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## **民事轴心?：奥巴马政府亚洲轴心的另一种选择**

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## **A Civic Pivot? A Proposed Alternative to the Obama Administration's Pivot to Asia**

The United States' pivot to Asia is spurring a new round of military competition in the Asia-Pacific region. This paper argues that this is doing more harm than good to the long-term relationship between the United States and Asian nations, particularly between the United States and China. Money could be saved from the military efforts to focus on a civic pivot to build stronger intercultural bonds between the United States and Asia. Proposed measures include the creation of more rigorous educational programs on Asian languages and civilizations for Americans to cultivate a deeper understanding of and identification with Asian civilizations.

Key words: Asia, pivot, United States of America, military, civic, civilization

### **民事轴心?: 奥巴马政府亚洲轴心的另一种选择**

美国将轴心定位于亚洲，刺激了亚太地区展开新一轮的军事竞赛。本文认为，这种做法对于美国和亚洲国家的长期关系，尤其是美中之间的长期关系弊大于利。从减少军事行动节约出的资金可以投入民事方面，用以建立美国与亚洲之间更加牢固的跨文化纽带。推荐的措施包括，推出更为严格的亚洲语言和文化教育项目，来帮助美国人更好的了解亚洲文明、认同亚洲文明。

关键词：亚洲、轴、美国、军事、民事、文明

# **A Civic Pivot? A Proposed Alternative to the Obama Administration's Pivot to Asia**

## **The Military Nature of the Present Asia Pivot**

The United States of America (US) Secretary of State Hillary Clinton defined the US's pivot to Asia as a military, economic, diplomatic and political "all-in-one" policy. Her speech "America's Pacific Century" at the East-West Center in Honolulu on November 10, 2011, however is in contrast to the Obama Administration's military focused policy outcomes. To date the US's Asia pivot has been predominantly a military pivot; though laced with public diplomacy.<sup>1</sup>

Is the true nature of the Obama Administration's "Pivot to Asia" military? Is this kind of pivot thus far doing more harm than good to the US-China relationship and Asia? Since Secretary Clinton's speech the US has decided to deploy 60% of its naval forces to the Asia-Pacific region within the next decade. The US has both created new military base access arrangements such as the one at the port of Darwin, Australia,<sup>2</sup> and strengthened its military ties with Vietnam and Myanmar – which were both former unfriendly states.<sup>3</sup> Since then, tension has arisen in the Asia-Pacific. While it appears that conflicts over the issue of island sovereignty are between China and its neighboring lesser powers such as Vietnam, South Korea, the Philippines and Japan, the bigger and underlying escalating conflict is arguably between the great powers – US and China.

Thus, no matter how the US explains the pivot, China may see the US as a behind-the-scenes motivator for other states' actions. The US does have strong military ties with regional countries, three of which host US military bases, and it leads joint exercises which exclude China.<sup>4</sup> Between June 17 and August 3, 2012, the US-led Rim of the Pacific Exercise was conducted. It was the world's largest international maritime exercise, involving more than 20 countries, including India and Russia for the first time.<sup>5</sup> Then, at the same time as the 18<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, "America's Pacific Century". Retrieved on 11/12/2012 at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/11/176999.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Peter Hatcher, "US Marine Base for Darwin". Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at <http://www.smh.com.au/national/us-marine-base-for-darwin-20111110-1n9lk.html>

<sup>3</sup> Julia E. Barnes, "Vietnam Cautiously Builds Military Ties with the US". Retrieved at <http://blogs.wsj.com/searealtime/2012/06/04/vietnam-cautiously-builds-military-ties-with-us/>. also

