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Thai soldiers rest outside the venues of the 14th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits on 11 April 2009 in Pattaya, Chonburi. Protestors successfully cancelled the three day regional summit, highlighting their campaign against the Thai government;

A U.S. Navy CH-53E Sea Stallion helicopter, assigned to the Air Combat Element of the U.S. Marine Corps 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, lands on the flight deck of the forward deployed amphibious assault ship USS Essex (LHD 2) in the South China Sea, 13 April 2009

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THE U.S. 'PIVOT': A PREAMBLE TO THE ASIA PACIFIC'S COLD WAR?

Meidyatama
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Yet rather than a fervor for Asia, the U.S. seems preoccupied to be back with a spirit of political 'vengeance' – a desire not to be outdone by the world's most populous nation, which has now overtaken the U.S. as the world's largest manufacturer and replaced Russia as Washington's peer power.”



Secretary of the U.S. Navy in Phnom Penh, October 2012

Some have described it as a rebalancing, others a re-emphasis. There are even those who say it is a refocusing consistent with established policies.

U.S. officials in their assertiveness have been careful to explicitly not mention China, while others have gone out of their way to point out that this is not a containment strategy. Whatever catch phrase, explicit or implicit, the U.S. 'pivot to Asia' is designed to re-establish itself in the region, by way of countering a rising China.

Politically, militarily and economically, America is back (in Asia)! Yet rather than a fervor for Asia, it seems preoccupied to be back with a political 'vengeance' to not be outdone by the world's most populous nation (China) which has now overtaken the U.S. as the world's largest manufacturer and replaced Russia as Washington's peer power.

It began in Australia in November 2011, when U.S. President Barak Obama announced the stationing of Marines in Darwin by saying that "as we (the U.S.) plan and budget for the future, we will allocate the resources necessary to maintain our strong military presence in this region". He added, "we will preserve our unique ability to project power and deter threats to peace". Since then, a slew of carefully placed

remarks have given flesh to the pivot, buttressed by revealing operational plans from Washington and its allies.

In January 2012, the U.S. Defense Strategic Guidance, titled *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, confirmed Washington's outlook to increase military presence in the region. It highlighted a conscious move away from the traditional emphasis of Europe and the Middle East.

"China's emergence as a regional power will have the potential to affect the U.S. economy and our security in a variety of ways... The growth of China's military power must be accompanied by greater clarity of its strategic intentions in order to avoid causing friction in the region", it said. It is no exaggeration to suggest that Obama's visit to Australia and the proceeding U.S. Defense Strategic Guidance document can be preambles to a new Cold War.

Australia's *Force Posture Review 2012* clearly points to China as the main factor shaping Australia's military strategy, while a foundation of its security outlook remains the "continuing strategic engagement of the United States in the Asia Pacific".

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Vice President Joe Biden has asserted, 'let me be clear: we believe that a rising China is a positive development - not only for China but also for the United States and the world.'

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Even Washington's most loyal European ally, the U.K., spelt out the significance of the pivot to allay concerns of U.S. neglect towards NATO. Speaking in Washington in July 2012, Britain's Minister for Defence Phillip Hammond told fellow NATO members - far from being concerned about the tilt to Asia Pacific - European powers should welcome the U.S. engaging in a new strategic challenge on behalf of the alliance.

"The rising strategic importance of the Asia Pacific region requires all countries, but particularly the United States, to reflect in their strategic posture the emergence of China as a global power", Hammond said. To be fair, top American officials have also made formal statements generous to the rise of China, while claiming to seek a cooperative framework with Beijing. "Today, cooperation between the United States and China is imperative to address the many vexing challenges we face," said U.S. Secretary of State of Hillary Clinton. "Developing the habits of cooperation is not easy. We have a lot of work to do. But we are both committed to building a lasting framework of trust."

Similarly, Vice-President Joe Biden has asserted, "let me be clear: we

believe that a rising China is a positive development - not only for China but also for the United States and the world". He added "it will fuel economic growth and prosperity, and a rising China will bring to the fore a new partner with whom we can have help meeting the global challenges we all face". But these positive remarks have also been hedged by equally veiled extortions, particularly by Secretary Clinton's incessant jabbing of China during her global trotting of the past 12 months.

In a provocative gesture during a visit to the Philippines in November 2011, Secretary Clinton referred to the disputed area in the South China Sea by its local Filipino distinction: the 'West Philippine Sea', irking China and emboldening Manila to overshoot its exertions in the disputed territory. Her sugar-coated threats have since carried a common tone: explicitly or implicitly aimed at dissuading countries against Beijing's rising influence.

Commenting on Mongolia, China's rising democratic neighbor, Clinton highlighted in July 2012 that governments "can't have economic liberalisation without political liberalisation". As if referring to China's slowing economy, Clinton said, "clamping down on political expression or

maintaining a tight grip on what people read, say or see can create an illusion of security. But illusions fade - because people's yearning for liberty don't".

