities).\footnote{See “New US Military Concept Marks Pivot to Sea and Air,” IISS Strategic Comments 18, no. 20, May 2012; and Deputy Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, “The U.S. Rebalance to Asia: A Defense Perspective,” speech at the Asia Society, August 1, 2012.}

By 2020, the U.S. Navy is expected to move from the current fifty-fifty split in its forces between the Pacific and the Atlantic to more of a sixty-forty split between these two oceans. All of these adjustments, moreover, have been justified by numerous senior State Department, DoD, and White House officials as logical, essential, and, in most cases, overdue modifications to U.S. diplomacy and national security policy, given the rising importance of the Asia-Pacific region to America’s security and prosperity at a time of growing cuts in the defense budget and a winding down of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This perspective, initially developed and refined in the first Obama administration, still stands as the primary rationale for the pivot in the second Obama administration. More importantly, given the broad consensus on Asia’s importance throughout the American foreign policy community, it would most
likely have been adopted as well by a Romney administration (even if certain pivot-related programs were accorded a different priority), had President Obama been defeated in 2012.

Further on this last point, it is important to remember, as alluded to earlier, that the U.S. military rebalance to Asia began in large part back in 2004 under President Bush, as the United States began increasing its capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region and focusing more on Southeast Asia as a way of responding to a perceived shifting of “the global community’s ‘center of gravity’ [toward] the Asia-Pacific region.”\textsuperscript{38} Compared to the rebalance called for in the 2012 DSG, the Pacific build-up proposed by the Bush administration (and as outlined in its GPR documents) assumed a lower profile, eschewing major new rotational deployments to new locations (such as Australia or Singapore) and relying mostly on less visible measures, such as upgrading equipment, consolidating existing forward bases, conducting reinforcement exercises to demonstrate commitment to regional allies, and negotiating a limited number of new access agreements, largely for training purposes. There were also modest increases in U.S. troop deployments to Alaska, Guam, and Hawaii, and regular rotations of bomber and fighter aircraft to Guam became more frequent and were maintained up to four times longer than had been the case a decade earlier. In addition, the deployment of KC-135 refueling tanker aircraft to Guam provided critical air refueling support to these increased rotations, as well as for other U.S. and allied aircraft in the region. The Pentagon also began operating the \textit{Global Hawk} unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) out of Guam, and it planned for U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) to host 60 percent of America’s submarine fleet, including three of the four brand-new \textit{Virginia}-class attack submarines. By 2008, more than 60 percent of

\textsuperscript{38} Admiral William J. Fallon, USN, Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, testimony on U.S. Pacific Command posture before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, March 8, 2005.
the Navy’s ballistic missile submarine patrols were being conducted in the Pacific, compared to only 15 percent in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{39} 

Given this increased focus on Asia over the past several years, with contributions being made under Republican as well as Democratic presidencies, quite a few Asia hands have downplayed the significance of the Obama administration’s pivot, calling it “overstated” or “much more political than strategic.”\textsuperscript{40} One commentator simply declared it “empty.”\textsuperscript{41} Others have noted that every Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) released by DoD since 2001 has pointed to the rising strategic importance and potential volatility of the Asia-Pacific, and to the need to sustain a credible American military presence there.\textsuperscript{42} Looking even further back in recent history, Evan Feigenbaum, a former senior State Department official who focused on Asian policy, has argued that “this notion of some gigantic pivot obscures the degree to which there are some really central pillars of American Policy in the Pacific that have roots that go back decades.”\textsuperscript{43} Many other Asia specialists have elaborated on this theme since the pivot was first announced, emphasizing that the United States has always been a major Pacific

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Many Asia hands} argue that the pivot did not signal a “return to the region” because...the United States had never left.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{39} For a detailed description of this incremental U.S. military build-up in the Asia Pacific, see James L. Schoff, \textit{Realigning Priorities: The U.S.-Japan Alliance and the Future of Extended Deterrence}, Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, March 2009, 21–23.

\textsuperscript{40} See, respectively, interview with Feigenbaum, by Gwertzman, “Strengthening the U.S. Role in Asia;” and Michael Green, interview with Dispatch Japan, www.dispatchjapan.com/blog, February 20, 2012.


\textsuperscript{42} See, for example, U.S. Department of Defense, \textit{Quadrennial Defense Review Report}, September 30, 2001. Among other points made, this report cautioned that “Asia is gradually emerging as a region susceptible to large-scale military competition...[for the United States] this places a premium on securing additional access and infrastructure agreements and on developing systems capable of sustained operations at great distances,” 4.

\textsuperscript{43} Interview with Feigenbaum by Gwertzman,“Strengthening the U.S. Role in Asia.”
power, and that the pivot did not in any way signal a “return to the region because...the United States had never left.”

Still, dismissing the rebalance as a simple strategic communications tool or budget exercise also obscures the fact that DoD is proactively shaping its defense posture, procurement plans, and security cooperation programs around this policy. For better or worse, the rebalance is directly affecting policy choices, with the deputy secretary of defense leading an intra-DoD committee (based on the deputy’s Management Action Group meetings) charged with overseeing implementation, and USPACOM establishing the new Office of Strategic Rebalance to thoroughly reexamine how it should allocate resources and augment initiatives as part of the rebalance going forward. What is unclear is how well this will be coordinated with other U.S. combatant commands (COCOMs) – particularly the other geographic COCOMs, or GCCs – around the world, leading to an Asian pivot that is pursued as part of a more integrated, trans-regional, globally attuned strategy that does not open the door to “security vacuums” (or to the perception of such) in other key regions. To get a better sense of whether this is or is not likely to be the case we must first understand more clearly what has actually been done since 2012 to implement the rebalance, and it is to this issue that we now turn.

**Update on the Pivot’s Progress**

While the pace of the pivot may be slower and the scale less far-reaching than many anticipated when it was first announced, there has nonetheless been noteworthy progress, much of it involving the military dimension of the rebalance. To begin with, with the drawdown

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45 Better aligning the U.S. engagement strategy under USPACOM and across DoD was among the first recommendations by the CSIS independent study of U.S. force posture and strategy in the Asia Pacific. See Berteau and Green, “U.S. Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region.”
of U.S. forces from Iraq and Afghanistan, Army units from the 25th Infantry Division, as well as Marines from both the I Marine Expeditionary Force (or I MEF) and III MEF, are finally returning to their home stations in the Asia-Pacific region, where they can contribute more directly to the rebalance effort. These particular shifts confirm, it has been argued by one former DoD official, that what the Obama administration has decided to keep in Asia by way of forward-deployed forces is just as important as what it has decided (and soon will decide) to add. Moreover, they underscore, this same official claims, a determination on the part of President Obama to halt, as a first step in the pivot, the Bush administration’s decision to downsize the U.S. military presence in the Republic of Korea (ROK), and to sustain a robust and credible presence in both the ROK and Japan.46 Further toward that end, in fact, the Pentagon announced in early January 2014 that a battalion of some 800 troops from the U.S. Army’s 1st Cavalry Division based at Fort Hood, Texas, along with forty new M1A2 Abrams tanks and forty of the latest-model Bradley Fighting Vehicles, would be deployed in February to the ROK for a nine-month rotation close to the demilitarized zone, and that the tanks and armored vehicles would remain in the ROK after the troops completed their rotation, to be used by the next rotational element.47 While relatively small, this deployment held considerable symbolic importance, as it represented the first increase in American forces on the Peninsula since April 2008, when the Bush administration and the ROK government agreed to hold that presence at 28,500 troops rather than the 35,000 level long maintained before then.48

Perhaps even more newsworthy from an Army perspective, the rotational deployment of 1st Cavalry Division units to the ROK is one of the first concrete examples of a shift toward what Army Chief of Staff

46 Janine Davidson, “What Hawks and Doves Both Miss on the Military Rebalance to Asia,” Defense in Depth, Council on Foreign Relations, April 25, 2014. Recent troop levels have numbered some 28,500 in the ROK and about 50,000 in Japan.
48 Capaccio and Gaonette, “U.S. Adding 800 Troops for South Korea.”
General Ray Odierno calls “regionally aligned forces” (RAF), a concept Odierno has promoted in part at least as a way to carve out an important and lasting role for the Army in support of the pivot. First described publicly in the *Army Times* in June 2013, the idea behind RAF is to develop Army units that will have a long-term relationship with a particular COCOM and will, as a result, receive in-depth region-specific language and socio-cultural training, rendering them far better prepared to operate effectively in the areas where they may be deployed and much more able to build effective partnerships with local forces. For the Asia-Pacific region, General Vincent Brooks, the first four-star commander of the U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) and living proof of the importance the Army assigns to this region, has taken the RAF concept a step further, and developed what he calls “Pacific Pathways.” In essence, this is an expeditionary-minded deployment scheme aimed at reducing response times, building regional expertise and familiarity, and cutting overall travel costs by sending key elements of a U.S.-based infantry brigade – initially some seven hundred troops and a contingent of helicopters – on a rotational deployment in East and Southeast Asia for up to six months at a time, moving them every few weeks from one country to another for planned training exercises, rather than flying them back and forth from the United States for each individual event in accordance with past practice. Presumably units so trained will already be forward-deployed and ready to respond to any regional contingency that may suddenly arise, be it a typhoon or a terrorist attack.

Via Pacific Pathways, the U.S. Army will rotate forces to East and Southeast Asia for regionally focused training.

Not surprisingly, there has been push-back against Pacific Pathways, especially from Marine Corps officers who believe that the Army is trying to usurp the Marines’ traditional expeditionary force role and from defense critics who suggest that the Army is simply trying to justify higher troop levels in the face of potentially severe reductions due to ongoing defense budget cuts. Whatever the truth of the matter, the Marine Corps leadership is also pressing for a return of the Corps to its maritime and expeditionary roots, positioning the Corps, in accordance with the newly released Expeditionary Force 21 (or EF21) concept, as the ideal forward-deployed crisis response force for the largely maritime and littoral environment of the Asia-Pacific region.\textsuperscript{50} Toward that end, and in direct support of the pivot, Marine units assigned to the Pacific, which account for some two-thirds of the Corps operational forces, are being realigned and relocated to ensure that they are better positioned to respond to the range of crises most likely to arise in Asia, and better configured to conduct security cooperation activities with regional allies and partner countries in as low-cost, small-footprint, and politically acceptable a manner as possible. Once these adjustments are complete, DoD will be able to draw upon a fully operational MAGTF – the Corps’ principal organizational structure for a combined arms task group under a single commander – from a variety of locations across the Pacific theater, thereby improving the likelihood of a quick crisis response.\textsuperscript{51}

More specifically, some five thousand of the Marines now based in Okinawa are being transferred to Guam, with the bulk of the rest (eight thousand to ten thousand) moving to less populated areas around the new USMC air station to be built in a more remote part of the main island in the Henoko Bay area, as approved by Okinawan officials in December 2013 after years of delay.\textsuperscript{52} As a result, a key barrier

\textsuperscript{50} EF21 is outlined in Christopher P. Cavas, “New US Marine Concept Re-establishes Maritime Roots,” defense.gov, April 6, 2014.

\textsuperscript{51} Honorable Michael D. Lumpkin, acting under secretary of defense (policy), “Rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific Region.”

\textsuperscript{52} For more details on these adjustments, see Lieutenant General Terry Robling, “Always Ready, Always There: Marines and the Pacific Rebalance,” PacNet, no. 42, June 13,
to closer military cooperation between Japan and the United States – a factor that remains critical to the success of the rebalance strategy – was removed, and a strong signal sent to the region as a whole (including to potential rivals) that the United States was both willing and able to maintain a sizeable forward presence in Japan, even in the face of ongoing defense budget cuts and a general fatigue within the American public over long-term overseas deployments after ten years of war in the Middle East. As additional proof of that intent, DoD officials and Marine Corps leadership have confirmed that the Marines’ oldest helicopters based on Okinawa are being replaced by new MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft, providing a major leap forward in speed, payload, range, and mission flexibility over, for example, the CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter commonly used by the Marines for all-weather troop transport, combat support, search and rescue (SAR), and other medium-lift tasks. In time, Okinawa will also host the Corps’ F-35B variant of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF).

By relocating Marines in Japan to Guam and other locations in the Pacific (including Hawaii), DoD is also shifting them to a more militarily useful geographic distribution across the region, allowing them to be closer to potential crisis and disaster zones in Oceania and Southeast Asia, and providing them with more opportunities to train with likely local partners. Guam, with its upgraded air and sea port facilities, is an ideal base from which to deploy military assets rapidly throughout the wider Asia-Pacific, and it offers, together with the nearby Northern Mariana Islands, “an excellent location to train with partners on areas of amphibious and expeditionary

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53 Robling, “Always Ready, Always There.”
expertise. Of potentially much greater utility in this regard, however, is the 2011 agreement between the United States and Australia for the rotational deployment of up to twenty-five hundred Marines – equivalent to a full Marine Expeditionary Unit (or MEU) – by 2017 to military facilities at the northern Australia port of Darwin. As of 2014, a battalion-sized unit of some eleven hundred Marines had been deployed to Darwin for six months of training and exercises with the Australian military, including joint U.S.-Australian security cooperation activities with neighboring countries. In a related move, Australia has also agreed to provide the U.S. Air Force with greater access to military airfields in northern Australia, and discussions are underway to establish a regular rotational presence for the USAF similar to the USMC’s. In June 2014, moreover, President Obama and Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott struck a deal that could pave the way for a wider-ranging rotational presence by U.S. forces – to include warships as well as planes and troops – and the construction of permanent American military facilities at a greater number of locations on Australian soil. As result, Australia, which hosted no U.S. forces as recently as 2011, has emerged as a critical local hub for pivot-related operations.

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54 Ibid.
As important as Army and Marine initiatives have been in advancing the rebalance to Asia, the U.S. Navy and Air Force, it can be argued, are slated to play even greater roles, given, as noted earlier, the largely maritime nature of the Asia-Pacific theater (which places a premium on naval forces), as well as the huge distances that must often be covered to reach areas of crisis in a timely manner (which is a relative strength of airpower). The importance of Navy-Air Force collaboration to future pivot-related operations is reflected, moreover, in the effort both services have given to developing the Air-Sea Battle Concept, conceived largely as a way to counter China’s formidable anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) capabilities in the event of a showdown with Beijing.57 Of the two services, however, the Navy has perhaps the greater role to play, and it appears to be making steady, if somewhat slower than hoped-for, progress toward that end. According to U.S. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jonathan Greenert, the number of ships maintained by the Navy in Asia in mid-2014 (namely, fifty-one) was not all that much different from the level it first began to maintain on a regular basis some seventy years ago. That number is expected to increase to fifty-eight in 2015 and to sixty-seven in 2020, at which point Pacific-based ships will account for 60 percent of the overall fleet and forty-eight of the sixty-seven ships will be non-rotational.58

57 For a comprehensive discussion of Chinese thinking behind the A2/AD concept and key elements of the U.S. effort to counter it via the Air-Sea Battle Concept, see Aaron L. Friedberg, Beyond Air-Sea Battle: The Debate Over U.S. Strategy in Asia (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2014). In essence, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has sought the capacity to deny American forces the ability to project power against China by fielding advanced capabilities in the areas of information dominance, long-range strike, anti-satellite (ASAT) operations, and integrated air defense systems (IADS). The idea behind the U.S. response in ASBC is to deploy “networked, integrated forces capable of attack-in-depth to disrupt, defeat, and destroy adversary forces.” The key objective here is to disrupt the enemy’s command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities, thereby crippling his ability to deny access and to launch effective attacks (77–78).

In addition, the ten-month rotational deployment to Singapore of the Navy’s first littoral combat ship, the USS Freedom, went off in 2013 without a major hitch, conducting a number of security cooperation exercises and maritime presence operations with regional navies in near-shore environments, including the delivery of emergency supplies to the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan. With the Freedom’s maiden voyage completed and preparations underway for a second LCS deployment (the USS Fort Worth) in late 2014, plans to rotate up to four LCSes to Singapore by 2017 are on track, providing one of the clearest examples yet of America’s shift in strategic focus from Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean region as a central component of the pivot.\textsuperscript{59} No doubt, the U.S.-Philippine Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) signed in April 2014 will help to bolster the Navy’s presence in both areas, especially in the South China Sea sector, providing increased access to Subic Bay, Cubi Point, Clark Air Base, Oyster Bay, and the Batanes Islands, among other military facilities, and calling for greater American help in developing Filipino capabilities in the maritime security and maritime domain awareness (MDA) realms.\textsuperscript{60} Whether or not the EDCA serves as a deterrent

\textbf{Plans to rotate LCSes to Singapore provide a clear example of America’s shift in focus from Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean as a central component of the pivot.}\textsuperscript{59} No doubt, the U.S.-Philippine Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) signed in April 2014 will help to bolster the Navy’s presence in both areas, especially in the South China Sea sector, providing increased access to Subic Bay, Cubi Point, Clark Air Base, Oyster Bay, and the Batanes Islands, among other military facilities, and calling for greater American help in developing Filipino capabilities in the maritime security and maritime domain awareness (MDA) realms.\textsuperscript{60} Whether or not the EDCA serves as a deterrent

\textsuperscript{59} Fast, agile, and mission-focused, the LCSes are designed to operate in near-shore and shallow-water environments such as those found in the Southeast Asian archipelagic region, employing modular mission packages that can be configured for surface warfare, mine countermeasures, and anti-submarine warfare, as well as for HA/DR operations. The LCS is also ideal for operating in littoral areas to counter anti-access capabilities like those China is developing and to defend against small boat attacks. For more information about USS Freedom, see http://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/lcs1/Pages/USSFreedomReturnsfromDeployment.aspx.

\textsuperscript{60} Carl Thayer, “Analyzing the US-Philippine Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement,” Diplomat, May 2, 2014. On the MDA front, this will include U.S. Navy
to further Chinese encroachment on the disputed Scarborough and Second Thomas Shoals – which are both claimed by China and the Philippines – remains to be seen, but that was certainly an unspoken objective of Manila’s. As for additional advantages of the EDCA for the U.S. Navy, it allows for the pre-positioning of disaster relief supplies on Philippine territory, which will speed future humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operations like those undertaken by the Navy in response to Typhoon Haiyan. Moreover, U.S. naval access to the Batanes Islands, located just a hundred miles from the southern tip of Taiwan, could prove to be especially useful, it has been suggested, in the event of a crisis in the Taiwan Strait or even in the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands (the westernmost of which is also some one hundred miles from Taiwan) that might demand an American maritime response, so the EDCA could also help to support Navy operations farther afield in Northeast Asia.61

Reinforcing the pivot’s southward shift toward South and Southeast Asia, the Navy is also pursuing broader cooperative ties with Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam, ties that go (or soon will) well beyond, in the words of Admiral Greenert, “simple port visits,” to include, in the specific case of Malaysia, discussion of potential deployment sites for a U.S. Navy P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft or possibly the Navy’s new P-8A Poseidon maritime surveillance and anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft.62 Over the next few years, the Navy will

P-3C flights out of Clark Air Base with Filipino military personnel on board.


62 Greenert, “The Navy’s Rebalance to Asia.” In this May 2014 presentation at CSIS, Admiral Greenert mentioned the P-3C as a likely candidate for deployment in Malaysia, but in a more recent September 2014 speech at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C., he identified the P-8 as the likelier candidate, suggesting that the United States and Malaysia were close to reaching agreement on a plan that would allow for P-8 flights from a Malaysian air base in Sabah, located in northeast Malaysia. P-8 flights from Sabah would give the U.S. Navy a much improved capacity to patrol the waters of the South China Sea, a mission of rising importance given ongoing territorial disputes in the region and China’s growing submarine fleet operating out of Hainan Island. See Jane Perlez, “Malaysia Risks Enraging China by Inviting U.S. Spy Flights,” New York Times, September 14, 2014.
also be deeply involved in helping to build up the maritime security
capabilities of these countries and possibly others who are members
of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), following
a commitment of $32.5 million to that objective by U.S. Secretary
of State John Kerry during his December 2013 visit to Hanoi. Admiral Greenert also has his eye on improved navy-to-navy ties with
India which have stalled somewhat since the mid-2000s. The prima-

Admiral Greenert has taken pains as well to strengthen ties with China’s People’s Liberation Army Navy

integrated approach to security in the Indian and Pacific Oceans that
recognizes the strategic importance of each to the other.

To the extent possible, Greenert has taken pains as well to strengthen ties with China’s People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) via se-


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another’s intentions when both are operating in close proximity is dramatically reduced. A significant step toward these goals, Greenert has argued, was the April 2014 Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (known as CUES) signed by twenty-one Asia-Pacific navies, including those of China and the United States, at the most recent Western Pacific Naval Symposium held in Qingdao, China. Although it is non-binding, and despite China’s silence on whether or not it would apply to disputed territories in the East and South China Seas, the code does set forth procedures for avoiding uneasy incidents triggered by unexpected contact between naval vessels and aircraft, such as that between the USS Cowpens and a Chinese warship in the South China Sea in December 2013 and between a PLAN J-11 fighter jet and a U.S. Navy P-8A in August 2014. PLAN commander Admiral Wu Shengli has also assured Admiral Greenert that he is organizing a CUES training program for Chinese sailors, and Greenert has acknowledged that on at least one occasion in recent months PLAN ships actually took steps to prevent a Chinese commercial vessel from harassing an American destroyer patrolling in the South China Sea.

Other signs of progress include China’s decision to participate in the disaster relief drills and other non-sensitive portions of the 2014 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) multinational naval exercises held off Hawaii in the summer of 2014, plans for an exchange of HA/DR experts between the PLAN’s Peace Ark hospital ship and the USNS Mercy hospital ship, and the continuing participation of Chinese ships in joint anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. It is his hope, Admiral Greenert has made clear, that these and related initiatives will encourage the PLAN to become a responsible navy as it inevitably emerges as an increasingly powerful one, while also convincing Admiral Wu and Chinese officials more broadly that pivot-related programs are

68 Greenert, “The Navy’s Rebalance to Asia.”
not designed primarily to contain China. Convincing China of the pivot’s benign intent and encouraging the Chinese military – including the PLAN – to abide by commonly recognized “rules of the road” for military operations in international waters and airspace will not, however, be easy tasks. Not long after the August 2014 J-11/P-8A incident, for example, in which the PLAN jet flew dangerously close to an American P-8 flying in international airspace, no less an authority than General Fan Changlong, vice chairman of China’s Central Military Commission, warned President Obama’s national security advisor, Susan Rice, during her visit to Beijing in early September 2014, that the United States should “decrease and even end close-in ship and aircraft surveillance of China,” activities that “not only damage China’s security interests,” according to the Chinese defense ministry, “but also damage strategic trust...between China and the United States.”

A Chinese admiral assigned to the National Defense University in Beijing went even further, suggesting that Chinese fighter pilots should “fly even closer” when intercepting U.S. surveillance planes operating in international airspace off China’s coast, adding that “we didn’t give them enough pressure before” and that “a knife at the throat is the only deterrence” against such flights.

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69 There is, unfortunately, little evidence that Chinese officials and scholars will ever be convinced that the pivot is anything but a strategy aimed at hemming China in and holding it back from assuming its rightful position as a dominant (if not the dominant) regional power. The term “rebalance” in particular is often interpreted in Chinese circles as indicating an American intention to “balance” against China as a form of containment. See Scott A. Snyder, “Sour Notes from China on the U.S. Rebalance to Asia,” Asia Unbound, Council on Foreign Relations, June 20, 2014.


71 Greg Torode and Megha Rajagopalan, “Chinese Interceptions of U.S. Military Planes Could Intensify Due to Submarine Base,” Reuters, August 28, 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/08/28/us-china-usa-military-idUSKBN0GS2MZ20140828. According to this article, intercepts by Chinese jets were likely to intensify and become more aggressive in part to discourage U.S. surveillance efforts aimed at tracking China’s growing ballistic missile submarine fleet based in southern Hainan Island.
These and similar views being expressed by Chinese authorities reflect, according to many U.S. strategic analysts, Beijing’s ongoing effort to establish “new terms of reference for what is allowed and normal” along China’s periphery, and to signal to Washington that it can have “a cordial and more equal relationship with China” or continue efforts to maintain a dominant American position in Asia, but “that it cannot have it both ways.”

That said, it is clear as well that close-in surveillance along the East Asian littoral, together with a robust American maritime presence in the area, is essential if U.S. forward-deployed forces are to be ready and able to help counter potentially aggressive behavior by a near-peer competitor, such as China, or by smaller but well-armed adversaries, such as North Korea. In addition, therefore, to the joint training efforts and security cooperation activities described earlier, the Navy is deploying as well, or intends to deploy soon, some of its most advanced platforms and technologies to the Pacific as an integral part of the American rebalance toward Asia, and, whenever acquisition funding tightens, it intends to

72 The Nelson Report, September 2, 2014, 8. Interestingly, while it was considered an odd move for a new RIMPAC participant, China’s decision to send an uninvited auxiliary general intelligence (AGI) ship to monitor the RIMPAC 2014 exercises from international waters off Hawaii was also seen by USPACOM commander Admiral Samuel Locklear as a potential sign of tacit approval by China that it did in fact agree with the U.S. position that, as Locklear put it, “military operations and survey operations in another country’s [exclusive economic zone] – where you have your own national security interest – are within international law and are acceptable.” Others, however, have been quick to disagree, arguing that while the AGI deployment certainly illustrates China’s willingness to take advantage of America’s rather permissive posture on surveillance activities by other countries in U.S. EEZs, it should not be seen as evidence that China was now ready to tolerate similar activities by foreign navies in its own EEZs. See Sam LaGrone, “U.S. Pacific Commander: Chinese Spy Ship off Hawaii Has an Upside,” USNI News, July 29, 2014, http://news.usni.org/2014/07/29/u-s-pacific-commander-chinese-spy-ship-hawaii-upside.
give precedence, Greenert has said, to the procurement of systems that would be ideal for Asia-Pacific operations.\footnote{Greenert, “The Navy’s Rebalance to Asia.”} Secretary of Defense Hagel, moreover, explicitly endorsed this point of view when he briefed the press on the FY 2015 defense budget in February 2014, even calling for the development of an entirely new frigate-sized ship that would be better able (and specifically designed) to survive in the increasingly lethal security environment now taking shape in the Asia-Pacific region.\footnote{U.S. Department of Defense, “Remarks by Secretary Hagel and Gen. Dempsey on the Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Preview,” transcript, February 24, 2014, http://www.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=5377.}

More specifically, apart from the LCS deployments to Singapore discussed earlier, the first deployment of the Navy’s new Poseidon maritime surveillance and ASW aircraft, for example, was to the Pacific in late 2013, performing admirably in 2014 during the search for the lost Malaysian airliner and gaining considerable notoriety, of course, after the PLAN’s controversial intercept of a P-8 in August of that year. In addition, a fourth Virginia-class fast attack submarine has been tapped for deployment to Guam; two more ballistic missile defense (BMD)-capable ships were deployed to Japan in 2014; the next-generation Triton unmanned maritime surveillance aircraft will be sent to Guam for initial operational tests in mid- to late 2017 (and deployed later to Okinawa); the multi-mission Zumwalt-class destroyer will be operating in the Pacific by 2018; the Unmanned Carrier-Launched Airborne Surveillance and Strike (UCLASS) system is being designed with China-related scenarios uppermost in mind;\footnote{The debate is ongoing as to whether the UCLASS should be optimized solely for long-range and persistent intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) or should include as well a serious deep-strike capability. Advocates of a platform that can do both believe such a system would be an ideal counter to the A2/AD capabilities being developed by China and possibly Iran. See Sydney J. Freedberg, Jr., “Crunch Time for UCLASS: USD Kendall, Rep. Forbes, & the Requirements Fight,” Breaking Defense, August 5, 2014.} and the F-35C naval variant of the JSF should be deployed on carriers in the Pacific by 2020. The Navy is also testing how best to use the Joint High Speed Vessel (JHSV) and the Mobile Landing

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\footnote{Greenert, “The Navy’s Rebalance to Asia.”}


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Platform (MLP) system to provide – in addition to their HA/DR roles – amphibious lift support to Marines stationed in the Pacific.\textsuperscript{76} Finally, the JHSV is being used as well to test the Navy’s new rail-gun technology, which should be available for use in the Pacific by 2020 and could offer significant cost advantages over the use of missile systems in anti-air, anti-surface, land-attack, BMD, and anti-cruise missile missions.

As for the U.S. Air Force, it, too, is seeking to develop a more robust forward presence in the Pacific to help underwrite the rebalance, utilizing, as the Navy has, a variety of joint exercise and training opportunities with regional allies and partner countries to build local capacity, promote interoperability, and phase in over time its most advanced combat capabilities. Bringing America’s newest and most cutting-edge airpower platforms and defense systems to the Pacific is especially important, argues General Herbert “Hawk” Carlisle, commander of U.S. Pacific Air Forces (PACAF), because the United States cannot assume that its command of the air – or that of those with whom it is most likely to collaborate – will go untested in the Pacific, as was largely the case in Afghanistan and Iraq. Unquestioned American control of the skies “is not the way it is going to be in my theater of operations,” General Carlisle has stressed, adding that “we’re going to be denied [communications]...We’re going to have cyber attacks...We are going to be tested in this environment...[and] we’re going to have

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. According to Admiral Greenert, the current COMCOS demand for expeditionary and amphibious warfare ships is huge, equivalent to about a fifty-ship requirement if one tried to meet it all with traditional grey hulls. Shortfalls in amphibious capability, moreover, remain a potentially serious weakness of the pivot, which is why the Navy is exploring the possibility of using JHSV and MPLs to help fill any capability gaps in that role.
problems.” An issue of particular concern, he has gone on to note, is the likely sale of advanced missile strike, electronic attack, and jamming capabilities by China and Russia, but especially China, to any customer willing to pay the price, including local bad actors such as North Korea and possibly even sub-state groups. So, while the United States and its regional allies may not end up fighting China directly, it is very likely, Carlisle has concluded, that “we will fight their stuff.” The need to counter such capabilities, it is worth noting, is one reason why the Air-Sea Battle Concept places such importance on disrupting an adversary’s ability to locate and target U.S. forces in the first place as a way to “break the kill chain,” as Admiral Greenert and U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff General Mark Welsh recently put it.

Looking to the future, therefore, the Air Force and its partners in the region must focus, General Carlisle goes on to suggest, on developing far more agile and flexible command and control systems; enhanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities; better defenses against cyber and electronic warfare; more effective use of space-related assets (especially for improved situational awareness); a wider network of integrated air and missile defenses with key allies; and more assured methods of projecting power throughout the Asia-Pacific region, capitalizing on the speed, range, and multi-mission character of advanced airpower systems. Toward these objectives, the Air Force’s Global Hawk unmanned ISR aircraft and its F-22 Raptor stealthy fighter were both deployed to Japan in 2014, and once the Air Force version of the JSF, the F-35A, comes on stream it will no doubt join them. In the not-too-distant future, moreover, Australia, Japan, and the ROK will all procure the F-35 JSF, creating a number of options for powerful combined force operations when any are deployed in tandem with U.S. F-35s

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78 Ibid.
79 See Jonathan Greenert and Mark Welsh, “Breaking the Kill Chain,” Foreign Policy, May 16, 2013.
operating in the Pacific. In the meantime, steps have been taken to improve the U.S. and allied position with regard to space-related military operations, following a decision by the United States and Australia in 2013 to sign their first-ever bilateral space situational awareness (SSA) agreement. Among other benefits, the agreement allows them to share with each other without delay sensitive data derived from a C-band radar deployed by the U.S. Air Force to Australia in 2012.

With regard to assured power projection into the Pacific theater, stealthy long-range American bombers, especially the B-2, have covered that requirement for the Air Force to a significant degree, and they will continue to do so in years to come, particularly once a follow-on platform to the B-2 is fielded. Working from the assumption, however, that “virtual presence is actual absence,” and understanding the importance of a visible forward military presence based in Asia to the credibility of the pivot, General Carlisle is working to set in place a “rotational presence” strategy – similar in some ways to the Army’s Pacific Pathways concept and the Marines’ Darwin deployments – for PACAF and the Air Force at large. Patterned, more specifically, on the Cold War-era Checkered Flag program for rotating U.S.-based air units to Europe every eighteen to twenty-four months, he hopes to do much the same for the Asia-Pacific going forward, focusing first on deployments to established Air Force facilities in Guam, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand, but extending quickly to new sites in Australia, the Philippines, and Singapore, among other locations in the Southeast Asian and

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81 Lumpkin, “Rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific Region.”
Indian Ocean sectors. The idea here is to maintain a continuous rotation of Air Force jets, bombers, and other air power systems to and from a wider range of facilities in the Asia-Pacific, so that they are better prepared to operate throughout the region as a whole. These rotations will be integrated into and build upon the Air Force’s extensive series of exercises and theater security cooperation activities held each year with regional allies and partners, expanding them when appropriate and possible from bilateral and trilateral efforts to a multilateral format. In this way, the Air Force plans to establish a higher level of interoperability with (and build up the capacity of) key allied and partner forces, and to ensure, as the Navy will, that at least 60 percent of its forward-deployed forces – including an equal percentage of its most advanced combat aircraft – will be operating on a regular basis in the Pacific by 2020.

Taken together, the various service-specific initiatives outlined above confirm that a good deal has been done, or is now well under-way, to implement the pivot at the operational level, albeit perhaps at not quite the pace or on quite the scale imagined when the strategic shift to Asia was formally announced in the January 2012 DSG. At the policy level, moreover, DoD has undertaken a number of additional steps to set these initiatives on a more permanent footing, even if it may take a few years yet to be sure of lasting success. For the first time since 1997, for example, Washington and Tokyo have begun a full review of the U.S.-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation, the primary focus of which will be to clarify the roles and responsibilities of

83 Ibid. According to General Carlisle, PACAF had plans for about four hundred different engagements with regional allies and partners in both FY 14 and FY 15. Prominent among these were the U.S-Japan-Australia Cope North and U.S.-Singapore-Thailand Cope Tiger exercises, as well as the Air Force’s Red Flag training programs, one of which involved a path-breaking U.S.-Japan-ROK exercise in which the command and control systems of all three air forces were operating together. As for the expansion of these exercises, portions of the Cope North exercise included the ROK in 2014, and both New Zealand and the Philippines, according to Carlisle, are expected to join in 2015, at least for those sessions focused on HA/DR missions.
their respective military forces when they conduct coordinated operations in the Asia-Pacific region and even beyond. Most importantly, this review will be the first to examine more fully what types of military assistance Japan is or is not likely to provide to the United States under the new and more flexible concept of collective self-defense endorsed by Prime Minister Abe and his cabinet in July 2014. Decisions in this regard must still be approved by the Japanese Diet, but it is no secret that they could carry significant implications for America’s ability to operate effectively from its bases in Japan and to undertake a variety of important defense and deterrence missions in the Pacific as a whole. Should U.S. forces based in Japan ever be attacked by North Korean ballistic missiles, for example, Japan could not use its missile defense radars and interceptors to help defend them without a clear right of collective self-defense. In the event, moreover, of a crisis involving Taiwan or even the Senkaku Islands that required a response by U.S. forces based in Japan, a substantially larger commitment of forces would be required to keep operational risks at acceptable levels if Japanese forces were not able to provide direct support as part of its right to undertake collective self-defense missions.

Strong support by the Obama administration for the Abe cabinet’s decision in July, therefore, can be seen in part at least as an additional effort to help advance the rebalance.

As an integral part of the pivot, Washington has also taken steps — some of which have been touched on already — to strengthen its


alliances with the ROK, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand, to build more effective partnerships with Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma, India, and New Zealand, and to engage more fully with China. In this regard, joint efforts with the ROK to improve deterrence on the Korean Peninsula, to develop a more explicit counter-provocation plan to discourage further aggression by Pyongyang, and to implement a new “strategic alliance” concept that has a more multidirectional, off-peninsula focus deserve particular mention. Indeed, similar to Tokyo’s greater willingness under its new defense program guidelines to support joint missions farther afield from Japan’s home islands, a more “off-peninsula” perspective by Seoul, as codified in its latest Defense Reform Plan, could become increasingly important to the United States as it seeks to encourage regional partners with the means to do so to help build cooperative ties and enhance security throughout the Asia-Pacific, both of which are key goals of the rebalance.86 No doubt, additional assistance in achieving these goals will come from a number of the other bilateral defense initiatives – especially, closer and broader U.S. cooperation with Australia, Singapore, Vietnam, and the Philippines – that were discussed earlier in connection with new deployments by the U.S. Army, Marines, Navy and Air Force in support of the pivot. Such assistance could also become a stronger selling point for the rebalance in Congress, and more

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86 Both Japan and the ROK are critically dependent on open sea lanes from the Middle East through Southeast Asia and into the Western Pacific and, by extension, on stable security conditions in the coastal and archipelagic areas through and around which these sea lanes flow. Hence, they both hope to establish, as does the United States under the pivot, broader partnerships with ASEAN nations and institutions, as well as with India and Australia. Toward this objective, Japan, for example, completed in early 2014 a fundamental update and revision of its 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), emphasizing the need to improve capabilities for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, sea control, sea-based missile defense, and the defense of remote islets within Japan’s territorial waters, as well as for sealane protection, maritime safety, HA/DR, and other joint missions in areas (such as Southeast Asia) quite distant from Japan’s traditional geographic zone of military operations. For its part, South Korea seeks similar capabilities as part of its Defense Reform Plan, with a particular emphasis on developing a blue-water navy to undertake maritime security missions in Indian Ocean and Western Pacific waters that are quite far away from the Korean Peninsula.
critical to its implementation than initially expected, if deeper cuts to the U.S. defense budget really do substantially lower overall force levels and funding for overseas deployments.