Gwen Robinson, "US Military Officials Arrive in Myanmar". Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at [http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/d2cfd494-1604-11e2-b6f1-00144feabdc0,Authorised=false.html?\\_i\\_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2Fs%2F0%2Fd2cfd494-1604-11e2-b6f1-00144feabdc0.html&\\_i\\_referer=http%3A%2F%2Fyaleglobal.yale.edu%2Fcontent%2Fus-military-officials-arrive-myanmar#axzz29fPFCwiQ](http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/d2cfd494-1604-11e2-b6f1-00144feabdc0,Authorised=false.html?_i_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2Fs%2F0%2Fd2cfd494-1604-11e2-b6f1-00144feabdc0.html&_i_referer=http%3A%2F%2Fyaleglobal.yale.edu%2Fcontent%2Fus-military-officials-arrive-myanmar#axzz29fPFCwiQ)

<sup>4</sup> American Forces Press Service, "Pacific to Feature More Participants, Biofuel Use". Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=116930>

<sup>5</sup> American Forces Press Service, "Pacific to Feature More Participants, Biofuel Use". Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=116930>

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Congress in November, the largest, US-Japan, joint military exercise was held.<sup>6</sup>

Inevitably, China may take such regional military linkages as preparation, provocation, coercion or even threat. China has recently unveiled its first aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, at Dalian in Northeast China.<sup>7</sup> With Japan's persistence in 2012 to nationalize the Diaoyu (from Japan's perspective, the Senkaku) Islands, China sent a fleet of seven naval vessels near the islands. This attracted the arrival of the USS Washington aircraft carrier proximate to the East China Sea.<sup>8</sup> The escalation of a perceived US-China conflict has been palpable and is being politicized. In the US the characterization of China during the recent Presidential election was shrill. China's then Vice-President, Xi Jinping, unexpectedly canceled a meeting with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on September 6, 2012.<sup>9</sup> Xi has since then assumed the top positions of the Chinese President, CCP General Secretary and the Chairmanship of the Central Military Commission.

### **The Likely Consequences of the US Military Pivot to Asia**

The excessive use of the military in its pivot to Asia, albeit laced with public diplomacy, seems to suggest the US is anxious to maintain its presence, relevance, and leadership in the Asia-Pacific region. However, to achieve this Washington could utilize more soft power – its economy, institutions and culture. The US is predominantly an Atlantic country with a Eurocentric civilization and this has informed its strategy to stay relevant in the Pacific.

Historically, the US has demonstrated a wide variety of policies. These have chiefly included respect towards East Asians, being largely interested in trade, but not entirely immune to the use of gunboat diplomacy. When the Japanese declined Captain Perry's offer of trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Americans showed their cannons to coerce them. Later, they sent their missionaries to try to convert Asians who already had their own spiritual traditions, religions, and faiths, older than or as old as Christianity. When the US became wealthy, they tried to attract East Asians into the free market and to turn their political systems into democracies. When faced with resistance from Asia, weapons of war were deployed again, this time in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century much of Asia is prosperous having adopted the free market economy and is poised to assume the leadership of the global market. The US is thus feeling vulnerable for the first time since it became the world's superpower in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, Americans are unnecessarily showing off their military superiority in the Pacific Ocean.

President Obama's military pivot to Asia has also received criticisms from Western foreign policy elites. Robert Ross, a senior China specialist based in Boston, Massachusetts, stated

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<sup>6</sup> UPI, "Japan-US Military Exercise Begin". Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at [http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/World-News/2012/11/06/Japan-US-military-exercise-begin/UPI-43881352184464/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2012/11/06/Japan-US-military-exercise-begin/UPI-43881352184464/)

<sup>7</sup> Washington Post, "China's First Aircraft Carrier, the Liaoning". Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at [www.washingtonpost.com/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/)

<sup>8</sup> Pakistan Defence, "US aircraft carrier USS George Washington cruises South China Sea". Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at [www.defence.pk](http://www.defence.pk)

<sup>9</sup> Telegraph, "China's Xi Jinping cancels Hillary Clinton meeting amid 'tensions'". Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/9521741/Chinas-Xi-Jinping-cancels-Hillary-Clinton-meeting-amid-tensions.html>

that Obama's pivot to Asia is "unnecessary and unproductive" as it has further alienated China from the US and has caused China to become more hostile and aggressive to the US.<sup>10</sup> Kevin Rudd, former Prime Minister of Australia (the first to be deposed in his first term and by his own party), is cited to have proposed the creation of the "Pacific Peace Model". His keynote speech at the Ninth Beijing Forum, which took place at Peking University in November 2012, implicitly disapproved of Obama's military pivot.<sup>11</sup> Thus from Boston to Canberra numerous opinions holds that the military pivot has created more instability and tension in the region, and from numerous argued perspectives.

