

Assessing Maritime Power in the Asia-Pacific, edited by
Greg Kennedy and Harsh V. Pant, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015, pp. 242, £110

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Since taking over in 2009, the Obama Administration considered Asia to be significant for power cooperation and for establishing an international order based on accepted rules and norms. This started the journey of a much-debated concept that was first called the 'Back to Asia' strategy and later re-termed as a 'Rebalance' or 'Pivot to Asia'. In November 2011, then American Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, in an article titled 'America's Pacific Century', reiterated the importance of Asia-Pacific for the United States (US). Subsequently, in November 2011, the US rebalance or pivot to Asia was formally announced by the Obama Administration. This announcement has often been ascribed to two events: first, the rise of China as a regional power; and second, the perception of a decline in the stature of the US in the Asia-Pacific. While China viewed the strategy as being aimed against itself, American allies questioned the ability of the US to stand by its commitments, especially due to the challenges posed by a belligerent North Korea and China's economic and military growth. Additionally, as a major element of the rebalance or pivot consisted of bolstering American military presence in the region, it was seen as a shift from power cooperation to power balancing. The methodology, according to some analysts, was seen as a

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combination of the ongoing US policy of engagement and balancing in the region.

This book mainly accounts for a period of five years from 2010 onwards and deliberates the impact of the US rebalance or pivot policy on the maritime power and posture of selected nations in the Asia-Pacific, namely China, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), India, and South-East Asian nations as well as extra-regional players like the UK, France and Canada. It contains nine chapters, authored by leading strategists, who write on contemporary strategic maritime issues. The book, therefore, provides a comprehensive assessment of the varying perspectives of nations with respect to their national interests in the strategic environment of the Asia-Pacific region and the path they follow to balance their individual stands vis-à-vis each other amidst the competition and complex relations between the US and China. The recalibration of the stances of these nations could influence their relations with both China and the US. The chapters cover how the pivot impacted some nations and the region in a certain manner, while it did not shape the geostrategic contours of others, which could have been the possible intention.

Greg Kennedy, Director of the Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies, King's College London, and co-editor of the volume with Harsh V. Pant, helms the first chapter in the book. Kennedy challenges 'rebalance' as a concept and strategy, calling it an operationally-oriented creation in which the focus has been more on the military components of the rebalance strategy. Therefore, other equally important aspects of the issue have not been covered. As an example, he highlights that the 'myopic and insular' US-only approach to understanding the economic aspect of the rebalancing strategy could have dangerous consequences.

The second chapter is authored by Tim Benbow, Senior Lecturer in Defence Studies, at King's College London. Benbow's analysis suggests that though the immediate impact of the rebalance can be considered as exaggerated, there are long-term consequences for the United Kingdom (UK). He suggests that the UK should delay joining the US in its rebalance strategy. Rather, it should consider leading other European nations in reassessing the situation in the Mediterranean Sea and Persian Gulf regions so as to play a more significant role in these regions. Keeping in mind that the book was published in 2015 (and perhaps the chapters begun further back), whether Benbow's suggestion still stands in light of Brexit is perhaps something to ponder on.

The third chapter by Hall Gardner, Professor at American University, Paris, views the rebalance strategy from the French point of view. Gardner's analysis brings out the fact that France is caught between the need to seek a sort of strategic autonomy in forging relations with Russia and China and the need to stay in sync with the US. He brings out the tripartite French dilemma in the continued export of military technology to Russia and China as against building its own maritime power to operate in local waters, and the requirement to continue focusing on French global aspirations.

Chapter 4 is authored by Elinor Sloan, Professor at Carleton University, Canada. Sloan highlights Canada's inability to play a major role in supporting the US in its rebalance due to a lack of effective naval capabilities. Also, as Canada has not made any serious investments in the Asia-Pacific region in the past few years, it greatly reduces its influence in the region. In fact, Canada is not considered a global player in the maritime domain and its presence in Asia-Pacific regional affairs is negligible.