Finally, beyond these bilateral ties, Washington has made a fair amount of progress toward promoting multilateral security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, an objective that was also highlighted in the 2012 DSG and more recently in the 2014 QDR. Central to this effort has been America’s increasing participation in ASEAN’s Defense Minister’s Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) activities. Established in 2010 and comprising the ten ASEAN nations plus eight others (including Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia, and the United States), the ADMM-Plus has proven to be a useful forum for building military-to-military cooperation, reducing risks of miscalculation, and increasing local capabilities to respond to regional crises. By 2014, six expert working groups (EWGs) had been established to promote joint planning for maritime security, counter-terrorism, HA/DR, peacekeeping operations, military medicine exchanges, and humanitarian counter-mine action, and serious work was underway in all six mission areas. In June 2013, for example, Brunei hosted a major HA/DR and military medicine exercise under ADMM-Plus auspices that involved seven ships, fifteen helicopters, and some thirty-two hundred personnel from all eighteen countries.87 U.S. Secretary of Defense Hagel, moreover, has sought to deepen and expand ADMM-Plus cooperation, hosting a summit for ASEAN defense ministers in Hawaii in April 2014 that focused on opportunities for broader information sharing, joint and combined exercises, and, most importantly, maritime security awareness and closer coordination at sea.88

To a degree, these multilateral initiatives in the defense policy realm have been paralleled (and reinforced) by a number of U.S. diplomatic

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87 See Lumpkin, “Rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific Region;” and Anit Mukherjee, “ADMM-Plus: Talk Shop or Key to Asia-Pacific Security?” Diplomat, August 22, 2013.
and foreign economic/trade-related efforts aimed at advancing the rebalance. Perhaps the most important of these was the Obama administration’s 2009 decision, noted earlier, to sign the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation with ASEAN, a step that actually opened the door to wider U.S. engagement with ASEAN institutions, including the all-important ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) that was the first ASEAN grouping to encourage open discussion of regional security issues, as well as the ADMM-Plus. In 2010, the United States took the additional step of becoming the first non-ASEAN country to establish a dedicated diplomatic mission to ASEAN headquarters in Jakarta, Indonesia, and Washington assigned its first resident ambassador to that mission in 2011. As mentioned earlier as well, the Obama administration also gained membership for the United States in the East Asia Summit, an annual ASEAN-initiated gathering of ministers and heads of state from the same eighteen countries that belong to the ADMM-Plus. Focused in particular on promoting regional cooperation in the areas of energy and the environment, finance, education, natural disaster management, pandemics, and connectivity, the EAS has emerged as the region’s premier leadership forum, and active participation is considered a must for any non-ASEAN countries who wish to be seen as serious players in the region. In that spirit, the U.S. secretary of state has always attended the ministerial sessions, and President Obama attended the heads-of-state session in November 2014 (as he did in 2011 and 2012). Such participation, according

89 On this particular issue, many have argued that President Obama lost important opportunities to develop close ties with key leaders in Southeast Asia when he canceled his participation in the October 2013 EAS session because of the U.S. government shutdown. Worse still, he appeared to be upstaged somewhat by the scheduled presence at that same meeting by China’s President Xi Jinping, suggesting to some that America can never be quite as present in the Pacific as China. Put another way, “In Asia, it’s not just quality time,” according to a longtime U.S. ambassador to the region, “it’s quantity time” that counts, and each time the president passes on a chance
to U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel, is meant to underscore the administration’s commitment to “the development of regional institutions in the Asia-Pacific region [as] a priority” component of the pivot.\textsuperscript{90}

On the trade and economic statecraft front, President Obama has continued the efforts launched by the Clinton and Bush administrations to complete free trade agreements (FTAs) with major Asia-Pacific countries, negotiating a number of necessary modifications to the U.S.-South Korea FTA to bring it into force in 2012 and pushing ahead with negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a proposed regional FTA that would include the United States and eleven other nations from the Asia-Pacific region. More specifically, the TPP, viewed by the administration as a cornerstone of the rebalance, seeks to introduce a high standard of rules-based trade into the region to protect American companies from unfair business practices, and it could, as currently configured, account for no less than 37 percent of all U.S. exports and some four million trade-related jobs in the United States.\textsuperscript{91} A successfully implemented TPP, therefore, could go a long way toward achieving President Obama’s goals of doubling U.S. exports and adding another two million American jobs under the administration’s National Export Initiative.\textsuperscript{92} With those goals in mind, President Obama also launched the U.S.-ASEAN Expanded Economic Engagement (E3) initiative in 2012 aimed at helping non-TPP ASEAN members qualify for eventual TPP participation.\textsuperscript{93} At the same time, the administration has tried as well to set aside additional funding for development assistance projects that could make a major difference at the regional level, such as the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI)

\textsuperscript{90} Press briefing by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel hosted by the Brookings Institution and the State Department Foreign Press Center, August 4, 2014, as reprinted in The Nelson Report, August 6, 2014.
\textsuperscript{91} U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Re-Balancing the Rebalance, 14.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
designed to improve education, infrastructure, the environment, and women’s rights in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.\(^{94}\)

As discussed briefly in chapter 1, however, the diplomatic and economic aspects of the rebalance remain significantly under-resourced both in terms of assigned personnel and funding. For example, according, once again, to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations’ 2014 *Re-Balancing the Rebalance*, the FY 2015 budget request to support diplomatic engagement by the State Department’s Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (known at State as EAP) ranked “second-to-last of all 6 regional bureaus, or 8 percent of the total, despite the region’s 35 countries accounting for nearly a third of both the world’s population and GDP.”\(^{95}\) Worse still, the request represented close to a 12 percent decrease from the peak in EAP funding levels reached in FY 2012.\(^{96}\) For its part, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) did increase its personnel deployed in East Asia from 84 in 2008 to 183 in 2013, but that still represented only 11 percent of USAID’s foreign-based staff. Concurrently, the FY 2015 budget request for USAID was returned to the FY 2011 level despite a 65 percent increase in staff since that time.\(^{97}\) For better or worse, therefore, the best gauge for how the pivot is faring at the moment, and what the prospects are for further progress in the foreseeable future, is the existing state of affairs with regard to the defense component of the rebalance and its associated military deployments, as outlined already in this section. And based solely on that review, the pivot has certainly made a good deal of progress since 2012, and is poised to continue to develop further, if not quite to the extent that the somewhat overblown rhetoric often associated with early descriptions of the rebalance had suggested.

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\(^{94}\) Ibid., 16.

\(^{95}\) Ibid., 9.

\(^{96}\) Ibid., 16.

\(^{97}\) Ibid.
The FY 2015 Budget, the QDR, Russia, and Other Potential Complications

That said, whether or not the full potential of the pivot is ever reached, and how it is perceived both within the Asia-Pacific and in other regions of strategic importance to the United States, depends on a number of other factors not directly tied to the rebalance itself. First on the list, not surprisingly, is the ongoing squeeze on the U.S. defense budget and the very real possibility that automatic sequestration-scale spending cuts could return with a vengeance in FY 2016 and beyond. Indeed, based on the FY 2015 defense budget request outlined by U.S. Secretary of Defense Hagel in late February 2014 (along with its associated five-year defense budget plan), spending levels for FY 2015 are projected to remain – in accordance with the December 2013 Bipartisan Budget Act – at roughly the same levels as that for FY 2014 (or some $496 billion overall), but that still represented, Hagel admitted, a reduction of more than $75 billion over the two-year period from the levels requested by President Obama in his

Department of Defense Base Budget, 1950-2020

Annual Base Budget Authority

Note: The FY 2015 request does not include the $26 billion requested in the Opportunity, Growth and Security Initiative.

FY 2014 budget submission. Further, these reductions, he went on to explain, came on top of a $37 billion cut already imposed on DoD in FY 2013, and they were over and above the $487 billion worth of cuts over a ten-year period required by the sequestration provisions of the 2011 Budget Control Act, cuts that could begin again in FY 2016 when the two-year budgetary relief agreed to as part of the Bipartisan Budget Act comes to an end. Perhaps more strikingly still, the FY 2015 defense budget proposal amounts to a 30 percent drop from the defense spending peak of $705 billion reached in 2011, when the pivot was first announced.

To retain what he argued would still be a credible force, able to implement the 2012 DSG (albeit with a modest increase in operational risk), Secretary Hagel, with the backing of Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Dempsey, proposed as well a smaller military force that sacrificed some size and capacity to retain an adequate level of readiness and to move forward with necessary investments in advanced capabilities. It would be especially important, he noted, for U.S. forward-deployed forces – particularly naval platforms – to be able to survive and operate effectively against potential adversaries in the Asia-Pacific region who might be armed with

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sophisticated weapon systems.\textsuperscript{100} To ensure that such a force would be available, however, the FY 2015 budget also called for Congress to approve an additional one-year $26 billion funding package called the Opportunity, Growth and Security Initiative to increase training, improve readiness, make repairs, and upgrade equipment, given the disruptions and shortfalls caused in these particular sectors by recent spending cuts. Moreover, to achieve the longer-term readiness and modernization goals set by DoD, the five-year budget plan that accompanied the FY 2015 budget programmed for expenditures that were a full $115 billion higher than the amount that would be allowed under sequester guidelines. Unfortunately, with sequestration back in force by FY 2016 unless Congress decides otherwise, it is far from certain that the extra $26 billion for FY 2015 will pass muster on Capitol Hill, and even less likely that the additional $115 billion requested for the next five years would ever be approved. Congress, in fact, seems more inclined to reverse some savings proposed by DoD, robbing the readiness accounts to sustain pet acquisition projects and to cover expected increases in military pay and compensation.\textsuperscript{101}

In practical terms, this all means that a much feared hollowing out of the U.S. military could be very hard to avoid, with obviously quite negative consequences for America’s ability to perform its global security roles, including those related to the pivot. This will almost certainly be the case if sequestration returns in full force in FY 2016, and Secretary Hagel stressed this particular point when he briefed the press on the FY 2015 budget. “Sequestration,” he argued, “requires cuts so deep, “The resulting force [from sequestration] would be too small... to fully execute the president’s defense strategy”

\textsuperscript{100} U.S. Department of Defense, “Remarks by Secretary Hagel and Gen. Dempsey.”

\textsuperscript{101} Bryan Clark and Todd Harrison, “How Congress Is Hollowing Out the Military,” \textit{Político Magazine}, May 21, 2014. Not surprisingly, few members of Congress would willingly approve savings proposed by the Pentagon based on the cancellation or curtailment of weapons programs based in their home states, and fewer still want to be on record as opposing funding to support military pay and benefits.
so abrupt, so quickly that we cannot shrink the size of our military fast enough. In the short term...[that] would almost certainly result in a hollow force...one that is not capable of fulfilling assigned missions. In the longer term...the resulting force would be too small...to fully execute the president’s defense strategy.”

But even if sequestration is pushed further off or better yet repealed, the smaller, but presumably better-equipped and trained force proposed by Hagel might not be sufficient to meet America’s obligations. Hit the hardest and reduced to its smallest size since 1940, the Army, for example, “would find itself hard-pressed,” according to one prominent U.S. defense analyst, “to carry out such basic missions as maintaining two brigade combat teams (BCTs) in Europe – where they serve as a critical check on Russian expansionism,” a mission, it is worth noting, that has become more important to America’s NATO allies as proof that the rebalance to Asia (and the expense associated with it) will not undermine the security of Europe. No doubt, such concerns would increase exponentially were sequester-level force structure cuts added to those anticipated under the FY 2015 budget.

The Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force would not be cut as deeply as the Army, but they would also face major operational challenges as a result of force reductions, the net effect of which could be especially worrisome in the Asia-Pacific given the relative greater importance of all three services to the pivot. Facing an almost 13 percent shrinkage in size under Hagel’s proposal, the only way the Marines could meet their overseas commitments, it has been suggested, would be “by reducing ‘dwell time’ at home, thereby putting a major strain on Marines and their families and possibly hurting retention.” The Navy, so central to military operations in the largely maritime Pacific theater, could be even more hamstrung, especially if, following a return of sequester-level cuts, the number of aircraft carriers is reduced to ten and the overall fleet from today’s 289 ships to as few

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104 Ibid., 28.
as 250 to 270. In that event, quantity would truly begin to matter just as much as quality, for at some point it becomes impossible “for a shrinking number of [ships, no matter how advanced...] to patrol all the world’s sea lanes and deal with threats ranging from pirates to the navies of Iran and China” to the degree required. Already under the Hagel budget plan, the purchase of LCS ships, tagged to play such an important engagement role as part of the rebalance, will be capped at thirty-two (rather than the fifty-two previously called for), and, if sequestration is not repealed, procurement of the Navy’s F-35C JSF will be delayed for at least two years. For its part, with a return of sequestration in 2016 and thereafter, the Air Force would have to endure, on top of a slowdown in the procurement of unmanned ISR platforms already imposed under the Hagel budget, the loss of a sizeable block of Global Hawk ISR aircraft, major delays in the fielding of its F-35A JSFs, and significant decreases in flying hours for both manned and unmanned systems, and, as a result, a big drop

105 Ibid. The reduction of the carrier fleet to ten, when current requirements really call for from twelve to fifteen ships, could have an especially deleterious effect on the Navy’s ability to maintain adequate forward presence in key strategic theaters, including in the Asia-Pacific region. By way of illustrating this point, Mackenzie Eaglen and Bryan McGrath recently noted that even with a fleet of eleven no American carriers were deployed to the Mediterranean at the outbreak of conflict in Libya, when the U.S. ambassador to Libya was killed, when Syria “stepped over President Obama’s ‘red line’” on chemical weapons, or when Putin invaded Crimea. Similar gaps in coverage could certainly arise in the Pacific and Indian Oceans if the carrier force is further reduced. See Mackenzie Eaglen and Bryan McGrath, “America’s Navy Needs 12 Carriers and 3 Hubs,” American Enterprise Institute, March 11, 2014, http://www.aei.org/article/foreign-and-defense-policy/defense/americas-navy-needs-12-carriers-and-three-hubs/.

106 Ibid.

107 U.S. Department of Defense, “Remarks by Secretary Hagel and Gen. Dempsey.” As noted earlier, Hagel did, however, call for the possible development of a new frigate-sized surface combatant that would be more lethal and better able to survive in what he believes will be an increasingly high-risk environment in the Asia-Pacific region. While it is quite well suited to operations in relatively permissive operational environments, the LCS may not, as Hagel put it, have sufficient levels of “independent protection and firepower to operate and survive against a more advanced military adversary and emerging new technologies,” especially in open ocean areas of the Pacific.
in overall readiness.\textsuperscript{108} By 2019, the Air Force’s bomber, fighter, and surveillance inventory, representing its decisive combat enabling capabilities, could be cut virtually in half.\textsuperscript{109}

The release of the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review in early March 2014, moreover, did little to allay concerns that budget cuts along the lines outlined above could in time lead to a hollowed-out U.S. military force posture. The National Defense Panel (NDP), a bipartisan commission tasked by Congress and DoD with providing an independent assessment of the QDR, concluded in July 2014, for example, that the defense capabilities and capacities called for by the QDR, while perhaps appropriate, would “clearly exceed budget resources made available” to the Pentagon, and that the resulting shortfalls in funding would inevitably produce a force structure that was “inadequate, given the future strategic and operational environment.”\textsuperscript{110} The net effect of such an under-resourced military, the NDP went on to say, would be to “[prompt] our current and potential allies and adversaries to question our commitment and resolve,”\textsuperscript{111} including, no doubt, those in the Asia-Pacific region whom the rebalance is meant to reassure or, as the case may be, counter. Not surprisingly, the NDP endorsed, as did the QDR, further relief from, if not the outright repeal of, the sequestration provisions of the Budget Control Act, provisions it deemed to be “a serious strategic mistake on the part of the United States.”\textsuperscript{112} It called as well for a greater effort “to protect and enhance the technological advantages that are central to U.S. military superiority,” a priority that the QDR also noted and that U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Frank Kendall flagged in testimony before the House

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\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 1.
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Armed Services Committee back in January 2014. Of particular relevance to the pivot, Kendall emphasized at the time that when it came to “technological superiority, the Department of Defense is being challenged in ways that I have not seen in decades, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.”

The QDR also appeared to signal a slight shift in regional strategic focus to one less single-mindedly directed toward the Asia-Pacific. While noting that DoD was still “committed to implementing the President’s objective of rebalancing U.S. engagement toward this critical region,” the sense of urgency and certainty associated with the 2012 DSG’s statement that “we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region” – words often viewed as the official announcement that the pivot was underway – was absent. At the very beginning of the section on maintaining America’s presence and posture abroad, the QDR also coupled further progress on the pivot with concerns about broader global security in a much more explicit way than any wording in the DSG, noting that DoD will both “continue to rebalance and sustain our global posture [emphasis added].” At the same time, it stated in much stronger language than the DSG that “the United States also has enduring interests in the Middle East,” that it “will remain fully committed to the security of [its] partners in the region,” and that it “will place even

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113 Ibid., 3. See also testimony by the Honorable Frank Kendall III, U.S. under secretary of defense for acquisition, technology, and logistics, at a January 28, 2014, hearing of the U.S. House Armed Services Committee entitled “Rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific Region: Examining Its Implementation.”

114 Ibid. Kendall pointed in particular to the effect that China’s investment in anti-ship missiles, stealth fighter jets, hypersonic vehicles, and other high-tech weaponry was having on eroding American battlefield dominance.
more emphasis on building [their] capacity.”115 Gone as well was the DSG’s description of America’s European allies as mainly “producers of security rather than consumers of it” (and presumably less in need of U.S. military support), replaced by affirmations of Washington’s “deep and abiding interests in maintaining and expanding European security” and its desire to “continue to work with allies and partners to promote [Euro-Atlantic] regional security.”116 Finally, the QDR gave considerably more attention than the DSG to the strategic importance of Africa and Latin America, pledging that DoD would “maximize the impact of the U.S. presence” in both regions.117

Precisely how these QDR adjustments to the “Pacific first” tone of the DSG will play out in practice remains to be seen. At the very least, they suggest that the Obama administration – having learned some tough lessons from two years of multiple crises involving such diverse global hotspots as Mali, Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Crimea, and eastern Ukraine – now realizes, if it had not before, that the rebalance to Asia must be explained and implemented in a way that does not imply a turning away from other important regional priorities. The wider strategic perspective outlined in the QDR probably also reflects the observation made by one senior administration official – an observation undoubtedly shared by many others – that no matter how much President Obama wished to focus more on Asia and various pivot-related objectives, his attention and that of the top leadership at State and DoD has too often been diverted to the immediate demands of crises that have erupted outside of Asia, such as those listed above. This has happened so frequently since 2012 that “time and again,” this same official complained, “the urgent overwhelmed the important.”118 Going forward, therefore, funding and forces that might otherwise have been devoted to the Asia rebalance may very well be directed to areas of crisis overseas that did not appear to be

116 Ibid.
117 Ibid., 36.
118 Sanger and Landler, “Obama’s Strategic Shift to Asia.”
unstable (or likely to become so) when the pivot was first announced. Along these very lines, the NDP, for example, emphasized, in its review of the 2014 QDR, that, while the QDR’s references to the “centrality of East Asia” and the “continued importance of the Middle East” made sense, current risks to security triggered by Russia’s actions in and around Ukraine, together with Moscow’s ongoing efforts to gain greater leverage over former Warsaw Pact countries that are now members of NATO, required more concerted efforts in 2014 and beyond by the United States and its NATO allies to develop a more robust Alliance presence in Central and Eastern Europe.\(^{119}\)

Picking up on this last point, the Crimea/Ukraine crisis and the U.S. response to it (or perceived lack thereof) have had a particularly strong effect since early 2014 on how America’s regional allies view the rebalance and on what it suggests to them about Washington’s willingness (and need) to back up its rhetoric on a strategic pivot to Asia with credible, concrete actions. In Europe, for example, Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its ongoing threats against Ukraine have prompted a number of NATO allies to call more forcefully (as the Polish defense minister has) for a “re-pivot” of U.S. attention to Europe and for a shoring up of the Alliance’s collective defense capabilities.\(^{120}\) More is said about this in chapter 3 of this report, which explores European perspectives on the pivot in detail. Suffice it to say here, however, that NATO European reactions to Russia’s assertiveness are likely to affect the Asia rebalance strategy in two specific ways. First, America’s allies in Europe are now more likely to reserve for Euro-centric territorial


\(^{120}\) See, for example, an interview on this issue with the Honorable Tomasz Siemoniak by Marcus Weisgerber, *Defense News*, April 22, 2014.
defense operations whatever European military resources may have been available in theory before the Crimea/Ukraine crisis to support out-of-area missions in Europe’s near abroad (in North Africa and the Arab Gulf, for example), support that was seen by many in both Europe and the United States as a way to help free up American forces that might otherwise be engaged there to swing to the Asia-Pacific region. Second, as a result of this Euro-centric preference, the likelihood that NATO European allies might actually be willing to contribute, however marginally, to the defense component of the rebalance within Asia proper – contributions that could lend the pivot, according to a number of senior American and European strategists, an important degree of transatlantic legitimacy121 – would appear to be even slimmer than it was before. For its part, the Obama administration appears in fact to be taking the NDP’s recommendations on European security to heart, unveiling plans in the run-up to NATO’s September 2014 summit in Wales for a $1 billion European reassurance initiative to fund joint exercises, additional rotations of U.S. troops to Europe, and various military infrastructure projects in NATO countries.122

As for the reactions of America’s friends and allies in Asia to Russia’s land grab in Crimea and its ongoing military pressure on Ukraine, some have clearly drawn a connection, rightly or wrongly, between Washington’s responses to Russian military brinkmanship in and around Ukraine and what they believe it may or may not be willing to do to counter similar efforts at a land grab and military pressure by China in contested areas of the East and South China Seas. There remains, in particular, a good deal of unease in a number of Asian capitals – especially in Tokyo, but also in Seoul and Manila, and perhaps in Hanoi as well (given China’s recent maritime presence and drilling efforts in the Paracel Islands area) – that American

121 For more on the logic of and opportunities for transatlantic cooperation on the pivot, see Hans Binnendijk, “Global Trends and the Pivot,” in Binnendijk, ed., A Transatlantic Pivot to Asia.

military support may not be forthcoming, based on the Crimea and Ukraine examples, should China try to seize a disputed island and/or to defend by use of force its claims to sovereignty. Despite the clear differences that exist, for example, between the situations in Crimea and the Senkakus (especially with respect to a U.S. commitment and capacity to act), Japan has been especially anxious to receive explicit assurances from the Obama administration that the Senkakus are indeed covered under Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. It remains to be seen if President Obama’s statement that they are included during his April 2014 visit to Tokyo will prove to be a sufficient level of guarantee and an adequate deterrent to future mischief by Beijing.

On that particular score, more than a few Japanese officials and strategists, it should be noted, continue to worry that the president’s statement may be just one more “red line” that he may choose to ignore – as many believe he did in Syria and might do again in the event of further Russian advances into Ukraine – if Japan were to request U.S. military support in a confrontation with China. To a certain degree, such worries over American resolve and reliability, in combination with concerns about the impact of current and future cuts to the U.S. defense budget, have begun to erode the confidence of America’s friends and allies in Asia that the rebalance can ever be implemented and sustained as originally advertised. Such concerns were heightened, moreover, in a number of Asian capitals following President Obama’s speech to the graduating class of West Point on May 28, 2014. In what was touted as a major foreign policy address that would, in essence, set forth an “Obama doctrine” for U.S. military engagement overseas, the president dismissed those who “say that every problem has a military solution,” going on to argue that “the United States [should]
use military force, unilaterally if necessary, when our core interests are at stake,” with those “core interests” being defined quite narrowly.\footnote{123}{See “Transcript of President Obama’s Commencement Address at West Point,” \textit{New York Times}, May 28, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/29/us/politics/transcript-of-president-obamas-commencement-address-at-west-point.html?_r=0; and Editorial Board, “At West Point President Obama Binds America’s Hands on Foreign Affairs,” \textit{Washington Post}, May 28, 2014.} Most worrisome from an Asian perspective, however, was the fact that the speech made no mention at all of the “pivot to Asia,” despite its being a centerpiece of the administration’s global strategy, an omission that sent “mixed signals to Asian countries about what really constitutes an American core interest in the region” and whether their security would be part of it.\footnote{124}{These quotes from Asian newspapers and the ones that follow were drawn from a foreign press summary produced by the State Department after the West Point address. See U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, “RRU Special Report: President Obama’s West Point Speech,” OpenSource.gov, May 30, 2014.}

A number of leading news outlets from across the Asia-Pacific region expressed concern as well over the practical implications of President Obama’s statement in the speech that America “should not go it alone” when the use of force could not be avoided, but rather “mobilize allies and partners to take collective action.”\footnote{125}{See “Transcript of President Obama’s Commencement Address at West Point.”} Japan’s most widely read newspaper, the \textit{Yomiori Shimbun}, for example, was quick to question the utility of such a “cooperation-oriented approach,” suggesting that it would be sorely tested as “an effective deterrent against China and Russia, which continue to take unilateral actions backed by force.” More specifically, a prominent Australian paper complained that the speech “lacked detail about China’s rising military clout... and was equivocal in how the US would react to further Sino aggression.” Picking up on the president’s emphasis on the need for collective action by partners in the future, a top South Korean commentator openly worried that America’s allies in Asia now had to be prepared, despite the pivot, to “bear more of the responsibility for their security” in the event of local crises. Not surprisingly, Chinese media drove this point home even harder, suggesting that the West Point
speech was simply one more indication that the Obama administration would not be able to deliver on its “return to the Pacific” rhetoric, with the People’s Daily going so far as to depict the United States as “struggling to be the world’s boss.” More pointedly, Obama’s push for multilateral responses to security challenges was based, the Daily charged, on America’s “inability to match its ambition,” be that in Asia or elsewhere.

Apart from the critical comments from China (which continues to see the rebalance primarily as an aggressive effort aimed at containing Chinese influence), these quotations from regional media provide clear evidence of an additional dynamic that could also affect the fate of the pivot. Simply put, it is the fact that while U.S. allies and potential partners in the Asia-Pacific still very much welcome an American rebalance to the region, they increasingly believe that it is not being properly resourced or implemented in an effective or consistent manner. On this specific point, a recent survey of “strategic elites” in a number of key Asia-Pacific countries conducted by the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) revealed that an average of 79 percent of those surveyed supported the rebalance (ranging from a low of 54 percent in Thailand to a high of 96 percent in Singapore), but that a much lower percentage (some 50 percent of those who favored it) felt that the administration was doing all that it could or should to make it a reality. Among the chief reasons for skepticism regarding the pivot, according to this report, were growing concerns among those surveyed about the future of the U.S. defense budget, the diversionary effect of multiple crises


127 See Michael J. Green and Nicholas Szechenyi, Power and Order in Asia: A Survey of Regional Expectations (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2014), 12.
outside of Asia, and a seeming decline in enthusiasm for a strategic shift to the Pacific among top leadership in the second (versus the first) Obama administration.\footnote{Ibid.} Changing attitudes, therefore, in the very countries that stand to benefit most from a broader U.S. engagement in the region – reinforced by a more widely held sense among them that Washington has become both less committed to the pivot and less able to set it in place – could become an increasingly influential factor in determining how and at what pace the policy is pursued. Local authorities, after all, are not likely to go out on a limb for a policy on which those who developed and promoted it appear unable to deliver.

\begin{quote}
94 percent of the South Korean public consider the U.S.-ROK alliance a strategic necessity, but only 55 percent support the pivot.
\end{quote}

For a striking example of how public opinion even in one of America’s closest allies in Asia can complicate the pivot’s implementation, one needs to look no further than a recent poll conducted by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul, one of South Korea’s most respected and influential foreign policy think tanks. With fully 94 percent of the South Korean population indicating that they saw the U.S.-Republic of Korea alliance as a strategic necessity, and with that view shared broadly across all age cohorts and political parties, it would be reasonable to assume an equally high level of support for the rebalance. In reality, however, only some 55 percent of the South Korean public indicated that they fully supported the pivot.\footnote{See Karl Friedhoff, “South Korean Views on the U.S. Rebalance to Asia,” Academic Paper Series, Korea Economic Institute of America (KEI), Washington, D.C., May 8, 2014, 3.} The reasons for this apparent contrast in how the alliance and the rebalance are viewed are several and complicated. In the first place, there is a growing fear among South Koreans that the military components of the pivot, while welcome
in the context of strengthening deterrence against North Korea, will ultimately generate an increase in tension and potential for conflict with China.\textsuperscript{130} This is something that they very much want to avoid, given that China has become Korea’s biggest trading partner and that its regional influence, in their view, is likely to eclipse America’s in about ten years’ time. Second, the pivot is seen to be encouraging an unwelcome (again, in their view) rise in Japan’s military capabilities, a development about which many average South Koreans remain quite suspicious, given Japan’s colonial past, its failure (from a South Korean perspective) to adequately atone for World War 2-related abuses, and its claims of sovereignty over islands that Korea also claims. And thirdly, as Washington has tried to highlight the economic and diplomatic aspects of the rebalance to demonstrate that it is not primarily a military initiative, a goodly number of South Koreans – especially those in their thirties and forties – tend to respond that this is just a “PR effort” to hide the true character and goals of the pivot, which, again, they see as mainly military.

The ironic aspect of these trends in public perceptions is that military steps taken by the United States to shore up defenses against North Korean provocation and nuclear blackmail – steps that Washington sees as part and parcel of the pivot – are viewed with considerable favor by most South Koreans, as they are seen to be valuable enhancements to the U.S.-Korea alliance, which, again, is roundly supported by all.\textsuperscript{131} To the extent, therefore, that the United States can cast future pivot-related deployments as necessary enhancements to the overall alliance, public support for the rebalance in general could possibly be increased. This is particularly true, the polls suggest, with respect to initiatives that could be taken to reassure South Koreans that they remain protected by the U.S. nuclear umbrella, that Washington would retaliate in kind to any North Korean nuclear attack on the South, and that improving extended

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 6, 7. In contrast to the CSIS survey discussed earlier, the Asan poll focused on the general public rather than the policy elite in South Korea, who, as confirmed by CSIS, have a more favorable view of the pivot.

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 5, 6.
deterrence for South Korea as a whole remains an American priority as part of the rebalance. Whether or not such assurances can be convincingly conveyed in view of other factors highlighted in the CSIS report – and elaborated upon in this chapter – as potential brakes on forward progress toward an Asian rebalance remains to be seen. If that cannot be done, the South Korean public, like their counterparts in a number of other Asia-Pacific countries that Washington seeks to more fully engage, may feel more and more “caught between the United States and China as China continues to rise and the pivot strengthens [or appears to].” The key take-away from all the above, however, is that making good on the pivot is a complicated business at a complicated time, requiring, in addition to adequate funding and steady political support from the highest levels of the administration and from Congress, a deeper understanding of how it is viewed within the region and what can be done to ensure that those views remain favorable.

**Conclusion**

In summary, then, the current state of affairs with regard to an American pivot to Asia is something of a mixed bag. On the one hand, U.S. military forces are being strengthened, deployment patterns adjusted, and arrangements for closer security cooperation with allies and partners set in place throughout the Asia-Pacific region. There has been as well an effort to engage more effectively in South and Southeast Asia, while retaining a potent and more flexible posture in Northeast Asia. Admittedly, some of this activity has its roots in decisions made by earlier administrations, and a number of recent deployments to the region were more a matter of returning troops to their traditional Pacific area assignments in the wake of the Iraq/Afghanistan drawdowns than signs of a truly new focus on Asia. Moreover, many of the new weapons platforms and military technologies now slated for deployment to the Asia-Pacific (or newly based there) have long been in the works, and cannot really be seen as inspired by the pivot.

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132 Ibid., 6.
At the operational level, at least, it seems fair to conclude that slow but steady progress toward the pivot has indeed been made, and that the prospects are good for further progress along the same lines, barring a return to extended sequester-level cuts to the defense budget.

On the other hand, the diplomatic, economic, and civil society aspects of the rebalance have not fared quite as well or taken root as quickly. Some of this obviously can be traced back to overall reductions in federal funding as a result of sequestration, as well as to the fact that it often takes a good deal of time to see concrete results from such activities. They are long-term affairs by and large, without the immediate and quite visible impact that a deployment of Marines, a sizeable naval exercise, or an emergency airlift would have. Over and above these problems related to the non-military dimensions of the pivot, however, there is a growing unease among U.S. allies and partners in Asia over what they fear may be a reduced willingness on the part of the administration to use military force when necessary to defend their strategic interests. And it is on this specific question of America’s readiness to do what it takes to assure the security of its close allies and friends that the potential for a real disconnect between the rhetoric and the reality of the pivot is most likely, and it is a disconnect that could quite seriously undermine regional support for the rebalance overall. It is the question, moreover, that weighs most heavily on the minds of America’s key allies and partners in other regions of strategic importance as they consider the impact of the pivot on their own security, and what that may require them to do to strengthen their overall defenses. Answers to this last question
will determine, in turn, the degree to which these non-Asian countries will be able or even want to try to help implement the pivot in any particular way. It is to an assessment of these and related issues that this study now turns.
TO DATE, THE most direct and immediate non-Asian critiques of the U.S. rebalance policy have come from America’s NATO European allies and partner countries. Almost three years after the official announcement of the pivot, many Atlantic Alliance members in particular are still struggling to come to grips with the rationale for, and long-term implications of, Washington’s strategic shift toward Asia. To begin with, they take issue with statements made in the January 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (or DSG) that “most European countries are now producers of security rather than consumers of it,” and that this condition of relative European security, combined with the Pentagon’s troop drawdowns in Iraq and Afghanistan, had created a justifiable “strategic opportunity to rebalance the U.S. military investment in Europe, moving from a focus on current conflicts toward a focus on future capabilities.”

It is not that the Europeans reject the need for greater efforts to deal with Asia-Pacific security challenges or the need for (and capacity of) European countries to pick up more of the defense burden in Europe. Rather, the new strategic guidance, as outlined in the DSG, seemed to them to suggest, as also reported in the Economist in January 2012, that the American military presence in Europe was an expensive relic of

the Cold War, and that there were no significant threats to European security other than Iran’s developing a nuclear-capable ballistic missile, a threat that presumably would soon be countered by the new missile-defense system that President Obama was proposing to deploy on and around NATO territory.

Even in 2011, the picture looked much less rosy to many Europeans, who noted that the Euro-Atlantic theater and its near abroad were far from being an oasis of stability. After Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 and went on to support a separatist movement in eastern Ukraine, triggering the worst crisis in East-West relations since the end of the Cold War, the validity of this point of view, many in Europe assumed, would become glaringly obvious to Washington, perhaps sufficiently so to inspire, as Poland’s defense minister put it, an American “re-pivot to Europe.”\(^{135}\) Certainly, Washington had ample reason to do so, in their view, given the need to reassure NATO countries in Central and East Europe, especially the Baltic states, that the Alliance – and the United States, in particular – would do whatever was necessary to defend their territorial sovereignty under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which states that an armed attack against one member is an attack on all and would open the door to a collective defense response by the allies. Quite apart from Ukraine and Russia (and the potential that future hostilities between them could spill over into NATO territory), the fifty-one-country area of responsibility overseen by U.S. European Command (USEUCOM), European strategists are quick to point out, also includes such hot spots as Georgia’s borders with Russia, Kosovo’s border with Serbia, and Turkey’s border with Iraq and Syria, as well as the whole of Israel, where future conflict and instability may well require sizeable U.S. and allied military operations of one kind or another. Indeed, the Turkish border has loomed as especially important in recent months, as the Obama administration and leading European governments have taken steps to provide assistance to Syrian refugees, to support moderate elements of the Syrian opposition, and to degrade the combat capacity of the

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\(^{135}\) See, for example, Marcus Weisgerber, “Interview: Tomasz Siemoniak, Poland’s Defense Minister,” *Defense News*, April 22, 2014.
so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

With this last point in mind, many European experts have expressed worries over Washington’s repeated assertions that American ground troops will not be committed again to a major counterinsurgency operation in the Middle East or Southwest Asia once the drawdown from Afghanistan is completed in 2015, warning that “it is betting too heavily that counterterrorism can be left to special forces and armed drones.”\footnote{136 “The Downgrading of Europe,” Economist.} For this very reason, they also remain uneasy over the statement included in the 2014 QDR that the U.S. military as a whole “will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, pro-longed stability operations;” a paradigm shift which to them appeared to signal that much of the expertise in counterinsurgency that was gained in ten years of irregular combat in Iraq and Afghanistan – expertise that could be crucial in the fight against ISIS and could be relevant to future efforts to counter hybrid operations along the lines conducted by Russia and its proxies in Crimea and Ukraine – was being downgraded unwisely. More worrisome still, Europeans fear the consequences of the QDR’s reconceptualization of America’s approach to regional conflict, according to which U.S. forces will now focus only on “defeating a regional adversary in a large-scale multi-phased campaign, and denying the objectives of – or imposing unacceptable costs on – a second aggressor in another region.”\footnote{137 U.S. Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review 2014, Washington, D.C., March 2014, vi, 19.}

This specific phrasing, it is suggested by some in Europe, was simply the latest attempt by the Pentagon to put a positive spin on the administration’s decision announced in the 2012 DSG that it no longer...
subscribed to the long-held view among strategic planners that the United States should be able to conduct and prevail in two major military conflicts in two different regions simultaneously. This, in turn, has raised doubts among America’s European allies that Washington could ever manage a truly serious challenge to their security and to that of one (or more) of America’s Asian allies at the same time, especially in an era of sequester-defined U.S. defense budgets and rising tensions in the Middle East. Given the priority assigned to the Asia rebalance by President Obama, together with his expanding focus on countering ISIS, it is perhaps understandable that those in Europe who hold views along these lines fear that Europe’s security will inevitably get the proverbial short end of the stick.

