

US Pivot to Asia and its Impact on the Rise of China

Sachithra Sajeevi Rathnayake, R. M. ¹

China has been an important element in the strategic policy framework of the United States (US) during the past several years due to China's emergence as a global power. While China's rise created a shift in the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific region, the US under Obama administration took action to 'pivot' or 'reorient' its foreign policy to the Asia-Pacific region with the intention of making the region peaceful and economically-stable and finding solutions to shared regional and global challenges. Given the declining US military presence in the Middle East and South Asia at the time and the strategic importance of the Asia-Pacific region, this 'pivot' came across as an effort to assert US commitment and its hegemonic goals within the region. US policy towards the Asia-Pacific region has six important approaches: strengthening security alliances, improving relationships with emerging powers, engaging with multilateral institutions, expanding trade and investment, expanding military presence and advancing universal values such as democracy and human rights. In spite of the comprehensive nature of the policy, by 2012 there was a comparatively strong focus on increasing US military troops and strengthening regional security alliances in the Asia-Pacific which in turn appeared as US attempts at 'containing' China's growing influence. In response to US 'pivot' to Asia, China has taken steps to protect its national interests and reinforce its sovereignty affirming that China would not cede to US primacy. In this backdrop, the objective of this research is to identify the main principles of the US pivot to Asia and examine its impact on China's rise as a global power. This qualitative study is mainly based on secondary data and theories such as the Cycles of Hegemony and War Theory, Realism

and Offense – Defence Theory are incorporated in the data analysis. As per the study, in addition to the intended outcomes in the fields of economic cooperation, regional security and democracy, this US reorientation towards the Asia-Pacific region has served as a strategic reassurance of US support for its allies in the region in the face of China's assertive power. The study notes that even though the US presence in the Asia-Pacific negatively affects China's rise to leadership in the region, China is unlikely to acquiesce to US pre-eminence. It can also be concluded that while the strategic competition between China and the US would certainly grow, the two powers are unlikely to clash due to their economic interdependence. Further, China's increased partnerships with countries in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa would balance US predominance. It is also advisable to encourage China's participation in more cooperative policy discussions and transparent security endeavours and to boost China's engagement with regional and global institutions, paving way for its peaceful accommodation into the regional order.

Keywords: US foreign policy, pivot to Asia, national interest, rise of China, hegemony