A month later in Senegal, Clinton tried to sell the tagline that the U.S. was committed to "a model of sustainable partnership that adds value, rather than extract it". She conceded that U.S. policies in the past "did not always line up with our principles. But today, we are building relationships... that are not transactional or transitory".

Clinton's rhetoric in Ulan Bator may have been a political rallying call, but her presence also served as potent lobby for American companies vying for contracts of a huge coal deposit in the south Gobi, just 140 kilometers from the Chinese border. China overshadows the U.S. as Africa's largest trading partner. This tour was a belated effort to wrestle back influence in the continent. Beijing's impact in Africa - such that the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa - has been built as a gift from China, further extending its credit line to Africa to US\$20 billion.

Notable U.S. Bases/Significant Presence in the Asia Pacific	
Hawaii	Naval, Army & Air Force bases. Pearl Harbour is home of the Pacific Fleet
Guam	Anderson Air Force Base a major station for bomber crews
Australia	Rotational Marines Development. Washington and Canberra are in talks to give U.S forces unfettered access to shared facilities
Japan	Some 50,000 military personnel across several installations, including major bases in Kyushu, Honshu and Okinawa
South Korea	Over a dozen military bases
The Philippines	Despite the closure of military bases in 1991, the U.S maintains a notable force presence covered under the Visiting Forces Agreement
Singapore	A supply chain to keep the U.S. 7th Fleet operational. A recent agreement also provided docking for Littoral Combat ships
Diego Garcia	A major Air Force & Naval support base for regional military operations

During the 2012 Pacific Summit in the Cook Islands, Clinton toned down her rhetoric, especially since she would be in Beijing a few days later. Yet her efforts to suspend the extension of China's 'string of pearls' to the Pacific islands using economic carrots seems paltry in comparison. Beijing has pledged over \$600 million in loans to the South Pacific since 2005.

In comparison Clinton – the first U.S. Secretary of State to attend the annual South Pacific summit – pledged \$32 million in new projects some 18 years after Washington suspended aid programs to the South Pacific.

Hegemony Redux

The pivot strategy encompasses political, economic and military aspects. But with the U.S. economy still reeling, most doubt the wherewithal to sustain or compete with China in terms of both assistance and investment. Hence the military option has been the first, and most demonstrative, foot forward in implementing the pivot. The significance of bases, or places, for U.S. military deployment can not be overstated. As the *U.S. Overseas Basing Commission* reported in 2005, U.S. military bases are, "the skeleton upon which the flesh and muscle of operational capability (can be) moulded".

During the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2012, U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta spoke of plans to expand, tighten and integrate alliances with

defence treaty partners in the Asia Pacific (Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand) with further emphasis "to expand military-to-military relationships well beyond the traditional treaty allies".

Some have concluded this to mean a more concerted approach towards countries in Southeast Asia most of whom already lean towards the 'West' in their foreign policy outlook, namely Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and to some extent, Indonesia. While Jakarta's foreign policy rhetoric remains staunchly 'non-aligned', the U.S. has increased its military contacts - conducting over 150 military exchanges and visits with the Indonesian Military over the past year.

In South Asia, Washington has a long history of strategic cooperation with New Delhi through counter-terrorism work and a mutual need of balancing China, of which India fought a war with in 1962. This history of cooperation was solidified in 2005 when the U.S. and India signed a strategic alliance agreement. In recent years it intensified further with arms sales and defence cooperation.

"The United States is also investing in a long-term strategic partnership with India to support its ability to serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region," read the *U.S. Defense Strategic Guidance*. In May 2012 Panetta highlighted India's role in

The U.S. Pacific Command Some 350,000 military personnel (one-fifth of total U.S. forces)	
U.S. Pacific Fleet	Six aircraft carrier strike groups, 180 ships, 1,500 aircraft and 100,000 service members
U.S. Marine Forces Pacific	Two-thirds of Marine Corps combat troops, two Marine Expeditionary Forces and 85,000 personnel
U.S. Pacific Air Forces	40,000 airmen and more than 300 aircraft, with an additional 100 aircraft based in Guam
U.S. Army Pacific	Over 60,000 service members and five Stryker combat vehicle brigades. There are also an estimated 1,200 Special Operations troops assigned to Pacific Command

the overall 'pivot' describing the defence cooperation with India as "a linchpin in U.S. strategy" in Asia.

The geographic scope of the 'pivot' was clearly delineated by Clinton to include the Indian subcontinent. She defined Asia Pacific in a *Foreign Policy* article in November 2011. The geography is stretching "from the Indian subcontinent to the Western shores of the Americas". Similarly the *U.S. Defense Strategic Guidance* document issued in January refers to the area engrossing the pivot as "the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean and South Asia".