European analysts have also criticized the rebalance policy for accelerating the closure of multiple U.S. military bases on the continent even though these bases remain closer to many of the fights that American forces may be committed to in the future than bases in the United States. Since 2004, for example, USEUCOM has closed or consolidated over two hundred bases of various sizes across the European theater, and U.S. military installations in Europe as a whole have been reduced by more than 75 percent from their peak in the 1950s. With the number of European-based American soldiers dramatically reduced, and given that the current euro crisis could lead to deeper and extended reductions in European defense spending (despite recent pledges to the contrary at the 2014 NATO summit in Wales), Washington’s NATO European allies and partners remain concerned over the risks associated with such a reduced U.S. footprint in Europe, a worry that increased after the pivot was proposed. Indeed, during his

138 House and Senate Armed Services Committees, testimony of Admiral James Stavridis, USN, Commander, United States European Command, before the 113th Congress, 2013.
139 “NATO Summit: Reassurance and Effective Responses,” IISS Strategic Comments, September 2014, 2. For the first time in a NATO summit communique, the communique approved at the September 2014 Wales summit makes explicit reference to the goal of member-state defense budgets reaching 2 percent of GDP, pledging to “aim to move towards the 2% guideline within a decade.” In the communique NATO leaders also agree that 20 percent of their defense expenditures should go toward equipment purchases as well as to research and development.
2013 testimony before the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, then-USEUCOM Commander Admiral James Stavridis admitted that European Command comprised at that point less than 5 percent of the U.S. military overall. Adding to Europe’s trepidation was USEUCOM’s announcement of further significant force-level cuts triggered in part by the Asia rebalance, including the withdrawal of two heavy brigade combat teams and the phasing out of the Army’s V Corps Headquarters, along with three forward-stationed Air Force squadrons and a host of other Army and Air Force enablers.\footnote{140} With the removal of the two brigade combat teams noted above, the number of Army troops based in Europe – which constitutes about 45 percent of the total number of American forces deployed there – could drop by the end of 2014 to about 29,000 (with 25,000 in Germany alone), most of whom would be serving as logistical enablers and training partners for allied forces. Strikingly, this would represent an 87 percent reduction from the approximately 217,000 U.S. Army troops posted in Europe at the height of the Cold War.\footnote{141} It remains to be seen, of course, whether decisions taken at the Wales summit to boost allied readiness and increase the rotational presence of U.S. forces in Europe will halt or reverse this trend,\footnote{142} but it seems safe to assume that any adjustments along these lines will not lead to a significant increase in Europe-based American troops.

So, too, the steady downsizing of the U.S. military footprint in Europe has generated a great deal of angst on both sides of the Atlantic about the reduced capability and flexibility of U.S. forces to react swiftly to unexpected events in and around the region. This is especially true since, in addition to providing forces for out-of-area NATO missions, USEUCOM is a key service provider for two other important geographic combatant commands, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) and U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM). According to Jim Thomas, a former deputy assistant secretary of defense for strategy, additional base closures are therefore “more likely to result in the loss of facilities that would be critical in contingencies in North Africa or the Middle East,” thereby reducing the ability of American naval and air forces to maintain resupply and air refueling capabilities for any engagement in those regions.\textsuperscript{143} Some European observers have even cautioned that the prospect of the further elimination of combat brigades from the continent runs the risk of “downgrading the United States European Command into little more than a hollowed out headquarters.”\textsuperscript{144} Significantly, they argue, the training and exercises USEUCOM conducts with America’s NATO allies and with NATO partner countries help to build military capacity, interoperability, and a habit of multilateral collaboration that might not otherwise be possible, and that could be utilized when needed in such diverse, but increasingly important, theaters of operations as North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Caucasus and Central Asia, if not in the Asia-Pacific region itself. By contrast, according to the commander of the U.S. Army in Europe (USAREUR), no units based in America currently engage in such theater security cooperation and partnership capacity-building programs.\textsuperscript{145} Further, as one European observer put it bluntly as early as May 2012, “coalition operations over the past twenty years, from Desert Storm to Operation Unified Protector in Libya, demonstrate that the only way the United States and its partners – including from the Middle East

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\item\textsuperscript{143} John Vandiver, “The Struggle to Downsize EUCOM,” \textit{Stars and Stripes}, March 2, 2014.
\item\textsuperscript{144} “The Downgrading of Europe,” \textit{Economist}.
\item\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
European Views on the Pivot and Asian Security

and Asia – can operate together is by following NATO doctrines, procedures, and standards.”

European security experts warn that to move away from or undermine this proven approach would be like “trying to switch from digital to analog communication. It is always a feasible alternative, but at what cost in terms of efficiency and effectiveness?” Moreover, European critiques of the rebalance have also emphasized that NATO remains “the only vehicle that reliably provides partners when America wants to do something and does not want to do it on its own,” cautioning that the Pentagon’s strategic guidance risks talking up the importance of partners while at the same time undermining the effectiveness of USEUCOM, which does more than any other command to make those partnerships work in Washington’s interest. Many at NATO do understand, of course, that a broader shift in American focus toward Asia is inevitable, and most, as discussed throughout this chapter, wish Washington success as a strategic balancer in the region, but they worry as well that it could lead to an overall weakening, or what some have termed “benign neglect,” of the Atlantic Alliance, which could have, as outlined above, a far-reaching effect on the success of future coalition operations.

European Economic and Strategic Interests in Asia

Although the Pentagon’s release of the DSG in 2012 did trigger much heated debate and discussion in Europe, including with regard to the rising strategic importance of Asia, European powers and the EU continue to grapple with the challenge of finding a common and coordinated strategy for themselves toward the Asia-Pacific region. So far, for example, there has been little discussion of a substantial European role in East Asian security, with the debate focusing almost entirely on a Europe-centric agenda for dealing with the perceived

147 Ibid.
148 “The Downgrading of Europe,” Economist.
American disengagement from the region’s political and security crises, and on what that might mean for Europeans as providers of security in their immediate neighborhood. To the extent that they do broach the subject, most European countries, with a few exceptions, adhere to the overarching assumption that the United States will continue to act as the predominant external military power in the Asia-Pacific. Any potential role that Europe may have in East Asian security, moreover, is often weighed first and foremost in terms of its likely effect on transatlantic realities, with the key question for many being how Europe might be able to strengthen Washington’s commitment to the Alliance by helping as it can to facilitate U.S. strategy in Asia. The focus, in other words, is more on shoring up Europe’s security than on making any unique contribution to Asia’s.

In many ways, of course, the Europeans’ lack of attention to matters of military importance in the Asia-Pacific region is understandable, given that EU security and defense policies have primarily focused on areas closer to home, from the Eastern Atlantic to the Western Indian Ocean. In fact, only two of the EU’s twenty-seven peace operations to date have been deployed beyond Europe’s broad neighborhood, namely those to Afghanistan and Aceh in Indonesia. At the same time, Europe’s near abroad has become remarkably turbulent and taken the spotlight off Asia, with a civil war raging in Syria and the rise of ISIS, ongoing instability in Iraq and Libya, major concerns about Iran’s nuclear program, and continued violence in eastern Ukraine, among other challenges. As Herman Van Rompuy, president of the European Council, pointed out before an audience in London as early as May 2012, “Europe is clearly not a Pacific power

149 See Rem Korteweg, “A Presence Farther East: Can Europe Play a Strategic Role in the Asia-Pacific Region?” Center for European Reform, July 2014, 2. As Korteweg has put it, “If European governments fail to play a role in Asian security – an area of strategic interest to the United States – Washington may further question the value of transatlantic security cooperation in promoting global stability.”

and will not become one: geography still matters!” Soon after, in its latest Guidelines on the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy in East Asia released in June 2012, the European External Action Service (EEAS) echoed that perspective, stressing that it is “the credibility of U.S. defense guarantees” in that part of the world that is really “essential for the region’s stability.” Former U.S. Secretary of State Clinton and Catherine Ashton, the EU’s first high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, did release a joint statement at the July 2012 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit calling for closer U.S.-EU cooperation on Asian security, but follow-up since then has been slow and very low-key, reflecting the skepticism, it is said in Brussels, of those in the EU hierarchy who wish more than anything else to “present an independent face to Asia.”

To a large extent, the present apathy in some national capitals vis-à-vis Asian-Pacific security is also the result of a European mindset that has tended primarily to see markets rather than enemies or potential rivals in that region, generally preferring to “trade rather than fight” where Asia is concerned. Indeed, the Asia-Pacific area is now emerging as one of the most important markets for Europe’s economic growth, particularly as Asia’s share of the world economy continues to rise rapidly. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), for instance, Asian countries contributed 18 percent while the eurozone (an area consisting of eighteen of the EU’s twenty-eight member states) accounted for 17 percent of global GDP in 2012, compared with 8 percent and nearly 21 percent, respectively, only ten years ago. In addition, in 2010 China became one of the

152 Keohane, “The EU’s Role in East Asian Security.”
153 IFPA interview in July 2013 with EU officials.
154 Keohane, “The EU’s Role in East Asian Security.”
fastest-growing trade markets for EU exports, importing a record €113 billion worth of goods and services, up 37 percent from 2009.\(^156\) Similarly, in the same year Japan ranked as the sixth-largest importer from the EU, and in 2011 ASEAN members became as a group the EU’s third-largest trading partner, just behind the United States and China.\(^157\) Overall, according to official figures, some 28 percent of the EU’s external trade in 2012 was with East Asia, an impressive 5 percentage points more than its total trade that year with North and South America combined.\(^158\) Of that total, moreover, China alone accounted for 12.5 percent, ASEAN for 5.2 percent, and Japan for 3.4 percent, and that at a time when the United States accounted for just 14.3 percent of EU’s global trade.\(^159\)

It is also true that the financial meltdown of late 2007 and the following public debt crisis in Europe not only undermined the leading position in global trade decision making that the EU had enjoyed up to that time, but they also reinforced European perceptions that the center of economic gravity was shifting toward Asia, prompting many EU governments to focus their foreign policies on short-term geoeconomic interests, especially trade and investment deals, rather than on longer-term geostrategic concerns.\(^160\) This increasingly prevalent mindset was evident even shortly before the economic crisis, when Europeans shocked American and Japanese observers in the period from 2004 to mid-2005 by discussing the possibility of lifting their arms embargo on China, initially without much thought about the potential impact this might have on the strategic environment in East Asia. Instead, much of the arms restrictions debate, which eventually stalled, revolved around those who wished to increase their trade with a fast-growing China and others who opposed weapons sales to


\(^{157}\) Ibid.


\(^{159}\) Korteweg, “A Presence Farther East,”10.

\(^{160}\) Keohane, “The EU’s Role in East Asian Security.”
European Union in the World
Trade Data

Top EU Trade Partners and Their Share of the EU28 Merchandise Trade in 2013

- USA – 14.2%
- China – 12.5%
- Russia – 9.5%
- Switzerland – 7.7%
- Norway – 4.1%
- Turkey – 3.7%
- Japan – 3.2%
- South Korea – 2.2%

Source: Adapted from multiple sources. Data from Eurostat.

European Views on the Pivot and Asian Security

Import and Export Data

North America
- 2004: 176.4, 2013: 258.2

Europe (excl. EU)
- 2004: 253.3, 2013: 477.6

Asia
- 2004: 424.1, 2013: 538.2

Oceania & Polar Regions
- 2004: 477.6, 2013: 538.2

Africa

South America
- 2004: 46.0, 2013: 72.6

Central America & Caribbean
- 2004: 18.3, 2013: 27.2

Growth of EU trade with Asia

EU import of goods from Asia

EU export of goods to Asia

Source: Adapted from multiple sources. Data from Eurostat.
Managing the Global Impact of America’s Rebalance to Asia

Beijing on account of its abysmal human rights record.\textsuperscript{161} For its part, China has sought to cultivate bilateral ties with individual European states rather than pursue primarily an EU-wide approach, hoping in part to play a divide-and-conquer policy with economically vulnerable European countries so as to discourage and complicate the promotion of a more cohesive European approach to security matters in Asia about which Beijing is particularly sensitive. In this context, China hopes in particular to minimize any European or EU involvement in the various maritime disputes to which it is a party in the South and East China Seas, disputes that China views as local issues to be resolved bilaterally with its neighbors, not multilaterally.\textsuperscript{162}

In any event, whatever the specific cause (or causes), individual EU states have been notably slow to prioritize China-related security issues in their strategic planning, especially the potential strategic consequences of Beijing’s rapid military expansion. While defense budgets in many NATO countries are likely to continue to shrink (despite the previously mentioned pledge at Wales to do better), China’s weapons spending alone rose by an incredible 170 percent between 2002 and 2011, and, according to recent defense industry reports, by 2024 China will spend more on defense than all of NATO’s European members combined.\textsuperscript{163} In that respect, a good number of European security experts lament the fact that, aside from a few sporadic exceptions (such as the 2013 French white paper on defense\textsuperscript{164}), very little discussion is taking place within EU circles about the potential implications for Europe of Asian security developments in general and China’s rise in particular, and that Europeans have failed by

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\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{162} Korteweg, “A Presence Farther East,” 9.
\end{flushleft}
and large to fully appreciate the depth of America’s concerns about maintaining military balances in Asia as well as in other distant regions. To some degree, analysts say, this is because Europeans do not possess anything that comes close to the already large (and growing) military presence and network of alliance arrangements that the United States maintains in the Asia-Pacific region.165 Nor do the Europeans accept the same degree of commitment that Washington does to the security of its friends and allies in Asia. Most Europeans, for example, do not feel that the status of Taiwan has major security implications for their individual well-being, preferring to view this as a strictly American challenge tied to a long-standing U.S. legislative commitment to defend the island from a potential Chinese invasion. Presumably, the same would be true with regard to defending Japan’s administrative rule over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.

Significantly, as well, many European countries do not share America’s perceptions of the threat of a rising China, nor, as one European analyst has put it, do they “feel that they are engaged in a geopolitical struggle with China” or “see events in the Asia-Pacific through a strategic lens.”166 This, again, is due in large part to European countries’ ever-closer economic cooperation with the Chinese government, which is fast becoming one of the world’s largest creditors. According to the German Marshall Fund’s 2013 Transatlantic Trends survey, only 46 percent of Europeans polled considered China to be an economic threat, while 62 percent of Americans did. Moreover, while at least half of the Americans polled saw China as a military threat, a full 63 percent of the Europeans felt that it posed no such threat.167 Some of this, of course, may be attributed to the fact that Europe wants Beijing to use some of its vast foreign exchange reserves to help stabilize the euro and thereby

165 Keohane, “The EU’s Role in East Asian Security.”
167 Ibid., 8.
support the EU’s economic recovery. Asian investors, for example, have reportedly bought over 40 percent of the issuances of the new European rescue fund, while at the same time an estimated 25 percent of China’s $3.2 trillion in foreign reserves is invested in euro bonds.\textsuperscript{168} In addition, the Chinese government and state-owned companies have become much more active in acquiring shares of European firms in key industrial sectors, as exemplified by China’s bid in 2010 to take over Dutch cable-wire maker Draka and its acquisition the same year of Sweden’s Volvo Cars, among other cases. Overall, according to a recent report by the Rhodium Group, annual Chinese investment flows to the European Union surged from less than €1 billion per year between 2004 and 2008 to €2.7 billion per year in 2010, before tripling again to nearly €8 billion in 2012.\textsuperscript{169}

To the extent that it unduly influences European perspectives on Asian security, Europe’s growing economic dependency on China, however, carries with it the potential to seriously undermine transatlantic relations. With European officials and businesses becoming increasingly sensitive to any issues that may rankle Beijing, America’s NATO European allies may grow ever more reluctant to risk a conflict with China over Asia-Pacific security issues, and some in the EU may even resist pressure from Washington in the near future to support U.S. economic initiatives that deal more forcefully with Chinese trade policy.\textsuperscript{170} Many European countries, for instance, are already wary of being seen as part of a U.S.-orchestrated “encirclement of China,” and they are equally careful not to harm their long-standing economic and political ties in Asia by overtly participating in a joint pivot with the United States in which Europe is very much seen as a junior partner simply following America’s lead. This in turn could have negative implications for Washington’s ongoing

\textsuperscript{168} Tunsjø, “Europe’s Favorable Isolation.”


\textsuperscript{170} Tunsjø, “Europe’s Favorable Isolation.”
efforts to rebalance its policy in the Asia-Pacific region, given the strategic importance of a cooperative Europe for the pivot’s success and for engaging China. To further complicate matters, especially in economic negotiations, Beijing, as noted above, often seeks to exploit the differences between European capitals on Asia-related policies, and it has learned as well to play EU member states and transatlantic allies against each other by dealing bilaterally with big European actors, essentially bypassing Brussels, in order to gain more leverage compared to what it would enjoy if it were to directly engage the EU. So far, this strategy has worked relatively well for China, even though many decisions in Europe remain consensus-based. The worry, as some European observers argue, is that Beijing may be able to implement a similar divide-and-conquer approach in cases where the United States and the EU may be developing parallel and compatible, but as of yet still uncoordinated, policies, thereby placing a further strain on transatlantic relations.\(^{171}\)

Amid concerns and questions over Europe’s ability to devise an effective response to the shifts in U.S. priorities at a time of EU austerity, many in the European think-tank and academic communities have called on Brussels to define and develop a common, Europe-wide “grand strategy” that would mobilize the varied national strategic assets and power resources of EU members, thereby helping the organization to capitalize on its strengths and punch its true weight in world affairs. What’s more, so the thinking goes, promoting greater synergy between the bilateral and multilateral policies of EU members would also allow Europe to convey a more decisive and coherent message to its global partners.\(^{172}\) Mapping out such a future-oriented grand strategy for the EU in the context of a rebalancing United States is especially important, it is further argued, because European security thinking, much like trade policy, continues to be heavily over-determined by the various national interests of its member states. This is one reason, for example, why Europe’s post-Cold War


\(^{172}\) Stokes and Whitman, “Transatlantic Triage?”
efforts to achieve greater defense integration have moved at a glacial pace at best, hindered by a combination of strong reliance on U.S. security guarantees, a differential assignment of strategic resources by individual European countries to deal with likely threats, ongoing collective action problems in responding to foreign crises, and persistent leadership rivalries.\(^{173}\) As the 2013 French-led intervention in Mali demonstrated, France and the UK remain Europe’s key strategic powers by a considerable margin, with many other European militaries increasingly resembling “bonsai armies.”\(^{174}\) In 2013, for example, Britain ranked fifth worldwide in defense spending, with a budget of $57 billion, followed closely by France with $52.4 billion. By contrast, the next highest-spending European power, Germany, had an estimated budget of just over $44 billion, while Italy spent slightly less than half as much as the UK, at $25.2 billion.\(^{175}\)

So, too, strategic differences among EU member countries hampered collective efforts to respond to the recent conflicts in Mali and Libya, much as they hindered the EU’s earlier collective responses to the U.S.-led interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Significantly, Europe’s visible dependence on American power during the 2011 operation in Libya highlighted the continued gap and disparity between Washington and its NATO European allies in terms of military assets, capabilities, and resolve. Meanwhile, in the absence of an overarching grand strategy, the EU’s “big three” have responded differently to changes on their previously stable flanks to the south and east. Germany, as discussed in more detail later in this chapter, remains essentially “strategically constipated,” and many Europeans have criticized Berlin’s reluctance to assume a security role commensurate with its international stature. German officials, moreover, have

\(^{173}\) Ibid.
\(^{174}\) Ibid.
\(^{175}\) The Military Balance 2014 (see chap. 2, n. 25); Stokes and Whitman, “Transatlantic Triage?”
yet to show any real interest in playing a part in jump-starting a debate in the EU on a European grand strategy, be it toward Asia or any other region. France, on the other hand, has chosen an entirely different approach, and it is actively engaged in debates on how to preserve power and influence, as most recently demonstrated in its much-awaited defense white paper of 2013. So, too, as confirmed by the UK’s 2010 Strategic Defense and Security Review (SDSR) and its National Security Strategy of the same year, British officials have been working hard to ensure that the UK emerges as a key player and an engaged architect in shaping what they expect will be more of an “American-lite” European security order in years to come. Finding the right formula to ensure that London can play those roles looms, in fact, as a key task of the upcoming 2015 SDSR. In addition, recent Anglo-French defense agreements demonstrate that Britain and France are both trying to frame effective strategic responses to the changes taking place in global politics, and that they are prepared to engage in deeper and more substantive collaboration in pursuit of that goal. Both countries have also demonstrated the desire to maintain a capacity for bilateral interoperability in military operations independent of NATO.

Nevertheless, given the difficulties of organizing the diverse interests and capabilities of individual European nations into a common and effective European approach, Brussels’ capacity to project hard power to distant parts of the world, including in support of the American pivot, remains rather limited, a fact that is also limiting the Europeans’ ability to work together to influence or manage a range of strategic challenges now emerging in Europe’s near abroad. Indeed, despite its Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) and a recently updated European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), the EU is still struggling to devise a coherent long-term strategy for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, an area of vital strategic importance that is geographically much closer to home. In fact, Europe’s strategic response to the wave of political transitions and

176 Stokes and Whitman, “Transatlantic Triage?”
177 Ibid.
unrest unfolding across the MENA region has been described by many as simply “another case of old wine in new bottles,” as EU officials continue to prioritize technical cooperation over crisis management policies, and have sought to deal with the region’s problems by launching new task forces, organizing training programs, and mostly just outlining programmatic objectives and benchmarks. That said, as America pulls out of Afghanistan, it is quite possible, despite these coordination problems at the European level, that a new division of labor among the transatlantic allies will increasingly come to the fore, whether Europe likes it or not, with Washington handling the Alliance’s Asia-Pacific duties and the EU states concentrating on neighboring regions – such as North and sub-Saharan Africa – with which the United States may have less of an appetite to engage.

At the same time, and somewhat ironically, Europe’s relative strategic weakness in East Asia is increasingly viewed by some Europeans as a strength for the EU’s broader institutional outreach to the region, especially vis-à-vis China, given that the lack of any serious commitment by Europe to Asia’s security “has made it easier for EU policy-makers to engage Beijing across the board and avoid contentious matters.” Indeed, given in particular its lack of military capabilities in Asia, the EU, it has been suggested by no less than the chief operating officer of the EEAS, is seen “as engaged but not threatening” and as “active but without a geopolitical agenda.”

More pointedly, Catherine Ashton, the EU’s foreign and security policy chief, stressed in June 2013 that “the EU is an Asian partner, [but] not an Asian power,” and that “its interest is ‘not on projecting power, but [on] empowering’.” Importantly, the Europeans’ diplomatic softly-softly approach, and their apparent “non-threatening lack

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178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
180 Keohane, “The EU’s Role in East Asian Security.”
182 Ibid., 8.
of capacity” to influence the emerging strategic environment in Asia, are perceived as actual sources of leverage that the EU can use while pursuing its broad economic interests within the region. In that regard, this European “lesser pivot” toward Asia will aim to provide, according to Brussels insiders, a complementary (as opposed to an alternative) political presence to America’s in the region, given that Europe is unlikely to become a serious Pacific power any time soon, and that EU leaders are not able (or willing) to replicate the deepening security and diplomatic ties now forming between Washington and the ASAEN nations, many of which are increasingly nervous about China’s rising military heft.

Given that Europe’s “pivot” is unhindered by binding military alliances, it may also allow the EU to become a “minor Asian power” in a way that would offer Asian elites the option of playing the European card against the United States and regional rivals, whether in the context of a free trade agreement negotiation, collaboration on space technology, or even the purchase of weapon systems. Indeed, encouraging a shift along these lines in Europe’s approach to the Asia-Pacific could increase the EU’s credibility in the region and perhaps in time its role as a strategic actor, even if clearly not the most important one, thereby helping Brussels to avoid situations in which it is squeezed by, or dragged into, a zero-sum game between Chinese and American ambitions to shape the security landscape in Asia. It remains to be seen how such a strategy might play out in the context of the still unfolding U.S. rebalance, and whether the EU really wishes and is able to identify common strategic priorities for a rising Asia that promises to be a geostrategic focal point for many years to come. Unquestionably, the task of moving in that direction has become more difficult still by the growing instability of the MENA region, which demands Europe’s attention as well and lies so squarely within Europe’s near abroad.183 Indeed, as outlined below, the question of how to balance Asia-Pacific and MENA interests – and to share the burden of defense in both regions with the United States – is

183 Stokes and Whitman, “Transatlantic Triage?”
likely to emerge as a key challenge for those NATO European countries that are still able to contribute to security beyond the confines of the European theater.

**European Schools of Thought on Asian Security and the Rebalance**

Although European countries remain preoccupied with the euro crisis and many capitals are conducting austerity-dictated reappraisals of their strategic goals, it is possible nonetheless to distinguish some embryonic strands of thinking about the so-called Pacific century, as well as about the American rebalance toward Asia and its impact on NATO Europe. In the absence of a united and coherent strategic approach to Asia, however, European governments have for now adopted a multitude of Asia-related policies that remain largely unconnected and are primarily focused, as discussed above, on trade and bilateral relations. As the EU struggles with the challenge of formulating a policy that goes beyond the lowest common denominator, current European state perspectives vis-à-vis Washington’s pivot tend to revolve around five main categories of opinion, or schools of thought, some of which at times can overlap and be pursued together: backfillers, regional Atlanticists, me-too-ists, global Atlanticists, and redirectors.

**Backfillers**

To begin with, as America moves national security resources toward the Pacific and away from the Atlantic, a number of European capitals see the Asia pivot as a defining moment for Europe that could finally spur EU members to overcome their longstanding security dependence on Washington and start to prioritize their own roles as defense providers within their immediate neighborhood. Given Europe’s limited resources, a focus on building up a European defense capacity, such “backfillers” argue, makes much more sense than trying to take on (or support) a new faraway mission in Asia. More specifically, countries that subscribe to this particular school of thought view the rebalance primarily as a welcome prod to fulfill at least the
old Gaullist narrative that Europe should manage its own affairs and eventually become a strategic pole in its own right on the international scene. In theory, such an approach would also require European states to take more of a lead in nearby out-of-area military operations and at vital choke points and along sea lines of communication on Europe’s perimeter. It could, therefore, also help to speed up the incipient transatlantic division of labor alluded to earlier, whereby the United States looks west toward the Asia-Pacific while Europe focuses on its southern and eastern flanks.

Such a turn of events, however, could also lead to further transatlantic estrangement in the years ahead, if U.S. and European out-of-area priorities are seen to diverge too sharply. The key question here may be how far out of area backfillers are willing to go, and where the dividing line may be between America’s and Europe’s primary responsibilities. At present, there does not seem to be a clear answer on this score. That said, given the participation of European navies in anti-piracy and maritime security operations in the Straits of Malacca under the Singapore-based Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), at least a few backfillers have proposed a dividing line near the eastern edge of the Indian Ocean. According to this formula, Europe would stand ready to contribute to security activities in an area extending roughly from the Azores to Singapore, leaving the South and East China Seas and the Pacific beyond to the United States.

With regard to individual nations, France, in particular, stands out as a classic backfiller, though the United Kingdom also has its advocates for this position. France, of course, has long been a leading proponent of deeper European defense integration, stemming in part from its historical distrust of an American-dominated NATO,

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184 Rem Korteweg, “European Approaches to Asia,” in A Transatlantic Pivot to Asia, ed. Binnendijk (see chap. 2, n. 44).
but also in part from its commitment to the “European project” and its belief in a robust military capacity. Such views explain, for example, why cash-strapped and inward-focused Paris has embarked over the past few years on a flurry of military operations and bold strategic moves, including a de facto regime change in Libya, ousting former President Gbagbo in Ivory Coast, recapturing Northern Mali and destroying a jihadist sanctuary, supporting the Free Syrian Army, and hosting a high-level planning session on how best to counter ISIS, in addition to a number of other minor operations, such as reinforcing its presence in the Central African Republic.¹⁸⁵ For the French, according to one influential EU observer, defense has always been equated with proof of sovereignty and power. Indeed, France’s much-anticipated defense white paper, released in April 2013, emphasized that Paris must be able to partner with European allies in the absence of the United States, a prospect that it considered ever more likely in the wake of Washington’s announcement of the pivot and its shift toward a more Asian-oriented security posture.

To be sure, France also has a growing interest in Asia, and among European countries it maintains perhaps the highest military profile in the region. France’s strategic focus, however, remains centered primarily on Europe’s immediate neighborhood, especially North and West Africa as well as the Middle East, where it believes, as do most backfillers, Europe’s principal interests lie, and Paris views its recent interventionism in this area as filling a vacuum left by a more restrained U.S. policy.¹⁸⁶ After all, in the post-Iraq and Afghanistan drawdown setting, Washington’s growing reluctance to intervene militarily in crises that are not vital to its own interests – as stated most clearly in President Obama’s May 2014 West Point speech – has left Paris

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.
(and London) in the driver’s seat in Europe’s near abroad, most notably in Libya and, for the most part, in Syria. In a sense, therefore, France sees itself as leading by default, and a dominant feature of French strategy of late has been to “lead to the point of appearing to force Washington’s hand,” although Paris clearly welcomes U.S. support and acknowledges that U.S.-UK-French solidarity can be a real game-changer in international crises.¹⁸⁷

Nevertheless, unlike filling in for U.S. power in the Western Balkans or in NATO Europe itself, backfilling to cover a potential power vacuum in the wider MENA region or even farther afield is a prospect that also gives a number of European nations in the backfiller camp considerable pause. Similarly, quite a few remain apprehensive about handling Russia without strong and visible U.S. support for fear of the divisions that may arise among them on Russia policy and the likelihood of simply being outmatched in terms of military capacity and diplomatic toughness. In this regard, recent American efforts to enhance the U.S. military presence in Europe are appreciated by most backfillers, and may well be seen by them as a key precondition to future steps on their part to pick up more of the allied security burden in both NATO Europe proper and out of area. By paying a bit more attention to Europe’s security, therefore, Washington may be able to strengthen the resolve of the backfiller camp to assume additional defense responsibilities elsewhere in ways that would allow America to focus more on Asia.

As for new approaches to the Middle East in particular, a developing idea that has started to gain ground among some backfillers suggests that Europe and China might find common cause to cooperate on security tasks in and around the Arab Gulf at least, especially if America’s domestic energy revolution, for example, were to weaken its commitment to that troubled region. As China’s reliance on Middle East energy resources continues to grow (and it is estimated that 90 percent of the region’s oil exports will go to Asia by 2035), Beijing’s need to deepen its engagement with oil-producing states will

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.
become ever more compelling. In that event, it is suggested by backfillers who have floated this idea, Europe, the Middle East’s experienced neighbor, could become China’s strategic partner in such an endeavor. Receptiveness to such a turn of events could well increase within the MENA region as well (especially among the Gulf states) to the extent that the United States is seen as a more reluctant regional player, indications of which a number of Gulf states believe they have detected in America’s hesitant approach toward Syria and its moves to engage Iran, as well as in its renewed focus on Asia. Whether or not the tougher stance taken toward ISIS by the Obama administration in the fall of 2014 will alter significantly the Gulf states’ views on this score remains to be seen, but it is unlikely, in any event, to overturn the logic of a larger European security role in the MENA region, with or without China, or to lessen the incentives to pursue that objective for those backfillers who can to take that role to heart.

Finally, a number of Central and East European NATO and EU members – often called the “New Europe” – express sympathy as well for the backfiller approach to the extent that it can encourage closer ties between Europe and Asia on security matters related to Russia, even though their primary concern (they fall into the redirectors camp detailed later) is to draw America’s attention back to Europe and NATO’s classic collective defense mission. These countries believe in particular that there may be useful ways to backfill in concert with Japan (while hedging against Russia), given that Tokyo is worried, as they are, about a more assertive Russia, especially one that has adopted a more jingoistic tone with regard to neighboring countries and disputed territorial claims. Tentative steps in that direction can be detected in the visit by Japanese Prime Minister Abe to Poland in June 2013 in connection with a summit between Japan and the Visegrad Group, which includes Poland, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, and Hungary. Soon thereafter, in August 2013, Poland’s defense minister went a step further, meeting with his counterpart in Vietnam and agreeing that the two countries should expand bilateral relations by strengthening their defense cooperation links. Again, this is not the primary response of the Central and East
European allies to the rebalance, but it is a small component worth keeping in mind. It confirms as well the inclination of a number of backfillers to concentrate first on improving defenses in the immediate NATO Europe area (as opposed to out-of-area sectors) when picking up any slack in European security that may be caused by an American Pacific pivot.

**Regional Atlanticists**

Other Europeans, whom we’ll call “regional Atlanticists,” acknowledge as well the security challenges in Europe’s near abroad, but they fear that, as Washington turns more toward the Pacific, NATO European and EU member states may not be able on their own to fill any void in the Alliance’s ability to respond to such challenges that the pivot may create. For this reason, they see NATO engagement on its flanks as a priority mission, and one for which the transatlantic link and a sufficient contribution of U.S. forces remain quite important – hence, their designation as regional Atlanticists. More specifically, while they agree with those backfillers who support a larger out-of-area role for Europe (especially in its near abroad), they do so from a much more Atlanticist – as opposed to EU and “European security pole” – perspective, and, for some in this group, with a greater desire to see Europe leverage its regional role (in, for example, the MENA region) into a global one.

While they champion the idea of U.S.-European cooperation, many in the regional Atlanticist school do worry that the pivot, in combination with the Obama administration’s policy of “leading from behind” in Libya and its “red line” fiasco in Syria, signals a growing American reluctance to focus on and respond to security issues in NATO Europe’s neighborhood, including in North Africa, the Sahel, the Levant, and even along the borders with Russia. Those who subscribe to this view tend to see the U.S. rebalance to Asia as largely an unfortunate and undesirable development, making it less likely than
ever that Washington will take their concerns fully to heart or provide the level of military assistance that would be required. That said, a good number of regional Atlanticists also believe that Europe’s relative disengagement from great-power rivalries in distant Asian seas, combined with its renewed preoccupation with European affairs in the face of Russia’s new assertiveness, may set the stage for a very welcome effort on Europe’s part to “get its own house in order” as a first priority if it is ever to take on, as they hope it will, more of a regional security role. For example, by emphasizing economic growth and stability at home – to include, if possible, greater increases in defense spending – NATO European countries, so the argument goes, can focus their limited capabilities on maintaining a benign security environment on and around the continent, boosting their capacity to act within NATO territory and perhaps in time rejuvenating Europe’s more global influence. After all, as one influential Dutch observer recently put it, if Europe is to gain weight in Asian eyes, it will be by making itself indispensable in its own backyard, rather than by getting involved in a potentially “flimsy global engagement” well beyond the Euro-Atlantic region. In terms of engaging Asia, therefore, this approach, described by some as driven largely by Europe’s “strategic marginalization” in recent years, prescribes for the moment only a limited, if any, role for Europe in Asian security matters, placing greater emphasis on maintaining robust economic ties and trade relations with East Asian countries. It is exemplified perhaps best by Germany’s strong and almost purely commercial strategy toward emerging opportunities in the Asia-Pacific.

Still, as much as they worry about the pivot (and hope to compensate for it), a solid faction of the regional Atlanticists also doubts whether they should really take America’s shift in focus to Asia seriously (given current constraints on implementing the pivot, as detailed in chapter 2), and a number of them share an ongoing sense

188 Korteweg, “European Approaches to Asia.”
189 Tunsjø, “Europe’s Favorable Isolation.”
of confusion about the true meaning of the rebalance. In particular, those who subscribe to this more skeptical perspective point to the way the pivot was first announced by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton rather than by President Obama, in an essay for a journal rather than in a major speech, followed by a quick reformulation of the term “pivot” to “rebalance,” all of which has made some Europeans wonder how well the notion was thought through to begin with. As NATO European officials often note, competing perspectives on the rebalance persist even within the Obama administration, with policymakers finding it hard to decide whether the shift is more economic than military, or more about trade than geostrategy, among other uncertainties. This, in turn, has left the impression among regional Atlanticists that the administration is not really as committed to the rebalance policy as it pretends, and that it may “return to its senses” when other pressures (Russian brinkmanship and ISIS extremism, for example) demand it. European skeptics of the pivot within this school further suggest that U.S. hesitancy in implementing the policy is entirely consistent with President Obama’s overall approach to statesmanship, which they would describe as stochastic rather than planned, cautious instead of bold, transactional rather than visionary, and more reactive than leading. Not surprisingly, this perspective has also led to a tendency among regional Atlanticists to adopt a wait-and-see policy with respect to the degree of commitment to the pivot U.S. officials are likely to maintain and what that suggests, in turn, for its longer-term sustainability.

Also not surprisingly, quite a few regional Atlanticists believe that America will continue to have vital interests in the Middle East, and that this factor alone will compel Washington to maintain a reasonably robust defense presence in Europe and to continue close collaboration with its transatlantic allies and partners for the foreseeable future. Coordinated efforts by the United States and Europe to strike against ISIS in the fall of 2014 are seen as a case in point. So, too, recent appointees to the second Obama administration, they argue, seem to support the perception that even though the official policy in Washington is to rebalance toward Asia, there is also a renewed emphasis
on placing experienced transatlantic advisors in key U.S. policy positions and on maintaining close U.S.-EU and U.S.-NATO rapport.

Secretary of State Kerry’s appointment, his greater focus on Europe, and his shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East provide, they suggest, more than enough evidence of this trend. Perhaps buoyed by these developments, there is a much more explicit emphasis among regional Atlanticists compared to backfillers on pooling allied assets (including U.S. enabling technologies) and leveraging the NATO planning process to defend Europe’s near abroad. In terms of the debate over NATO’s strategic focus, therefore, they are more expeditionary-minded than most backfillers, who tend to emphasize the defense of the NATO homeland and out-of-area territory that is close to NATO’s borders.

