

**AVOIDING THE TRAP:
U.S. STRATEGY AND POLICY FOR COMPETING
IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC BEYOND
THE REBALANCE**

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The rise of China is the 21st century's pivotal event. The Obama administration's response to China's rise was the rebalance to the Pacific. The Trump administration announced its intentions to remain actively engaged in Asia, but is reformulating its approach. The reformulation of policy begs many questions: Is this a repeal of the bumper sticker "Strategic Rebalance," typical of administration change? If so, what is its replacement? Moreover, if this change is just in name but not in substance, will President Trump stay the course? If not, what will be Trump's policy toward the Asia-Pacific? What should be the new focus and priorities? In short, given the enduring U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific, what should be a sound and forward-looking U.S. strategy toward this region?

This research project began with two questions on the future of the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific: Was it the right thing to do, and have we done it right? Given the enormous expected growth in the region and thus the expected impacts in the world, the answer to the first question is a resounding yes. The answer to the second question is less clear. On the one hand, there have been several successes, not the least of which was the public pronouncement of the Obama administration's directive to pivot attention to the region and increase significant travel and engagement in the region by former President Obama and his senior officials. On the other hand, there have been limited effects in world affairs and murky plans for future U.S. endeavors in the region, complicated by growing financial and political challenges inside the United States. Perhaps the best answer to the second question is that there was a great start with an unclear

follow-up. With the Trump administration now guiding U.S. foreign policy, it is time to move forward from the rebalance to a revitalized strategy and approach to the Asia-Pacific for the third decade of the 21st century.

The challenge now for the U.S. administration, and for policy experts writ large, is to build an effective strategy for whole-of-U.S. Government action in moving forward from the rebalance. In order to offer useful recommendations on the development of an effective U.S. strategy to address those challenges in the region, it is useful to establish an overarching concept with which to describe the wide-ranging strategic recommendations of the researchers in this project. To that end, we posit:

- Strategic Goal: Ensure American leadership, security, and prosperity.
- Strategic Task: Accommodate China's rise through competition without conflict.
- Strategic Vision: Economy by priority; enabled by military power; tempered by diplomacy.

The strategic goal has long been a foundation of American national policy. While it focuses on U.S. interests first, this does not mean to the exclusion of all others. American leadership will promote democratic values and preserve the successful international order. Partner nations want U.S. leadership in the region as a counter to China's rising power.

Long-range success in the Asia-Pacific region will only come from effective international cooperation. This cooperation must include China. In keeping with the 2015 U.S. *National Security Strategy*, the

U.S. position should continue to accept the rise of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous China. To that end, the overarching strategic task for the United States is how to accommodate China's rise. America must not constrain the responsible rise of China in the region and globally, but at the same time should provide a check on Chinese power by protecting U.S. and partner national interests. This check will come through the effective use of a rules-based international order, but ultimately it will be empowered by a position of U.S. strength across the elements of national power.

Strategic change must have a vision to paint the picture of success but also to motivate and guide the efforts to achieve that success. The vision statement is intended to highlight the three strategic instruments the United States must use to lead in the region. The highest priority of effort must be economic, therefore the detailed American strategy for the region will need to chart a course for the future centered on economic cooperation and growth. Despite the primacy of economic considerations, the stark reality of the region is one of significant security concerns. Therefore, the strategy by necessity will require a strong, comprehensive plan for ensuring regional security through a revamped regional security architecture and military agreements and the interactions of capable, well trained, and professional armed forces to keep the peace. Finally, robust diplomatic efforts will enable the United States to resolve the many regional challenges without resorting to economic or armed conflict. This strategic concept frames the detailed recommendations of the project's researchers.

The subsequent chapters in this book, written by student researchers during their year at the U.S. Army War College, provide information and recommendations on topics regarding the instruments of national power, regional affairs, and key Asia-Pacific countries. The key findings of this project can be distilled

into four primary recommendations for the United States:

- Create a comprehensive Asia-Pacific strategy to guide whole-of-U.S. Government action plans.
- Improve U.S. national power across the instruments of national power to ensure the resources and capability exist to achieve the strategic goals.
- Create a "post-Trans-Pacific Partnership" (TPP) trade initiative as the cornerstone of the economic element of strategy.
- Create and lead a new Asia-Pacific regional security architecture that includes China; and modernize current alliances and partnerships.

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