Firstly, the US's military pivot to Asia runs counter to the fundamental ethical principles of Asian civilizations. Despite modernization in the context of the Western cultural influences, Asian nations have consistently believed in peace and harmony rooted in Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Any regional or global leadership genuinely accepted by the Asia-Pacific countries and peoples will have to identify with and promote such fundamental Asian values. Secondly, the military nature of the US pivot to Asia undermines American legitimacy to seek to assume the leadership of the Asia-Pacific Century. The leadership the US is trying to assume is being forced upon the Asia-Pacific region using the persuasion of military power.

Thirdly, the military pivot to Asia violates the traditional military code of the region that entails the use of etiquette ('li') before the display of force.<sup>12</sup> In today's lexicon of liberal interdependence, the use of soft power should precede the use of hard power. If the US pivot to Asia is first and foremost a military one, it runs counter to the traditional code of etiquette and the current epoch.

Fourthly, the military method of foreign policy has brought the US into financial difficulty. The war in Afghanistan and the war on Iraq during the past decade have already drained several trillion dollars from the federal budget and brought the US into deeper debt aside from some two thousand war casualties on the American side and thousands of war casualties on the Iraq and Afghan sides.<sup>13</sup> If the US fought a comprehensive war with China in the Asia-Pacific region, it conceivably could bring the US into an irreversible bankruptcy.

Finally, a serious consequence of the US military pivot to Asia is to escalate military competition in the region, particularly between the US and China. In many ways, China's effort to modernize its military is prompted by the presumed American effort to contain China. This high-profile military pivot to Asia by the US has already sped up China's effort

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<sup>10</sup> Robert S. Ross, "The Problem with the Pivot." *Foreign Affairs*. December 2012. Retrieved on 11/04/2012 at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138211/robert-s-ross/the-problem-with-the-pivot>

<sup>11</sup> Peking University News Center, "北京论坛（2012）圆满落幕" ("The Beijing Forum 2012 has been Successfully Concluded"). Retrieved on 11/04/2012 at [http://pkunews.pku.edu.cn/xwzh/2012-11/04/content\\_256588.htm](http://pkunews.pku.edu.cn/xwzh/2012-11/04/content_256588.htm)

<sup>12</sup> See Luo Guanzhong, the Romance of the Three Kingdoms (sanguo yanyi) Chapter 11 (one of the four classic Chinese novels). The original term "xianli houbing" has become an idiomatic expression and a basic life principle in Chinese culture.

<sup>13</sup> Huffington Post, "Afghan War: Death Toll Hits 2000 for US Military". Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/30/afghanistan-war-death-toll\\_n\\_1926668.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/30/afghanistan-war-death-toll_n_1926668.html)

to build more than one aircraft carrier.<sup>14</sup> China, for the first time in its history, has declared its intention to become a strong maritime power in the forthcoming decade.<sup>15</sup> This strategic goal is formally included in the 18<sup>th</sup> CCP Congress Work Report presented by the retiring Chinese President Hu Jintao. This escalation of the military competition in the Pacific Ocean between the US and China, if unchecked, would not only end up dividing Asia into two Asias as suggested by James Steinberg, but also risk war of unprecedented proportions and thus global economic devastation.<sup>16</sup>

The alternative is for Americans to emphasize the treatment of Asians as their true equals. One method of doing this is through the expanded study of Asian cultures and languages. Emulation and integration of Asian ethics, morals and values into American culture and identity would signify equality. To achieve peaceful co-existence, cultivate harmony, human security and global development it is generally acknowledged that all members of this village should be equal under the same roof. All the villagers should thus respect and learn from each other's culture. Thus if the US is to share the leadership and the prosperity of the Asia-Pacific Century with Asian countries and peoples equally, the US must transform through the integration of Asian culture.