Regional Atlanticists who detect a shift in U.S. policy as outlined above tend to stress as well that the Middle East’s troubles alone will likely make it impossible for America to disengage from the MENA region to the extent it may wish to in order to pivot toward Asia, and they predict that the level of defense spending required to sustain the air campaign against ISIS will almost certainly make the costs of the rebalance even more difficult to cover than they are now. This has led some in the regional Atlanticist camp to conclude that the rebalance is in reality a rather unstable strategy, and that if, for example, ISIS really ever overran Iraq or the nuclear dispute with Iran were to boil over, the pivot to Asia would no longer be America’s main foreign-policy priority. In that regard, some adherents to this school have gone so far as to suggest that Russia and perhaps China may actually be trying to manipulate conditions in the Middle East in order to distract America from Asia, exposing in the process an underlying weakness of the pivot. That is an outcome, they say, that Beijing at least would welcome, since it would undercut significantly America’s credibility in Asia.
Finally, there is a variant of the regional Atlanticist school that sees Europe’s capacity – or at least that of its major powers, such as the United Kingdom and France – to project power along and even beyond Europe’s flanks, especially in the Middle East, as a way to confirm its global relevance by acting more locally (i.e., in strategically important areas of Europe’s near abroad). While the UK, according to this perspective, may not be able to do much to directly support the American pivot in Asia (or to underwrite Asian security irrespective of the pivot), it could nonetheless play an important global security role in out-of-area regions closer to NATO Europe by accepting, for example, greater responsibility for the security of the Arab Gulf. By relieving the United States of a portion of its traditional security burden in the Gulf, such an effort on London’s part, it is said, would at least provide indirect support to an American pivot to Asia, freeing U.S. forces to shift eastward. Moreover, by shoring up the defense of an oil-producing region on which key Asian states increasingly depend, it could also allow the United Kingdom to gain, in the words of two prominent British strategists, “a degree of purchase over geopolitical dynamics in East Asia.”

“Through such an approach,” they go on to say, “the UK ‘goes global’ by concentrating on the MENA ‘local.’” Such a formula, they imply, might also apply to other initiatives along NATO Europe’s periphery, such as developing an enhanced European posture in the Arctic region and along its approaches, access to and the security of which is of growing importance to both the United States and a number of Asian economic powerhouses (notably, China, Japan, and South Korea). In this way, Europe, they conclude, can more effectively use its Atlanticist bona fides, as opposed to the more Euro-centric approach...

192 Ibid.
advocated by the backfillers, to convert its regional role into a more global one.

**Me-too-ists**

By contrast, a third school – “me-too-ists,” or “global European-ists” – envisions from the very get-go a broader role for European powers in the Pacific area, and would like to see the EU and European countries take a larger stake in Asia’s security. This perspective stems in part from their belief that Europe now finds itself at a critical historical juncture that requires it to adapt to new realities if it is to remain relevant as a global player. Me-too-ists are somewhat self-conscious about Europe’s being regarded as just a trading club, and they are eager to demonstrate Europe’s broader range of influence and ability by building closer diplomatic and security ties to Asia. In that respect, proponents of this view would be happy to see a separate role for Europeans in the Asia-Pacific region, with any complementarity with Washington’s rebalancing efforts considered more of a useful bonus than a major objective. Subscribers also display considerable discomfort at the prospect of being regarded as America’s junior partner in Asia, and a good number of European officials in this camp remain reluctant to become embroiled in the emerging high politics and great-power rivalry between Beijing and the United States within the region, even as they seek to become more involved there. Again, one important asset that can help Europe achieve this goal, according to me-too-ists, is the EU’s generally non-threatening, low-profile posture, together with the fact that it is a Western (and, hence, attractive) partner, but not the United States (with all its “global cop” baggage).

Within this context, for example, the European Union has begun to explore an Asian pivot strategy for itself, based in part on its

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193 Korteweg, “European Approaches to Asia.”
The EU has begun to explore an Asian pivot strategy for itself by way of lessons learned from EU-led peacekeeping missions around the globe and its anti-piracy and sea-lane protection operations off the coast of Somalia, some conducted in concert with Asian-Pacific militaries. European air forces and navies, they point out, are making greater efforts to build stronger military-to-military (or mil-to-mil) ties with potential Asian-Pacific partners, providing operational advice and technical expertise to nations like Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia, all of which are exploring larger regional roles for themselves. As a key component of this more robust mil-to-mil approach, the me-too school also looks forward to boosting the level of European defense sales to the Asia-Pacific region, noting that the regional arms market is expanding rather significantly and that it should not be left to American companies alone to reap the benefits. For many me-too-ists, in fact, the single most important contribution that Europe can make to Asian security over the near- to mid-term is in the defense sales sector. At the same time, the EU, as part of its own pivot to Asia, should strive, they would argue, to expand further its commercial presence in the region, building a wider network of bilateral free trade agreements with local trading partners. Toward that end, they are pleased that Brussels is currently negotiating free trade deals with Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, and that it is considering opening discussions with Indonesia and Brunei. Since 2009, moreover, the EU, they are happy to report, has completed or is close to concluding diplomatic agreements with eleven countries in the Asia-Pacific that run parallel to and reinforce the free trade deals.

The biggest challenge they face, me-too-ists readily admit, is the difficulty of coordinating various European activities in Asia and combining them into a more strategic (and influential) approach to

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194 Robbin Laird, “America Pivots to Asia; Europe Arms It,” Diplomat, August 16, 2013.  
195 Korteweg, “European Approaches to Asia.”
the region. Despite the EU’s agreement in 2012 on a common set of guidelines for foreign and security policy in East Asia, the organization’s twenty-eight member states, as noted earlier, generally pursue their own bilateral policies toward Asia, rarely acting in unison or deferring to the advice of EU institutions. As a result, to the extent that there is ever a European policy on Asian issues, it rarely “goes beyond the lowest common denominator” or focuses on any issue but trade.  

So far, then, the me-too-ist school, despite its aspirations, has little capacity to match the scope and pace of the American rebal-ance to Asia, even in its more restrained, sequester-inhibited variant. Again, adherents of the school do argue quite forcefully that Europe, and the EU in particular, has much that it could usefully share with Asian-Pacific countries and regional organizations in the area of effective institution building, a subject of rising interest in the region where multilateral and transnational structures are still relatively weak, especially in the security policy realm. In all likelihood, given both their post-World War 2 and post-Cold War efforts at regional reconciliation, European countries, it is suggested as well, could also be of help in advising Asian countries on ways to overcome historical grievances that stand in the way of deeper regional cooperation, pointing in particular to grievances related to Japan’s behavior prior to and during World War 2. Still, despite the enthusiasm and ambitions of the me-too school, most Asian governments and institutions, its advocates would also admit, still do not consider Europe to be a very serious strategic player in their region, or likely to become one any time soon. Changing that perspective, therefore, is perhaps the me-too-ists’ primary task going forward.

Global Atlanticists (or “Me-too-ists with a Twist”)
A related fourth school – “global Atlanticists” – also seeks to shift European attention toward Asia, but unlike the me-too perspective, it sees a strong need for Europe to pivot together with the United States, motivated in large part by its strong commitment to maintaining the

relevance of the transatlantic security partnership. This “me-too with a twist” school of thought strives to support the Pentagon’s goal of boosting American ties in Asia in any way that it can, be it via a direct or indirect contribution. So far, however, advocates of this school – similar to other schools described above – tend to gravitate toward strategic options vis-à-vis Asia that are much more centered on diplomacy and economics than on military power or defense cooperation. In practice, much of Europe’s current approach to the Asia-Pacific region reflects a mix between the “global Atlanticist” and me-too perspectives, with perhaps a bit of the “regional Atlanticist” school mixed in, given its advocacy of “leveraging the local to go global.”

Not surprisingly, one of the most prominent adherents of the “global Atlanticist” point of view on the rebalance is the United Kingdom, which in recent years has devised and undertaken its own “mini-pivot” eastward and is keen for others in Europe to follow suit. In July 2013, for instance, Britain signed a series of groundbreaking bilateral agreements with Japan, creating a legal framework to guide the joint development of defense equipment as well as a wider-ranging program for security cooperation between the two countries. Significantly, the accord makes Britain the first nation in the world to sign such a comprehensive agreement with Japan, pointing to the country’s efforts, against the tide of falling defense capabilities in Europe, to extend itself back into the region east of Suez. In fact, ever since the UK’s accession to ASEAN’s Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 2012, more British officials have visited Southeast Asia than at any other time in the past twenty years. London also works hard to expand its ties with Australia and the Asian Commonwealth countries (especially Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Brunei, and Sri Lanka), while also building closer trade relations with China. Moreover, Britain, as

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197 Korteweg, “European Approaches to Asia.”
198 Ibid.
a Korean War participant, retains a spot on the UN Military Armistice Commission, and this, together with the fact that it also has an embassy in Pyongyang, allows London to maintain a greater degree of involvement in Korean security matters than it might otherwise enjoy.

Britain, along with the Netherlands and a few other EU member states (including Poland and Italy), sees a need for transatlantic cooperation with Washington in the Asia-Pacific, and it is actively pushing for a strategic dialogue with the United States on Asian issues writ large. This is why British and likeminded EU officials voiced such concern in the summer of 2013 when it appeared that changes and ongoing vacancies in senior U.S. foreign policy leadership circles (including the departure from the State Department of Mrs. Clinton and the architects of the pivot on her staff), together with new and competing security priorities in the Middle East, might put an end to any serious transatlantic cooperation on Asia before it could even begin. They worried in particular that without a clear U.S. willingness and readiness to move forward with the rebalance and to “pivot together with Europe,” European governments, already distracted by other pressing issues in their own neighborhood, would find it very difficult to sustain any kind of focus on Asia. 199 At the same time, France, where any me-too inclinations veer toward a more traditional Gaullist approach, continued to see its own effort to engage more fully with Asia as distinct from the U.S. pivot and less Atlanticist in orientation, but one in which its historical and sociocultural ties to francophone Indochina might give it a competitive leg up.

In marked contrast to the French position, NATO itself is poised to become a more active advocate of the “me-too with a twist” school, and one with a decidedly transatlantic cast to its efforts in this regard. This is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, but suffice it to

199 Ibid.
say here that the American pivot to Asia could spur a greater effort by the Alliance to develop more fully its fairly new global partnerships with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand. This will not likely take the form of military deployments of any size to the region under NATO auspices, but it could lead to the opening of NATO liaison offices in partner countries, more regular visits to the region by NATO officials, and a richer NATO-Asian dialogue on security issues of common concern. While limited in scope, such efforts could certainly help supplement the U.S. rebalance strategy, which also places a high premium on building local partnerships. These efforts are supported, moreover, by a good number of senior European policy officials at NATO headquarters.

Redirectors
The “redirectors’” perspective on the U.S. rebalance revolves primarily around the views of Central and East European countries, who fear that over time the pivot could seriously undermine America’s commitment to NATO, together with the collective defense guarantee enshrined in Article 5 of the Atlantic Treaty, according to which an armed attack on one member would be treated as an attack on all. Such concerns, of course, were dramatically heightened by Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its subsequent support for separatist forces in eastern Ukraine, all of which has prompted Central and East European leaders to call for greater efforts by the United States and NATO as a whole to bolster the defenses of the eastern flank of the Alliance, especially in countries – such as the Baltic states – with significant ethnic-Russian populations. More specifically, they have called for Washington to rethink its overall defense posture and presence in Europe and to engage in, or redirect its attention to, a so-called intra-European pivot.

“Redirectors’” fear that over time the pivot could seriously undermine America’s commitment to NATO.
While acknowledging that there is little strategic rationale for Washington to retain large, expensive bases in Germany or Italy more than twenty years after the end of the Cold War, moving the U.S. military footprint in Europe eastward instead, they argue, makes both strategic and economic sense. According to this line of thinking, an already lightened American presence that is shifted to Poland, Romania, or Bulgaria, for example, would strengthen conventional deterrence along NATO’s borders with or closest to Russia, while providing U.S. forces with more immediate access to allied territories where they may be most needed in the post-Crimea/Ukraine era, and doing so at a relatively low cost compared to the funding levels that American deployments to Europe have traditionally required. One of the most outspoken advocates of the redirector position, Polish foreign minister Radoslaw Sikorski, went so far as to call in April 2014 for NATO to permanently station ten thousand troops in Poland, a perspective that was soon echoed by a former Latvian minister who argued with respect to his own country for “a few American squadrons here, boots on the ground, maybe even an aircraft carrier.” As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Polish defense minister Siemoniak has pressed the redirector argument even more explicitly, stating that “the idea until recently was that there were no more threats in Europe and no need for a U.S. presence in Europe anymore, [but] events show that what is needed is a re-pivot, and that Europe was safe and secure because America was in Europe.” Siemoniak has further argued that the physical presence of American troops in Eastern Europe – to include eastern Poland – is now very much justified, and that American Army “boots on the Polish ground” at some level would be an

ideal “visible testimony” to a revitalized transatlantic link in the face of Russian adventurism. 203

Not all that the redirectors seek in the way of a more robust allied presence on their territory will be forthcoming any time soon. That said, they have certainly been heartened by a number of recent U.S. and NATO moves, including the repositioning of F-15 and F-16 fighter jets to Lithuania and Poland, the deployment of a quartet of B-52 heavy bombers to England, the reaffirmation of America’s commitment to field elements of the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) for ballistic missile defense in Romania in 2015 and in Poland by 2018, and Washington’s announcement of a $1 billion plan to boost a rotational U.S. troop presence in Europe. No doubt, they must have been reassured still further by decisions taken at the NATO Wales summit to establish a Readiness Action Plan that would allow the allies to maintain a schedule of force rotations sufficient to ensure that there will be a “continuous air, land, and maritime presence and meaningful military activity in the eastern part of the Alliance.” 204

So, too, redirectors were almost certainly equally pleased by plans approved at the summit to form a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) of four thousand to six thousand troops deployable at two to five days’ notice, to expand the staff of NATO’s Multinational Corps Northeast based in Poland, and to regularly test allied forces via short-notice exercises in Central and Eastern Europe. 205

Redirectors, however, have also made it clear that their concerns for European security go beyond a newly belligerent Russia, and that what they are hoping for is a more fundamental rethinking of NATO strategy that would give greater priority over the longer haul to Article 5 collective defense missions, especially along the

203 Weisgerber, “Interview: Tomasz Siemoniak.”
204 “NATO Summit: Reassurance and Effective Responses,” 1–2.
205 Ibid.
periphery of the Alliance. In this sense, Central and East European advocates of the redirector approach have common cause with strategists in Norway who have pressed in recent years for an improved NATO capacity to operate (and defend allied interests) in the Arctic High North, as well as with Turkish officials who are calling for better NATO tools to deal with ISIS and similar asymmetric threats emanating from a Middle East wracked by civil and sectarian conflict. For the redirectors, then, the American pivot to Asia provided a timely incentive, and Russia’s actions a useful justification, to make their case, and they readily refer to both developments in presenting their arguments. Their ultimate objective, however, is to encourage a strategic shift within NATO – and, more specifically, in Washington – that focuses first and foremost on the defense of allied territory, whatever happens in Asia, in non-NATO areas of Europe where Moscow seeks greater (and renewed) influence, or in more distant parts of Europe’s near abroad.

**Challenges and Opportunities**

Taken together, these various schools of thought confirm that Europe’s responses to America’s rebalance to Asia are quite diverse, with some seeing it as an opportunity to build up a more independent European security capacity, others seeing it as a logical shift in strategic focus that Europe should emulate with its own pivot, and still others worried that it overlooks the current need to reinforce (and pivot back to) Europe’s security, especially in the NATO zone. Many in the more Atlanticist-minded schools, moreover, contend that America’s NATO European allies ought to do what they can to facilitate the pivot, either directly by becoming more active in Asian security or indirectly by taking on more responsibility for defense missions that U.S. forces have traditionally performed, thereby freeing them for deployment in the Asia-Pacific region. In this context, a key motivation of the Atlanticists, whether they are more regional or global in orientation, is to provide proof of the ongoing utility of NATO to American security and, in this way, to strengthen transatlantic ties that have become frayed in recent years. To a significant
### European Schools of Thought on the Pivot and Asian Security

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<tr>
<th>Backfillers</th>
<th>European Views on the Pivot and Asian Security</th>
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<tr>
<td>See U.S. pivot to Asia as an incentive for Europeans to build up their own independent defense capabilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Led by France, aim to strengthen European security pillar under EU, but coordinated with NATO.</td>
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<td>Rely on European defense capacity to “backfill” for any reductions in American forces and to cover any gaps in European security the pivot might create.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus first on defense of NATO European territory, but willing to contribute more to some out-of-area operations, especially in Europe’s near abroad (for example, North Africa and parts of the Middle East).</td>
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<td>Backfillers in Central and Eastern Europe see potential to cooperate with Japan in hedging against Russia.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Regional Atlanticists</th>
<th>Me-too-ists (or Global Europeanists)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Worried that pivot could create security gaps in Europe and concerned over Obama policy of “leading from behind.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agree that security challenges along NATO Europe’s flanks and in its near abroad are rising, but fear that Europeans cannot handle such challenges on their own.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Believe that out-of-area operations are best with NATO and U.S. involvement, conducted in an Atlanticist as opposed to EU/Euro-centric format.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Think that Middle East instability will demand a greater U.S. response and put a limit on any pivot to Asia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hope that Europe can contribute to Asian and global security (and perhaps help the pivot) by picking up more of the defense burden in areas like Arab Gulf (“going global” by defending Gulf “local”).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Believe in a larger and more explicit European role in the Asia-Pacific region.</td>
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<td>Advocate an EU pivot to Asia separate from the U.S. effort, and champion the EU’s appeal as an alternative to Washington’s more military-minded pivot.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Believe that EU has many lessons learned to share with Asian partners on security sector reform, peacekeeping, and regional reconciliation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote a European pivot that is more economic and diplomatic in content, but see defense sales to Asia as a top priority.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acknowledge that forward progress is hampered by preference of European states to engage Asia bilaterally rather than through EU.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Global Atlanticists (Me-too-ists with a Twist)</th>
<th>Redirectors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Call for a European pivot to Asia in close cooperation with the U.S. pivot.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seek to strengthen the transatlantic link and U.S. commitment to NATO Europe by contributing to or helping to facilitate the American rebalance to Asia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support to U.S. effort could be direct (via, for example, naval deployments to the Asia-Pacific region) or indirect (by freeing U.S. military from duties elsewhere so it can swing to Asia).</td>
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<tr>
<td>The United Kingdom is a clear supporter, as are the Netherlands, Poland, and, to some extent, Italy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational, NATO is poised to play a key role via its Global Partnership program and activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Largely composed of Central and East European members of NATO who fear that U.S. pivot to Asia will undermine over time the transatlantic link and America’s commitment to Article 5.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocate a larger and more robust NATO presence in Central and Eastern Europe, ideally to include U.S. ground troops, in response to Russian brinkmanship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Welcome NATO plans approved at the Wales summit to achieve that via a new “spearhead” rapid reaction force to defend Central and Eastern Europe.</td>
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<tr>
<td>View Article 5 collective defense mission as the Alliance’s top priority.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Call for an American re-pivot back to Europe and for an intra-European pivot to the eastern part of the Alliance.</td>
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degree, then, they advocate for stronger European efforts to support the pivot as a way to sustain the Atlantic Alliance and all that it offers in terms of maintaining a credible allied capacity to take joint military action when and where required.

That said, not all European countries who may wish to become more active players in Asian security have the capacity to do so, and those who do often follow rather separate, uncoordinated approaches, keyed more to their specific national interests than to Europe-wide or allied goals. Britain’s Asia policy, for example, aims to beef up London’s economic, diplomatic, security, and defense relations with Asian powers, often in close coordination with the United States. Even before its series of 2013 agreements with Japan, the United Kingdom was the first NATO European country to initiate concrete steps and negotiations with Tokyo on possible defense equipment cooperation. As a direct result, a landmark defense cooperation agreement, signed in April 2012 by British Prime Minister David Cameron and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda, made Britain Japan’s only defense technology partner after the United States. What’s more, the Cameron-Noda agreement is widely viewed as not just a continuation of the UK’s traditional trading policy, but rather as an important element in a strategic shift to reassert British and perhaps wider European security interests in the Asia-Pacific, demonstrating London’s determination to show that it too can be an actor in the emerging Asian balance of power.206 As British Foreign Secretary William Hague later explained, “Today, Britain is looking East as never before,” pointing out that this time the United Kingdom is coming to Asia from the vantage point of being a leader within Europe and NATO.207 Other European countries, notably France and Italy, are following suit in the specific areas of defense trade and cooperation, and it is likely that the new UK-Japan “overarching framework” now under development will become a model that they can use as well to promote future bilateral projects of their own with Asian-Pacific partners.

207 Ibid.
Britain’s strategy in Asia, therefore, tends to emphasize cooperation with old allies, such as Japan and Australia, and with important trade partners, such as China, while simultaneously deepening ties with ASEAN. In many ways, France’s approach is similar, but again Paris views its role in the Asia-Pacific as distinctly separate from that of the United States. In August 2013, French foreign minister Laurent Fabius became the first French government official to deliver a policy speech at the ASEAN headquarters in Jakarta, Indonesia. In his address, more importantly, Fabius sought to differentiate France’s policy toward Asia from Washington’s rebalance, stressing the diplomatic and economic component of the French pivot, though also indicating French aspirations to act as a lead within the EU and proposing an ASEAN–EU pact that would balance against what Paris sees as an undesirable “G2” bipolar world dominated by the United States and China. Meanwhile, Germany is pursuing its own, mercantilist approach as part of a national pivot toward Southeast Asia. German policy, in that regard, centers primarily, and almost exclusively, on economic ties and related capacity building, based on the reasoning that strong trade relations equal political influence. In addition, to show its support for ASEAN’s institutions and regional integration, the German government has contributed over $13 million through its international development agency, Die Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, for strengthening ASEAN’s headquarters in Jakarta, and since 2005 Berlin has allocated more than $80 million to support regional economic integration programs.

To be sure, the European Union as a whole is looking east as well and has launched its own ministerial dialogues with ASEAN members,

208 Korteweg, “European Approaches to Asia.”
209 Felix Sharief, “European Pivots to Southeast Asia: Leaving the EU–ASEAN Corridors?” Cogit Asia, Center for Strategic and International Studies Asia Program blog, August 30, 2013.
but its attempts to follow a middle ground that reflects the policies of its three main powers have often been overtaken by the unilateral pursuits of British, German, or French agendas. As noted earlier, in June 2012 the EU released an update to its previous guidelines for foreign and security policy in East Asia, a document viewed by some as an effort to compensate for Europe’s “lost geopolitical prominence” due to the shift in America’s strategic focus toward Asia. Shortly thereafter, EU policy makers embarked on a series of politically significant trips to multiple countries in the Asia-Pacific region as part of an “Asian semester,” and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton led the largest-ever delegation of EU officials to an EU-ASEAN ministerial dialogue, which promised deeper institutional ties on everything from counterterrorism to trade. As one European foreign policy official remarked in May 2012, “Following the U.S. announcement of a pivot to Asia, it’s now Europe’s turn,” adding that while the United States “will be an Asian power, we will be an Asian partner.”

Nevertheless, EU efforts in that direction are to some degree constrained by the fact that the organization itself does not have troops in Asia, nor is it part of the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+) or the East Asia Summit (EAS). What’s more, setting aside the fact that the EU does not meet the requirements to join either group because it lacks security ties with ASEAN, many Asian governments continue to question the EU’s capacity to contribute usefully on security matters in the first place. Against this backdrop, France’s announcement in 2013 of its desire to join the ADMM+ is largely seen as an alternative way to boost its own future role in the regional security architecture, rather than waiting with uncertainty until the EU as a whole is accepted into all ASEAN-led frameworks. Other likeminded European countries may follow suit in order to have a seat at the table with regard to important regional issues, and to establish engagement mechanisms with ASEAN where the EU cannot.

Nevertheless, senior EU leaders continue to caution that, while country-to-country engagement with Asia’s rising powers

211 Sharief, “European Pivots to Southeast Asia.”
may be tempting, and despite the fact that China often prefers bilateral dealings, the broader re-nationalization of EU member-state foreign policies that might result would simply make a Europe-wide Asian pivot (that all members could benefit from) more difficult to accomplish.

It is worth noting that alongside Europe’s “big three,” other member states, such as the Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, and Poland, have also developed extensive relations in Asia, some of which clearly dovetail with the American pivot. In this context, some are pursuing bilateral relations with strategic Asian-Pacific partners based on specific niche interests, such as Sweden’s focus on human rights in Asia and Dutch efforts to develop stronger relations with Indonesia, building on its historical and cultural ties to the archipelago. So, too, the important role in global trade played by the port of Rotterdam has led the Netherlands to pay especially close attention to matters of maritime security and freedom of navigation along the sea lanes of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Yet, these smaller EU member states must often look to Brussels to act as a policy multiplier.

The Hague, for example, which is a strong proponent of deepening EU-China relations through the EU-China summit, looks to the EU not only to discuss trade issues, remove trade barriers, and improve market access in China, but also to address a wider set of topics dealing with the rule of law, human rights, and the use of natural resources, among other key policy issues. Indeed, it is through the EU that countries like the Netherlands are able to strengthen their positions and augment their political voice.

Just as member-state differences have hampered a common EU approach on Asia-Pacific policy, so too have internal policy differences among different institutional elements of the EU made it difficult

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213 Korteweg, “European Approaches to Asia.”
214 Ibid.
for it to play effectively the policy-multiplier role noted above. To take just one example, the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), both of which oversee the EU’s foreign relations, do not pursue a harmonized policy toward Asia, and in particular towards China. While the EU’s trade commissioner, Karel de Gucht, is willing to be tough with Beijing and confronts China on trade issues, EEAS chief Catherine Ashton is much more reluctant to do so.\footnote{215} This interagency discord creates a number of vulnerabilities that can be exploited by China and other major Asian-Pacific states and institutions, a condition that is often worsened by pre-existing policy differences between individual EU member states and the European Commission. Of course, similar interagency problems can also plague policy making at the European national level, often leaving those charged with fashioning a national response to the U.S. rebalance wondering whether Asia hands or transatlantic experts are (or should be) in the lead.\footnote{216} To some extent, both dynamics serve to bedevil the efforts of all the schools of thought as they take steps to respond to the American pivot and its strategic implications for Asia and beyond.

**European Security Concerns Regarding the Asia-Pacific Region**

Given that the majority of Europe’s interests in the Asia-Pacific are economic in nature, open sea lines of communication and the unimpeded flow of global goods through the area have become a must for healthy Eurasian trade, especially since well over half the world’s merchant tonnage traverses the South China Sea and given the fact that the EU’s maritime trade with Asia already accounts for more than a quarter of all transcontinental container shipping traffic.\footnote{217} Hence, any disruptions to maritime commerce in the region would likely have a very negative effect on Europe’s ailing economy, and for this reason alone NATO Europe, just like the United States, has

\footnotetext[215]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[216]{Ibid.}
\footnotetext[217]{Keohane, “The EU’s Role in East Asian Security.”}
an abiding interest in a stable and secure Asia-Pacific. For Brussels as for Washington, the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes in the region and the need to ensure maritime mobility and freedom of navigation and overflight rights, as appropriate, throughout the East and South China Seas, stand out as top priorities.

Concern for sea-lane security between the Atlantic and Pacific is extending as well into the Arctic Ocean, where newly opening transarctic shipping routes could soon provide a more direct and cost-effective seaway between Europe and Asia, bringing energy-hungry East Asian markets like China, Japan, and South Korea closer to the vast and ever more accessible natural resources of the High North. In 2012, for instance, forty-six commercial vessels carried more than 1.2 million tons of cargo through the increasingly navigable Northern Sea Route (NSR), north of Russia, an increase of 53 percent compared with 2011, and Chinese analysts predict that by 2020 up to 15 percent of China’s total foreign trade will be transported through the NSR.\(^\text{218}\) Not surprisingly, therefore, developments in the Arctic are beginning to provide many Northern European countries, but especially the Nordics, with an additional reason to pay closer attention to Asian security dynamics and the U.S. pivot, as all sides – Asian, European, and American – rely increasingly on the smooth functioning of global trade routes to and from the Pacific (and the energy supplies they carry), including those north of the Arctic Circle. How U.S. and EU sanctions on Russia may affect the Arctic dimension of the Asian security puzzle, of course, remains to be seen, but it will likely be a factor of rising relevance in one shape or another. In this regard, China’s post-sanctions emergence as a more important energy partner for Russia – and possibly a partial funder of Russia’s Arctic oil and gas operations – is but one interesting twist that bears watching.

Whatever happens on the Arctic front, however, it is developments farther to the south in the East and South China Seas that have the Europeans most worried, with simmering tensions and potential conflicts over territorial claims and maritime disputes in the area threatening to cause tectonic shifts in local geopolitics. The number of disputes in the East and South China Seas, for example, has risen dramatically from just four during the 1980s to at least thirty between 2010 and 2012 alone.  

One of the most immediate sources of conflict, in that respect, has centered on regional competition over energy and fishing resources in the South China Sea, an area of about 1.4 million square miles, stretching from Singapore to the Strait of Taiwan, that encompasses major transit routes worth more than $5 trillion in annual trade and is thought as well to hold potential reserves of at least seven billion barrels of oil and about nine hundred trillion cubic feet of natural gas.  

China’s deteriorating relationship with neighboring countries is of particular concern, given Beijing’s ever more aggressive maritime behavior since 2012 and its growing compulsion to assert Chinese preferences rather than seek cooperative or compromise solutions to territorial spats in the region. The Chinese government, for example, has greatly increased its military pressure on Vietnam and the Philippines over their respective claims in the South China Sea, and in May 2014, in an unprecedented and potentially very dangerous move, Beijing planted an oil rig and began active drilling in waters within Vietnam’s declared exclusive economic zone (EEZ). That same month, China also deployed armed warships to reinforce its oil-rig operations near the Paracel Islands, the first time its leadership had done so, and not long after, the Chinese navy reportedly sank a Vietnamese fishing vessel in waters surrounding the area.

Meanwhile, old enmities and territorial disputes between China and Japan, the world’s second- and third-largest economies, have recently resurfaced in the East China Sea, where China’s unilateral proclamation in late 2013 of an air defense identification zone (ADIZ) above


contested waters in the area provoked angry responses from both Japan and South Korea. Moreover, as noted in chapter 2, a string of dangerous incidents between Tokyo and Beijing over the sovereignty of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, administered by Japan, has threatened to mushroom into hot skirmishes, elevating the risk that any missteps or a miscalculation in the ongoing dispute could swiftly veer into a larger confrontation. A number of aggressive episodes near the islands, for example, including a near-collision between Chinese and Japanese military planes in May 2014, followed by continued flybys by Chinese fighter jets, approaching within one hundred feet of Japanese surveillance planes, and separate cases in which Chinese navy frigates used fire-control radars to lock on to a Japanese destroyer and a helicopter as if in preparation to open fire, have all prompted Asian and other military experts, including many in Europe, to warn that both Beijing and Tokyo seem to be ready for “a short war.”

Adding to the fear of an Asia-Pacific conflict is the rapid and consistent growth of Asian military spending, with China’s spending growth rate significantly higher than that of either the United States or the EU at present. Overall, regional governments increased their defense budgets in real terms by roughly 8 percent in 2011 and 7 percent in 2012, and by many estimates China in particular will draw level with the United States in terms of total defense spending by the middle of the century, or even as early as 2040. A number of Southeast Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines, have also made great progress in overhauling their defense strategies and improving, in particular, their naval and air capabilities. In addition, Beijing has acquired an aircraft carrier and is building anti-ship missiles, submarines, and fifth-generation aircraft, while Japan is commissioning new helicopter carriers and fighter jets. So, too, China’s growing ability to project air power well into the South China Sea is

222 Jamie Shea, “NATO and the U.S. Pivot to Asia: To Follow or Not to Follow?” in Transatlantic Security Cooperation in Asia after the U.S. Pivot, German Marshall Fund, April 18—19, 2013.
223 Keohane, “The EU’s Role in East Asian Security.”
a significant cause for concern. As Pentagon officials noted in April 2014, Beijing’s ongoing modernization of its air forces, which is occurring on a scale unprecedented in the country’s history, will soon allow it to close the gap with Western air forces across a broad spectrum of capabilities, including combat aircraft, command and control (C2), jammers, electronic warfare (EW), and data links.\textsuperscript{224}

The Asia-Pacific region, therefore, displays elements of the classic “push-pull cycle” in which arms races both reflect and further exacerbate regional disputes in a way that makes an accident and escalation that can lead to an unintended exchange of fire more possible and de-escalation less likely.\textsuperscript{225} What’s more, unlike many other areas of the world, an Asian conflict would probably involve major state powers, each armed with considerable levels of modern military might, and possibly even nuclear weapon capabilities. Such a conflict would be qualitatively different from the asymmetric conflicts that NATO European countries have confronted over the past twenty-five years, and its consequences would likely be more far-reaching for global security, as well as for commercial, trade, and investment connections worldwide. If, for example, the Straits of Malacca, through which close to 40 percent of the world’s trade passes, were ever blocked as a result of a local conflict, that would pose a direct threat to vital NATO European (and EU) interests, even without an Article 5-type attack on allied territory. And the absence of a strong regional security architecture in Asia comparable to what exists in Europe would make the task of containing the conflict and encouraging de-escalation all that more difficult.


\textsuperscript{225} Shea, “NATO and the U.S. Pivot to Asia.”
With these and related concerns in mind, the European Union has shown growing interest over the past few years in acting as a stabilizing force in East Asian security, an objective that was clearly emphasized in the European Council’s 2012 guidelines on future EU policy in the Asia-Pacific region. Indeed, the guidelines specifically identified developments in and around the South China Sea as one of three main security issues in the region that had a direct bearing on the EU’s interests, the other two being tensions over the Taiwan Strait and North Korea’s nuclear program and frequent exchanges of artillery fire with the South along the maritime extension of the Korean demilitarized zone. Many European experts agree as well that at the grand strategic level, it would be in Europe’s interest to avoid the rise of China as a regional hegemon, especially since Chinese revisionism would likely be accompanied by unpredictability, turbulence, miscalculations, or even a military conflict in the region, all of which could ultimately threaten European interests across Central Asia and the Middle East as well as in East Asia.226 Hence, as also spelled out in the Council’s 2012 guidelines, the EU has concluded that its long-term aims should focus on supporting and encouraging further regional integration and the strengthening of multilateral institutions, such as ASEAN, so as to maintain a much-needed balance of power in the Asia-Pacific, all with the goal of reducing the risk of unilateral expansionist maneuvers by any single power in the area.

In that regard, the EU’s trade-centered approach, according to leaders in Brussels, combined with Europe’s successful experience of post-war political and economic integration, places the European Union in a unique position to help promote security in East Asia, despite the absence there of any major European military assets or bases. As David O’Sullivan, chief operating officer of the EEAS, stated in 2013, since the Asia-Pacific “perhaps doesn’t need another hard security player [like the U.S.],” Europe’s “added value” is to act as a “principled champion of rules-based, cooperative security,” a distinct asset and “a model” that could enable the EU to effectively promote

226 Korteweg, “European Approaches to Asia.”
multilateral solutions, build trust, bolster military-to-military contacts, and share lessons on how to promote regional reconciliation in the face of long-held resentments.\textsuperscript{227} The problem with this up-beat and rather self-congratulatory posture, critics point out, is that so far it has not drawn much interest from key Asian-Pacific governments. As alluded to earlier, moreover, even though the EU’s large single market is a huge attraction for Asian investors and exporters, Europe is still not considered to be a serious security player in the region.\textsuperscript{228}

At present, Britain and France stand apart as the only European powers that are militarily involved to one degree or another in the Asia-Pacific, as both countries maintain a permanent, albeit small and rather limited, military presence in the region. The UK, for instance, has stationed a British garrison of roughly nine hundred troops (mostly Ghurkhas) and a small helicopter group on Brunei, and the Royal Navy owns and operates a large fuel depot and a berthing wharf in Singapore. The wharf, located in Sembawang dockyard, provides access for up to three escorts at a time, and the fuel depot, reported to be the second-largest in the Asia-Pacific region, can be used by allied as well as British ships. In addition, London recently deployed a British destroyer, HMS Daring, to the region for much of 2013 and part of 2014, during which time the crew focused on building military-to-military relations, making port calls, and promoting maritime security. Even more importantly, however, the warship also provided vital humanitarian assistance to the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan hit the country in 2013, a task that served as a reminder of Britain’s renewed commitment to the Asia-Pacific, and which, according to some British analysts, demonstrated as well that only

\textsuperscript{227} David O’Sullivan, “Priorities for EU Diplomacy in East Asia,” GRIPS Forum speech, Tokyo, February 12, 2013.

\textsuperscript{228} Korteweg, “European Approaches to Asia.”
the UK among Europeans is both able and willing to maintain a naval presence in Southeast Asia for any length of time. In any case, HMS Daring’s ability to simultaneously project naval power, provide relief in the wake of natural disasters, and foster strategic cooperation with local partners stands as an excellent model for future Asia-centered missions, and the UK has announced plans to maintain a more regular naval presence in the region.

Britain is also the only European state to boast a multilateral security agreement with partners in Asia in the form of the Five Power Defense Arrangement (FPDA), which was established in 1971 by the UK, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and Malaysia, following the British government’s military withdrawal from Southeast Asia during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Although envisioned as a formal mechanism to talk about security issues, the FPDA does not impose a collective defense obligation on any of its members, and several of its core security rationales have never been disclosed by the members, prohibited from being openly discussed in Southeast Asia for fear of further undermining sometimes strained relations within the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore triangle. Nevertheless, the five militaries do take part in yearly naval and air force exercises to improve interoperability, even though Britain has never been too keen on contributing many forces to these activities or in projecting its expeditionary military power into the area. At the moment, there also seems to be little appetite among the five members to extend the FPDA’s traditional range of security cooperation. It does nonetheless give London a legitimate and ongoing voice on defense trends and security requirements in Southeast Asia, an area of rising American interest as part of its Pacific pivot. Moreover, during the FPDA’s Bersama Shield combined exercise in 2013, Royal Air Force Typhoon fighter aircraft participated for the first time, indicating perhaps an increased interest on the UK’s part in making a stronger show at this annual multilateral event.