Chapter 5 is authored by Geoffrey Till, Chairman of the Corbett Centre for Maritime Policy Studies, King's College London. Although Chapter 5 analyses the impact of the pivot to Asia on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), this reviewer feels that some constituent countries could have been covered separately, especially those nations that are embroiled in disputes with China. It also points to a tendency to view the ASEAN as a monolithic bloc, although different member states react to and counter the looming Chinese presence in the region in specific ways. Although Till brings out the stances adopted by various nations, including the US, and their expectations with reference to nationalist advantages that can be accrued, a more detailed analysis of Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines would have added weight to the contents. Given the varying sub-regional geopolitical-economic-strategic hues, it is a very broad canvas. Therefore, the relevant aspects could have been addressed either nation-wise or sub-region wise in separate chapters.

Chapter 6 by David Scott from Brunel University examines the China-centric scope of the pivot and its effect on China's maritime power. Scott measures the effect of the pivot on China's maritime power by covering the resultant increase in assets and deployments by China as well as its various operational strategies such as anti-access and area-denial (A2AD). He also covers American actions to strengthen the pivot,

including the growth of new relations with neighbours like Vietnam, strengthening of existing relations with Japan, and the resurgence of old relations with the Philippines. The question of whether the pivot resulted in an increase in China's maritime prowess or whether this increase called for the pivot remains open-ended. However, Scott ends by saying that if the pivot strategy was to dissuade China, then it has failed.

The seventh chapter by Emi Mifune, Professor of Law at Komazawa University, examines the subtle change in the US–Japan relations, with a focus on the US offshore balancing policy. The chapter also examines various shifts in Japanese defence policies and guidelines to revitalise its maritime and self-defence force-oriented outlook. Mifune also refers to the recommendations of the 2012 Armitage–Nye report¹, which form the basis of the author's argument about Japan developing the requisite capabilities to buttress the offshore balancing/burden-sharing policy.

Chapter 8 by Balbina Y. Hwang, a Visiting Professor at American University, Washington, DC, analyses the effect of the pivot on the naval power of ROK. Hwang argues that the security calculus of South Korea has been affected more by changes in the US defence standing post 9/11 than the pivot. Other aspects affecting the calculus include the rise of China, threat emanating from North Korea and South Korea's own rise to middle power status and search for more autonomy. The last aspect, which the author qualifies with ROK's vision of a global Korea, has been identified as the main driver for the modernisation of ROK's naval power.

The ninth and last chapter by Harsh V. Pant, Professor at King's College London, and Yogesh Joshi, from Jawaharlal Nehru University, examines the impact of the pivot on the Indian Navy. The chapter concludes that there has been no perceptible effect as the 'hedging' by India in its maritime relations with the US has continued as before, despite the US overtures to India with expectations of more interaction. The authors highlight several factors that delineate India's hedging, namely, the strategic landscape, ongoing power transition, India's rise as an economic and maritime power and India's internal political dynamics.

As several contributors in this volume have underlined, the American decision to pivot and rebalance its diplomacy and military forces towards the Asia-Pacific region has been viewed as a response to China's growing regional ambitions. Much of the pivot is a continuation and expansion of the policies already undertaken by previous administrations. Apprehensions with respect to the viability and sustainability of the American pivot have been voiced, and this uncertainty is also shaping

the response of various nations. As the impact of the US pivot is regional in nature, the provisions of the impact of the rebalance strategy on other nations has ensured that national policymakers examine this issue more holistically rather than from a mere national perspective.

This book will serve as a useful guide to policymakers of the myriad nations affected by America's rebalance or pivot to Asia. Overall, the book is recommended for readers who have an interest in US policies and the dynamics of the Asia-Pacific.

NOTE

1. Richard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, *The US-Japan Alliance: Anchoring Stability in Asia*, August 2012, Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, available at https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/120810_Armitage_USJapanAlliance_Web.pdf, accessed on 3 July 2017.