### **A Civic Pivot as an Alternative to the Military Pivot to Asia**

An alternative to the military pivot to Asia thus may be a civic pivot to Asia. A civic pivot would reduce the excessive emphasis on military power and focus on understanding and mutual respect rather than military domination. A civic pivot would see the US as a genuine resident power of the Asia-Pacific region, concentrating on trading ports and commercial shipping rather than more military bases and naval vessels.

This civic pivot approach has also been identified as less expensive. For example, in his response to a US House Committee's effort to stop funding for the East-West Center, Charles E. Morrison, President of the East-West Center wrote:

“To put the funding into perspective, the cost of building one new nuclear-powered submarine would keep the East-West Center running for 125 years”.<sup>17</sup>

The present focus however, is by funding outcomes, an exclusively military pivot over one supported by a civic pivot. The US Congress backed the Obama Administration's Asia Pivot of putting 60% of US naval forces in the Asia-Pacific region, whilst simultaneously trying to

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<sup>14</sup> Ackerman, Spencer, “Afghanistan, Iraq Wars Killed 132,000 Civilians, Report Says”. Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/06/afghanistan-iraq-wars-killed-132000-civilians-report-says/>

<sup>15</sup> Hu, Jintao, “The Report to the 18th Party Congress” (“Shibada baogao”). Retrieved on 11/11/2012 at <http://wenku.baidu.com/view/52acad7402768e9951e738ac.html>

<sup>16</sup> James Steinberg, “Zhuanjia Qianzhan Zhongmeishidai (2): Buyinba Yazhouguojia Yifenweier” (“Experts Predict about the US-China Era (2): Asian Countries Should not be Divided into Two”). Retrieved on 11/11/2012 at [http://chinese.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2012/11/10/20121110000004.html](http://chinese.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/11/10/20121110000004.html)

<sup>17</sup> Charles E. Morrison, “East-West Center is Valuable Asset to Hawaii and the United States”. Retrieved on 11/11/2012 at [http://www.staradvertiser.com/editorials/20110731\\_East\\_West\\_Center\\_is\\_valuable\\_asset\\_to\\_Hawaii\\_and\\_the\\_United\\_States.html?id=126444803](http://www.staradvertiser.com/editorials/20110731_East_West_Center_is_valuable_asset_to_Hawaii_and_the_United_States.html?id=126444803)

reduce the East-West Center. The Center is a signature American research and education institution. It educates Americans about Asia and builds intercultural ties between the US and the Asia-Pacific. A civic pivot would expand the role of the East-West Center.

In 2012, Australia released its “Australia in the Asia Century White Paper”.<sup>18</sup> The purpose of the white paper is to prepare Australia to better engage with Asia economically and culturally. The US could thus follow the Australian example and prioritize the study of Asia as a top strategic national education goal.

Thus a civic pivot also means that the US needs to start a dedicated effort to teach Chinese language and culture as well as other Asian languages and cultures, just like China has been studying Western countries. This has occurred primarily since 1979 when China began its economic reforms and other “open door” policies. Indeed, Asians have already undergone a transformation by the US-led Western culture in order to enjoy economic prosperity and democracy. Why shouldn’t the US respond in kind and receive an equal measure of benefit?