229 James Rogers, “Britain and Japan: Two Islands at the Center of World Power,” European Geostrategy, December 1, 2013.
230 Korteweg, “European Approaches to Asia.”
France, meanwhile, maintains two military contingents of roughly eleven hundred to fifteen hundred troops, including infantry forces, a frigate, and surveillance and transport aircraft, in French Polynesia and the New Caledonia archipelago. In particular, France’s ownership of the above territories in the southern Pacific, together with Reunion/Mayotte in the Indian Ocean, prompted the French defense minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, to declare at the 2013 Shangri-La Dialogue that “France is a power of the Indian Ocean and of the Pacific Ocean,” and that Paris intends to remain fully committed to fostering security for the strategically important Asia-Pacific region.\(^{231}\) The country’s territorial presence in the region, which is something that no other European country can match, is also one of the main arguments put forth by France in its bid, announced in 2013, to join the ADMM+ framework mentioned earlier, a forum consisting of the defense ministers of Southeast Asian nations (plus the United States and Russia) that meets to discuss regional issues of security importance, including maritime stability, counterterrorism, disaster relief, and humanitarian assistance. In this regard, France’s posture gives the metoo school at least a small strategic perch in the region that could in time expand.\(^{232}\)

As this quick summary of British and French assets in the Asia-Pacific region confirms, Europe’s forward military posture there is, while useful, still quite small scale. On the other hand, the scale of Europe’s defense sales and its defense-industrial relationships with Asian countries reveal a much larger level of involvement, and stand perhaps as the strongest tools it has to advance European interests in Asia, at times in competition with the United States. Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the


\(^{232}\) For a short overview of French interests and capabilities in Asia, see Leveau, “What Place for the Asia-Pacific in French Global Strategy?”
Netherlands, for example, all compete for a share of Asia’s defense technology and weapons market, and they will continue to do so as tensions in the region rise and national military budgets and spending increase accordingly. Apart from London’s defense agreement with Japan in July 2013, recent activities of note include Germany’s sale of Type-214 submarines to South Korea, and an arrangement between Paris and Tokyo in January 2014 to work together on various military technologies, including discussions about France’s export policy on dual-use capabilities, which has been a key Japanese concern. In addition, the militaries of South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand are becoming increasingly dependent on imports of European arms and military technologies. As a result, European defense firms are now providing core capabilities for Asian customers in the areas of military aerospace, associated weapons, and naval systems, and Europe’s defense industry in general is starting to play a larger role in Asian defense and security, a fact that is often overlooked when weighing Europe’s own inclination to pivot to Asia. Given the fact that Europe’s larger Asian customers clearly wish to expand their ability to produce their “own” equipment, it is also likely that the “re-export” of European-based systems from Asia will eventually become more of a reality for the global arms market in the twenty-first century. Clearly, then, the defense-industrial relationship between Europe and Asia provides NATO European powers with a degree of influence over the future direction of Asian-Pacific security policies and the opportunity at least to discuss mutual security concerns with their Asian counterparts.

Nevertheless, even though Europe continues to emphasize its trade promotion efforts and its generally non-threatening approach to Asia, some European experts have cautioned that the EU and its member states are walking a diplomatic tightrope in Asia, and will likely find it increasingly difficult in the future to stay out of or ignore disputes and flare-ups over sovereignty claims in the East and South China

233 Korteweg, “European Approaches to Asia.”
234 Laird, “America Pivots to Asia; Europe Arms It.”
235 Korteweg, “European Approaches to Asia.”
Seas. Brussels, for example, recently found itself in hot water when Tokyo became upset by the EU’s muffled response and lack of criticism over China’s self-proclaimed ADIZ, and Beijing not long afterward was displeased with the EU’s weak statements on Japanese Prime Minister Abe’s controversial visit to a wartime shrine. Similarly, while European countries have repeatedly underlined their impartiality with respect to cases of contested maritime rights in the region, EU members may soon be forced to make a difficult decision regarding one such matter, as the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, based in Hamburg, is reviewing an arbitration case submitted by the Philippines to help settle its dispute with Beijing over a chain of islands in the South China Sea. A ruling on the issue would potentially force Europe to decide between neutrality and backing an international legal opinion that could very well raise China’s hackles. In that regard, it may well be better for Europe to accept that its current strategy of non-involvement will never be considered adequate by either side, not least because territorial disputes are a matter of vital national interest for all of the Asian states involved. As one influential European observer recently suggested, if Europe wants to be taken seriously on security issues, it may have to “start picking sides.”

Possible New Roles for Europe in Asia-Pacific Security

Should they have to “pick sides,” a number of European countries and security organizations do have some capacity to contribute more directly to the security of the Asian-Pacific region, despite their limited military presence there. To begin with, using their accumulated expertise in preventive diplomacy and the handling of non-traditional threats, European governments and their militaries could become more involved in training and exercise programs in the Asia-Pacific region. They could also become more active in capacity-building initiatives in the areas of security sector reform, disaster management, maritime and energy security, counter-piracy efforts,

236 Ibid.
237 Ibid.
and counterterrorism activities, or even in wider-ranging efforts to strengthen regional security structures by boosting ASEAN’s role in East Asian stability. Some European nations can also play a more active role in engaging their Asia-Pacific counterparts on higher-end security challenges in such areas as nuclear non-proliferation and arms control, cooperation on cyber security, and ensuring freedom of navigation, especially given Europe’s interest in having a say on the ultimate rules and outcomes that prevail with regard in these specific matters. Closer to home, enhanced European efforts to keep open vital sea lines of communication that connect the U.S. east coast to the western Indian Ocean and, more generally, doing what they can to guarantee allied access to the Indo-Pacific from the west – via the Mediterranean Sea, Suez Canal, Red Sea, and Bab el-Mandeb Strait – could also provide major contributions to the success of America’s pivot goals in Asia and to Asian security overall.238

More specifically, the Europeans point to the many contributions that NATO European forces (and USEUCOM) can and do make to security operations well outside the European theater, a good number of which may benefit Asian-Pacific security – and, again, the goals of the rebalance – in direct and indirect ways. Already, for example, European naval deployments to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean in support of counter-piracy operations help to secure some of the sea routes that remain important to both the United States and Asia for commerce and strategic mobility, including transit from the Mediterranean to the Pacific (which could be required for pivot-related missions). According to some naval analysts, maritime security missions by European navies could possibly even be extended farther into the strategic waterways of Asia in times of crisis, perhaps to include patrols by Western nuclear-powered attack submarines. Taking their

cue from the *Daring* deployment, other European states, together with the UK, might also pool their resources to make sure that there is a more visible and regular destroyer-scale maritime presence from Europe operating in the region. However likely such missions may or may not be, military planners at NATO have begun to recognize that the Alliance needs to develop an Asia-oriented mindset and an agenda of its own in parallel with the American rebalance, so as not to be caught off guard by events that, though seemingly far away, could have an immediate effect on Europe’s economic health and well-being.

With respect to conflict prevention and humanitarian relief in particular, the EU has already made important contributions to several confidence-building, conflict-mediation, and post-conflict reconstruction measures in Southeast Asia, demonstrating its ability to bring various European political, development, and humanitarian instruments together in support of Asian security. In 2005, for example, the EU deployed a special monitoring mission to Aceh, Indonesia, to help implement a peace plan that would end a nearly three-decades-long conflict in the area. EU members have participated as well in confidence-building efforts in Southern Mindanao, efforts that led in March 2014 to a politically negotiated settlement of the sectarian conflict there, and the EU has also been active in post-conflict development in Timor Leste and, more recently (and noted already), in providing disaster relief to the Philippines. Significantly, as these cases illustrate, the EU’s widely recognized preference for decisions by consensus and its track record of effective multilateralism position it well to take a more central role in bolstering security in the Asia-Pacific region, where serious mechanisms for regional cooperation – and the habit of such cooperation – are just now taking root. As mentioned earlier, drawing on lessons from their unique experience in post-World War 2 reconciliation, for example, European countries have much they could share on ways to move beyond the types of historic grievances and animosities that still complicate Sino-Japanese and Korean-Japanese relations, as well as Japan’s ties with several Southeast Asian countries. In fact, a number of the EU’s Asia-Pacific partners have already signaled that they would welcome the Union’s
enhanced engagement in that specific arena. In addition, and related to this role, the EU can and should continue to promote the framework of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as offering the best approach for settling disputed maritime claims. This, too, is an area where Europe has a legitimate and influential voice, especially since the United States has yet to ratify and accept the convention.

Aside from emphasizing adherence to global collaborative frameworks, some naval experts have suggested that European countries could also help to advance diplomatic solutions to maritime disputes, while lending support to the U.S. rebalance and affirming the right of innocent passage in contested waters, by participating more routinely in peacetime maritime exercises and freedom-of-navigation (FON) operations. European seafaring countries, for example, can dispatch vessels flying Western flags to cruise through the East and South China Seas and their approaches in response to Beijing’s excessive maritime claims and its increasing resolve to tightly control if not block the free passage of ships through Chinese-claimed disputed waterways. Such deployments are especially important, given that unreasonable legal claims that go uncontested have a way of solidifying into international practice and consequently, over time, into international law. 

By showing the flag and engaging in the occasional FON tour, European navies can deliberately counter China’s or any other coastal state’s attempt at undue aggressiveness or overreach on the high seas.

So, too, as promoted by the global Atlanticist school, European allies and their fleets could also help the rebalance policy by taking on greater responsibility for maritime security in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea, which would free up high-end U.S. assets and allow Washington to focus its energies elsewhere and reposition naval forces for more pressing theaters of action, including

European allies could help the rebalance by assuming more responsibility for security in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea

239 Ibid.
in the Asia-Pacific. By engaging in these and similar maritime security activities, other Western navies can support the U.S. pivot by simply continuing to operate together with American forces, honing their ability to fight side by side, and preserving in this way their hard-won skills, tactics, and procedures in support of combined operations. This is an especially important feature of U.S.-European collaboration, given that the capacity to conduct effective combined operations, which remains one of the transatlantic alliance’s greatest virtues, also requires nurturing and care.\(^{240}\) As noted as well by the global Atlanticists, NATO, more specifically, could also play a more central role in facilitating European contributions to such activities, particularly given the Alliance’s agreement at its 2010 Lisbon summit that the Alliance as a whole should take on more of a global security role. Since then, NATO has sought to expand its global ties and operational capacities well beyond the Euro-Atlantic zone to include the Asia-Pacific region, and it has done this precisely because many of the Alliance’s primary security challenges – from energy security to cyber security, terrorism, illicit trafficking, and pandemics – are no longer regional but rather global in reach. Moreover, this broadening of NATO’s geographic focus is happening at the same time that major Asian-Pacific countries – most notably, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and even India (not to mention China) – aspire to a stronger global posture in their own right, in part through closer security cooperation with NATO and other regional security organizations, or by participating in extra-regional operations that may include NATO and/or EU members (e.g., in Afghanistan, in Sudan, off the Somali coast, and along key sea lanes to and from the Pacific). For NATO and its potential Asian partners, the United States has been a very helpful go-between in this process, and, with the pivot to Asia still a primary objective of the Obama administration, Washington could play an even more powerful facilitating role for NATO in Asia going forward. Hence, rather than trigger a reduction in European security via a loosening of transatlantic ties,

\(^{240}\) Ibid.
America’s strategic rebalancing toward Asia could actually pave the way toward (in the words of a 2012 editorial on the topic) a unique “Pacific moment” for NATO and its European member states, and one in which the U.S.-NATO link could prove indispensable.241

Applying NATO’s global partnership concept more fully in the Asia-Pacific could improve security in the region, raise the Alliance’s profile there, and support as well – even if only indirectly – key goals of the American pivot in a number of ways. First, as confirmed by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, which saw contributions from twenty-one non-NATO countries, NATO can secure through partnerships important financial, military, and political support for its missions abroad without which those missions could not be sustained, and this could certainly hold true with regard to operations the Alliance might seek to conduct in Asia. Second, such partnerships give NATO a useful organizational framework through which it can try to influence regional dynamics and perhaps even defuse crisis situations before they boil over in strategically important non-NATO regions, which, again, would include Asia. Third, through training and military assistance, the Alliance, it has been argued by one European specialist on NATO, “can enable partner countries to take care of their own regional security and to intervene, if needed, in crisis situations on their doorstep.”242 Empowerment of this kind, he went on to say, can drastically reduce the pressure on NATO allies to


242 See Karl-Heinz Kamp, “How NATO Can Pivot Towards Asia,” in A Transatlantic Pivot to Asia, ed. Binnendijk, 207. The authors are indebted to the insights offered and suggestions made by Dr. Kamp, many of which we have drawn on and elaborated upon in our discussion of the ways in which NATO could pivot to Asia and also support the American rebalance strategy.
use their own shrinking forces for out-of-area crises.\textsuperscript{243} A well-devised network of NATO partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region, therefore, could help NATO European countries acquire additional means of influence within the region, complementing the economic ties they might have through the EU. And once again, the incentives are fairly high for many Asian nations to participate in partnership programs with NATO, as doing so would allow them at least to approach NATO standards for joint and combined military operations, standards to which they all aspire.

For NATO, however, seizing its “Pacific moment” by means of active global partnerships along these lines will take some time. For example, even though then-NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen traveled to both Japan and South Korea during 2013, and despite the fact that NATO recently signed a joint political declaration with Tokyo to cooperate on emerging security challenges, Rasmussen stressed that the Alliance did not intend to participate in military training in the region any time soon, and that the NATO-Japan agreement focused principally on information exchanges, at least initially.\textsuperscript{244} Meanwhile, NATO, according to a prominent German expert on Alliance policy with a clear global Atlanticist bent, could pursue a number of dialogue and outreach activities targeted toward Asian-Pacific partners that would not involve major military deployments or large financial commitments. For example, as it has done in Moscow and Kiev, NATO could establish special liaison offices in key Asia-Pacific capitals like Tokyo, Seoul, and Canberra, a step that would signal its real interest in Asian security matters and provide regional platforms for sharing information about the Alliance with a broader regional audience. In addition, to remain more fully abreast of security concerns and developments in Asia, NATO could sponsor occasional visits to key countries in the region by top

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{244} Korteweg, “European Approaches to Asia.”
allied leaders (including the chairman of the NATO military committee and various assistant secretaries general, as well as the secretary general), and it could also dispatch high-level representatives on a regular basis to important regional security discussions, such as those held by the ASEAN Regional Forum.

So, too, back in Brussels, the Alliance could establish a new forum for advanced partner countries that share NATO values and are fully developed democracies, such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as Austria, Sweden, and Finland, so that they could all closely confer on a more formal basis with NATO members on questions of common interest. Finally, to encourage exchange on matters of nuclear security policy (including counter-proliferation measures), NATO could offer observer status at selected meetings of its Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) to Asian-Pacific countries—such as Japan and South Korea—that enjoy an extended deterrence nuclear guarantee from the United States. For Japanese and South Korean officials in particular, participation in relevant NPG meetings could expand their knowledge on alternative ways to maintain extended deterrence in Northeast Asia, an issue of growing importance to them and to the success of the pivot. These limited but feasible measures would provide the NATO European allies with useful avenues to engage more directly with Asian-Pacific countries on strategic trends and requirements in their region, and to do so in concert with the United States.²⁴⁵

To further ease America’s defense burden in NATO’s near abroad, the Alliance, it has been suggested by more than one global Atlanticist, could also transform its anti-piracy mission in the Indian Ocean into a standing maritime group, similar in structure and mode of operation to those that are already cruising in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. This could provide NATO with a more permanent maritime presence along sea lanes critical to Europe’s economic health, while hopefully freeing up additional U.S. assets to focus on the Asia-Pacific. That said, apart from the small British and French

deployments discussed earlier, any larger and more regularized role for European militaries in Asia proper, naval or otherwise, will not be easy to organize and maintain, especially since many in NATO Europe simply do not have the means, even if they have the desire, to sustain such a commitment. European defense capabilities in general have been eroding for decades as military budgets have shrunk, despite repeated promises to increase spending and improve efficiencies. Today, more than 70 percent of all NATO defense spending comes from the United States. Only a handful of European countries contribute the suggested 2 percent of GDP on defense, while Washington spends more than 4 percent.\textsuperscript{246} Moreover, despite the newly militant tone between NATO and Moscow, it is unlikely, experts say, that Russia’s annexation of Crimea will prompt a dramatic increase in European military spending at a time of continued economic and budget cuts, despite proposals to do so at the Wales summit. This particular state of affairs has led Rolf Tamnes, one of Norway’s leading strategy and defense scholars, to note recently that going forward Washington will need to “make it crystal clear that the European part of NATO will have to stand up and raise its defense expenditure,” a task, he went on to stress, that is “unpleasant at times” but necessary in the longer term “to maintain coherence in the Alliance.”\textsuperscript{247}

Meanwhile, without such a turn-around in defense investments, major gaps will continue to grow in European defense capabilities and the capacity to deploy them effectively. For a fairly current example, one need look no further than the unexpected and quite embarrassing difficulties faced by the German military in September 2014 as it tried to transport weapons and military trainers to Iraq to help bolster local Kurdish forces in their fight against ISIS. In a nutshell, there was not a single German transport aircraft available, the Dutch aircraft eventually used broke down, the instructors were stranded for a time in Bulgaria, and the arms arrived well after the German


defense minister, who flew to Erbil to witness their handover, had left for home.248 According to a June 2104 report on the widening gap between ambition and capacity within the Alliance, NATO’s land forces, in particular, have lost substantial ground when it comes to their overall combat capacities, with glaring shortfalls in the size of units and the equipment and facilities at their disposal. Paradoxically, this has raised concerns about the future ability of allied land forces to deploy rapidly and sustain themselves operationally, even though NATO troops have benefitted from extensive operational experience and newly learned expeditionary capabilities as a result of lengthy deployments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Africa. Another example involves NATO European shortages in aerial support and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), leading to an almost exclusive dependence on Washington for battlefield intelligence from such platforms, as was the case in Libya and at the start of the French-led operation in Mali.249 In short, if trouble were to start in the East or South China Seas, over North Korea, or around Taiwan, Europe may find itself without any meaningful capabilities to contribute, however vital its interests at stake may be.

Moreover, even in situations where they are both willing and able to project power beyond Europe, many European allies, across the various schools of thought outlined in this chapter, are also keen to avoid any mission creep that might arise with a more active NATO position in Asia, and some officials in Brussels may even reject outright the notion of an upgraded European presence there, especially

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248 Frank Jordans, “German Military Struggles,” Boston Globe, September 27, 2014. According to a confidential report to the German parliament that was leaked to the press, hardware problems are rife in the German military, with only 24 of 43 C-160 transport planes (the real workhorse of the air force) available, just 42 of 109 Eurofighter, and 38 of 89 Tornado jets ready to fly, and none of the German navy’s Sea Lynx helicopters suitable for anti-piracy duties thanks to cracks in their tails.

since recent allied operations in the Middle East and North Africa have been highly controversial within NATO policy circles. There does not seem to be much interest among Washington’s European allies, for example, in once more taking on anything close to what was required by the recent wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and even Libya. Nor is there much enthusiasm in a number of influential countries for a more assertive European role overseas in general, as illustrated in a recent survey by the Koerber Foundation that found that only 37 percent of Germans favored “more involvement in international crises,” a decline from roughly 62 percent two decades ago. Needless to say, that level of opposition could very well increase with regard to a conflict that could erupt half the world away.

However, this should not preclude the Alliance from engaging in a more subtle shift in strategic focus to include more of an Asian-Pacific slant, and many in Europe agree that NATO has an important role to play in the region. It can do so, they go on to suggest, not so much by undertaking military operations in the region, but by putting the Asia-Pacific as a whole more squarely on its radar screen and acting in the overall security interests of the Alliance when Asia security issues crop up, so as to guarantee NATO’s continued relevance for years or decades to come. One immediate consequence of the U.S. pivot that European members cannot avoid is the reality that if NATO is to remain a global player, and if it hopes to retain at least a residual capacity to operate in the Asia-Pacific region when it truly must do so, then it will also have to review its defense planning process to ensure that it pays adequate attention to the kinds of capabilities that will increasingly be needed for Asia-oriented operations, be that in peacetime or in times of conflict. This would include strategic lift and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, special operations forces, cyber-defense capabilities, and WMD protection, as well as a range of naval forces, all of which would significantly enhance NATO’s value as a security partner in the region. Looking ahead, it can be argued as well that NATO (and USEUCOM)

education, training, and exercise programs stand as unique assets for improving and expanding allied and partner operational capabilities in ways that are as potentially relevant for Asian security in the context of the rebalance – and a potential NATO or EU pivot to the Pacific of one kind or another – as they are for European security.

**Russian Responses to the Rebalance**

Moscow, too, has begun looking east and seeking a more prominent role in Asia and the Pacific over the past five years. Russian President Vladimir Putin, for example, noted in September 2012 that Russia views an increasingly dynamic Asia as “the most important factor for the successful future of the whole country.”

A rapidly increasing percentage of Russian trade is conducted with Asian states, and China has consistently been Russia’s largest single trade partner since 2010. In fact, Moscow’s fast-expanding trade with Beijing is already higher than its trade with Germany or the United States, aiming to reach $200 billion by 2020, while trade volume with Japan and South Korea has in the meantime doubled and tripled, respectively, in the five years up to 2010. For this reason, and also to boost development of the Russian Far East, Moscow has been working hard to negotiate a series of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements with countries in the Asia-Pacific, including Vietnam, New Zealand, and Singapore. In June 2013, moreover, Putin, speaking at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, declared his intentions to “take a page” from America’s book and pivot east. Significantly, he went on to announce sweeping measures to boost Russia’s economic growth by looking to the Asia-Pacific region rather than to its traditional markets in Europe, and proposed substantial investments in infrastructure, including upgrading the trans-Siberian railway to better link his

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country to the Pacific. Putin also praised Russia’s state oil company Rosneft for successfully concluding a major oil export deal with China earlier in 2013. The speech came less than a year after the Russian president hosted for the first time the annual meeting of the leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Vladivostok, an event billed as “Russia’s official coming out party—or coming back out party—after decades of strategic and economic neglect of its own Far East.”

The shift in economic focus might sound very much like the U.S. pivot to Asia, and Russia has indeed begun to reassert its military presence in the Asia-Pacific, much as the United States and other regional powers have done. Most recently, for example, in mid-November 2014, a fleet of four Russian warships entered international waters off the northeastern Australian coast to highlight and coincide with Putin’s visit to Australia for the G20 summit which brings together the leaders of the world’s twenty largest industrialized and developing economies. The warships’ presence has been widely interpreted as a “show of force” by Moscow and as a way for the country to flex its naval muscle and to demonstrate Putin’s desire to assert Russian military power deep into the Pacific region, which generally falls outside Moscow’s traditional area of operations. Russia, for its part, has claimed the ships are there to perform research and to test their range of capability, while also providing security for Putin, although Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott has angrily accused Russia of trying to “reclaim the lost glories” of the Soviet Union. What is different about the Kremlin’s recent security-related moves, however, is that Moscow has made a concerted effort to emphasize that

254 Ibid.
255 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
its main goal is to cooperate, not compete, with Beijing. Russia, according to informed observers, denies outright any suggestions that there is even the slightest element of trying to contain China in its regional policy. Indeed, during a meeting with international journalists and analysts in the Russian Black Sea resort city of Sochi in September 2010, Putin accused “foreign experts” of “always trying to frighten us with China.” He retorted, “We’re not frightened. China does not worry us… China and Russia will cooperate on many questions.”

Russian-Chinese relations, as Putin boasted at the APEC summit, are at an unprecedentedly high level, and Beijing seems to have taken a similar line, with the two countries coordinating their stance more closely over foreign policy issues, including Syria, and Chinese President Xi Jinping choosing to make his first official trip as president to Russia in March 2013.

In July of the same year, moreover, Beijing and Moscow cemented even further their cooperation with joint naval exercises in the Sea of Japan, and in recent months long-range Russian air patrols and naval activity in the Asia-Pacific have increased significantly, which U.S. military commanders have attributed largely to a desire on Moscow’s part to demonstrate its strategic capabilities in response to Western criticism of its actions in Crimea and Ukraine and to signal its solidarity with Chinese displeasure with President Obama’s statements of America’s renewed resolve to pivot to Asia. Even more significantly, in May 2014 Russia concluded a huge and long-awaited deal to begin supplying 1.34 trillion cubic feet of natural gas to China beginning in 2018. The thirty-year agreement, worth an estimated $400 billion, not only fulfills Russia’s goal to increase exports to Asia, but also, with the stroke of a pen, Moscow has sharply shifted its economic relations with its neighbors, creating a major new export market to the east and reducing its reliance on European customers at a time when its relations with the West are at their lowest point

258 Hill and Lo, “Putin’s Pivot.”
259 Ibid.
since the Cold War. In this sense, the sanctions imposed on Russia by the West in response to Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its support for Ukrainian separatists has pushed Moscow more quickly and solidly into Beijing’s arms than might otherwise have been the case.

That said, the incentives for Putin to make Russia a powerful Eurasian player that looks both ways – East and West – pre-date the Crimea and Ukraine incidents, and the Kremlin’s fundamental motivations in that regard are relatively transparent. Like many in the United States and in Asia, Moscow subscribes to the fashionable notion that a global shift in power to the East is under way, and that the rise of China will likely come at the expense of the United States and the West. As one of the world’s largest oil and gas producers, Russia considers energy one of its primary sources of strength, especially since proceeds from hydrocarbons production make up a quarter of the country’s gross domestic product and nearly half of government revenues. While Russia had already begun looking east well before the recent unrest in Ukraine, the resultant deepening rift between Moscow and the West has not only solidified Russian inclinations to tilt towards East Asia, but it has also served to accelerate Russia’s drive to use its energy supplies to develop closer relations with China and other nations in the Asia-Pacific, a trend that will likely persist into the foreseeable future. With regard to Moscow’s pivot toward Asia, then, as one Russian foreign policy expert recently explained, “we are talking about a certain eastward reorientation of the Russian strategy in general [which] will be happening inevitably.”

Although it primarily seeks to turn its transactional partnership with China into a strategic alliance, Moscow is also, in a quiet hedge, attempting to strengthen its relations with Beijing’s neighbors. Unlike those of other European countries, however, Russia’s Pacific pivot, according to many pundits, is motivated as much by its anxiety about the

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262 Hill and Lo, “Putin’s Pivot.”
vulnerability of its sparsely populated eastern parts as by its desire to protect its landmass, increase its overall presence in the Pacific, bridge the growing gap between its own policies toward Asia and Europe, and devise an appropriate strategy to work with China and other regional players.\footnote{264}{Hill and Lo, “Putin’s Pivot.”} According to one of Russia’s leading commentators, \emph{Euro-Pacific power}” given the country’s “historical eastward expansion, its unique Eurasian geography and fusion of cultures, and the inescapable demographic and economic rise of the Asia-Pacific, the only future for Russia is as a Euro-Pacific power.”\footnote{265}{Ibid.}

Unfortunately for Putin, experts say, Moscow currently has only limited capacity to make its Pacific pivot aspirations a reality. To some extent, this is tied to the fact that, in spite of the recent flurry of eastward activity by Russia, Asia remains more of a “sideshow” than a central front in Russian foreign and security policy.\footnote{266}{Ibid.} For all its posturing about turning Russia into a nexus of intra-Asian trade and cooperation, Moscow’s strategic focus, according to analysts, is still “stuck on the West” – its current population is mostly in the West, its economic ties are still mostly oriented to the West, and its official military doctrine remains preoccupied with the United States and NATO.\footnote{267}{Ibid.} Indeed, a good many in NATO Europe, especially in the redirector school of thought, have argued of late that Moscow was secretly delighted by Obama’s pivot to Asia, as it appeared to create (or at least to promise) something of a power vacuum along NATO’s eastern flank and in former Soviet territory that Russia might be able to exploit. Prior to the crisis triggered by events in Ukraine, for example, Moscow had been quite actively using its dominant position in the energy markets in Central and East Europe to gain greater political leverage in these countries – including those that are now

\footnote{264}{Hill and Lo, “Putin’s Pivot.”} \footnote{265}{Ibid.} \footnote{266}{Ibid.} \footnote{267}{Ibid.}
members of NATO – and to block any efforts by them to reduce their dependence on Russian energy supplies by developing domestic and foreign supply alternatives. Toward that end, Russia has been building a new nuclear power plant in Kaliningrad in part to undermine (and render uneconomical) efforts by the three Baltic states to reduce if not eliminate their reliance on Russian nuclear-generated electricity by building a replacement to the Soviet-era nuclear plant at Ignalina that Lithuania had to close down as part of its accession to the EU. In a similar vein, Russian energy conglomerates have invested heavily since 2012 in the energy sectors of Bulgaria, Romania, and a number of smaller Balkan states, including in local gas station networks, investments that could offer Moscow additional ways to bring pressure on these countries if and when it ever needed to do so. But the main point here is that old patterns and preoccupations are hard to break for Russia, including its traditional westward--leaning geopolitical focus.

Meanwhile, its ventures in the Asia-Pacific region have so far brought mixed results. Over the past two decades, for instance, Russia has developed considerable oil and gas resources on Sakhalin Island to respond to the growing energy demands of its neighbors in Northeast Asia, and it has completed the construction of a major oil export pipeline across Siberia to the Pacific coast that also links to China. Yet, Russia’s twenty million tons in 2011 accounted for only around 6 percent of Chinese oil imports, well behind those provided by Saudi Arabia and Angola. Similarly, Russian trade with APEC states now stands at $96 billion, less than a quarter of Russia’s total trade volume and a small fraction of APEC’s $16 trillion total trade turnover. This marginal contribution to the regional economy undermines Moscow’s claims to a larger political role in Asia and adds

269 Hill and Lo, “Putin’s Pivot.”
270 Ibid.
to the skepticism many Asian officials express about Russia as an Asian power. Moreover, despite the fact that Russia’s latest natural gas deal with China, along with a multi-billion dollar deal signed in 2013 to double oil supplies to the Asian power, could have broad geopolitical and market-shaking economic implications, it remains unclear exactly what direction the newly cemented partnership between Moscow and Beijing will take over the longer term. It is difficult to see, moreover, how Russia’s share of China’s oil market will grow significantly given the general increase in Chinese oil imports from Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, and some observers even wonder if Moscow’s massive natural gas agreement signed in 2014 is more an opportunity for China to strike a good deal than a reliable safety net for the Russian energy sector and thus for Russia itself. What’s more, stricter sanctions that include a ban on U.S. and European exports of advanced drilling technologies and associated equipment to Russia could easily stall the Kremlin’s energy ambitions, hurting in particular the country’s plans for further exploration and development of its vast offshore oil and gas reserves in the Arctic Ocean. Indeed, Russia’s industry is heavily dependent on the assistance of Western energy companies, and Moscow sorely lacks the experience and expertise to operate on its own in the Arctic’s extremely demanding conditions.

Overall, Russia’s economic footprint in the Asia-Pacific is still rather modest, given that it accounts for only 1 percent of total regional trade and just over 2 percent of China’s external trade. Despite Putin’s promises to boost those figures, the increasingly neo-colonial character of Moscow’s trade relationship with Beijing is “a sore point.” Most of Russia’s current trade with China, for example, consists of natural resource exports in exchange for Chinese manufacturing and consumer imports, and Beijing, furthermore, has shown little interest so far in

271 Mankoff and Barabanov, Prospects for U.S.-Russia Cooperation.
272 Hill and Lo, “Putin’s Pivot.”
Russian industrial products except for arms, and even that demand has stalled in recent years. China’s frustration is growing, too, as Moscow has routinely refused to allow Chinese companies to acquire sizeable equity in Russian energy projects, including those in Russia’s High North. In fact, as some commentators point out, the Kremlin often appears to regard Beijing as “the investor of last resort – the partner it turns to only when all other possibilities have been exhausted.”

Aside from Russia’s relatively small economic presence in Asia, moreover, Moscow has little discernible influence region-wide on decision making in the security realm, which remains largely the purview of China, Japan, South Korea, and the United States. Notwithstanding the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Russia in April 2013 – the first by a Japanese prime minister in a decade – relations with Japan remain difficult and tense, which is also one of the main obstacles to a more visible role for Moscow in Northeast Asia. During a recent massive Russian military exercise in the Russian Far East, for example, Japan and the United States were the putative invading enemy forces. Furthermore, Moscow and Tokyo have yet to sign a formal peace treaty following World War 2, and the prospects for a resolution to their long-running dispute over the Southern Kuriles (known as the Northern Territories in Japan) remain rather slim. This may account at least in part for what Japanese defense officials have described as an abnormally high number of patrols by Russian aircraft in recent months close to the Kuriles and to Japanese airspace above the Sea of Japan, flights that are occurring at a more frequent rate than during the Cold War. None of this, of course, means that Japan will not buy Russian oil and gas, but it does suggest that Tokyo will be very reluctant to make any major investments in building up Russia’s Far East. So, too, on the Korean Peninsula, Russia is the least influential player in the so-called (and stalled) six-party talks, which have aimed, so far without success, to negotiate an end to North

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273 Ibid.
274 Ibid.
275 Ibid.
Korea’s nuclear program. Indeed, Moscow’s contribution has been described in the past as “more nuisance than value” by regional diplomats, and Russia remains almost entirely peripheral to attempts to resolve the impasse between North and South Korea.²⁷⁷

In summary, then, Russia’s present pivot to the Asia-Pacific, according to a growing number of Russia watchers, is not so much settled policy as rhetoric. Despite its eagerness to play a larger role in the region, the country has been slow to diversify relations in Asia, and Asian elites – including those in China – regard Russia as “neither Asian nor a credible player in the region.”²⁷⁸ They believe, likewise, that Russia is still rooted in Europe, or at best, only partly in Central Asia, and that it has little to contribute to East Asian countries beyond natural resources and weapons.²⁷⁹ Further complicating matters is the fact that Putin has taken a particularly top-heavy approach to foreign policy, in which he and his ruling elite deal personally with leaders of other countries, often in pursuit of domestic agendas. That kind of operation, experts point out, is difficult to pull off in the Asia-Pacific region, not the least because Putin and his inner circle have few close contacts and little expertise there.²⁸⁰ As a result, one could draw the conclusion that, unlike the United States, Russia does not yet have the presence, the capabilities, or even the level of interest to make its Asia-Pacific pivot a strategic and economic reality to any serious degree.²⁸¹ To be sure, Moscow’s ambitions in Asia need to be carefully considered, especially to the extent that they may be coordinated with China’s, but they are not likely to have much of an impact any time soon on the U.S. pivot to Asia and how it is perceived in Europe.

²⁷⁷ Hill and Lo, “Putin’s Pivot.”
²⁷⁸ Ibid.
²⁷⁹ Ibid.
²⁸⁰ Ibid.
²⁸¹ Ibid.
Conclusion

In many ways, the announcement of the U.S. rebalance to Asia caught Europe in a moment of real weakness, rattled by the euro crisis, growing concerns over the rigidity of EU institutions, a seemingly unstoppable decline in defense spending, and ongoing worries about the drift in transatlantic relations. It is no wonder, therefore, that Europe initially reacted to the pivot with, in the words of one European strategist, a classic “freeze-fight-flight” response. The “freeze” aspect, he suggests, was tied to the inability of Europe – given its vulnerabilities presented above – to respond in any concrete way to the pivot by joining it, launching a serious competitive effort, or moving quickly to pick up more of the burden of defending Europe (and European interests) as America turned its strategic focus to Asia. Hence, Europe’s first reaction was, for the most part, paralysis. The “fight” dimension, however, was reflected, he suggested, in renewed calls thereafter to build up the much-discussed but ever elusive “European defense pole” to defend Europe and its near abroad and to balance against Russian, Asian, or, for that matter, American power. A variant, he noted as well, adhered more to an “every man for himself” approach, in which individual nations and non-governmental organizations tried to develop their own strategies to improve European defenses and to engage Asian-Pacific partners without regard to what other European countries and relevant institutions were doing. The same constraints that led to the freeze factor, however, made progress on either of these two fronts, he argued, very hard going (if not next to impossible), at least over the near-to mid-term. Finally, the “flight” response, he went on to say, could be seen in the argument made by some that Europe’s day in the sun was now over, and that the best thing to do was to retreat behind Europe’s walls, leave the big power competition to China, the United States, and even Russia, and focus to the greatest extent possible on protecting Europe’s socio-economic welfare. None of these reactions, he concluded, was very conducive to U.S.-European collaboration.

282 IFPA interviews with EU official, June and July 2013.
on the pivot itself or on ways to ensure that it wouldn’t undermine European security, and some were actually antithetical to any such collaboration. The situation was made worse, he added, by the fact that Washington had made little effort to solicit the opinions of its European allies as it developed the pivot or to inform them about its main elements before it was publicly announced. For the first year or so after the plan was released, therefore, the reaction in Europe was largely a combination of fear, anger, confusion, and resentment, even though many Europeans could see the logic of an American shift toward Asia and the potential benefit of initiating a pivot of their own to one degree or another.