According to Panetta, by 2020, "the (U.S.) Navy will re-posture its forces from today's roughly fifty-fifty split between the Atlantic and Pacific to about a sixty-forty split between those oceans". This effectively means that Washington will

deploy a majority of its 11 super-carriers, 61 destroyers, 22 cruisers, 24 frigates, 72 submarines, plus dozens of other vessels to the region - if it has not already. Efforts have been made to assuage concerns over the presence of U.S. Marines stationed in Darwin and Littoral Combat Ships in Singapore. But power projection capabilities speak volumes to the intent of forward deployment. Hence, despite initial statements playing down these developments, it has become obvious that the intent is something more than what is actually stated. During Singapore Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen's visit to the Pentagon in April 2012, it was announced that the number of U.S. warships forward deployed in Singapore would be doubled for operations near the highly strategic Malacca Strait. Washington and Canberra are already in talks over increased rotations of U.S. aircraft through northern Australia, and

examining U.S. naval access to Australia's Indian Ocean port, *HMAS Stirling*.

The Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies recently assessed the U.S. force posture strategy in the Asia Pacific region. It noted the value of deploying and forward basing a second carrier from its current homeport on the east coast of the United States to a location in the Western Pacific or Southeast Asia.

"For evaluation purposes, the option proposes consideration of *HMAS Stirling*. Home-porting a carrier group to such a forward location would be a force multiplier... the rough equivalent of having three such assets versus one that is only deployed there", the report recommended.

With defence cuts in the U.S. budget primarily besieging the army, it makes

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sense that U.S. bases of the (near) future will no longer be geared towards large-scale stability operations, but instead on small-scale, lightning response operations like those potentially in Australia. Such a line of thinking is an appropriate guise to also highlight the basing of U.S. Marine task forces in Darwin under the rhetoric of assisting potential humanitarian and disaster relief efforts in the region.

Divide without Conquering

For more than a millennia, bases have been a key part of empire building, serving military, political and psychological purposes. Apart from a demonstrable projection of hegemonic power, the strategic value of forward defence bases in security trade routes and resources have been valuable. Often served as a form of conquest without major power conquest, the U.S. could consolidate its expansion by placing bases near ‘weaker’ states to protect from potential adversaries.

Southeast Asia was a chessboard for superpower rivalry during the Cold War. The demise of the Soviet Union brought about hope to the creation of a new international system in which countries of the region would

not become pawns of great power rivalry. Hence, joint efforts of the ten-member Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) were to construct a dialogue mechanism to mediate and mitigate hegemonic tendencies of external powers in the region. This included embracing a strong U.S. presence in the region as part of a new regional equilibrium of power to maintain the prevailing world system, with ASEAN centrality as its core and acknowledgement of a larger role for China.

Yet two decades after the Cold War, Southeast Asia finds itself where it first started: a pawn in the strategic chess match, but unlike in the past, the terms will not be dictated by the former Cold War rivals. Ultimately, the chess pieces will have to be set to a point where countries will be forced to make uncomfortable moves, one against the other, creating new *fait accompli* alliances.

The aggressiveness of the pivot creates a crevice - forcing countries to choose on which side of the divide they wish to stand. Politically, this would be through the identification of democratic or autocratic systems; and economically, in the pursuit of

initiatives, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership; and Militarily through the acceptance of reinforced U.S. bases and military embarkation points. Instead of an international system, Southeast Asia is being forced to revert back to a de facto balance of power system, hegemony *redux*. These views are not exclusive to Asia. Even noted political scientists in U.S. allied countries such as Australia, express concern at the seeming ‘divide-and-conquer’ conditions the pivot has created.

Hugh White, of the Australian National University, says Washington is trying to make Canberra choose by supporting U.S. military primacy in the western Pacific while strategically hedging against China. But Beijing is no innocent bystander. It too has often exacerbated events, primarily because of its belligerent nationalist stance towards territorial claims which are largely founded on history rather than international law.

Despite its burgeoning influence, it is likely that scholars, analysts and decision makers in Beijing’s great halls still query how the United States will wield its power to check or complement China’s emerging strength.

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Ultimately, the chess pieces will have to be set to a point where countries will be forced to make uncomfortable moves, one against the other, creating new fait accompli alliances.”

External incursion weighs heavily on the minds of the Chinese. The desire to secure its own *lebensraum* is a paramount concern of its concentric view of the world to solidify its place as a global hegemon with the United States.

The reinforced U.S. presence in Asia potentially heightens Chinese miscalculation and misjudgement leading to a *faux pas* conflict - especially when estimates suggest that China spends only one-tenth of the annual U.S. defence outlay. This affirms perceptions of Washington's power-maximizing tendencies for offensive realism in Asia.

The most comforting facet of this emerging rivalry is that the economies of Beijing and Washington are so intertwined and so dependent on each other, that their core security interest are unlikely to immediately clash.

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