A civic pivot however, requires a significant and sustained educational and intellectual reformation. The US’s attitude towards China today is similar to China’s hesitancy to embrace the US in the 1980s. Thus similar to China, the US could undertake rigorous education about China in all spheres such as language, culture, politics, history and economy. Importantly, educating at least one-third of its population in this manner would provide the US with a practical knowledge and thus competence in working with China. In this way, the US would undergo an attitudinal reform, shed its ideological “screen of liberalism”, and adopt a more balanced pragmatic approach. China has persevered over 30 years since the 1979 “open door” reforms and has still not entirely shed its ideological baggage of socialism and a planned economy.

Thus the civic pivot has benefits with these goals being widely acknowledged. However how can it be achieved? One proposed, albeit radical if not facetious, short-cut for the US to achieve the economic growth and assume the leadership of the Pacific Century is to attract 50 million wealthy and educated Asians to immigrate to the US from Asia. These new Americans, it was argued, would not only contribute to the US economically, but would help bridge the gaps between the US and Asia and strengthen the bond between the two together with the existing Asian America. Noah Smith stated in the *Atlantic* recently:

“This, then, is the ‘Alternative Asia Plan.’ America began as a nation of Europeans and Africans; it is now a nation of Europeans, Africans, and Latin Americans. It must become a nation of Asians as well. Failing to do this would mean shutting ourselves off from the master narrative of the 21st Century.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Australian Government, *Australia in the Asian Century Task Force, Australia in the Asian Century White Paper*. Retrieved on 11/11/2012 at <http://asiancentury.dpmc.gov.au/white-paper>

<sup>19</sup> Noah Smith, “The Secret to the US’ Growth in the 21st Century: More Asians. *The Atlantic*. October 2012. Retrieved on 11/11/2012 at <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/10/the-secret-to-us-growth-in-the-21st-century-more-asians/263161/>

At the other end of the policy spectrum there have also been more serious and entirely practical policy attempts. Unfortunately they have not been sustained. Before the Pivot to Asia initiative, the Obama Administration announced “the 100,000 Strong Initiative” which aimed to send 25,000 American students to study in China annually for four years.<sup>20</sup> The goal was to reduce the educational exchange deficit between the US and China where out of every 15 Chinese students studying in the US, there is only one American student studying in China. This results in significant disparities. For example, 25% of the Chinese population is competent in speaking English, but less than 1% of Americans speak Chinese.<sup>21</sup> Even American-born China experts interviewed on Voice of America Chinese programs are often provided with English translations.

Obama’s second term as President has begun, but the “100,000 Strong Initiative” is almost moribund; if it was not for China’s 10,000 scholarships to support his initiative, it would have been defunct long ago.<sup>22</sup> This, therefore displays the stark contrast between the US’s focus on the military pivot to Asia and the scant attention to the “100,000 Strong Initiative” to understand and engage China.

To educate more Americans so that they acquire English-Chinese bilingual competence and US-China intercultural competence, or to make more Americans absorb Asian culture, particularly Chinese culture into their own cultural identity, would be a smarter alternative to the militarized pivot to Asia policy as it brings long-term benefits to all Americans and Asians, and consequently the world community. The civic pivot alternative neither costs human lives nor trillions of dollars. The only two things it takes to make it happen for Americans are perseverance and patience in learning about and understanding Asia, particularly China.

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<sup>20</sup> State Department, US, “100,000 Strong Educational Exchange Initiatives”. Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at <http://www.state.gov/100k/>

<sup>21</sup> US Embassy to China, “Record number of Chinese students studying at United States colleges and universities; More American students studying in China”. Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at <http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/111610p.html>

See also “Number of Chinese Students in US Dramatically Expands”. Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at [http://www.voanews.com/content/number\\_of\\_chinese\\_students\\_in\\_us\\_dramatically\\_expands/1525749.html](http://www.voanews.com/content/number_of_chinese_students_in_us_dramatically_expands/1525749.html)

<sup>22</sup> Purdue University, “10,000 Scholarships Available to U.S. Students to Study in China”. Retrieved on 12/08/2012 at <https://engineering.purdue.edu/GEP/News/Opportunities/10000-scholarships-available-to-us-students-to-study-in-china>