Fortunately, the European response to the pivot – and the American counter-response – did not end there. Over the past two years or so, for example, it has become clear, as detailed in chapter 2, that the rebalance to Asia was more of a gradual, step-by-step affair, rather than a dramatic and sharp shift in focus. As a result, fears of a sudden decrease in European security as a result of the pivot have lessened significantly among America’s European allies. Similarly, it is generally recognized now on both sides of the Atlantic that U.S. military deployments (and re-deployments) to the Asian-Pacific region have not been as large-scale as many anticipated they would be, nor are they likely to be so anytime soon. The reasons, as discussed earlier in this study, are varied, including funding cuts due to sequestration and the likelihood of more to come, slow progress on the economic and diplomatic aspects of the pivot, and the security demands imposed by unforeseen developments in other critical regions, most notably in the Middle East and in northern Europe, but also in Africa. Indeed, as the regional Atlanticists in Europe expected, crises in the MENA region in particular have required a more robust American response to help stabilize Europe’s near abroad, while Russia’s antics in and around Ukraine have prompted, as the redirector school has called for, something of a “re-pivot” of America’s strategic focus back to NATO Europe and its approaches. In tandem with the 2014 QDR’s more nuanced articulation of U.S. geopolitical priorities,
all of the above have convinced many (if not yet a commanding majority) that the pivot is no longer, if it ever was, quite the threat they once thought it to be.

At the same time, there has been a greater degree of U.S.-European dialogue about the pivot and its strategic implications, including speeches by the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Asian-Pacific affairs to key European audiences, a major conference in Washington on the opportunities for transatlantic cooperation on the pivot, and the release of several reports on potential European contributions to Asian security.\(^{283}\) While fairly recent, these and related initiatives have helped to improve coordination among the allies on Asian security issues and to reduce substantially (if not erase entirely) lingering suspicions in Europe that its interests were not being properly addressed in the pivot’s implementation, just as they appeared to have been ignored in its initial formulation in the 2012 DSG. This upswing in cooperation, in turn, has helped the global Atlanticist position to gain greater traction, while concerns over the likely costs and limited availability of European military resources have rendered the “go it alone” strategies championed by backfillers and me-too-ists less appealing and/or realistic. Going forward, therefore, the potential exists to develop an implementation policy for the pivot that takes more fully into account the concerns and capabilities of America’s allies and partners in other key regions outside of Asia, especially those in NATO.

\(^{283}\) See, for example, multiple chapters in Binnendijk, ed., *A Transatlantic Pivot to Asia*, several of which explore the degree to which the pivot can be converted to a trilateral U.S.-European-Asia intuitive. Other relevant reports that address various ways in which European powers, especially the United Kingdom and France, can contribute to European security include Korteweg, “A Presence Farther East;” Stokes and Newton, “Bridging the Gulf?” Luis Simon, “Back to Basics and Out-of-Area,” *RUSI Journal*, June 2014; and Leveau, “What Place for the Asia-Pacific in French Global Strategy?” Simon even makes the argument that key Asian-Pacific countries, including Japan and Australia, welcome European engagement as a way “to reassure themselves that the United States will maintain its presence and support in the region.”
Europe. How successful such an approach will be, however, will depend in large part on the security demands that may arise within these same regions, and what that may require from both Europe and the United States in terms of a military commitment. The critical factor here, of course, is the course of events in the Middle East and, to a lesser extent, in Africa (especially insofar as this region is affected by Middle Eastern security dynamics), and it is to these issues – together with a very brief look at relevant security trends in Central and South America – that chapter 4 turns.
Clearly, NATO Europe has not been – and is not now – the only source of allied and partner state concern over the American rebalance to Asia. Given, for example, the Obama administration’s initial inclination to describe the military drawdowns from Iraq and Afghanistan as the key factors in freeing up sufficient resources to allow for a much needed shift to the Pacific, it should come as no surprise that America’s friends and allies in the greater Middle East have been among the most vociferous critics of the pivot. Their concerns, moreover, have continued to intensify over the past three years, as the regional security situation has worsened, especially with the rise of the self-styled Islamic State. Indeed, there can be little doubt that this particular development, in tandem with the broader disorder in Syria and Iraq, uncertainty over the fate of Afghanistan, and the prospect of a host of other flare-ups in the region, will keep the demand for American engagement in the Middle East – to include the forward deployment of U.S. military forces – quite high for the foreseeable future, likely much higher than anyone could have anticipated when the pivot was first announced. Whether and how this demand will be met at the same time that Washington takes steps to shore up its contributions to the defense of NATO Europe will determine in large measure the pace and scope of the pivot’s progress. And the task of shifting to the Pacific while providing adequate strategic coverage elsewhere will be all the more challenging given the
fact that less far-reaching, but still strategically important missions must also be attended to in Africa and in Latin America, lest unwelcome security vacuums arise in these two regions. Having clarified the nature of the problem with respect to Europe in chapter 3, the first order of business at this point, therefore, is to get a better handle on how security conditions in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America may be affected – or, just as importantly, are thought to be by regional leaders – by an American rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region. Armed with this knowledge, it may then be possible to consider additional ways to implement the pivot that don’t trigger an undue, unnecessary, and/or unexpected reduction in security in other regions of importance.

Security Trends and Developments in the Middle East

As with the situation in NATO Europe, the Obama administration’s unveiling and continued promotion of the 2012 DSG have also sparked growing concerns and considerable uncertainty among Middle Eastern officials, diplomats, and observers, many of whom regard the U.S. rebalance concept as yet another sign of Washington’s faltering commitment and diminished ability to maintain its presence in their increasingly troubled region. In the last few years, for example, friends and allies in the Middle East have challenged some of the main arguments used to justify what senior administration officials have suggested should be a substantial and long-overdue shift in the U.S. approach to the region, a key aspect of which, they have argued, would be a pivot toward the Pacific. Although in public statements Washington has sought to dispel regional worries and to counter any notion that the rebalance to Asia would involve a disengagement from the greater Middle East, senior members of Obama’s team have nevertheless argued in private that the United States has

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Senior Obama advisors have argued that the United States is “overinvested” in the Middle East
consistently “overinvested in the region” during the past four decades, and particularly during the administration of George W. Bush. This perspective, Middle East analysts fear, rather than the administration’s more reassuring public statements, is what will likely drive U.S. policy now that the pivot is a priority.

The prospect, moreover, that this will indeed be the case is heightened in the eyes of current and potential U.S. partners in the region by additional comments by administration officials implying that many of the Middle East’s problems are really “small squabbles” that have historically been exaggerated, and that a good number are the result of – or made worse by – American over-involvement and the inevitable blunders that result. The best way to avoid such blunders in the future, these same officials contend, is to reduce the U.S. forward presence in the Middle East, a step that should, so the argument goes, encourage regional governments to deal with and resolve local disputes on their own. Moreover, U.S. core interests in the Middle East, according to this line of thinking, are both more modest and far less vulnerable than commonly assumed, as exemplified, for instance, by the continued stability in the price of oil, generally accepted as the most reliable gauge of local conditions, and arguably the most significant American priority, in the region. Given the pervasiveness of such views within President Obama’s national security team, combined with America’s long-term defense budget woes, it is a foregone conclusion, in the minds of many Arab countries and in much of Israel, that the United States will increasingly try to swing its diplomatic and military assets away from their region and toward the Asia-Pacific, where Washington believes the “risk-reward ratio” will be far more beneficial for America in the future. The key question that remains, they would add, is whether the seemingly endless

series of crises, big and small, that still wrack the Middle East will prevent or significantly hamper such a pivot.

*Regional Dynamics in the Context of the Pivot*

It should be acknowledged, of course, that the Obama administration has largely continued to maintain considerable contact with capitals throughout the wider Middle East, and that it has hardly disengaged from the region and its troubles, especially in light of American strikes on the Islamic State (IS) militant group inside Syria begun in September 2014. However, many of America’s staunchest regional allies have nonetheless interpreted the U.S. pivot to Asia, along with rigid spending caps on the Pentagon’s defense budget and Washington’s firm insistence on using diplomacy instead of military power, as signs of increased American reluctance to shoulder the burden of Middle Eastern security. Indeed, many regional actors see Washington’s resolute military forbearance and substantially less confrontational approach to Middle Eastern affairs as further evidence of the administration’s unwillingness to invest more resources or pursue constructive agendas there.\(^{286}\) What’s more, some of the region’s leaders are rather worried, according to one prominent expert, that U.S. efforts to privilege diplomacy and refrain from getting too deeply involved will only stoke the violent spread of political turmoil throughout the Middle East. For evidence one need only consider, it is suggested, the worsening security situation in recent months, with Libya, Yemen, Lebanon, and Iraq already engulfed in acute conflicts, a deadly civil war and rising jihadist involvement in Syria, unrest and polarization in Bahrain and Egypt, growing disquiet in Jordan, and the potential spillover of instability in these countries across their borders into, for example, Algeria, Kuwait, or Turkey. Worse still, as Middle East experts point out, the continued chaos and bloodshed in the region are exposing a new and destabilizing trend, featuring the emergence of a “post-American Middle East” in which no broker has the power, or the will, to tip the balance and contain the region’s

\(^{286}\) Ibid.
sectarian hatreds. This vacuum, in turn, has provoked bitter rivalry and a vicious proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, two major oil powers, whose uncompromising sectarian agendas, many fear, will eventually snowball into a region-wide Shiite–Sunni conflict. As one influential Lebanese author and long-time observer pointed out in early 2014, “The West is not there, and we are in the hands of two regional powers, the Saudis and Iranians, each of which is fanatical in its own way. I don’t see how they can reach any entente, any rational solution.”

The policy differences and disagreements between Gulf partners and Washington over a broad range of issues have grown in parallel with the widespread exasperation in the region over what is viewed as American foot-dragging when it comes to purposeful action. These days, as one commentator wrote recently, America’s allies in the Middle East “seem to trust it less, and its enemies fear it less,” while at the same time various opponents and rivals have become emboldened by the decidedly “more cautious” implementation of U.S. strategy in the Gulf region. Many believe that America’s present policy is gradually and subtly changing the country’s overall position in the Middle East in ways that could have a major impact on regional alliances in the future and potentially on the regional order itself.

While Arab countries have complained about a number of issues lately, including the Obama administration’s lackluster approach toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the perceived refusal by Washington to save the regime of former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, and last year’s decision to scale back U.S. aid for Egypt’s military, one of their biggest and most immediate concerns revolves around the ongoing crisis over Iran’s nuclear program, which Israel and many Arab states consider the single greatest threat to their security. Saudi Arabia, Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and other regional

288 Ibid.
powers, for example, fear that the Obama administration is too eager to engage with and accommodate Iran’s new president, Hassan Rouhani. They worry, in particular, that Washington is being outmaneuvered by the “wily mullahs” of Tehran to reach a diplomatic deal that will be too weak to constrain Iran’s nuclear ambitions and, by easing international sanctions, will ultimately enable and pave the way for Tehran’s hegemonic aspirations.290

As a result of these tensions, Saudi Arabia recently took steps of its own in an attempt to curtail Iranian influence, announcing in March 2013, and then again in May 2013, that it had arrested over twenty-eight members of an alleged Iranian spy ring. That same year, moreover, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal warned that Iran’s nuclear program was a “danger to the security of the whole region.”291 In a similar vein, the island nation of Bahrain, together with the UAE, which in the past has served as one of Tehran’s enablers, surprised UN officials by reporting in mid-2012 that they would begin enforcing UN sanctions against Iran more strictly. And in May 2013, the leader of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Abdullatif Al-Zayani, strongly condemned what he called “Iranian systematic interference” in the Arab states of the area.292

Aside from concerns about Iran, however, Middle Eastern allies and partners question the steadfastness of America’s commitment to their long-term security. They are seeing clear signs that a fiscally constrained and war-weary United States is no longer eager to get deeply entangled into new conflicts and complex emergencies in the Middle East, especially after fighting two decade-long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that to date have yielded only paltry returns at best. The Obama administration itself admitted in January 2014 that it is “not in America’s interests to have troops in the middle of every conflict in the Middle East, or to be permanently involved in open-ended

292 Ibid.
wars in the Middle East,” according to White House deputy national security advisor Benjamin Rhodes. Gulf allies also worry about the implications that the “energy revolution” in North America will have for security ties and how the expected dramatic rise in U.S. oil and gas production in the coming years might alter the equation and the balance of power in their own region, given that Gulf nations like Saudi Arabia are today major suppliers of oil to the United States. As U.S. Democratic Senator Tim Kaine put it in early January 2014 during a U.S. Global Leadership Coalition event in Richmond, Virginia, “We have some immediate work to do to communicate to our allies in the Middle East that we’re not going away from the region.” Kaine added that he had been “in some settings where [allies] have really been banging on us about... moving away from the region,” not just militarily, but “officials talk about the U.S. becoming energy independent.”

The Saudis and the Israelis, according to experts on the Middle East, are feeling particularly uncertain about the future of their relationship with America, which has been the cornerstone of each country’s basic security for over half a century. Despite repeated requests from Riyadh and Tel Aviv, for example, Washington has refused to order military action to halt the progress of Iran’s nuclear program, opting instead to continue relying on diplomacy in its current efforts to resolve the crisis.

In late 2013, the notion that the United States is drifting away from the region was further reinforced by the controversy over President Obama’s response to the civil war in Syria. More specifically, Obama’s unexpected change of course and decision to blur his own “red line” regarding the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government was

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293 Hubbard, Worth, and Gordon, “Power Vacuum in Middle East Lifts Militants.”
294 Kahl and Stokes, “Overcoming the Gulf in the Gulf.”
a choice that has inevitably contributed to the widespread loss of U.S. credibility, and the accompanying erosion of Obama’s personal image, among allies across the Middle East, exposing also a rare instance of a commander in chief “seemingly thinking out loud and changing his mind on the fly.”

Gulf partners are looking at and interpreting these developments through the prism of Washington’s strategic pivot to Asia, and many of them have expressed fears in public that this recalibration of U.S. policy, with its decreased reliance on the military and a narrowing of American interests in the Middle East, will eventually leave them to face the twin tides of Iranian expansion and Islamic extremism on their own.

The rapidly worsening violence in Iraq is also fueling Arab countries’ frustration with Washington’s policy, as many in the region believe the Obama administration has in part brought the escalating crisis on itself by not trying harder to leave residual ground and air forces behind after the American troop withdrawal of 2011, not pushing the Baghdad government of former Iraqi prime minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki to be more inclusive, and neglecting to “recognize the growing threat” as the raging civil war in Syria next door increasingly began to engulf Iraq. Local officials have pointed out that even as their country was steadily disintegrating into a cauldron of sectarian violence, Antony Blinken, who is now President Obama’s deputy national security advisor, gave a speech in March 2012 echoing the White House’s rosy view of Iraq’s prospects after the withdrawal of American forces. Iraq, Blinken claimed, was “less violent, more democratic, and more prosperous than at any time in recent history.” Similarly, Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah remains astonished at

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297 Kahl and Stokes, “Overcoming the Gulf in the Gulf.”

298 Hubbard, Worth, and Gordon, “Power Vacuum in Middle East Lifts Militants.”
how naïve America was in promoting Shiite majority rule after the 2003 invasion, an “error in judgment” the king finds “irresponsible” to this day. Many regional actors fear that the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 will ultimately lead to an insurgency that could very well unravel that country, too.

These regional perceptions can also explain the predominantly skeptical and less than enthusiastic reaction from Middle Eastern pundits to President Obama’s latest national security strategy, articulated in his commencement address at West Point on May 28, 2014. In his speech, the president appeared to move away from direct military action in the Middle East, emphasizing that most problems there, as elsewhere in the world, cannot be solved with military means. “U.S. military action cannot be the only – or even primary – component of our leadership in every instance,” he said.

The caution inherent in Obama’s new “don’t-do-stupid-stuff” doctrine, however, and his warning that “just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail,” especially since “costly mistakes” come “not from our restraint, but from our willingness to rush into military adventures,” all seemed to indicate to audiences in the Middle East yet another degree of U.S. disengagement from the region’s constant distractions. Much of the Arab commentary, in this regard, criticized Obama’s speech for seeking to please too many listeners and ending up satisfying none. “By promising big policies and delivering none,” wrote the UAE’s leading government-owned newspaper, The National, “he has merely contributed to the continuing sense in this region and elsewhere that the Obama administration is too disengaged, too remote, and not willing to take the tough choices necessary to lead.”

Similarly, Lebanon’s Daily Star concluded that “where Obama sees

success in soft diplomacy and stepping back, the international community sees stumbling and inaction.”302 And the pan-Arab Al-Hayat complained about Washington’s “disassociation” from the Syrian crisis and the prospect of only “half steps” to assist its regional allies, finding that the president was “contradicting himself in saying there is no military solution in Syria and simultaneously urging the opposition to wage an impossible war against both the regime and the terrorists.”303

Meanwhile, some Gulf state commentaries took issue with the unveiling of a new $5 billion Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF), intended to support a network of partnerships from South Asia to the Sahel, with one editorial in the UAE’s The National, concluding harshly that “a failed policy does not need further funds” since “this money is likely to be used to continue with the drone strikes – which kill civilians, fuel extremism and, therefore, threaten the rest of the Peninsula.”304 What’s puzzling to some in the region, however, is the administration’s plan to step up its efforts to aid Syria’s neighbors, namely Lebanon and Iraq, both of which support the Syrian regime, on the one hand, and Turkey and Jordan, which support the Syrian opposition, on the other. By stating that the United States will be supporting these four countries, experts say, “the U.S. would in effect be supporting both sides of the regional (spillover) conflict,” a paradox that has left officials scratching their heads in search of the strategic thinking behind, and future implications of, such a policy.305

Most recently, growing suspicion about America’s political plans has affected the responses of Arab countries to the Obama administration’s expanded counterterrorism campaign and airstrikes inside Iraq and Syria, launched in September 2014, to degrade and destroy the Islamic State, the well-organized, well-funded, well-armed,

303 Ibid.
304 “UAE Press Negative on Obama’s West Point Speech.”
and media-savvy militant group, also known as ISIS or ISIL that has seized control of large parts of northeastern Syria as well as key cities in Iraq’s western provinces as far east as the outskirts of Baghdad. Given their past criticisms of American hesitancy, it might be assumed that a good number of Middle Eastern countries would applaud Washington’s adoption of a firmer policy toward the Islamic State, including concerted military action. In point of fact, however, the prospect of a new U.S. military intervention in the Middle East was met with mixed and tepid reactions throughout the region, even from leading allies like Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey. “As a student of terrorism for the last 30 years, I am afraid of that formula of ‘supporting the American effort,’” commented Diaa Rashwan, a leading scholar and head of the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, a government-funded policy organization in Cairo. “It is very dangerous,” he added.306

Arab states and factions that on paper share the same goal of eradicating the threat of Islamic extremism have shown reluctance to take part in the newly formed, American-led coalition of European and Gulf nations now conducting airstrikes on various Islamic State targets. The foreign minister of Egypt, for example, objected to participating on the grounds that Egypt’s hands were “full with its own fight against terrorism,” referring to the Islamist opposition inside Egypt. In Jordan, according to the state news agency, King Abdullah II reportedly told Secretary of State John Kerry that “the Palestinian cause remains the core of the conflict in the region” and that “Jordan is focusing on the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.”307 Even Turkey, which is concerned about the conflict spilling across its long border with ISIS-controlled parts of Syria and whose social fabric is

307 Ibid.
straining to accommodate the influx of Iraqi and Syrian refugees, has shown a great deal of caution about taking any military action or intervening against the Islamic State group. According to media reports, moreover, one Turkish official recently advised the United States “not to expect public support for the American effort.”

Indeed, despite the Turkish parliament giving the government powers to order cross-border military incursions in Syria, Turkey has so far resisted sending any troops across the border and has been careful not to get more deeply involved in the conflict, causing the Obama administration to express dismay and frustration with Ankara’s inaction and passive response. As one senior administration official noted on October 7, 2014, “This isn’t how a NATO ally acts while hell is unfolding a stone’s throw from their border.” To be sure, Turkey’s decision in late October 2014 to open a corridor for Iraqi Kurdish forces to cross over into Syria to reinforce Kurdish forces defending Kobani was a step in the right direction, but it is not at all clear that this will lead to broader Turkish support for Kurdish units battling ISIS.

For that matter, Middle Eastern reactions to Washington’s call for a united front against the Islamic State have been tepid even in Iraq and Syria, where the threat from ISIS is most immediate, underscoring the deep and growing mistrust of the United States on all sides. In a region that has become weary of disappointments from America’s policy over the past decade, many Sunni Muslims, in particular, are cynical about battling an organization that, from their perspective, evolved from jihadist groups fighting American occupation. Following Obama’s televised national address on the ISIS issue in early September 2014, for instance, some Iraqi leaders accused the United States and other Western powers of “turning a blind

308 Ibid.
311 Barnard and Kirkpatrick, “Arabs Give Tepid Support.”
eye” for years on the anti-Suni repression inside Iraq and Syria that they say helped give rise to the militant group. “All these [Western] countries knew of the existence of IS and possessed information in its regard, but they all failed to move one finger against it until it threatened their interests,” said Mazhar al-Janabi of Iraq’s Sunni forces bloc in an interview with a widely read Arab publication. \(^{312}\) “It’s not only that,” commented another Middle Eastern official, “[but that] they want to arm other terrorist groups in Syria under the pretext they are moderate Islamists.” \(^{313}\)

Even as five Arab monarchies – Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Jordan – joined the U.S.-led airstrikes on Islamic State strongholds in September 2014, the unease among them has remained high. Although all five are trying to balance against Iran’s power in Iraq and demonstrate their capability to respond to the situation militarily without Tehran’s help, joining a U.S.-led initiative is not without risk. Qatar, in particular, has been visibly uncomfortable in the coalition, according to a Lebanese military analyst, as shown by its taking the most minor of all roles in recent air raids against Islamic State targets in northeastern Syria. \(^{314}\) Qatar is already at odds with the United Arab Emirates, as the two remain engaged in a “virtual proxy war in Libya,” where Qatar is backing one, more radical, political faction while the UAE is supporting a more moderate one. Likewise, in Syria, “Qatar has favored more extreme rebel forces,” such as the Nusra Front, “while the Emirates and Saudis have sought out moderates.” \(^{315}\) Worse still, a recent attack on the Nusra Front, conducted solely by U.S. forces, reportedly came as a surprise

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313 Ibid.
315 Ibid.
to the Qatari government and, experts say, must have troubled the country greatly. Not surprisingly, with Qatar increasingly ill at ease with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, some military analysts predict that “this coalition could come apart at the seams very quickly.”

Ultimately, events like those unfolding in Syria and the ongoing air campaign against the Islamic State group represent another test that many in the region look at as a measure of the sustainability and credibility of U.S. defense commitments to the area as a whole and the extent to which the United States will re-engage with the Middle East militarily as it turns more toward the Asia-Pacific region. At the same time, the Obama administration has acknowledged that it would need to secure strong cooperation and substantial financial aid from Middle Eastern countries before it can launch a more comprehensive campaign against the Islamic State, especially since air power alone will not significantly degrade the group’s forces or dislodge them from densely populated cities. In that regard, it remains to be seen how regional allies will respond to Washington’s recent calls to provide further military capabilities to the U.S.-led, anti-ISIS effort, including, among others, intelligence sharing and financial assistance for the training and equipping of Iraqi troops and parts of the Syrian moderate opposition. In the meantime, however, Turkey’s continued abstention from the conflict might lead to a rift between Ankara and the United States, which, some experts suggest, would in turn seriously jeopardize Obama’s efforts to secure a coalition of Sunni Muslim countries to fight the Islamic State.

Of course, many allies across the Middle East were certainly heartened by several recent developments that have given them some hope that the pivot’s sharp turn away from the region and toward the Asia-Pacific might not in fact happen as quickly as they fear. To begin with, as noted in chapter 2, some of the key architects and proponents of the rebalance policy in the Obama administration, particularly Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell, and National Security Advisor Tom Donilon, have departed from their respective positions. All three officials, along with the president, had championed
the strategic justifications for the pivot during Obama’s first term, arguing not only that the United States needed to move on after nearly a decade of wars in the Middle East, but also that developments in the Asia-Pacific would likely shape the course of global order in the future more than those in any other region.\footnote{Ali Wyne, “Three Arguments for Strengthening the U.S. Rebalance,” \textit{Strategist}, July 4, 2014.} The departure of critical Asia hands, moreover, was followed by the nomination and appointment of Senator John Kerry as secretary of state, who is well known for his passionate interest in the Middle East and its challenges, as well as for his concern for European security, rather than for historic shifts to Asia, which were the focus of his predecessor. During his confirmation hearing in January 2013, Kerry emphasized the importance of fulfilling American commitments in the Middle East, noting that “whatever we do in [Asia] should not come, and I hope will not come, at the expense of relationships in Europe or the Mideast... It can’t.”\footnote{Nomination of John F. Kerry to Be Secretary of State, hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate 113–163, U.S. Government Printing Office, January 24, 2013, http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-113shrg86451/html/CHRG-113shrg86451.htm.} To illustrate the extent of this government reshuffling, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Randy Schriver noted at a Washington event in late 2013 that he was unable to call to mind a single official who could be considered the Obama administration’s current “Asia point man.”\footnote{Andrew Kwon, “The Pivot and the Red Line: The Syrian Civil War and U.S. Credibility in the Asia-Pacific,” \textit{Strategist}, August 29, 2013.}

Aside from high-level personnel changes, moreover, the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), the latest outline of U.S. military strategy formally released in early March 2014, introduced a clear shift in strategic focus, calling for a tilt back toward the Middle East, while still endorsing a stronger focus on the Asia-Pacific region.
in contrast to the Pentagon’s 2012 DSG, which placed a greater emphasis on the Pacific. Even though the United States has not exactly changed its force posture in the Middle East, stressing the importance of the region in the updated strategy, according to experts, was intended to send a message about America’s renewed resolve and continued commitment to Arab friends and allies. Indeed, to many it was no surprise that the greater Middle East has reemerged as a primary focus of the administration, given that the ever larger critical mass of unaddressed issues in the region, as demonstrated by recent events, is making it difficult for Washington to limit its involvement there.

In that regard, a rising number of U.S. national security experts and policy makers, worried themselves about the potential impact of the Asia rebalance on other strategically important regions, have spoken out against a premature shift of attention and resources away from the Middle East, which, in their view, will likely continue to dominate U.S. foreign policy into the foreseeable future. In 2013, for example, lawmakers applauded what they saw as Obama’s shift of attention to the Middle East in his second term, with New York’s Representative Eliot Engel, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, remarking on the reshuffling of top officials that “if this signifies a new emphasis on the region, I think it’s a good thing for the country.”  

Echoing these sentiments in government, at least a few American strategists have also argued recently that “the pivot to the Asia-Pacific threatens to skew U.S. military resources toward a theater where near-term threats are both less dangerous and less proximate than in the greater Middle East.”

Hence, if the American rebalance to Asia is to be implemented in a way that does not jeopardize key U.S. interests in other critical regions, it must be accompanied, they emphasize, by a hedging strategy against more immediate challenges outside of Asia, most particularly

in the Middle East and Southwest Asia. The best way to implement a simultaneous “pivot but hedge” strategy, they imply, would be for the Department of Defense to endorse a significant reorganization and role specialization of U.S. military forces to allow ground forces to focus primarily on security challenges in the Middle East (serving as the “hedging” element), with naval forces focusing on the Pacific Rim (as the “pivot” element), and air forces supporting both regions (as the “swing” element).

Most importantly, in cutting and reshaping the defense budget and associated force postures to meet the objectives of the Asia rebalance, the United States must take care, they add, not “to allow such a bold shift to place at risk its pressing interests elsewhere.”

Still, despite some encouraging steps lately that have suggested a re-shifting in U.S. focus and raised the prospect of a more nuanced (and restrained) version of the rebalance, fears in the Middle East about the pivot’s negative impact on the region have persisted unabated. Most Gulf and other states in the area, for example, remain unconvinced by Kerry’s efforts as the top U.S. diplomat, and they have interpreted President Obama’s return to Israeli-Arab peace negotiations more as an aberration and an “administrative concession to a Secretary of State still living in a previous era of American policy,” rather than a signal of renewed American priorities. In contrast, Middle Eastern allies continue to look at the administration’s approach to the ongoing Syrian crisis as a much better reflection of the future direction of U.S. policy and its defense posture, with some noting at the end of 2013 that Obama chose to focus on the “thing most threatening to American security,” namely the possibility that Syria’s chemical weapons might fall into extremist hands. More recently, President Obama’s candid admission in September 2014,”

321 Barno, Bensahel, and Sharp, “Pivot but Hedge.”
322 Bubalo, “Brave New Region?”
323 Ibid.
don’t have a strategy yet for ISIS,” raised more than a few eyebrows among regional U.S. partners, who have also taken notice of new estimates, revealed later the same month by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments based in Washington, D.C., that the administration’s growing military operations against ISIS fighters in Iraq and Syria are expected to cost tens of billions of dollars in the short term, creating new demands on a tightening Pentagon budget.\footnote{Dion Nissenbaum, “Islamic State Fighting Strains Pentagon Budget,” Wall Street Journal, September 30, 2014.} These pressures, together with the budget cuts already proposed through 2016 and the very real possibility of further sequester-driven reductions to come after 2016, could also seriously affect, it is acknowledged, America’s ability to deploy military power decisively and clearly in other theaters, including the greater Middle East, a prospect that is certainly coloring regional perspectives on the effects of the rebalance for their own security requirements going forward.

Curiously, in that regard, developments in the Middle East and the specter of future force adjustments in U.S. military posture are in turn also coloring the views of Asian-Pacific countries, whose leaders have begun to reassess the credibility of U.S. security assurances to their own region as well. Major allies throughout the Asia-Pacific, for example, have been closely following the Obama administration’s handling of the crisis in Syria and, more specifically, watching to see if the United States would be willing to stand firm on its threat to the Assad regime and demonstrate leadership or if it would hesitate and “cut and run” instead. To be sure, Asians would be distressed by another lengthy diversion of America’s attention and military assets away from their region. They already fear increasingly that the U.S. military campaign against ISIS, as well as the attendant efforts to prevent a spillover of the Syrian civil war into neighboring countries, will “suck the oxygen out of” many of Washington’s promised rebalance-related initiatives for at least the next couple of years.\footnote{Robin Niblett, “U.S. Foreign Policy Off-Balance,” Chatham House, September 25, 2013.}
However, as some critics point out, if it was true, as the president said, that U.S. security interests were not directly affected to an extent that would require going to war, then he should not have established a red line on the Syrian government’s use of chemical weapons in the first place.\textsuperscript{326} According to this thinking, it was precisely Obama’s “failure to back up a red line in general” with a credible threat of using force, not the use of force in Syria per se, that had, and still has, countries in the Asia-Pacific concerned.\textsuperscript{327}

Ironically, while decisive military action in Syria may have reassured U.S. allies in Asia of the credibility of America’s deterrent in their own region, it would also have greatly deepened the extent of U.S. entanglement in the Middle East, exactly the type of involvement that the pivot to Asia was meant to reduce.\textsuperscript{328} Nonetheless, even though the Syrian red line never had the same force as the mutual defense treaty with Japan, for example, growing doubts in Asia about America’s willingness to project military force could seriously undermine U.S. influence in both regions in the future. Some of the possible side effects and repercussions of this worrisome precedent, according to critics, could include stalled pivot-related legislative agendas in the future due to a reluctance among Asian allies to participate in ongoing efforts such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations, or to a more aggressive China and a more assertive North Korea, two of the most serious military threats to regional security. In any case, as one prominent observer concluded, “being selective about U.S. political leadership in the Middle East, while trying to be more strategic in its application in Asia, will be supremely difficult” for the Obama administration, as it also struggles with the challenge of regaining the pivot-inspired momentum it set in motion across Asia.

\textsuperscript{327} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{328} Niblett, “U.S. Foreign Policy Off-Balance.”
during its first term. Indeed, the administration’s ambivalence and perceived lack of cunning in Middle Eastern affairs will likely continue to ripple across other regions of the globe for some time to come.

Regional Efforts to Balance against a Pivot to Asia
So far, despite their pivot worries, Saudi Arabia and Israel, long considered two of Washington’s closest and staunchest allies in the Middle East, have withstood fairly well a multitude of threats, but they have not been immune to them, and, as suggested above, the pair have voiced some of the strongest criticism of and displeasure with U.S. policy in the region since the pivot’s announcement. The growing gap between U.S. and Saudi interests, in particular, has reached a critical stage, culminating with Saudi Arabia’s public refusal in October 2013 to accept a rotational seat on the UN Security Council, a position the kingdom had long lobbied and prepared for, together with the announcement by a top Saudi official that Riyadh will embark on a major doctrinal shift in its security partnership with the United States and its foreign policy behavior. This rather surprising move, considered by many to be a direct criticism of Washington and the Security Council for failing to promote peace, also highlighted a deeper Saudi paranoia and anxiety over the current course of American diplomacy, exposing a widening rift in one of Washington’s most important and long-standing alliances in the region. Put simply, the Saudis are angry, and they cannot accept a new regional landscape in which their archenemy, Iran, is given more room to project regional power. From the Saudi perspective, the Americans failed to consult them and went behind their backs to reach an interim nuclear deal with Tehran, and now, according to some experts, in its desperation to avoid a further military confrontation in the Middle East, the United States is “at risk of being hoodwinked” by the Iranians.

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329 Ibid.
330 Kahl and Stokes, “Overcoming the Gulf in the Gulf.”
Even though President Obama reportedly assured his Saudi counterparts during a visit to Riyadh in late March 2014 that he would not agree to a bad deal with Iran, their concerns have not been allayed, as many in the kingdom feel that Washington’s view of what is, or is not, bad may not conform to their own assessment. This is largely because they feel that America sees the problem mainly as one of nuclear proliferation and secondarily as a threat to Israel. The president’s approach, in that regard, is narrowly focused, they suggest, on preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear state, and he seems prepared to make concessions and even to accept some risk in order to achieve that goal diplomatically. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, most fears Iran’s overarching ambition to dominate the region, and it considers Tehran a subversive rival, both geopolitically in unstable countries such as Iraq and Syria, and ideologically as a “Shia power challenging the Saudis’ fundamentalist Sunni creed.” According to one former Saudi diplomat, officials in Riyadh have frequently criticized Obama’s good-faith gestures toward Iran, because they “know their region’s history very well,” and are not interested in hearing “mere sugar-coated words and empty promises that will not turn into real policies.” The Saudi kingdom wants the White House to be tough on Iran, while keeping the sanctions in place, and Saudi officials openly fret that Washington might “sell them out” just so it could reach a historic rapprochement with a power that they view as inherently hostile.

Saudi leaders have also argued both in public and private that the White House must become more assertive in the region, and Riyadh has been complaining about America’s refusal to intervene forcefully in the civil war in Syria as well as the lack of a “clear commitment from President Obama” to secure a peace deal between Israelis and Palestinians. “We’ve seen several red lines put forward by the president,

333 Ibid.
335 “Awkward Relations.”
which went along and became pinkish as time grew, and eventually ended up completely white,” said Prince Turki al-Faisal, the country’s former intelligence chief, in December 2013. “When that kind of assurance comes from the leader of a country like the United States, we expect him to stand by it,” the Saudi prince continued, adding that “there is an issue of confidence.”336 As alluded to earlier, Saudi Arabia worries as well that America’s increasing energy independence will make it less dependent on its strategic relationship with Riyadh, a prospect that could further decrease U.S. commitment to stability in the Middle East. If the trend continues, furthermore, the Saudis might no longer be able to use oil as a political weapon, as they did in the 1970s, which will likely make it harder for them to persuade Washington to fall in with their regional outlook.337

This complex situation, according to experts, poses an existential threat to Saudi security, especially given the widespread view among Sunni Arabs that a more concerted focus by the United States on Asia as it draws down from Iraq and Afghanistan could lead in time to what they call the “zero option,” or a “throughgoing pullout” of U.S. forces from the Persian Gulf.338 Unable to rely so much on American help, Saudi Arabia was recently compelled to launch its first major military engagement outside its borders, sending its own troops on a successful intervention in 2011 to quell a Shiite-dominated opposition rising that was threatening stability and the Sunni monarchy in Bahrain, also a Washington ally. In addition, the kingdom has committed nearly $30 billion in foreign aid to the governments in Jordan, Pakistan, Morocco, and Bahrain, with additional subsidies

337 Buluwi, “U.S., Saudi Drifting Apart.”
planned for Egypt. Payment of these funds might not necessarily be at odds with America’s wishes in the area, although even where interests coincide, there is the potential for friction, as in the case of Syria, where the Saudi government now supports Islamist rebels who often fight alongside affiliates of Al Qaeda. The Saudis have defended intensifying their efforts to stoke Sunni sectarianism by claiming that, in the absence of a full-on American intervention in the Iraqi and Syrian conflicts, they must proactively defend against Iran. This warring by proxy, however, has helped to facilitate a dangerous resurgence of jihadist movements in Iraq and Syria, both of which are likely to come under even greater Iranian influence, whether or not each country remains united in the future or splits.

Israel, for its part, has been monitoring these and other worrying developments with increasing concern, and its leaders are asking as well whether the United States has abandoned its leadership role in the region by turning more to the Pacific and what this would mean for Israel’s future security. The underlying question in Tel Aviv, as one high-ranking Israeli security official remarked in early 2014, is “whether the West is in decline or just withdrawal,” and “this is being broached at every meeting of foreign ministers or defense ministers and at every forum where issues of global balance of power... are being addressed.” Rival nations, it is added, may increasingly try to find an answer to this question by assuming more provocative or forward-leaning postures, both in Asia and in the Middle East. According to the same senior Israeli official, for example, China is deliberately ratcheting up tensions with its neighbors, including Japan, and continues to work systematically toward taking control of the South China Sea, destabilizing the Asia-Pacific with its “nine-dash line,” and “behaving as if the United States doesn’t exist.” Similarly, North Korea “for a long time has been slighting Washington, doing whatever it wants;” the official added. The Israelis also believe that

341 Ibid.
the Obama administration allowed Russian President Vladimir Putin to take center stage during the Syrian crisis, and expressed shock at U.S. recognition of the new Palestinian “reconciliation government,” which includes, among others, the Islamist militant group Hamas.

Many in Tel Aviv understand why Washington would want to reduce its military engagement in the region, especially deployments of ground troops, given that it got “entangled in two abortive wars, went broke, and grew weary,” as one Israeli defense official put it. The problem, he went on to say, is that Obama took the country from one extreme to the other, noting the opinion of many in Israel that there is a big difference between “wanton interventionism and total disengagement; between massive troop deployments and judicious uses of limited force.”

Even during the West’s direct intervention in Libya, Israeli officials point out, the administration kept a low profile, “coming up with the concept of leading from behind…[and] if you lead from behind you also stay behind.”

Not surprisingly, President Obama’s perceived equivocation over the situation in Syria has also given cause for Israel, like many others, to doubt the certainty of any future red lines he might declare, and to wonder, in particular, whether the United States can be relied upon to act against the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran. The Syrian case “proves that yesterday’s red line can turn into tomorrow’s gray area,” announced Israel in late 2013, with the country’s minister of economy and trade, Naftali Bennett, later stating that one of the lessons he and other decision makers can draw is that “Israel can trust no one but itself.”

Indeed, one longtime observer of the Middle East recently posited a potential indirect connection between the U.S. pivot to Asia and the

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343 Caspit, “Israeli Officials Believe Obama Lacks Resolve on Iran.”
possibility of an Israeli strike on Iran’s missile and nuclear facilities. Already, he argued, President Obama’s oft-quoted threat of keeping “all options on the table” with regard to Iran enjoys close to zero credibility with Prime Minister Netanyahu and others in Israeli decision-making circles who believe that a military strike by Israel may be the only way to prevent Iran from going nuclear. When combined with the “Asia first” implications of the rebalance, the American departure from Iraq, the impending withdrawal from Afghanistan, and a U.S. reluctance to take forceful action in Syria, the resulting decline in U.S. credibility may indeed reach the zero point both for Israel (who will increasingly feel compelled to take action on its own) and Iran (who will feel less and less pressure to negotiate). The end result, in this scenario, could be highly destabilizing, perhaps triggering a wider regional conflict, and it illustrates how perceptions of the rebalance outside of Asia could, together with other factors, contribute to a significant sense of insecurity for a key American ally in another region.

Although this may be an exaggerated case, Israelis do lament the fact that U.S. influence in the region, long the primary stabilizing force in the Middle East, is now at an all-time low, a loss of trust that will require years to reverse and will certainly hamper America’s ability to affect the course of regional events in the meantime. During the latest round of nuclear negotiations with Iran, for example, officials in Tel Aviv complained bitterly about the Western powers’ lack of resolve and their hesitant behavior toward Iran during the talks, “as if [they] had to have an agreement, while the Iranians conducted the negotiations as if they could do without it.” Often, said a seasoned senior Israeli officer, “if you are resolved enough and willing to pay the price, you end up winning, sometimes even without a fight.” As a result, senior Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon, view America’s present conduct vis-à-vis Iran as a “missed opportunity;” and have

346 Caspit, “Israeli Officials Believe Obama Lacks Resolve on Iran.”
expressed regret that it will last for generations to come, especially since Tehran has now completely emerged from its diplomatic isolation and was not even asked to “sacrifice the facility in Arak,” which the Iranians were willing and prepared to do at the outset.  

Hence, based on the assessments of Israeli defense officials, Israel cautiously expects that the world may be headed toward three years of relative “quiet,” during which Iran is unlikely to give up its long-term nuclear ambitions or its enrichment installations, opting merely to wait for more favorable circumstances. The Iranians already do not require 20 percent-grade enrichment thanks to the quality and quantity of their centrifuges, experts note. Recognizing the problem, the West will eventually be unwilling to sign a “bad deal,” and will then extend the negotiations for additional years, with the possibility, Israel says, of a “tacit understanding” between America and Iran, according to which Tehran would be asked not to defy the White House “so that the president will be able to stand by his word that Iran will not become nuclear on his watch.” The problem, in Tel Aviv’s view, is that by then Iran will be at the point where it could have a bomb “within a matter of weeks while having an arsenal of ballistic missiles that could reach the U.S. mainland.”

Nevertheless, despite the tough rhetoric and harsh criticism of Washington’s rebalance-influenced approach to the Middle East, both Israel and Saudi Arabia realize, of course, that America’s presence in the Gulf cannot be replaced as the ultimate guarantor of Saudi and Israeli security in the foreseeable future, and that the two will continue to rely on U.S. military might in the event of a major crisis in the region. For Israel, in particular, U.S. protection from endless diplomatic warfare at the UN and virtually every international forum is indispensable, and its relationship with Washington is considered fundamental to its very survival as a nation. Moreover, without large-scale economic assistance, American weapons, and U.S. deterrence guarantees, the entire IDF force structure, experts say, would likely

347 Ibid.
348 Ibid.
349 Ibid.
collapse. Similarly, Saudi Arabia needs the United States to keep its energy sector, the country’s lifeline, running, and Riyadh depends heavily as well on the West for weapons, which provide it with security against Iran, whose indigenous military force is viewed as the most powerful (and potentially destabilizing) in the region. This is why, according to some observers, the Saudis may have little choice in the end but to accept any possible strategic detente that the United States and Iran might agree upon.

That said, despite its ongoing dependence on American support, Riyadh’s articulation of a more independent Saudi foreign policy could indirectly complicate U.S. calculations for the Middle East on a number of fronts. Saudi Arabia, for example, still retains substantial clout that it could bring to bear to influence, for better or worse, the behavior of Syrian rebels in any attempts to forge a political settlement to the conflict. Further, Riyadh can still exert considerable influence on actions taken by the Egyptian military as it attempts to tamp down domestic dissent in the most populous Arab state, a country whose future as a reliable U.S. ally remains uncertain. So, too, the Saudis can also manipulate their ties with various Palestinian factions to help sway intra-Palestinian and Israeli-Palestinian negotiations one way or another. Whether or not these points of leverage can be managed in such a way as to create a strategic environment in which Washington will be more (rather than less) inclined to engage forcefully on these and related issues of importance to Riyadh remains an open question. If the United States becomes increasingly preoccupied with policy priorities in the Asia-Pacific region – a reasonable assumption given the Obama administration’s current objectives – the answer may not be to the Saudis’ liking.

Meanwhile, Arab leaders are moving more aggressively to fill the power vacuum in the Middle East created by what they believe to be a growing inclination by the United States and other Western powers to disengage from the region. At the end of 2013, for instance, the Saudi government pledged to allocate $3 billion to the Lebanese army in a strikingly bold bid to reassert some influence in a country where Iran has long played a dominant proxy role through Hezbollah, the radical Shiite group it finances and arms. In recent months as well, reports have circulated suggesting that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which includes six countries led by Riyadh, intends to form an “Arab NATO” of sorts by establishing an expanded military alliance between the GCC and the Arab kingdoms of Morocco and Jordan. The proposed NATO-like defense structure would operate under a joint military command of around one hundred thousand troops, initially headed by the Saudi National Guard, a move that is intended to resolve the bloc’s military manpower issues, which could emerge as a major operational complication should the United States pull back even further from its involvement in the region. In return for their participation, according to a Jordanian official, Morocco and Jordan would be offered much-needed financial assistance, in addition to the $5 billion aid package both received in 2012.

Furthermore, in April 2014, one month before Riyadh and the UAE announced the formation of a joint committee to confront regional challenges, Saudi Arabia staged its largest-ever military exercise, code-named Abdullah’s Shield, to demonstrate to regional rivals its capability to defend itself against its northern Shiite neighbors. The maneuvers, which showcased for the first time the kingdom’s Chinese CSS-2 intermediate-range ballistic missiles, were partially intended as a way to send a message of deterrence to Tehran and Baghdad, with the former Saudi intelligence chief, Prince Turki bin Faysal, warning that if Iran were to obtain a nuclear capability, Riyadh would have to develop its own, implying as well that Pakistan has committed to

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351 Hubbard, Worth, and Gordon, “Power Vacuum in Middle East Lifts Militants.”
providing the nuclear missile warheads when and if they are needed. Importantly, another intended recipient of the message was the United States, particularly because Saudi King Abdullah was reportedly dissatisfied with Obama’s visit to the kingdom a month earlier. The subsequent collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, regional experts say, must have further undermined the king’s confidence that Washington is working on resolving the region’s problems effectively. If pressed, the Saudis may choose to use the threat of a nuclear option, as some observers claim, to obtain greater U.S. security guarantees, but the potential domino effect of nuclear proliferation that such a scenario entails could eventually draw Washington into a far deeper investment in the region.

In recent months, GCC allies Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE have also begun to coordinate more closely with Egypt on plans for a future joint military force that could take targeted action against Islamic militants in other Mideast hotspots beyond Syria and Iraq. The idea is to establish a core force of elite troops trained in counterterrorism and backed by aircraft and access to timely intelligence to conduct quick, pinpoint operations against extremist elements. Reportedly, Sunni radicals in Libya and Shiite rebels in Yemen are high on the group’s list of regional troublemakers that need to be countered. Indeed, according U.S. and Egyptian sources, Egypt and the UAE have already carried out air strikes on Islamic militants in Libya during the summer of 2014, and Egypt conducted strikes on its own in October. Moreover, to help refine the concept of a joint force

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353 Riedel, “Saudi Arabia Puts on a Show.”
354 Ibid.
along the lines noted above, a number of bilateral and multilateral war games have been held during 2014 to harmonize procedures and promote interoperability among participating militaries, and officials in Jordan and Algeria have also been approached to determine their interest in joining.\textsuperscript{356} Still, while discussions are fairly well advanced on the value and basic direction of future military cooperation, significant differences are said to exist among the countries involved with respect to the size, funding, and headquarters for a joint anti-extremist unit, and over whether or not to seek an Arab League and/or UN mandate for operations that might be undertaken. The main point, however, is that Egypt and its primary Arab Gulf allies will likely continue to explore options for countering Islamic extremists, be they Sunni or Shia in origin, that go beyond the loose anti-ISIS coalition cobbled together by Washington. Perhaps as an indication of things to come, Egypt’s President el-Sissi has repeatedly emphasized that the security of Saudi Arabia and other GCC states is a “red line” for him, and that these countries could be quickly reached by Egypt’s new rapid deployment force that he set up shortly before leaving the Egyptian military to run for president.\textsuperscript{357}

At the same time, in an effort to reaffirm its own commitment to Gulf security, the Obama administration has sought to improve defense and economic ties with regional allies, including a number of major trade deals and a series of important arms sales. In June 2013, for example, the State Department announced the signing of a U.S.-Saudi Open Skies agreement, meant to loosen government regulation and restrictions on carriers between the two countries and to strengthen their business ties. Meanwhile, a State Department spokesman recently praised Washington’s security relationship and counterterrorism cooperation with Riyadh, including the Saudi-American efforts to eliminate the leadership of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen. The United States has also worked to upgrade regional militaries and enhance their deterrent power. The kingdom, for instance, is in the midst of the largest arms deal in

\textsuperscript{356} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{357} Ibid.
U.S. history, a massive $60 billion sale of fighter jets and helicopters, despite some concerns from U.S. ally Israel. In August 2014, the Pentagon indicated its desire to spend $2 billion on modernizing Riyadh’s AWACS radar picket fleet. And in May 2013, the White House announced another enormous defense deal, selling twenty-six F-16s to the United Arab Emirates as well as advanced missiles to both Gulf states, missiles that are capable of being launched in friendly territory and penetrating with great accuracy far behind a regional opponent’s borders, similar to the ones used by Israel the same month on Syrian weapons stockpiles destined for Hezbollah. Whether or not such efforts will prove sufficient to reduce the concerns about American resolve and steadfastness often expressed by major Sunni powers in the Middle East remains to be seen.

Chinese and Russian Activities in the Region
Interestingly, as America has sought to refocus its attention on Asia, while also dispelling fears among Middle Eastern allies that a budget-driven U.S. military withdrawal from their region is pending, other world powers, primarily China and Russia, have worked to consolidate their standing in the Middle East as a counterweight to both the United States and the West. Within this context, in an October 2012 article, a prominent Chinese scholar argued that unlike the Asia-Pacific, where U.S. presence and influence are well established, the Middle East offers an arena where Chinese involvement might stir less controversy and bring more opportunities. He proposed, moreover, that by employing such a “marching west” approach, or a “westward pivot,” Beijing could in fact achieve the twin goals of cooperating with the United States in the region while at the same time countering Washington’s “containment

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359 Gur, “Saudis, Gulf States Unnerved.”
policy towards China.” This view, no doubt, reflects the fact that China buys more than one million barrels of oil per day from Saudi Arabia alone, and its continued economic prosperity, as well as that of other Asia-Pacific powers, increasingly depends on the resource-rich but volatile Middle East.

Beijing’s strategy toward the Middle East, therefore, appears to emphasize the deepening of economic ties, large-scale investment, and soft-power political alliances with Arab countries, especially those needed by the United States for forward basing. Trade between China and the GCC nations, for example, has already surpassed $80 billion per year, and this commercial relationship could easily lead to greater bilateral exchanges, including weapons sales. In that regard, U.S. and European companies took notice of Chinese efforts, reported in February 2013, to supply an unknown number of UAVs to the United Arab Emirates. In addition, Turkey made a surprise announcement in September 2013 that it had selected China to supply it with air defense missile systems, causing fears within the Western defense industry that a Chinese incursion into the Middle East’s defense market is under way. And in March 2014, during a visit to Beijing, Saudi Arabia announced plans to expand its relations with China, a move that was motivated in part by Saudi eagerness to balance out and diversify its oil exports at a time of decreasing energy demand from the United States. The inherent concern with these blossoming economic and political ties is that they may eventually persuade Gulf states not to support American actions during a potential crisis with China in the future. Arab countries, for example, could opt to continue supplying oil to Beijing during such a contingency, thereby undermining any U.S. efforts to bring pressure on Beijing by arranging for a disruption in its supplies shipped from the Gulf. Moreover,

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experts worry about China’s possible use of proxy powers, such as Iran, to advance its interests in the region, as well as about China’s greater ability to project power and establish a maritime presence in the Gulf region via the overseas basing sites it has established using the “String of Pearls” strategy.363 Already in September 2014, Chinese warships docked at Iran’s principal naval port for the first time in history to conduct joint naval exercises. Using China’s port access along the Pacific and Indian Oceans, Beijing, defense experts warn, could employ its anti-access/area denial (or A2/AD) battle network in such a way as to constrain the U.S. military’s freedom to maneuver in Indo-Pacific waters, thereby adding an additional layer of protection to a critical portion of China’s energy transit network.364

Although to a lesser extent, Russia, too, has striven to fill the region’s perceived power vacuum by playing a larger role in Mideast dynamics, in spite of its current standoff with the West over Ukraine. Indeed, Russian President Vladimir Putin has garnered significant political capital lately among a number of Arab countries for the firm resolve he has shown in Europe, and for the way he is perceived to have stuck by his friends in the Middle East. Those friends, however, remain Saudi Arabia’s enemies, and for that reason alone, a complete reorientation of Saudi policy that would be more accommodating toward Russia seems very unlikely.

363 Abisellan, “China’s Soft Power Strategy.” The “String of Pearls” strategy refers to China’s efforts in recent years to develop port access and naval support facilities at various points along the Indo-Pacific littoral, including in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Coco Islands, and Pakistan. The objective, many believe, is to assist the PLA Navy to defend, if and when necessary, key sea lanes carrying oil and other products from the Middle East and Africa to China. For a more detailed assessment of this concept and other Chinese overseas basing options, see Christopher D. Yeung and Ross Rustici, “Not an Idea We Have to Shun”: Chinese Overseas Basing Requirements in the 21st Century, Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, National Defense University, October 2014.

364 Abisellan, “China’s Soft Power Strategy.”
at least for now.\footnote{Phillips, “Riyadh Wonders Whether Obama Can Repair the Damage.”} By exposing (or appearing to) a degree of fecklessness in Washington’s response to Russian assertiveness, the crisis in Ukraine, it has been argued in certain Arab quarters, could cast in doubt the future of a number of American initiatives in the wider Middle East, complicating, according to several former U.S. officials, administration efforts to curb Iran’s nuclear program, resolve Syria’s civil war, and, in the short term, secure a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.\footnote{Mark Landler and Anne Barnard, “Obama Says Tough Choices Needed in Mideast Talks,” \textit{Boston Globe}, March 4, 2014.} Russia, more specifically, is a pivotal player on Syria, an influential member of the negotiating group with Iran, and a symbol of resistance to the West throughout the region.\footnote{Ibid.}

In the immediate future, moreover, Moscow is likely to dramatically reduce its interest in a settlement to the Syrian conflict, and the Kremlin is already trying to enhance its ties to Iran and woo it with offers of much greater strategic cooperation, including in the military and technical fields. There is always the possibility as well that a long dispute with Russia over Ukraine may embolden Moscow to conduct a more active anti-American course of action in the Middle East and in other regions (such as East and Central Europe) where it sees a potential security vacuum developing.\footnote{Fyodor Lukyanov, “U.S.-Russia Mideast Cooperation in Balance Over Ukraine?” \textit{Al-Monitor}, March 5, 2014.}

To be fair, judging from developments in the last half of 2014, predictions that the United States will drift away and disengage from the Middle East would seem to be premature, especially because, just as previous administrations have learned, the region has a tendency to pull America back in, even when Washington wants to limit its involvement there. Although Washington is gradually recalibrating American policy in the greater Middle East, the region’s seemingly incessant problems remain, after all, too deeply intertwined with U.S. national security to ignore, and, despite local fears to the contrary, there is no scenario, officials and experts continue to argue, in
which the Obama administration would “ratify Iran’s dominance in the Gulf” in exchange for concessions on the nuclear issue or the Syria conflict. So, too, while Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, and others would prefer a more muscular U.S. military intervention against Damascus, they understand that the complex nature of the conflict makes it difficult for any outside power to address it quickly or easily, which is, of course, one of the primary reasons why America has been reluctant to get entangled too deeply or precipitously. “Everyone fighting in Syria is fighting for his own purpose, not only to protect Bashar al-Assad and his regime,” said an Iraqi Shiite fighter recently, speaking from Damascus, where hundreds of Shiite fighters from around the region and even Africa, including trained Hezbollah commandos, have streamed to defend a symbol of their faith.

What is clear as well, however, is that a stronger U.S. commitment to Asian security also means that the United States must remain sensitive to the Asia-Pacific’s growing economic engagement with and dependence on the Middle East, an aspect of the pivot that is likely to pull Washington back into the Gulf region even as it rebalances to Asia. This rather ironic twist to the pivot highlights yet again the interconnectedness of both regions and their joint importance for the rebalance, suggesting, in turn, the need for a more integrated U.S. approach that takes into account and incorporates the full range of these cross-regional dynamics. The growing ties between Asia and the Middle East – and especially Arab Gulf oil producers – stand out as perhaps the clearest illustration of why such an approach should be taken.

369 Kahl and Stokes, “Overcoming the Gulf in the Gulf.”
370 Hubbard, Worth, and Gordon, “Power Vacuum in Middle East Lifts Militants.”
Security Trends and Developments in Africa

Like NATO Europe and the greater Middle East, African allies and partners have expressed worries about the potential impact of a U.S. policy shift toward Asia, their chief concern being that the pivot appears to be yet another indication of an unwelcome degree of American disengagement from the region. As the former commander of U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), General Carter Ham, told an audience in December 2012, for example, the formal release of the Pentagon’s rebalance strategy caused a great deal of “interesting discussions with our African partners, both military and civilian,” many of whom felt slighted and disturbed by the U.S. government’s inadequate attention to the region, especially since, as they pointed out, the word “Africa” was mentioned precisely once in the entire DSG document.\(^\text{372}\) Chief among the issues commonly raised by local officials, according to General Ham, has been the question, “Does this mean that the United States military does not really think very seriously, or is not very committed to, African security matters?”\(^\text{373}\) – especially given the need for long-term U.S. military deployments in the Middle East and Asia to counter threats from Syria’s civil war, Iran, North Korea, and possibly China.

Although the region is growing in strategic importance, U.S. military assistance and forward presence activities on the African continent are still fairly low-profile and small in number compared to those in other regions, such as Asia and the Middle East. On any given day, for instance, there are only about five thousand U.S. troops scattered across all of Africa, while by comparison, twenty-eight thousand are stationed in South Korea alone.\(^\text{374}\) Fears in African countries that the continent might be relegated to the margins of American foreign policy interests were already raised, according to


experts, when President Obama, more than eight months into his presidency, still had not named a U.S. ambassador to the African Union or a permanent USAID assistant administrator for Africa, among other region-focused posts. In addition, many Africans continue to complain about President Obama’s relative absence from their region, given that he spent less than twenty-four hours on the continent during his entire first term, albeit delivering a notable address before the Ghanaian parliament. Pundits have also noted Obama’s failure to make a formal presidential trip to Africa until his second term, when he completed a not-so-well-received six-day tour of Senegal, Tanzania, and South Africa in June 2013. This trip drew particular criticism for its neglect of troubled African democracies in North Africa and the Sahel, with Kenya’s most influential newspaper, *Daily Nation*, calling its country’s “snub” by Obama “deeply” and “psychologically” wounding for Kenyans. As one prominent African scholar explained in 2013, “When we talk about U.S.-Africa policy..., [we] trace it to Bill Clinton, [we] trace it back to George W. Bush, and very little of President Obama. In that sense ... Obama has not been felt in Africa.”

Many on the continent had high hopes and enthusiasm for Washington’s regional policies after President Obama’s speech in Ghana in July 2009, in which he said that the United States stood ready to help African nations as they work to improve governance, fight corruption, and resolve regional conflicts. However, even though the White House has, in a few instances, modestly increased funding for the region, consistent direct engagement has been notably lacking from the very top, and the Obama administration has failed to launch major new initiatives such as the Clinton-era trade pact that substantially eased barriers for African goods or President George W.

Bush’s AIDS initiative of 2003, which continued the upward trend in U.S. aid begun under Clinton and committed billions of additional dollars to the fight against HIV/AIDS on the continent.\(^{378}\) Although Africans are often reluctant to criticize Obama, whom they see as “one of our own,” said Kenyan Mwangi Kimenyi, director of the Africa Growth Initiative at the Brookings Institution, “it turns out our expectations for the president were a bit overrated and unrealistic. He could have been more courageous and done more.”\(^{379}\) In a similar vein, as other observers have pointed out, even though the White House released an Africa-focused strategy paper in June 2012, which again emphasized U.S. commitment to strengthening democracy and spurring economic growth on the continent, it nevertheless lacked a single signature project that could cement Obama’s Africa legacy.\(^{380}\)

Instead, Washington’s attention for the time being has focused on U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), the Pentagon’s newest geographic combatant command, which was created in 2007 but only reached full operational capability in October 2008. USAFRICOM, according to leading security experts, was established on the assumption that a new regional command was needed to put to rest an antiquated DoD framework that had made Africa primarily a USEUCOM area of responsibility at a time when the continent barely registered on America’s strategic radar. Such a command, it was argued, could better manage the various bilateral and multilateral military-to-military relationships that Washington had established or was in the process of establishing with African countries. It was also hoped that the many different U.S. security assistance programs already in place on the continent would receive more focused attention under a dedicated

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\(^{379}\) Ibid.

\(^{380}\) Ibid.
That said, funding and resources to support the command and help it achieve its full range of goals have not always been readily forthcoming, a problem that was apparent even before the current trend of tightening budgets and fiscal austerity.

Indeed, as some have suggested, USAFRICOM’s engagement in Africa has at times been trapped in a strategic catch-22, because of organizational roadblocks and operational difficulties related to the fact that it was kludged together from elements of two other commands, notably USEUCOM and USCENTCOM. For example, even though the site was supposed to be only temporary, U.S. Africa Command has remained headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, ever since it split from USEUCOM because there was no politically viable host country on the African continent, a fact that continues to hamper the command’s credibility within the region.382 In addition, unlike most of the Pentagon’s other geographic combatant commands, USAFRICOM has only a handful of troops that are regularly assigned to it, and it must frequently borrow planes and personnel from other GCCs on a temporary basis.383 Adding to these constraints, USAFRICOM’s commander, Army General David Rodriguez, warned in February 2013 during a congressional hearing that the U.S. military would need to increase its intelligence-gathering and spying missions in Africa nearly fifteen-fold in order “to protect American interests and assist our close allies and partners,” adding that Africa Command currently receives only 7 percent of its total “requirements” for operating across the continent.384

Intelligence gathering in Africa needs to increase almost fifteen-fold to protect American and partner interests

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382 Whitlock, “For Pentagon, Pivot to Asia Becomes Shift toward Africa.”
383 Ibid.
384 Ibid.
a time of sweeping federal spending cuts, furthermore, U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel even hinted during a July 2013 press conference about a possible realignment and consolidation of combatant commands (COCOMs), which would have included dissolving Africa Command and splitting it up again between USEUCOM and USCENTCOM, among other budget-cutting options.\(^{385}\)

This particular option has not been exercised, however, and USAFRICOM has started to assume an increasingly important role in the region. In part this is thanks to increased funding for security cooperation with African partners over the past few years in an effort to counter transnational terrorism, build local military expertise and infrastructure, and help prevent regional conflict in general. Significant successes in that regard include a variety of civil support and military education programs run by USAFRICOM’s Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), a maritime security program for African coastal states called Africa Partnership Station (APS), and a number of trans-Saharan border security and counterterrorism initiatives with vulnerable countries in the Maghreb.\(^{386}\) In the past decade, American special operations forces (SOF) have also established a network of surveillance posts across the continent to help track and interdict a number of Al Qaeda affiliates in Africa and other militant groups. This includes extremist organizations such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which has expanded its reach throughout the Sahel, Boko Haram in Nigeria, which abducted nearly three hundred Nigerian schoolgirls in April 2014, the brutal Lord’s Resistance Army operating across Central Africa, and al-Shabaab in Somalia, to name just a few. Moreover,


it was recently revealed that since 2013, U.S. SOF units, including members of the Army’s Green Berets and Delta Force, have been instructing and equipping hundreds of commandos in Libya, Niger, Mauritania, and Mali, using millions of dollars in classified Pentagon spending, to help build indigenous counterterrorism teams capable of countering Al Qaeda and its allies on the continent.\textsuperscript{387} Likewise, this year U.S. Army soldiers are scheduled to conduct more than one hundred missions across the region, and earlier in 2014 the Marines fielded three new staging outposts, in Senegal, Ghana, and Gabon, aimed at helping these countries to respond more quickly to crises in West Africa and even farther afield.\textsuperscript{388} Most recently, about fourteen hundred soldiers headed to Liberia in October 2014, as part of a total force of three thousand U.S. troops whom the Pentagon will send on a humanitarian mission to the West African region to help stem the spread of Ebola.

One reason for this increased activity, of course, is the deadly September 2012 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, to which the Pentagon was admittedly ill-equipped to respond in a timely and effective manner. Another contributing factor has been America’s concern over the spread of Islamic extremism in parts of the Sahel, where in early 2012 Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and associated militant groups were able to seize control of northern Mali and hold a territory the size of Texas for nearly a year.\textsuperscript{389} To be sure, the continued spread of militants from Mali into other stretches of North Africa and the Sahel, combined with their growing strength in the Syria conflict and their ever larger collaboration and synchronization with the broader global jihadist movement, poses acute challenges to U.S., other Western, and regional partner interests. Even more significantly, however, Washington’s recent efforts to


al-Qaeda affiliates and other militant groups

Nouakchott, Mauritania: The United States flew PC-12 surveillance aircraft from here to track al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. The flights ended in 2008 after a coup.

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso: The United States flew PC-12 surveillance aircraft from here north to Mali, Mauritania, and the Sahara.

Nzara, South Sudan: The U.S. military says it’s planning to base surveillance planes here.

Entebbe, Uganda: The United States flies PC-12 surveillance aircraft from here over territory used by the Lord’s Resistance Army.

Arba Minch, Ethiopia: The United States flies Reaper Drones from here over Somalia.

Camp Leominster, Djibouti: The U.S. military targets al-Shabab in Somalia and al-Qaeda in Yemen from this key base.

Manda Bay, Kenya: More than 100 U.S. commandos are based at a Kenyan military installation.

Victoria, Seychelles: The United States flies Reaper Drones from this island base over East Africa.

SOURCE: Based on staff reports and graphics from The Washington Post.
extend and outsource its counterterrorism missions in some parts of Africa via tailored partnership programs reflect the broader shift in American military strategy outlined by President Obama in his May 2014 speech at West Point. To be more specific, this shift aims to avoid large, expensive land wars, like those in Iraq and Afghanistan, and instead favors targeted action, like raids and drone strikes, and stresses the training of allied and partner nations to battle militants on their own soil.  

“The United States doesn’t have a desire to expand and create a big footprint inside Africa,” Obama said at the conclusion of the first-ever U.S.-Africa Leaders’ Summit he hosted in Washington, D.C., in August 2014. “What we do want... is to partner with the African Union, with [the Economic Community of West African States], with individual countries, to build their capacity,” he added.

This enabling, or supporting, role was evident in the strife-torn Central African Republic, where American transport planes recently delivered seventeen hundred peacekeepers from Burundi and Rwanda, an operation to which no U.S. ground troops were committed. Similarly, the United States has conducted drone strikes in Somalia from its only permanent base on the continent, in Djibouti, and it is now flying reconnaissance drones from a base in Niger to support French and African troops in Mali, all without being a major combatant in, or having to pour a lot of money into, a war zone. In addition, Africa Command is running an annual exercise, called Flintlock, that in 2014 included about six hundred African troops and some five hundred Western trainers, most of them Americans, who gathered in central Niger to practice marksmanship, patrol the harsh desert terrain, and set up checkpoints for suspicious vehicles. Nevertheless, despite the success of these and similar

390 Schmitt, “U.S. Training Elite Antiterror Troops.”
393 Ibid.
initiatives, some African and Western analysts now worry that the Pentagon’s increased presence throughout the continent is causing U.S. policy on Africa to become too one-dimensional and overly dependent on military actions. In particular, Washington’s heavy focus on security and hard power, it is said, coupled with the lack of new economic initiatives, is gradually skewing the balance in U.S. ties with Africa, and this “militarization by default,” according to a number of Africa experts, could in turn threaten to undermine the cohesiveness of the administration’s Africa strategy over the longer term.  

Moreover, these experts add, an American policy that prioritizes military training with as many local security forces as possible stands in sharp contrast to Beijing’s broad and comprehensive approach to African affairs. China, which has been conducting its own, long-term pivot toward the region and its vast natural resources, has emerged in recent years as the leading investor in Africa and an increasingly significant influence on political and security issues on the continent. In fact, the interdependence between China and Africa, according to a top French military official, has now reached levels that far exceed simple economic relations and has entered the realm of grand strategy. Trade between Beijing and African countries, for instance, has increased more than tenfold since 2000, to about $170 billion in 2012, or twice the level of U.S.-Africa trade, and China has become, at least in economic terms, America’s main competitor in Africa. Even during the global financial crisis of 2009, moreover, then-Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao was instructing the country’s diplomats that Beijing should “use its

394 Quinn, “Security in Focus As Clinton Begins Africa Trip.”
vast foreign exchange reserves, the largest in the world, to support and accelerate overseas expansion by Chinese companies,” including in key African countries, such as Ethiopia, Mauritius, Nigeria, and Zambia, so as to also gain access to the European market.\footnote{Pham, “China’s Role and Influence in Africa.”} In a further symbol of the continent’s growing importance to Beijing, and in stark contrast to the current U.S. administration, former Chinese president Hu Jintao visited Africa seven times during President Obama’s first term alone, eventually making nearly two dozen trips to African countries over the course of his decade in power. Similarly, Hu’s successor, Xi Jinping, chose to visit three nations in Africa for his inaugural trip as Chinese president.\footnote{Luce, “Obama’s Trip to Africa Is Too Little.”}

As China continues to carefully cultivate ever-closer ties with African governing elites, Beijing’s non-conditional aid, loans, and bilateral agreements are also beginning to directly challenge U.S. interests and values in the region. In particular, China’s philosophy of non-interference in internal affairs and its consistent policy of not imposing explicit conditions on its aid recipients are often intended as a means to ensure, via implicit assumptions, that African ruling elites will support Chinese positions in various international forums, including, among others, the UN General Assembly where Africa accounts for one-third of the votes.\footnote{Pham, “China’s Role and Influence in Africa.”} This approach, according to one Africa expert, “represents a fundamental challenge to U.S. interests in promoting democracy, good governance, and sustainable development in Africa.” More specifically, it has encouraged and provided support for various rogue regimes, such as Mugabe’s in Zimbabwe and Beshir’s in Sudan, with far-reaching implications for security on the continent.\footnote{Lesley Anne Warner, “Advancing Peace and Security in Africa,” in Top Five Reasons Why Africa Should Be a Priority for the United States, Brookings Institution, March 2013.} Beijing, for example, repeatedly opposed a series of binding resolutions in the Security Council during the Darfur crisis, and Chinese arms sales to the Sudanese government.
have dramatically increased in the past two decades.\footnote{Gaudilliere, “From Pivot to Symmetry?”} Ultimately, Beijing’s “special relationship” with Africa and its dedicated strategy to indirectly oppose or circumvent Western influence on the continent via non-conditional credits, could well lead, some Africa watchers have argued, to a strategic hegemony for China in the region, a prospect that makes it imperative for Washington to include African considerations in its policy shift to the Asia-Pacific, especially if it is to successfully counter or balance China’s rapidly rising influence in Africa and in other key areas.\footnote{Ibid.} Indeed, “the failure to perceive and prepare for China’s moves,” it was recently emphasized by an American specialist on Africa, “would be dangerous, unwise, and potentially detrimental for the United States in the near future.”\footnote{Top Five Reasons Why Africa Should Be a Priority for the United States, Brookings Institution, March 2013.}

In the end, despite USAFRICOM’s regional outreach initiatives of late, some analysts and observers have pointed out that recent events in Mali, Libya, Nigeria, and elsewhere in North Africa and the Sahel have underscored the volatility of the African security environment, demonstrating how quickly and easily certain parts of the continent can shift from potential hotspots to actual ones. The U.S. government, in that regard, must exercise caution and make tough political judgments before investing in ambitious counterterrorism training programs, especially given the recent lessons of Mali, where American-trained commanders of elite army units defected to Islamic insurgents who then seized control of the country’s north.\footnote{Schmitt, “U.S. Training Elite Antiterror Troops.”} Against this backdrop, some pundits have questioned the extent and quality of America’s “contextual understanding” of the unique and pressing, but often under-appreciated, security environment on the

\footnote{401 Gaudilliere, “From Pivot to Symmetry?”}  
\footnote{402 Ibid.}  
\footnote{403 Top Five Reasons Why Africa Should Be a Priority for the United States, Brookings Institution, March 2013.}  
\footnote{404 Schmitt, “U.S. Training Elite Antiterror Troops.”}
African continent. Experts have also cautioned that while Asia is indeed important in geostrategic terms, U.S. national security interests cannot afford a myopic focus on any specific geographic region and, therefore, that “before Washington pivots and focuses the preponderance of its security resources in one direction,” policy officials would be wise to “stop and think about the security challenges that are emerging out of Africa,” including hybrid threats.405

Nonetheless, to date U.S. Africa policy has been largely reactive and piecemeal, even though the broad spectrum of potential threats on the continent would seem to call for an overarching national security strategy for the region that is far more comprehensive than the narrow scope of the Pentagon’s latest initiatives. Moreover, without a more thoughtful consideration and articulation of an overall “American doctrine” concerning Africa, especially one that would give policy guidance to the interagency process, including its civilian and military components, and communicate Washington’s long-term commitment to its partners on the African continent, any increased attention to and resources for the region are not likely to result in substantially greater U.S. political influence. Nor are they likely to open new markets for U.S. businesses or significantly enhance the security, development, and prosperity of Africans, experts say.406 Furthermore, to have any chance of success over the longer term, a more comprehensive American approach for Africa would also require a stronger coordinating mechanism than exists today to pull together the various disparate policies now pursued on the continent by various governmental agencies.

Currently, for example, there are several separate policy documents, developed by different departments and agencies of the U.S. government, that guide U.S. strategy for the Sahel region, assigning varying degrees of importance to this turbulent part of Africa. Each agency’s plan, moreover, primarily focuses on the agency’s own particular mission, a situation that has led DoD officials, for example,

406 Pham, “China’s Role and Influence in Africa.”
to suspend certain activities because of disagreements with the State Department. This has undoubtedly hampered the progress of U.S. initiatives as a whole in the region, many of which remain disjointed and unevenly funded. It illustrates as well the importance of articulating an integrated, whole-of-government approach to the continent, one that does not lie solely within DoD’s or State’s domain, but consolidates the strategies pursued by all relevant stakeholders and establishes a linkage to future national defense and military policies. As one former U.S. official conceded in 2014, “The dynamic between state, defense, and the ambassador in the field is very complex, and when you have defense being the 800-pound gorilla in terms of the funding that it can provide for a variety of different activities, it may be more difficult [for the country team] to say ‘no’ than what one might think.”

Hence, despite America’s expanding military footprint on the continent, it has had mixed results in terms of advancing U.S. interests on the continent and setting in place cooperative activities that will be able to survive as DoD funding continues to be cut. For this reason alone, African allies and partner countries continue to worry, like their counterparts in NATO Europe and the Middle East, about the potential effect of the Asia rebalance on the overall funding levels that may be available for other regions. This is the case, especially given that there is, after all, a finite amount of money that can (and will be) be set aside for U.S. military engagement overseas. Moreover, Africa’s share, officials from the continent add, is unlikely to remain stable in any event, considering the usual trajectory of American involvement on the continent, which, they go on to suggest, tends to sharply increase when problems arise on the conflict and violence front, as in the case of civil strife in Mali, or in the event of a humanitarian crisis, such as West Africa’s Ebola outbreak, but then decline again or become dormant during the periods in between. Again, this

is a reality that simply cannot be ignored in an increasingly austere budgetary environment, since the limited funding that is required for the security cooperation programs of USAFRICOM, compared to those of the other geographic combatant commands, would also be much easier to cut in future defense budget reductions, especially if doing so appeared to free up monies for Asia-oriented programs considered essential to the rebalance. Even in Africa, therefore, the pivot can be expected to have at least an indirect – and, for the most part, rather negative – effect on the scale of American military operations.

**Security Trends and Developments in Latin America**

Described by its current commander, General John F. Kelly, USMC, as both “an economy of force Combatant Command” and the “lowest priority Geographic Combatant Command [or GCC],”409 U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) – and the sweeping region over which it is responsible, including Central America, South America, and most of the Caribbean – has been affected far more negatively than other GCCs (including USAFRICOM) by sequester-imposed defense budget cuts. In fiscal year 2013, for example, the command was forced by such cuts to cancel four major multilateral exercises – including Fuerza Comando, arguably its most important counterterrorism exercise – and no fewer than 225 engagement activities that are critical to building up effective defense and security capabilities within the region.410 Moreover, given the growing demand for U.S. military forces and defense cooperation efforts in other key regions of the world (especially in the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific), General Kelly has concluded that USSOUTHCOM “will receive little, if any, ‘trickle down’ of restored funding”411 in the event that Congress extends the partial relief from sequestration approved

410 Ibid., 29.
411 Ibid., 3.
by the December 2013 Bipartisan Budget Act or agrees to forgo still further defense spending reductions mandated by sequestration. No doubt, USSOUTHCOM’s predicament is (and will continue to be) made worse by the fact that, with very few assigned and allocated forces, it remains highly dependent on budget and deployment decisions made by the individual military services, most notably the U.S. Navy, given that service’s dominant role in command-led operations. Already, sequestration has dramatically reduced the availability of Navy frigates and other maritime assets so central to USSOUTHCOM’s counter-drug operations, and forced the Navy to cancel indefinitely the annual Continuing Promise tours of the USNS Comfort hospital ship, tours that emerged in recent years as the command’s premier humanitarian assistance initiative and that spread so much goodwill throughout the region. Looking ahead, the Navy’s confirmation that it intends to focus its budget in 2015 (and likely beyond) on supporting “the rebalance to the Pacific” suggests that current constraints on USSOUTHCOM’s finances and overall resources will not soon lift.

The consequences of these trends for regional stability and U.S. national security are likely to be far greater than they might appear to be at first glance. In the first place, major portions of Latin America, especially in Central America and the Caribbean, are under the thumb of powerful transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), and each year they funnel tons of drugs, numerous counterfeit products, and, increasingly, tens of thousands of undocumented people into the United States via a complex web of illicit trafficking routes.


Given USSOUTHCOM’s declining access to service assets, together with the increasing sophistication and adaptability of the TCOs (described by General Kelly as being “more efficient than FedEx could ever be”), twenty more metric tons of cocaine reached the United States in 2013 than in 2012, with 14 percent of the total now flowing through relatively new Caribbean routes. Perhaps more damning, General Kelly acknowledged recently that the command is “unable to pursue 74 percent of suspected maritime drug trafficking” primarily because of shortfalls in U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard support. “Because of service cuts,” he has said, “I simply sit and watch it go by,” the negative effects of which on crime and addiction levels in the United States are obviously severe.

More worrisome still, these same smuggling routes and the safe havens controlled by the TCOs – particularly in what’s called the Northern Triangle of Central America, encompassing Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala – could easily be used by terrorist groups to smuggle operatives across U.S. borders with the intention of causing grave harm to American citizens and critical infrastructure. Such a scenario could be even more disturbing if the terrorists carried with them the makings for a weapon of mass destruction, such as a dirty nuclear explosive device or a chemical or biological weapon. USSOUTHCOM and DoD officials have grown more and more worried, therefore, over growing signs of a convergence in Latin America between criminal and terrorist groups (including those with ties to Islamic extremists), all of whom rely heavily on the global illicit economy for profit and to cover operating expenses. Lebanese

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415 Posture Statement of General John F. Kelly, 6, 17, 19.
Hezbollah-associated criminal networks are already operating in free trade zones and poorly governed areas of Venezuela and the tri-border region of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, where they can more easily engage in money laundering and other illegal activities (which likely yield revenues in the tens of millions of dollars), while also conducting recruitment and radicalization efforts. At the same time, there has been a noticeable uptick as well in proselytizing and fundraising by Islamic extremists among the Muslim communities of the Caribbean and in Central and South America.

More recently, General Kelly has begun to warn of an equally disturbing scenario that could trigger widespread panic and fears of a pandemic (if not the reality of one) along America’s southern borders – namely, the prospect of a mass migration of people fleeing Central America or the Caribbean following an outbreak there of Ebola. There is nothing far-fetched at all about this scenario, Kelly has argued, when one considers the facts that growing numbers of West Africans are using illicit trafficking routes through Central America to slip into the United States, that the Latin American countries through which they pass have virtually no capacity to deal with Ebola, and that the local populations are likely to react to any spread of Ebola within their own countries by trying to escape to the United States via the same routes used by the West Africans. Such a sudden migration, he has added, would “make the 68,000 unaccompanied minors [who have crossed illegally into the States] look like a small problem.” To help illustrate how such an outbreak could begin, Kelly, speaking at an October 2014 National Defense University conference in Washington, D.C., told the story of how five or six men from Liberia had been

\[ \text{A mass migration triggered by an Ebola outbreak is not inconceivable} \]

\[ \text{Posture Statement of General John F. Kelly, 9.} \]

Indeed, the creation of an elaborate and expanding network of illicit trafficking routes between Latin America and West Africa, supporting all manner of illegal activities and trade, is one the one newest and most troublesome developments for anti-trafficking organizations. For details, see A Comprehensive Approach to Combating Illicit Trafficking, Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, June 2010.
stopped at a Costa Rican border crossing with Nicaragua, after having first flown to Trinidad and then traveled to Costa Rica hoping to pass through the Central American isthmus and into the United States with the help of local smugglers. Given the estimated length of that journey, “they could have been in New York City,” he went on to suggest, “well within the incubation period for Ebola.”

In addition to these very real risks to the security of America’s Latin American neighbors and to the U.S. homeland itself, Washington, it is noted by a growing number of American specialists on Latin America, would also do well to pay closer attention to Chinese and Russian activities in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean.

Both Moscow and Beijing have sought to raise their profile within this broad region as the United States has turned its attention elsewhere (including to the Asia-Pacific), and their efforts could in time help to erode longstanding American relationships with key countries in the region well beyond the level that has already occurred (or soon will) as a result of sequester-induced reductions in U.S. military activities “south of the border.”

To a degree, China seems intent on outflanking Washington’s rebalance to Asia in part by establishing inroads into America’s own backyard, conducting a Chinese counter-pivot to Latin America. This has included an unprecedented series of Chinese naval deployments to the region since 2008, including a visit by the Peace Ark hospital ship in 2011 in an effort to emulate – though on a much smaller scale – the USNS Comfort’s health diplomacy tours, followed in 2013 with goodwill visits by the PLA Navy to Brazil, Chile, and Argentina and a first-ever naval exercise with

the Argentine navy. For its part, Russia has tried to signal over the past few years, through a combination of military deployments, defense sales, and high-level diplomatic visits, that it remains a global power with global interests, and that it has friends around the world – even in America’s near abroad – despite the sanctions imposed on Moscow after its annexation of Crimea and its support for Ukrainian separatists.

On closer examination, China’s engagement of Latin America, despite the naval deployments noted above, has been largely commercial and economic in nature, with a primary focus on the Caribbean and Central America. During his May 2013 visit to the region, for example, China’s president, Xi Jinping, offered more than $5.3 billion in financing, with very few conditions attached, to a number of countries that it seeks to cultivate. This included some $3 billion for infrastructure and energy projects in eight Caribbean countries, about $1.3 billion in loans and lines of credit to Costa Rica for road construction, and a $1 billion line of credit to Mexico for improvements to the state-owned oil company PEMEX. China is rumored as well to be discussing the idea of offering up to $40 billion for the construction of an alternative to the Panama Canal in Nicaragua, and Chinese companies currently hold sizeable investments in at least five major ports in the region. They also serve as major vendors for telecommunications services in about eighteen Latin American countries, underwrite large-scale resource extraction projects in Venezuela and Ecuador, and partner with Venezuelan, Brazilian, and Bolivian defense technology companies in the launching of imagery and communication satellites. Most appealing of all to many Latin American countries, Chinese finance is generally given for projects these countries really want (as opposed to what Western development assistance agencies say they need), and it is offered, as in Africa, without the harsh “conditionalties” regarding austerity and structural adjustment programs that

422 Posture Statement of General John F. Kelly, II.
the World Bank and other international financial institutions often attach to their financing efforts.⁴²³

Russia’s activities in Latin America, on the other hand, have tended to be more military in nature, and reflect an interest in leveraging its new ties with Latin American countries to bring diplomatic and strategic pressure on the United States. Toward that end, it has recently deployed military forces to the region on a scale not seen in over thirty years, including a visit by a Russian navy surface action group to Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, and the deployment of two Russian long-range strategic bombers to Venezuela and Nicaragua as part of a training exercise.⁴²⁴ As these initiatives imply, Moscow has certainly sought to cultivate closer cooperation with local regimes on the left side of the political spectrum that often see themselves in opposition to Washington, but it has also made an effort to establish ties with Latin American countries that are more centrist or even right of center. Along these lines, Russia has sold military helicopters to Peru, civilian aircraft and military weapons to Chile, and anti-air missiles to Brazil.⁴²⁵ Moreover, it sees current efforts by Latin American militaries as a whole to re-equip after some two decades of underinvestment as a potential boon for Russian arms sales, though Moscow understands as well that it will face stiff competition in this regard from China, Europe, and the United States. Meanwhile, on the diplomatic front, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov continues his quest to reach a deal on visa-free travel

⁴²³ “Latin America Playing a Risky Game by Welcoming in the Chinese Dragon,” Guardian, May 30, 2013. As outlined in this article, there are also substantial downsides to Chinese finance deals, as they often require borrowers to hire Chinese firms, buy Chinese equipment, and pay loans back in the form of oil supplies to China rather than in local currency. By focusing on large-scale commodities production, Chinese-backed projects can also perpetuate an over-reliance on the commodities trade, while increasing environmental risks and discouraging industrial diversification.

⁴²⁴ Posture Statement of General John F. Kelly, 10; “Russia Pushes to Deepen Ties in Latin America,” STRATFOR, April 30, 2014.

⁴²⁵ “Russia Pushes to Deepen Ties in Latin America.”
with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (known by its Spanish acronym, CELAC), a deal that Russia would view as a welcome symbolic victory given the European Union’s recent refusal of a similar travel agreement with Moscow.426

Parallel to these efforts by China and, to a degree, Russia to pivot toward Latin America, a good number of Latin American countries are pivoting, in turn, to the Asia-Pacific, largely in search of expanded global trade. In the words of a senior Argentine diplomat, many Latin American officials, just like their U.S. counterparts, see Asia as “an area of opportunity rather than one of trouble and ongoing strife like the Middle East and North Africa.”427 Hence, while they were not happy that DoD’s 2012 DSG, which formally announced Washington’s rebalance to Asia, did not mention a single Latin American country (or the strategic value of the Latin American region overall), they very much agreed – and still do – that a greater focus on, and a broader effort to engage, the Asia-Pacific region made good sense. Leading the charge to increase Latin American trade with Asia are the members of the Pacific Alliance, founded in 2011 by Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru to promote free trade with “a clear orientation toward Asia.”428 As the alliance has pushed forward with the objective of removing trade barriers with Asian countries, trade between Latin America and Asia has continued to grow at an annual rate of about 20 percent.429 It is expected, moreover, that further integration with Asian economies via participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) now being negotiated could offer Pacific Alliance...

426 Ibid.
427 Interview with IFPA, October 7, 2013.
members (especially Chile and Peru), as well as others in Latin America, even more trade benefits, including greater opportunities to expand exports to Asia by their small and medium-sized enterprises.\textsuperscript{430}

As a lead negotiator in the TPP process, the United States certainly has an opportunity to help shape Latin American participation in a way that is congruent with (if not directly supportive of) the American rebalance to Asia, at least insofar as its economic component is concerned. This, in turn, might encourage Latin American countries – especially Pacific Alliance members with a border on the Pacific and a pre-existing Asia orientation – to explore the options for broader diplomatic engagement with Asian-Pacific regional institutions, such as ASEAN. Given their own susceptibility to earthquakes, hurricanes, mudslides, and related disasters, quite a few Central American, South American, and Caribbean nations would likely be quite interested, for example, in ASEAN’s efforts to promote regional cooperation in the HA/DR mission area and their possible application to the Latin American environment.

That said, it is also quite apparent – based on the brief review of regional security trends provided in this chapter – that ongoing steps by DoD and the military services to implement the pivot even as the defense budget is cut, together with the increased demand for U.S. military support in NATO Europe, the Middle East, and even Africa, have left USSOUTHCOM and the region it is meant to support with far too few resources to cope with current and emerging regional risks. As a result, there can be little doubt that a security vacuum of some degree has indeed emerged (or soon will) in Latin America, a vacuum that others – China and Russia included, but certainly local TCOs and possibly terrorist collaborators – will likely try to exploit, if not fill. Washington would do well to remember, in that context, that even though Latin America may be considered a low-priority region overseen by a low-priority GCC, events there, given its geographic proximity, can have a more immediate and direct impact on the security of the U.S. homeland than its “low-priority” status would.

\textsuperscript{430} Ibid.
suggest. This will certainly be the case, moreover, to the extent that security requirements in the region continue to be shortchanged.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that more than a few Latin American security experts have begun to call for at least a “half-pivot back to the Americas”\textsuperscript{431} sufficient to contain the TCOs and other belligerent non-state actors and to maintain an adequate level of U.S. security cooperation with regional partner states. The good news is that such an effort need not be unduly expensive, given that USSOUTHCOM and military service budgets for activities in Latin America are relatively modest compared to those for other regions of importance. This has understandably made such funding an attractive target for cost-cutters trying to manage the current budget squeeze, but it also means that a fairly modest re-allocation of funds to support military operations in Latin America could have an out-sized effect on the security of the region. While they do not always agree with American policy, most Latin American countries do want to retain the partnerships that they have built with the United States over the years (including in the security realm, broadly defined), and they are puzzled by Washington’s reduced attention to these relationships. Hence, getting back on track in this regard would provide welcome reassurance, for example, to the Argentine security policy official – and likely to others who think the way he does – who recently expressed concern over the fact that “Argentina is now hosting naval exercises with China just as the U.S. seems unable or unwilling to participate in similar exercises with old friends in the region.”\textsuperscript{432} Unless this situation is remedied, longstanding habits of U.S.-regional cooperation (and the strategic benefits that accrue), he added, could eventually fall by the wayside. Clearly, this is


\textsuperscript{432} Interview with IFPA.
an unintended consequence of the American rebalance to Asia, among other recent defense trends, that ought to be avoided.

**Conclusion**

It is clear that unfolding events in the Middle East, including the administration’s decision to become more deeply involved in the fight against ISIS, could encourage a reallocation back to this troubled region of at least a portion of the financial and military resources that might otherwise be devoted to implementing the pivot. In this sense, the American rebalance to Asia could be influenced (and perhaps slowed) by security dynamics in the Middle East just as it in turn could affect those same dynamics (perhaps for the worse) by focusing U.S. military assets and defense spending increasingly toward the Pacific. Precisely where the line will be drawn in terms of future commitments of American “blood and treasure” between these two regional priorities remains to be seen, but the fact that achieving the right balance between America’s engagement with (and presence in) the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific has itself become a higher priority since the 2012 DSG demonstrates how interconnected U.S. security efforts can be across key regions. Actions taken toward one may have significant consequences in others, and the perceived or imagined impact in the eyes of regional officials may demand as much attention from Washington as any actual effects. Having a strategy for dealing with how the pivot is viewed is therefore just as important as taking corrective steps to alleviate or minimize any real security gaps it might create elsewhere. This is especially true with respect to the Middle East and NATO Europe, where forward-deployed American forces have played such a prominent and visible role over a long period of time.

In comparison, given the more limited role of U.S. military forces in Africa and Latin America, President Obama’s announcement of a rebalance toward Asia has not triggered the same type or level of reactions in these regions that it has in Europe and the Middle East, and African and Latin American officials have been fairly silent on the pivot. That said, both regions, as discussed in this chapter, remain
strategically important to the United States, and the illicit trafficking routes that now connect them mean that what happens in one may affect the other more than is commonly appreciated. Perhaps most important from a U.S. security perspective, should these routes ever be used to smuggle terrorists from Africa (where the terrorist and Islamist threats are growing) through Latin America and into the American homeland, the strategic importance of both regions to Washington would suddenly rise to an unprecedentedly high level. Hence, as the U.S. defense budget continues to tighten, the primary pivot-related challenge for local officials and for U.S. combatant commands operating in Africa and Latin America will be to try and avoid any serious drop in regional security that a reshuffling of scarce resources to the Pacific may prompt, especially given the likelihood that additional resources will also be needed to respond to new security risks in the Middle East and Europe. To be sure, any negative effects of the rebalance on African and Latin American security are likely to be more indirect and less immediate than in the last two regions mentioned, but they still could be no less real, both in actuality and in the eyes of those responsible for defending either region. This is all the more true, it should be remembered, in view of the fact that U.S. military expenditures related to Africa and Latin America are already quite low (compared to higher-priority regions), so additional cuts to these accounts would have a proportionately larger and more disruptive effect than they would on those for operations in Europe, the Middle East, or Asia.
AS DETAILED IN previous chapters, numerous factors have likely slowed the pace and reduced the scale of the American rebalance to Asia compared to what was anticipated when the idea was first floated in the fall of 2011 and its military dimensions formally codified in DoD’s 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG). Constraints on its implementation have included, for example, defense budget reductions due to sequestration and the very real possibility of more to come, problems jump-starting (and sustaining) the non-military aspects of the pivot (particularly in the economic and diplomatic realms), security developments outside of Asia that have demanded more attention (and a strategic response) from Washington, and a parallel need to reassure non-Asian allies and partner states – especially in NATO Europe and the Middle East – that the United States will not abandon them. At the same time, Washington must also demonstrate to America’s Asian friends and allies that the rebalance is real and moving forward, even if not as quickly or comprehensively as initially hoped. Further on this last point, it is also clear, as outlined in chapter 2, that the pivot is in fact making slow but steady progress, particularly in its military dimensions, not the least because it is so in tune with (and reinforced by) adjustments to U.S. military deployments in the Asia-Pacific and plans for defense cooperation in the region that had been in the works well before President Obama came into office. So long as an extended period of sequester-level
cuts can be avoided, and barring another major U.S. ground war in the Middle East, there is no fundamental reason why such progress cannot be continued. It may not measure up to what the more enthusiastic champions of the pivot had envisioned, but it may very well be a sufficient and appropriate effort to prioritize America’s role in the Pacific in a way that does not shortchange security in other important areas of the globe.

That said, to help lock such a process into place, Washington will need to take a number of additional steps. At a minimum, these should include the ones outlined below.

- **First and foremost, the administration and Congress must make a more serious effort to reduce substantially, if not eliminate altogether, sequester-driven cuts to the defense budget.** This is perhaps the single most important step that could be taken to avoid the prospect of a hollowed-out military and to ensure that sufficient funding and forces are available both for the rebalance and for other regional security initiatives that have (or may later) become a priority. Indeed, budget relief will be essential even for the less ambitious and slower to materialize variant of the pivot that now seems more likely than the sweeping, multifaceted ideal popularized in 2011 and 2012. Somewhat ironically, it may be the battle against ISIS and renewed fears of disorder in the Middle East that do more than anything else to boost official support for halting sequestration, thereby sustaining defense spending at a level that would fund steady progress on the Pacific pivot while also covering the costs of expanded operations elsewhere, especially in Syria and Iraq and in post-Ukraine NATO Europe.

- **The administration should issue a high-level policy statement, ideally in the form of a national security presidential directive (NSPD) or similarly authoritative document, that would provide an update on and reaffirmation of the American rebalance toward Asia, but would do so in a way that would discuss more explicitly how the pivot may affect, or, alternatively, be affected by, security dynamics and emerging requirements in other**
key regions. The main idea here would be to cast the pivot in a broader global context that reflects recent and emerging trends, perhaps a bit like the 2014 QDR provided more detail on the strategic importance of other regions (most notably the Middle East and Europe) while still giving priority – albeit in a more muted form – to an overall shift toward the Pacific. Such a document could acknowledge, and comment at least briefly on, the concerns about potential U.S. disengagement expressed by allies and partner countries outside of Asia, while also providing a very welcome confirmation of Washington’s intention to engage more fully with, and help build security within, the Asia-Pacific region. Similar to past NSPDs, it could do this in just a few pages, but they would carry the official imprimatur of the president and the White House, which is key to providing the degree of clarity and level of reassurance about the pivot and its broader implications that allies and partners really crave. Embedding the rebalance in a more inter-regional framework, an NSPD-like statement along these lines could also include further guidance on the need to improve inter-agency, cross-COCOM, and wider U.S.-allied and multilateral cooperation on pivot-related efforts, perhaps outlining in general terms how that might be achieved by way of a few concrete examples.

• With regard specifically to the defense and military aspects of the rebalance, greater efforts can and should be made to tailor training and to design operations for forces assigned to the Asia-Pacific theater to be as compatible as possible with local conditions and security needs. This may seem obvious, but since the individual military services retain primary control over the training regimes and theater security cooperation activities in which their forces participate, as well as over the bulk of funding available for such programs, the region-specific requirements that USPACOM and even DoD may have in mind to help advance the pivot may not be given top priority. Indeed, whatever the region in question, the preferences of
the geographic combatant commands (GCCs) and policy planners in the Office of the Secretary of Defense are not always viewed by service leaderships as the optimal paths to follow. Initiatives, therefore, like the U.S. Army’s regionally aligned forces (RAF) concept – and its Pacific Pathways program, in particular – should be commended, and, to the extent possible, replicated (or reinforced, if they already exist) among the other services. The same could be said about the U.S. Navy’s exchange programs that allow junior officers to deploy with a variety of other Asian-Pacific navies (and thereby learn how they think and operate), and about the joint exercises and deployments with Australian and other regional forces undertaken by U.S. Marines stationed in Darwin, Australia. In an era of declining budgets, steps like these to develop forces that are more cost-effective precisely because they are trained for and more familiar with the regional settings within which they are likely to operate will be increasingly in demand.

- *In a similar vein, on the military hardware and procurement front, a broader effort to determine the extent to which platforms, weapons systems, and associated technologies that are central to the pivot and Asian-Pacific security are also a high priority for operations in other regional theaters.* Understanding more fully where there is overlap, as well as potential differences, in capability needs across GCC regions could prove to be extremely helpful in deciding how best to resource the rebalance while avoiding any serious security gaps elsewhere. Presumably, advanced technologies related to ISR, multi-domain awareness, joint and combined connectivity to build a common operational picture, electronic warfare, cyber security, strategic lift, missile defense, and both long-range and precision strike, among others, would be high on the shopping lists of all GCCs (as well as the services), and building a consensus around these common capability needs would help to confirm that fielding systems and technologies to support the Asia rebalance will also help to boost America’s ability to
operate effectively beyond the Asia-Pacific region. Conducting a cross-GCC capability review like this as a regular part of the COCOM commanders’ annual meetings would be an especially useful exercise, and it would provide DoD acquisition planners with useful additional guidance on procurement priorities that would be supported by all the key commands. To be sure, as noted in chapter 2, some new systems that are (or soon will be) in high demand may be field tested and deployed first in the Pacific (in part as confirmation of the pivot’s ongoing importance), but this need not suggest a lack of interest in or a failure to appreciate their strategic value for other theaters.

- **Operationally, DoD and the military services should continue and, in fact, extend their current plans to leverage longstanding alliance relationships in Asia – especially with Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Australia – to enhance security and achieve rebalance objectives throughout the broader Asia-Pacific region.** Already, for example, updates being made to the U.S.-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation and options under consideration for U.S.-ROK collaboration on off-peninsula security tasks as part of the Strategic Alliance 2015 initiative open the door for wider-ranging bilateral efforts farther afield in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean region. U.S.-Australian cooperation centered around USMC and USAF deployments in the Darwin area offers similar opportunities to build on bilateral ties to achieve region-wide effects. That said, Washington should press ahead as well with efforts to expand bilateral efforts into trilateral initiatives, with a focus on U.S.-Japan-ROK, U.S.-Japan-Australia, and U.S.-ROK-Australia cooperation. For certain mission areas, all three dynamics could also converge into a four-way collaboration that draws in India (the Asia-Pacific’s fourth democracy), and, depending on the task at hand, they could even be expanded into a multilateral framework adding certain ASEAN countries and even China on occasion, as discussed further below.
Conclusions and Recommendations

- In the current era of reduced U.S. defense spending and multiple regional crises, partnership networks like those noted above are likely to emerge as increasingly important cooperative platforms for advancing the pivot by boosting the contributions made by regional friends and allies and easing the overall burden assumed by the U.S. military. In this regard, given the largely maritime nature of the Asia-Pacific region, trilateral and multilateral cooperation on naval and maritime security tasks would appear to be especially attractive options to explore, and Washington should take more concerted steps to do so. Indeed, even with respect to the ever complicated U.S.-Japan-ROK triangle, trilateral cooperation in the maritime realm is likely to be easier to achieve than in other sectors of military operations, while also providing a springboard to broader trilateral and multilateral efforts in the future. The reasons why this is the case are several. First, given ongoing South Korean sensitivities over the potential deployment of Japanese military forces on (or close to) ROK territory, joint naval training and exercises conducted well off-shore, out of the public eye, are much less likely to trigger any serious South Korean opposition. This could emerge as an especially attractive attribute of maritime collaboration as the three allies take additional steps to ease recent ROK-Japanese tensions and to reinvigorate trilateral cooperation. Second, trilateral maritime activities have emerged as near ideal tools for developing common skills in a number of mission areas – such as ocean surveillance, sea-lane protection, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) from the sea, as well as search and rescue (SAR) by naval and coast guard units – that remain top priorities for Japan, the ROK, and the United States, given, again, the largely maritime nature of the Northeast Asian security environment and the need to safeguard seaborne trade passing through its waters. Third, quite apart from cooperating at sea in and around Northeast Asia, the prospects that Japan, the ROK, and the United States can (and will) extend joint naval activities farther
afield into Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean are also increasing, opening the door for these three countries to work together, bilaterally and trilaterally, on building maritime capacity and partnerships throughout the Indo-Pacific region. In this context, their support to local navies (e.g., the Philippine navy) in the fight against piracy along the Straits of Malacca, together with their joint counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, have been especially successful and instructive. Fourth, and finally, over time, maritime collaboration along these lines could pave the way to wider-ranging multilateral collaboration on key naval tasks (such as counter-piracy and maritime safety) and to broader trilateral cooperation. Eventually, such cooperation could also become a critical component of a larger regional security architecture better able to cope with the full range of traditional and non-traditional risks and challenges to stability that are likely to come to the fore in this strategically vital region in the years ahead.

- **Precisely because such activities at sea are comparatively low-profile and non-threatening in nature, naval cooperation centered on SAR and HA/DR training could also appeal to China, whose inclusion could be a useful adjunct to success at the trilateral level.** In that sense, regional maritime cooperation is one policy area on which Chinese anxieties about the strategic implications of the pivot could be alleviated to a degree at least, and the United States should consider how it might best encourage that effect as it moves forward with the rebalance. Looking ahead, the China factor is likely to influence U.S.-Japan-ROK initiatives – and the pivot as a result – in at least three, at times quite contrasting, ways. First, Chinese maritime pressure in contested parts of the East China Sea could prompt the three allies to coordinate more closely on crisis management operations at sea. At some point, this might even include trilateral efforts to reach agreement with Beijing on “rules of the road” for avoiding accidents and miscalculations in the waters and coastal zones of Northeast Asia.
Second, given their collective interests in expanding security cooperation activities in Southeast Asia, we can reasonably assume that Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul will continue to provide selected ASEAN countries – especially those, such as Vietnam and the Philippines, that have a maritime territorial dispute with China – with financial and technical support to improve their maritime security capabilities, and to provide such support whenever feasible in a coordinated (if not exactly trilateral) manner. Among other virtues, building up local maritime capacities in this fashion could help to discourage overly assertive behavior by Beijing in sectors of the South China Sea that are claimed by two or more countries (one being China), something about which the United States, Japan, and the ROK all worry. Third, and on a more positive note, as counter-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden and along the Straits of Malacca have demonstrated, collective maritime deployments have proven to be a successful way to include China in cooperative security efforts, especially the farther away they are from parts of the South China Sea where sovereignty is disputed. No doubt, China’s successful collaboration on the counter-piracy front has quickened its interest as well in exploring additional opportunities for maritime collaboration with the United States, Japan, and the ROK on other missions of common interest (for example, naval training for HA/DR), albeit to be conducted (as in the case of counter-piracy cooperation) within a more multilateral framework. China’s decision to participate in the disaster relief drills and other non-sensitive portions of the 2014 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) naval exercises held off Hawaii in summer 2014 was clearly a step in that direction.

- **Turning to the NATO European dimension of the rebalance debate, Washington should promote a more regular U.S.-European dialogue on Asian security.** Such a dialogue should focus on the various ways in which individual NATO European countries, as well as NATO and the EU institutionally, can both contribute to Asian security and/or backfill on missions and
in regions where America’s contributions may be more limited in the future, in part owing to pivot-related responsibilities and priorities. Clearly, there is a core group of allies – including the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Italy, and, to some extent, Germany and Turkey – that can contribute to one degree or another to military operations and defense cooperation in NATO’s near abroad (such as North Africa and the Middle East). A few of these – most notably, the United Kingdom and France – could, as noted in chapter 3, also make a smaller (but still useful) contribution to security in the Asia-Pacific region. To render such contributions more likely than not going forward, the United States should do what it can – by boosting, for example, its own post-Ukraine contributions to European security and halting any further troop withdrawals from Europe – to strengthen the voices of the “regional Atlanticist” and “global Atlanticist” schools of thought in NATO Europe. Just as these Atlanticists (especially the global variety) seek to strengthen transatlantic ties by supporting the pivot as they can, Washington can encourage support for the pivot by attending to evolving European security concerns. At the same time, and with a similar goal in mind, it should encourage NATO to assume a higher-profile (but still relatively low-cost) role in Asian security matters, expanding its global partnerships to include the opening of liaison offices in key Asia-Pacific capitals (such as Tokyo, Seoul, and Canberra), creating a new forum for advanced democratic partners that could include Asian allies, and transforming its anti-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden into a standing maritime group. Meanwhile, the United States and the EU could coordinate more closely on efforts to strengthen ASEAN (especially the ASEAN Regional Forum, or ARF), and to encourage reconciliation and cooperation between key Asian countries – between, for example, China and Japan, as well as between Japan and the ROK – where historical animosities often stand in the way. Developing an annual action plan to advance the
goals set forth in the U.S.-EU declaration issued at the 2012 ARF ministerial, and making relations with Asia a regular topic for discussion at U.S.-EU summits, would also be useful initiatives.

- **Platforms for responding to (and easing) the concerns of America’s Middle Eastern allies and partners regarding U.S. support for their security (and the potential effect the pivot may have on it) are at present less well developed than the cooperative networks and alliance ties that exist in Asia and NATO Europe, many of which can be bolstered in various ways to provide needed reassurance.** That said, the loose coalition that Washington has begun to organize to help defeat ISIS is certainly seen as a positive development by a number of Arab countries that have criticized what they see as America’s steady disengagement from the greater Middle East, and it could provide a framework for advancing regional cooperation and signaling American resolve. Progress on both these fronts could certainly help to reduce regional fears that the rebalance to Asia will inevitably lead to a decline in security in the Middle East and Arab Gulf regions. Future meetings of military leaders and defense planners from member states of the anti-ISIS coalition like the one held in Washington, D.C., in October 2014 could provide as well a logical forum within which to acknowledge the interconnections between security dynamics in the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific, and the major stake that key Asian countries have in the long-term stability of the Middle East, especially the oil-producing Arab Gulf. To the extent that Turkey participates in the coalition and in coalition meetings, the coalition’s linkage to NATO Europe and to what NATO European countries can (and are willing) to do to respond to security challenges in the Middle East can (and should be) highlighted, as this can also help ease regional fears of an unwelcome security gap as the United States continues to strengthen its posture in the Pacific even as it takes more robust steps to counter ISIS and assist moderate Syrian rebels. Such steps, together with
commitments by NATO European countries (as well as by Canada) to take action against ISIS, and the obvious interest that major Asian-Pacific powers have in protecting uninterrupted access to Gulf oil supplies, should help to drive home the point that the security of Europe, the Middle East, and the Asia-Pacific are in many ways interlinked, and that efforts to improve the security of one region (via, for example the pivot) should not automatically be seen as likely to lead to a net loss in security for the others. How well and how long this message gets across to all concerned will depend in part, of course, on how long the anti-ISIS coalition can be sustained, given the varying priorities that exist among coalition members with regard to defeating ISIS, on the one hand, and the Assad regime in Syria, on the other.

• Finally, as it proceeds with the pivot, reassures NATO Europe, and responds more directly to the Syrian civil war and the threat posed by ISIS, Washington must take care not to undermine or unduly underfund important operations in Africa and Latin America. As discussed in chapter 4, counter-terrorism, anti-trafficking, health diplomacy, capacity-building, and general security cooperation efforts have achieved much in both regions at relatively low cost, and current regional trends argue for an increase in such activities, not a decrease. These and related programs, however, remain easy targets for DoD and service cost-cutters looking for savings, precisely because their budgets are fairly small compared to those for similar operations in regions that are considered strategically more important. Unfortunately, the consequences of further reductions in funding for U.S. military activities in Africa and Latin America may also be more severe than many suspect, including a potential step-level increase in narco-terrorism, an expansion in the smuggling routes linking the two regions, and the possibility of inadequate defenses against a pandemic. Avoiding such cuts, and, better yet, securing modest increases for USAFRICOM and USSOUTHCOM initiatives, could yield
significant benefits. Both courses of action need to be a larger part of the discussion than they now are, as the Pentagon and the administration as a whole take steps to respond to regional crises elsewhere while still pursuing the pivot.

In summary, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, in the face of a number of constraints (some predictable, others less so), the rebalance is moving forward at a slow but steady pace, principally in its military and defense policy dimensions, and this is likely to remain the case for the foreseeable future, so long as sequestration can be contained, if not reversed. For some, such limited progress (compared to what was originally expected) may seem to discredit the very notion of a strategic shift to the Pacific. In truth, however, such a shift was never quite so new, or likely to be as dramatic, as its early advocates suggested, and much of what has been achieved so far was already in train when the pivot was first announced. In many respects, therefore, the current level of progress is entirely in keeping with earlier laid and still quite appropriate plans for enhancing America’s presence and capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region, even if it is somewhat less wide-ranging than was hoped for in the first Obama administration.

Beyond this, however, it is worth remembering as well that a good deal of what the U.S. military can do (or soon will be able to do) in the Asia-Pacific region will be shaped as much by the relationships and partnerships it is able to establish and maintain with regional counterparts and security networks as by any specific troop deployments, port visits, surveillance flights, base negotiations, or breakthroughs in defense technology. When he commanded U.S. Special Operations Command, Admiral William McRaven was fond of saying, quite correctly, “You can’t surge trust,” by which he meant to suggest that the United States cannot assume that regional allies and friends will be ready and eager to cooperate as soon as American forces show up on their doorstep. Neither, it could be added, can you “surge partnership,” and both trust and partnership depend, first and foremost, on relationships that have been built and nurtured over the years in a consistent and persistent manner. Operationally, having the right
relationships in place is just as important as having in hand the assets and capabilities that those very relationships will allow you to deploy. Judged by this standard, the rebalance – with its emphasis on strengthening and expanding longstanding alliances with Japan, the ROK, and Australia, developing new ties to ASEAN and its member states, and drawing India (and Indian Ocean perspectives) more fully into the Asia-Pacific security equation – has almost certainly made more headway than many of its critics are willing to concede. Going forward, as President Obama has learned the hard way in Europe and the Middle East, as well as in Asia (in relation, for example, to America’s commitment to Japan under Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty), it is the credibility of those relationships, based on America’s demonstrated willingness to support and defend its allies and partners when called upon to do so, that will in the end determine whether or not the pivot, whatever its eventual scope or scale, is in reality a long-term success.
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America’s rebalance to Asia has made slow but steady progress on the military front, but it has yet to achieve the scale of success anticipated when it was first announced in January 2012. The reasons for this are several, including defense budget cuts due to sequestration, problems jump-starting (and sustaining) the diplomatic and economic aspects of the rebalance, security developments outside of Asia that have demanded more attention (and a strategic response) from Washington, and a parallel need to reassure non-Asian allies and partner states that the United States will not abandon them as it pivots to the Asia-Pacific region. Indeed, it is this last task of reassurance that may be the trickiest to get right as this pivot proceeds, given America’s multiple and at times competing global interests and responsibilities. Simply put, making sure that Asia’s “gain” is not seen as a net loss for Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, or any other area of rising strategic importance will be critical to the future success of the rebalance. Exploring how that might be done and what it might entail is the central aim of this monograph. Toward that end, the authors first review what has and has not been done to set the pivot in place. They then examine a broad range of European, Middle Eastern, and other regional reactions to the rebalance, highlighting what they suggest about the ability and willingness of U.S. allies and regional partners outside of Asia to take on defense missions once performed by American forces or to contribute in some way to the security of Asia as America turns its gaze toward this region. On this basis, recommendations are made for implementing the rebalance in ways that do not shortchange security in other important areas of the globe, and that might even draw on contributions from them.